Ambition and opportunity: thirty years of the Scottish Library and Information Council
A short history by Professor Peter Reid

Introduction
Since 1991, the Scottish Library and Information Council (SLIC) has been the independent advisory body first to Scottish Ministers and then to the Scottish Government on matters relating to libraries and information. It was formed in 1991 after a number of years of campaigning for such a body and provides leadership and focus for the wider Scottish library and information community, drawing together the interests of all sectors, public, school, further and higher education, health and special interest libraries. Over the thirty years since its foundation, Scottish Library and Information Council has led developments in the library sector, monitored standards of provision (including through the creation of quality assurance frameworks) and promoted development, particularly through the distribution of funding which it has done across the last thirty years. SLIC has regularly commissioned research to understand issues within the sector and to promote innovation as well as to advocate on behalf on the library and information sector in Scotland.

One of the strengths of the organisation – perhaps its greatest – is that it has been from its very inception a membership organisation, bringing together expertise and knowledge from all sectors and demonstrating the value of cross-sectoral partnerships. SLIC started as a relatively small, modest organisation, working in conjunction with the Scottish Library Association. It’s founding Director, Robert Craig, simultaneously ran the Scottish Library Association and was one of the most important advocates for libraries in Scotland of his generation. For the first twenty years of its existence, this co-working model with SLA and then later the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals Scotland (CILIPS) endured. Over that period the shape and scope of activities changed considerably and SLIC continued to expand and develop its role and its influence. In the last decade, it has worked independently of (but complementary to) CILIPS. Since 2015, it has expanded considerably, building on existing partnerships and creating new ones. It has become responsible for managing and distribution more funding streams, and it has taken a lead on strategic developments including national strategies for both public and school libraries.

One of the enduring reasons for SLIC’s success has been its longevity. In other parts of the United Kingdom, advisory bodies similar in nature and activities to SLIC have come and gone in these last thirty years; responsibility for the activities overseen by SLIC in Scotland has moved around considerably more in the other Home Nations. In its thirty years, SLIC has had four Directors (Robert Craig, Elaine Fulton, Amina Shah and Pamela Tulloch, with Moira Methven acting as Interim Director in 2013-14). This longevity and continuity in management has been one of the strengths of the organisation, not least because enduring relationships across the sector, with government, and with external agencies and interested parties have been possible. The following account gives an overview of the activities of the Scottish Library and Information Council as it celebrates it thirtieth anniversary.
Background

The Scottish Library Association had a long and successful role in shaping and influencing library policy in Scotland but, by the 1980s, it was felt that a stronger representational role was required. There had been a number of attempts to establish an equivalent to the (English) Library and Information Services Committee (LISC) but each approach had been unsuccessful. Eventually, however, in 1982, the Library and Information Services Committee (Scotland) was established. However, it was a sub-committee of the Board of Trustees of the National Library of Scotland rather than an independent body and it had neither funding nor staff and, initially, little formal role beyond advising the Board of the National Library of Scotland itself. Even after it received a small subsidy from the Scottish Office, it was still dependent on the time of NLS staff and was generally perceived to be the poor relation of its English equivalent and, although it carried out its duties reasonably effectively, it was seen as something of a lame duck by the wider profession in Scotland.

Throughout the period that LISC(S) existed there were protracted discussions between it, the Scottish Education Department, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COLSA), the National Library of Scotland and the SLA to draw up a plan for the establishment of a Scottish Library and Information Council as a focus for library and information activity across Scotland. It was conceived as a partnership organisation, receiving funding from the Scottish Office on the one hand and from its membership on the other. Thus SLIC came into being and had, from the very start, the role of being the advisory body to Scottish Ministers (later the Scottish Executive and, finally, the Scottish Government) on library and information matters. The objects of the Council were:

- To act as a focus for library and information services in Scotland;
- To review, monitor and evaluate the provision and development of such services to achieve improved co-ordination and co-operation between such services, and update standards for all sectors;
- To report to and advise the Secretary of State for Scotland on library and information matters, and to make recommendations.¹

