

Paper 8

FUTURE OF THE SCHOOL LIBRARY SERVICE (SLS)

Background

1. The role of the School Library Service (SLS) is to provide centralised support to school libraries and to work closely with the Curriculum Advisory and Support Service (CASS), and other services in each Education and Library Board (ELB). In addition to central purchasing of bookstock, the SLS provides advice and support to schools. This includes: -
 - help with a library policy,
 - library management and layout;
 - organising specific exhibitions,
 - supporting particular projects in schools, and
 - guidance on bookstock.

The Importance of School Libraries

2. Research evidence across the world highlights the contribution that an effective school library can make to a child's development and the SLS is therefore well placed to make a significant contribution to our wider educational objective of raising standards. In addition to stimulating an interest in reading, a good school library, accessible after school, can also compensate for a poor home learning environment by, for example, offering access to learning support material, a place to study and access to ICT.
3. DE recognises the potential benefits of an effective school library. For example: -
 - DE endorses the Library Guidelines, published by the Library and Information Services Council Northern Ireland (LISC) and setting out advice for schools in aspects of school library provision;
 - The guidance provided for the development of school development plans recommends that schools consider the scope for greater utilisation of resources such as the school library and to what extent such provision is aligned with strategies for literacy, numeracy and ICT; and

- The Inspectorate includes school library provision and use within the inspection of individual schools.

Policy Requirement

4. The Secretary of State's announcement in March 2006 on the remaining RPA issues set out the decision for a new body at regional level to deliver the public library service. DCAL is currently preparing legislation for a new Public Library Authority and it is intended that the legislation will issue for consultation in January 2007. The current legislation, which will be repealed on introduction of the new legislation establishing the Public Library Authority, covers both the public and schools services and a decision is now required on the way forward for the School Library Service and the nature of any future relationship between the new Public Library Authority and the Schools Library Service.

Existing Arrangements

5. Both the public and school library services are integral parts of the education and library boards with policy direction and funding coming from two Departments ie DCAL for the Public Library Service (PLS) and DE for the School Library Service (SLS).

Way Forward

6. It is proposed that the SLS moves to ESA, with other education support services, but retains links to the public library service. The budget and the staff for the SLS move to ESA and the nature of the links between the two services would be determined by the two Departments in discussion with public library chiefs, and implemented through a Service Level Agreement. In coming to this proposal the Department considered advantages and disadvantages as follows:-

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Stronger links between SLS and teaching/learning, resulting in more relevance of SLS and better service to pupils; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Opportunity for knowledge and skills transfer between the two library services would be ensured through terms of an SLA;
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Maintains policy for and operation of SLS within one Department; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Possible lack of career progression for staff
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ensures clearer accountability lines; 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ensures service to the public from the public library service is not put at risk from uncertain funding regime for SLS; 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reflects the different policy approaches – the SLS focusing on children in formal education structures, public library service is for all citizens, is about informal learning, and has cultural and community roles as well as educational. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Capacity for joint stock purchase between the public library service and the SLS, resulting in economies of scale 	

Views of Stakeholders

7. The only discussions to date have been between DE and DCAL officials. The next stage will be to communicate our proposals on the way forward with ELB Chief Executives and Chief Librarians and in particular to discuss: -

- Staffing issues;
- Implementation arrangements;
- Measures to minimise the impact of the disadvantages; and

- Future library policy in light of recent developments such as the revised curriculum, Learning NI, School Improvement Policy and extended schools.

Legislative Powers Required

8. The draft legislation for the NI Library Authority allows for partnership agreements / arrangements between the Authority and other organisations. DE will need to prepare new legislation to ensure that ESA has the power to provide and deliver an efficient and effective SLS.

School Improvement Division
28th November 2006