All-Party Parliamentary Group for Education
Literacy Inquiry
Submission from The School Library Association May 2011

NB Comments have been submitted in only some of the areas of the inquiry.

1. <u>The value of literacy:</u> What is the value of literacy, as seen through the eyes of:

    a. Pupils;

    b. Teachers;

    c. Employers and wider society?

    <u>Response</u> - The recent report from the National Literacy Trust (2010) *Literacy: State of the Nation*[1] shows a rather grim picture of recent literacy rates and the negative impact on social responsibility, workplace and educational achievement of lower literacy rates. Literacy is the key life skill – enabling active participation in all areas of life

2. <u>Literacy rates:</u> In order to develop a more granular understanding of the literacy landscape:

    a. How should we characterise literacy rates? How should we measure literacy?

    b. What patterns of literacy can be discerned? How common is weak literacy?

3. <u>Expectations:</u> What expectations of young people's literacy should we have? Have they changed over time, and if so, why? <u>Response</u> - Literacy rates have risen but are currently perceived to be at a plateau, though in international comparisons we are perceived to have dropped in the ratings (PIRLS(2006)[2] and PISA 2010)[3]) . It seems that children are more able with the mechanics of reading but have lost the enjoyment of wider reading – which is so important for motivation, health etc.

4. <u>Barriers to literacy:</u> What anomalies and barriers do you see within literacy policy and teaching? <u>Response</u> - A fear that schools follow rigidly to one scheme rather than adapting and employing more than one approach – learning styles and creative teachers instil a love of reading, and wider reading has been shown to impact on motivation, well being and attainment in a positive manner. (See note 7 below)

5. <u>Successful approaches:</u> To help the APPG create a practical set of approaches and recommendations:

    a. How can those barriers to literacy and anomalies within policy and practice be overcome? <u>Response</u> - The lack of a coherent support for school libraries and their proven impact early in children's education seems a huge anomaly – they are not the total answer but a well run

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[1] National Literacy Trust (2010) Literacy: State of the Nation. A Picture of Literacy in the UK today. Available at
http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/assets/0000/3816/FINAL_Literacy_State_of_the_Nation_-_30_March_2010.pdf
[2] Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (2006) available at
http://timssandpirls.bc.edu/pirls2006/intl_rpt.html
[3] OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (2010) available at
http://www.pisa.oecd.org/pages/0,2987,en_32252351_32235731_1_1_1_1_1,00.html

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and active library can fully support all the literacy teaching and learning within a school.

    b. What successes have there been in raising literacy rates and standards? See note 1

    c. What lessons can be learnt and what approaches could be applied more widely? <u>Response</u> - Good practice can be seen in many school libraries, SLA makes it a major plank of it's mission to enable sharing this good practice to the benefit of all students in schools by supporting the development and sustainability of good school libraries.

Comment - The Benefit of a Good School Library

The benefit of an effective school library and librarian are amply demonstrated in the wonderful good practice celebrated annually in the School Librarian of the Year Award – see our website at www.sla.org.uk/slya.php for examples.

Our concern is that students in schools without school libraries will not have access to a wide range of learning and reading resources to support their learning. A good library and, crucially, a librarian can be a huge benefit to a school as evidenced by recent research nationally, and this is supported by other international research too[4]. I have also included with my submission a PDF of a recent article from *School Librarian* (our quarterly journal), which gives a thorough background to current research into school libraries and their contribution to student attainment and motivation.

A recent survey of school libraries nationally (2010), carried out by School Libraries Group of Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP)[5] has shown that a qualified librarian makes a contribution to Information Literacy teaching in schools –

> 82% of qualified librarians focused on finding information compared with 75% of the others; and 67% on selecting information, compared with 60%. The difference becomes more marked in relation to evaluating information (52% compared to 38%) and making sense of information (54% compared to 35%).

The recent School Library Commission report, chaired by Baroness Morris and published by the National Literacy Trust (NLT) with the Museums Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) found that, although they had investigated the school library scenario with an open mind to look for new and creative methods of delivering the library experience they came to the conclusion that there was no better way than through a school library and librarian[6]. The commission acknowledge that the picture is by no means consistent across school libraries but that there are many libraries exhibiting excellent practice.

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[4] Ofsted (2006) – Good School Libraries: Making a Difference to Learning. HMI2624
School Libraries Work (2008) – Research Foundation Paper. 3rd edition. Scholastic Library Publishing.
[5] CILIP School Libraries group (2010) - School Libraries in the UK: a worthwhile past, a difficult present - and a transformed future. available at http://www.cilip.org.uk/get-involved/special-interest-groups/school/pages/news.aspx
[6] School Libraries: A Plan for Improvement. 2010. NLT & MLA available at http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/policy/nlt_policy/school_library_commission

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The commission was supported by a piece of research by NLT[7] which surveyed 17,000 students. One of its key findings was –

> There was a very strong relationship between reading attainment and school library use, with young people who read below the expected level for their age being almost twice more likely to say that they are not a school library user. Conversely, those who read at or above the expected level were nearly three times more likely to say that they are school library users

Surely one of the strongest reasons to have a school library and librarian, especially in relation to any literacy policy that may be in development. I do hope that you will find these compelling arguments to consider statutory basis for school libraries and librarians.

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[7] Linking Libraries and Literacy. Christina Clark. 2010. NLT available at ditto

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