The establishment of the Scottish Library and Information Council in 1991 was, therefore, the culmination of several years of hard work. Gavin Drummond noted that one of the key aspects of the organisation was that it created in Scotland a body that was essentially independent of government but still had a role as advisor to it, and that it brought together all parts of the library and information sector alongside politicians and decision makers.² From the very start SLIC was a membership organisation, drawing together the public library sector, universities, colleges, health boards and trust, and other parts of the information and library sector. Initially, with limited funding and a general inability to predict or forecast levels of income from membership, it proved difficult to staff the organisation, most particularly in making the appointment of a director. Eventually, after much discussion, Robert Craig, Secretary of the Scottish Library Association (SLA), was appointed as the first Director of SLIC but on a consultancy basis. This model continued for many years and

² Drummond, ibid. p119.
established the basic pattern of co-working between SLIC and SLA (later CILIPS) which existed for the first twenty years. Although finances were tight, SLIC did establish discretionary funding awards at its inception and it has continued to manage a range of funding opportunities throughout the last thirty years.

The new organisation was overseen by a Management Committee (now the Board of Trustees) with a chair drawn from public service and members drawn from across the library and information community. The first Chair of SLIC was Peter Peacock (then Vice Chair of Highland Regional Council and later a minister in the Scottish Executive). To begin with, despite sharing a director (Robert Craig) SLA and SLIC worked out of separate offices, SLIC in Glasgow and SLA in Hamilton. The SLIC office was staffed first by Keith Webster and then by Joyce Wallace, before eventually all being centralised in Hamilton. The combined weight of SLA and SLIC had immediate impact. In their biographical essay on Robert Craig in *Advocating Libraries*, Robert Miller and Loudon Craig noted:

The success of SLIC has cemented year by year a cordial and effective working relationship with the Scottish Executive and has paved the way to mutually beneficial initiatives. SLIC has no shortage of ideas and invariably has quick-start projects on the shelf that just need funding, while the Executive sometimes has funding looking for projects. The dependability of SLIC in the management of its affairs and the compounding success of its initiatives has persuaded the Executive to use SLIC as a medium for directing grand-aid to recognised priority areas of library and information work.³


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Robert Craig (right) picture with Jimmy Airlie, 1988. Photograph courtesy of CILIPS.

**Governance**

One of the reasons that SLIC has been durable has been the robustness of it is governance and it has benefitted from having both good executive officers and a strong board of management (and later Board of Trustees). The founding chair, serving 1991-94, was Peter Peacock who was at that time Deputy Chair of Highland Regional
Council and then first Convener of the (unitary) Highland Council between 1995-99. He subsequently became one of the first intake of Members of the Scottish Parliament and served as Minister for Education and Young People. Peter Peacock was succeeded as chair by Professor (later Sir) Alistair MacFarlane who was Principal of Heriot-Watt University who served between 1994 and 1998.

After Alistair MacFarlane stepped down, it became common practice for an elected politician (either at Westminster or Holyrood) to serve as Chair of SLIC. Rosemary McKenna, MP for Cumbernauld and Kilsyth, was appointed in 1998 and served for five years which saw major changes and developments in the library sector including the People’s Network and National Grid for Learning. In 1999, Rosemary launched the first version of the Slainte website. Rhona Brankin MSP briefly served as chair (2003-04) but had to resign upon being appointed to ministerial office. She was succeeded by Christine May MSP who served from 2005 through to 2011 a time which saw many of the major expansions in SLIC’s activities, not least the introduction of the Public Library Quality Improvement Matrix. Fiona McLeod MSP served 2011-15, during the period which SLIC and CILIPS disaggregated their co-working relationship. After Fiona stood down, Gordon Hunt (then of University of West of Scotland and later of the Robertson Trust) became chair and after his retirement from the role, Professor Ian Ruthven of the University of Strathclyde became the latest incumbent to lead SLIC’s Board of Trustees.

![Rosemary McKenna MP (Chair of SLIC 1998-2003) at the launch of the first Slainte website, 1999. Photograph courtesy of CILIPS.](image-url)
Early initiatives

In 1993, SLIC was one of the key partners involved in the establishment of Newsplan Scotland to preserve Scottish local newspapers for the nation and to promote access to these valuable historical resources. The initiative was in response to the Report on Scottish Newspapers which had acknowledged the poor condition of many collections and the lack of adequate conservation measures. As a result of this involvement, in 1995, SLIC entered into its first major collaborative venture, with the National Library of Scotland, to establish the Scottish Newspapers Microfilming Unit (SNMU) to provide for high quality microfilming of Scotland’s local newspapers. The Unit was funded through a grant from Mellon UK Microfilming Project and from money which had been raised through a public fundraising appeal. This continued as an important initiative until SLIC and NLS transferred SNMU to Heritage Microfilming in April 2003. The initiative had undeniably raised the momentum in terms of adoption of national approaches towards a conversation challenge for libraries across Scotland.

One of the most important early pieces of work that SLIC undertook was research into library and information provision for the NHS in Scotland in 1998. The report, Enabling Access to the Knowledge Base of Healthcare, showed that the knowledge base of healthcare supports a number of different purposes, including the importance of information in providing evidence to support clinical effectiveness, the role on information in supporting research and development, and the way in which the knowledge base supported learning. The report showed that these elements, taken collectively, made a powerful contribution to clinical governance. The wider implication of the report was that it was recognised as essential that staff in a modern NHS have access to a knowledge base that supported their work. This was recognised in policies of the Scottish Executive Health Department in their Learning Together strategy, and other policies on clinical effectiveness, clinical governance and research. Enabling Access to the Knowledge Base of Healthcare also showed that information was in many instances not available to those who need it for these purposes and that the practical arrangements for storing and accessing the information were uneven and fragmented. It made recommendations for the policy, management, funding and staffing of library and information services which have all proved influential in the years that followed.

The late 1990s marked a significant shift for SLIC and, indeed, for Scotland as a whole with the re-convening of the Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh. Instead of being the source of advice to the Secretary of State for Scotland, SLIC became the advisory body on the library and information sector to the Scottish Executive and then later the Scottish Government. In tandem with these political and constitutional changes, the late 1990s were also the point where digital technologies and, in particular, the worldwide web really took off and revolutionised the information and library landscapes. It would later be noted that:

For the first time in many years the development of ICT initiatives is being driven by central government, who see access to ICT services and information on the Internet as a major weapon in the fight against social exclusion. Encouraging active citizenship by

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5 Background to this initiative and SLIC’s role is discussed in the interview with John Hunter in MacDougall, I. Voices of Scottish Librarians: the evolution of profession and its response to change. Edinburgh: Scottish Working People’s History Trust & John Donald, 2017, pp. 253-254.
reducing the digital divide will widen educational opportunity and develop the ICT-skilled workforce so crucial to economic sustainability and development.6

Major initiatives came thick-and-fast including the National Grid for Learning (NGfL), New Opportunities Fund (NOF), the People’s Network, and the Scottish University for Industry (SUfI). SLIC produced a report *Enabling seamless access* 7 which made the case for a national information strategy for the whole of Scotland as it sat at the cusp of the twenty-first century. In tandem with this the publication of *New Library: the People’s Network* had a major impact across the whole of the United Kingdom. It was eagerly seized upon by the government of Tony Blair (from 1997) which ring-fenced funding through the New Opportunities Fund (NOF) for all libraries in the United Kingdom to become connected to the internet. The New Opportunities Fund provided £11.5m for technical infrastructure and £2.7m for staff training in Scotland. This was, as Elaine Fulton noted, investment in public libraries on an unprecedented scale and ‘not since the time of Andrew Carnegie had libraries received such an injection of cash and support and significantly it came for the first time via central government’.8

The investment from NOF focused on the use of digital to support education and lifelong learning, to encourage active citizenship and participation in society, to support business and the economy through training and employment, and to establish learning centres and opportunities for training. Although the NOF investment was overseen by the Library and Information Commission and its successor body, Re:source: the Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries, SLIC was heavily involved in the development of the implementation and their own initiatives helped inform this. In 1997, the then Scottish Office Education and Industry Department allocated £300,000 for innovative ICT projects in Scottish public libraries with this investment was administered by SLIC. Six major projects were funded. One of these projects was an integrated Cybercentre at the Ewart Library in Dumfries which later ensured that their application for NOF funding was deemed to be exemplary.

SLIC was later able to appoint a temporary member of staff to support Scotland’s thirty-two local authorities as they prepared their applications to the New Opportunity Fund for infrastructure and training funding. The support officer’s role, together with the lessons learned from the projects previously funded by the Scottish Office’s grant of £300,000, meant that Scotland did very well in gaining grants from NOF and, indeed, six of the applications were considered exemplary. By 2001, all thirty-two local authorities had secured their allocations of funding. SLIC’s role in this was crucial at the time but also laid the foundation for all manner of digital developments which have occurred in the years since.

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8 Fulton, ibid. pp82-83.
During this period – 1997-2003 – SLIC was involved in a heady and bewildering array of digital developments across all library sectors including CAIRNS (Co-operative Academic Information Retrieval Networks) and COSMIC (Confederation of Scottish Mini-Clumps) and, in this age of the digital project acronym, many others now forgotten. It also created its own information portal in the form of Slainte which was launched in 1999.

From its inception, SLIC tried hard to encourage innovation and development of services through its grant-funding programme. For much of its first decade this was through the Challenge Fund but also through funding SLIC secured from the Scottish Office for specific projects and initiatives and this model continues today.

"Maintaining the momentum of the last dizzy few years."

When Robert Craig stood down as Director of SLIC his contribution was celebrated in a festschrift volume entitled Advocating libraries: essays presented to Robert Craig. He had in the previous twenty years changed radically the professional community in Scotland and also the wider library and information landscape more generally:

He has been both the ardent, effective advocate and the honest broker. Formulating ideas and policies, making these attractive to the people who may influence the future of libraries; convincing these people of libraries’ potential; and then harnessing their support in libraries’ service. In doing so, he has won for libraries a position of trust and influence with policies makers and decision takers. 

9 See Fulton’s discussion of these Ibid, pp86-87.
10 Attributed to Robert Craig.
These principles remain core to SLIC’s function today. It is perhaps Robert Craig’s main legacy that strong and effective advocacy for libraries continues to be at the heart of SLIC’s activity today.

Following Robert Craig’s retirement, Elaine Fulton became Director of CILIPS and SLIC in 2003. At the time of her appointment, she noted that:

In the last five years library and information services throughout Scotland have undergone great changes due to the impact of electronic resources and the Internet. However there is still much to be done to ensure the current level of interest in the pivotal role that library services of all kinds is maintained and secured. The current and developing landscape has five main strands (i) lifelong learning, (ii) digital libraries, (iii) modernising government, (iv) reader development and cultural support, and (v) social inclusion. Libraries have a long history of working in these areas and more recently the People’s Network and other related initiatives have raised the profile of the profession’s role in encouraging lifelong learning. Librarians have long prided themselves with their work in reaching into communities, encouraging and supporting reading and literature. In the next few years balancing of all of these roles will be crucial to be able to respond to the needs of users.\(^\text{12}\)

These themes outlined by Elaine Fulton in 2003 have had considerable resilience and still lie at the cornerstone of SLIC’s work nearly two decades later.

In 2005-06, a significant body of work was undertaken by SLIC with the development of the Public Library Quality Improvement Matrix (PLQIM).\(^\text{13}\) SLIC and its forerunners, together with COSLA, had long been closely associated with the development of standards for public libraries but the development of PLQIM was a considerable step-change with quality assurance reports and visits being built in to the mechanism. Initially, it was piloted in nine local authority library services. The development of PLQIM also marked a significant step-change in terms of the organisation’s relationship with government. The Scottish Executive affirmed its support for the development of PLQIM by announcing in September 2006, an annual fund of £500,000 to support library projects as part of its response to the recommendations of the Cultural Commission.\(^\text{14}\) The inaugural round of awards from the Public Library Improvement Fund were made shortly afterwards, totally over £440,000, to East Renfrewshire, Falkirk, Fife, Glasgow, Highland, Scottish Borders, Stirling, and West Lothian.\(^\text{15}\) This funding stream, administered by SLIC, would

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\(^{13}\) In order to make the PLQIM acronym intelligible, the ‘Q’ was silent.


eventually become known as the Public Library Improvement Fund and has, in the years since, become one of the major successes of the organisation, and indeed the wider public library sector across Scotland.

In 2008, SLIC reconceptualised its main priorities around quality, standards and evaluation, innovation and service development, the development and promotion of the Scottish information environment, collaboration and co-operation, workforce development and sectoral support. Work around developing quality standards in public libraries was soon followed with further projects examining this in schools, colleges and the digital environment. The Annual Report of 2009 noted that PLQIM was beginning to establish credible benchmarks of adequate provision and that the reports were being published and used in advocacy both a local and national levels to demonstrate that authorities were discharging their statutory obligation to provide an ‘adequate’ public library service. At much the same time SLIC’s own discretionary funding was re-badged as the Innovation and Development Fund, a grant source for all (non-public library members) of the organisation. Through the joint funding with National Library of Scotland of the Scottish Confederation of University and Research Libraries (SCURL) Development Manager’s post significant collaborative projects were achieved during this period including the Scottish Higher Education Digital Library (SHEDL) and the IRI Scotland project which looked at open access and institutional repositories in higher education.

The Slainte website combining SLIC and CILIPS ca. 2007

17 Ibid.
SLIC collected statistics from all of Scotland’s public library services which showed support for and use of public libraries had grown in the years 2008-10.\textsuperscript{18} Ahead of the 2011 Scottish Parliamentary elections, SLIC produced a report \textit{Libraries: connecting people and communities} which, alongside the Scottish Library Excellence Awards (held in the garden lobby at Parliament) gained significant recognition from and traction with politicians.

![Christine May MSP, Chair of SLIC, presents Public Library Quality Improvement Matrix Excellence Awards to Janice Goldie (East Renfrewshire Libraries) and to Michael Russell (Dumfries and Galloway Libraries, Information and Archive Service) at the Garden Lobby at Scottish Parliament, 18 January 2011.](image)

\textbf{The end of co-working with CILIPS}

In 2011, for a variety of different reasons, it became apparent that the co-working relationship between CILIPS and SLIC was likely to come to an end. This was down to various factors including funding settlements but also because the two organisations had come to recognise the potential benefits in having their own independent identities and their own independent missions. The negotiations around the disaggregation of CILIPS and SLIC were protracted and stretched on until 2013\textendash{}14. The SLIC negotiating team comprised Moira Methven, Christopher Phillips and the then chair, Christine May, MSP; the CILIPS team included Alan Reid, Audrey Walker, Sheila Miller, and Peter Reid.

During this period, there was also change in the personnel of the organisations with both Elaine Fulton and Rhona Arthur leaving and Catherine Kearney eventually moving to the role of Director of CILIPS. The organisations relocated out of Hamilton to establish separate offices in central Glasgow. For some time, Moira Methven, who had played an important role over the years in the organisation as a member of the Board, was acting interim Chief Executive of SLIC until the appointment of Amina Shah in March 2014. Although much had been achieved by the joint-working approach and many were sorry to see it come to an end, it had perhaps run its natural

\textsuperscript{18} Scottish Library and Information Council. \textit{Annual Report, 2010.}
course and the two organisations were sufficiently mature and confident to branch out on their own whilst remaining close and complementary partners in advocating for libraries and librarians.

**Standards and strategies**

By 2012, there was a growing acknowledgement that a review of the Public Library Quality Improvement Matrix was required. Standards of service delivery had improved over the period since PLQIM’s introduction. The context within which public libraries operate had also changed due in part to advances in technology, while the political and economic climate has also had an impact on services. Additionally, there was a perception that it was becoming ‘too easy’ to attain the highest ranking of ‘Excellent’. During 2013-14 a review of PLQIM was undertaken Peter Reid and Caroline Whitehead of Robert Gordon University (RGU) on behalf of SLIC. The review focused on the extent to which the quality indicators and levels were (a) robust and meaningful, and (b) in need of revision to reflect the improvement in standards in library services demonstrated in evaluation reports carried out up to that point. The review highlighted that there was an upwards trend in grading but that this reflected improvements in the services provided by public libraries and that it had not become ‘too easy’ to get good grades. However, the review did also highlight that the quality indicators (and the outcomes) required recalibration to reflect those enhancements and improvements.

Following the completion of the review of PLQIM, the same research team at RGU were then commissioned to revise the framework. This led to reducing the number of quality indicators, revising the qualitative statements around the grades and, in effect, ‘moving every up a notch’ to capture better the substantial advances made across the sector in the years since PLQIM had first been launched. The quality standards were remained as *How good is our public library service?*, bringing them in line with other quality assurance mechanisms. A stronger emphasis on peer-review and self-evaluation was also introduced to the framework. The first review carried out using the new mechanism was undertaken in Scottish Borders in January 2016.

Amina Shah’s appointment as Chief Executive Officer of SLIC in March 2014 coincided not only with the development of *How good is our public library service?*, but also the development of the first national strategy for public libraries across Scotland. This initiative was led by the Carnegie UK Trust and SLIC with the active involvement of the Scottish Government and heads of public library services. The result was the publication of *Ambition and Opportunity: a strategy for public libraries in Scotland 2015-20* which provided a strong clear strategic approach. Ambition and Opportunity highlights that public libraries are trusted guides connecting all of our people to the world’s possibilities and opportunities. Scotland’s public libraries are also part of shared civic ambition to fulfil the potential of individuals and communities and

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19 This project is fully discussed in Reid, PH. *’How good is our public library service?: the evolution of a new quality standards framework for Scottish public libraries.* Journal of Librarianship and Information Science, 2019, 52(3), pp647-658.
every step that those individuals and communities fulfilling their potential adds to Scotland’s social, economic and cultural wellbeing.

Early in 2014, the Scottish Government awarded the Scottish Library and Information Council additional funding of £300,000 to support public library WiFi provision. The funding was linked to the government’s ‘Let’s get on’ strategy. The purpose of the funding was to increase the availability of free public access WiFi across Scotland, via the public library network. The funding was allocated using the Public Library Improvement Fund (PLIF) framework of competitive bids. Fifteen library services were successful in their bids, resulting in the introduction or extension of WiFi in over 130 libraries. This offered new opportunities for these library services to develop and encourage further digital participation, as well as providing users with alternative and flexible ways to access the inestimable range of online resources.20

During her time as CEO, Amina worked closely with the heads of public library services, COSLA, the Scottish Government and other organisations across the sector. She proved a powerful and articulate advocate for libraries (as is her successor). Following Amina’s departure in January 2016 – to become director of programmes at the Scottish Book Trust – Pamela Tulloch was appointed to role of Chief Executive Officer and this takes the story of Scottish Library and Information up to the present day.

The Scottish Library and Information Council today

As SLIC enters its fourth decade, it can look back on thirty years of achievement and impact. When Robert Craig retired he spoke of it having been a period of dizzying momentum and the last five years, since 2015, have been a period of similar activity with the national strategy for public libraries, the digital participation fund, research into prison libraries, mobile library provision, and much else beside. Over recent years SLIC has taken the lead in a number of important initiatives and projects including the Every Child a Library Member (ECALM) scheme which aims to introduce public library membership for every child a key stages through early years. All local authorities in Scotland are committed to the delivery of ECALM and to ensure that every child in Scotland is an active library member.

Every Child a Library Member.

In addition to this, SLIC supports Read, Write, Count a Scottish Government initiative to improve the literacy and numeracy skills of Scotland’s children. It is a partnership between SLIC, the Scottish Book Trust, and Education Scotland. Like Every Child a Library Member, Read, Write, Count is part of the Scottish Government’s commitment to raise attainment in education, but it is also tied directly to the first strategic aim of Ambition and Opportunity to promote libraries as a place for reading, literacy and learning. As part of the 2019 campaign, Read, Write, Count and SLIC developed a library based Treasure Hunt to encourage children to find the answers to ten fun questions with each designed to help them with their reading, writing or counting.

Following on from the success of Ambition and Opportunity in developing a national strategy consensus across Scotland’s public libraries, SLIC then embarked on the creation a national strategy for school libraries. A fourth edition of How good is our school library? was produced in 2017 and an advisory group for a school library strategy was established, chaired by Martina McChrystal, Director of Library Services
at the University of Glasgow. The result was *Vibrant Libraries, Thriving Schools – A National Strategy for School Libraries in Scotland 2018-2023*. The foreword to the national strategy was written jointly by the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Deputy First Minister, John Swinney MSP, and Stephen McCabe, COSLA’s spokesperson on Children and Young People. In it they noted:

School libraries have a vital role to play, throughout the learner journey from 3-18, in supporting literacy, health and wellbeing, and improving attainment across the Curriculum. There are many schools in Scotland where the school library is the epicentre of the school, promoting an appreciation of literature, an understanding of information literacy and a place of contact, friendship, dialogue and reassurance. At their best, school libraries are a hub of activity, with library staff supporting a range of creative approaches to learning, addressing issues related to health and wellbeing, and facilitating connections between pupils across the school community. By recognising the important role school library services play, and by seeking to maximise the positive impact they have, we can ensure sustainable provision in innovative and flexible ways that will benefit Scotland’s young people.21

These significant bodies of work have had real impact, not least the establishment of the School Library Improvement Fund with £100,000 available in 2017-18 and then £450,000 in each of the subsequent years. In 2020, School Library Improvement Fund projects were funded in each of Scotland’s thirty-two local authority areas. What was particularly significant about the development of the school library strategy was the strong political impact that it has had – chiming in with policies to raise educational attainment and educational outcomes – and therefore reinforcing both SLIC’s ability to deliver meaningfully and to respond effectively to key policy objectives for government.

A more recent initiative has been the establishment of the Scottish Co-working Network (SCN) which is the first national network of its kind. It aims to create a network of business hubs in underused spaces in Scotland’s public libraries - allowing entrepreneurs and small businesses to work, meet and collaborate in a shared space. The network has sought to create accessible spaces in communities where entrepreneurs and businesses are supported to work, meet and collaborate and, through a programme of events and activities, support business development and encourage networking. Members of the SCN can access desk space, online resources, events and professional development workshops. They can also use any of the hubs within the network. The Scottish Co-working Network is funded by the Scottish Government through its Connectivity, Economy and Participation division and is delivered by the SLIC. Libraries involved with the Scottish Co-working Network receive an annual grant from SLIC which is based on the number of hub users. Hubs have been established in Dundee, Edinburgh, Troon, Inverness, and Dunfermline.

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Thirty years on

In 1991, the Scottish library and information community had a clear sense of ambition for the future and recognised that there was a very real opportunity in coming together collaboratively right across the sector. No matter how optimistic those who helped establish SLIC in 1991 were, it is doubtful, however, that they could have foreseen the success and, indeed, the durability that the organisation has had. Equally significant however, has been the impact of it is work has had through both the provision of funding and its clear strategic lead. As in the early days, SLIC’s great strength still lies with its memberships, drawn from right across the public library sector and from every part of Scotland, school libraries, higher education institutions, further education colleges, health libraries, and special libraries. Each one of these brings expertise, knowledge and innovation to the library sector. The collaboration and partners envisaged at the time SLIC was founded have yielded enduring results. SLIC as organisation and the library and information sector across Scotland is greater together than the sum of its parts.

Gavin Drummond, writing in 2002, noted:

Over the last twenty years the Scottish library profession has discovered how to work in partnership with users and decision makers in promoting the value, and the role of services it provides. At a time when ‘social inclusion’ is keynote of government policy, there is an urgent need for the profession to build on that achievement and, in the 21st century, to develop further an advocacy role which will ensure that libraries remain at the heart of their communities.22

That spirit is alive and well and will, no doubt, continue to guide SLIC as it enters its fourth decade.