



**National Library
of Scotland**

**Leabharlann
Nàiseanta na h-Alba**

Claire Adamson MSP
Convenor
Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and
Culture Committee
The Scottish Parliament

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3 October 2025

Dear Ms Adamson

Thank you for your letter dated 18 September in which you noted the media coverage of the National Library of Scotland's handling of the book, *The Women who Wouldn't Wheesht*, and asked how the Library approaches the task of reaching decisions in the context of different perspectives.

I am grateful for the opportunity to discuss this with the Committee. As I indicated to the Committee Clerks, we are undertaking an independent investigation into the handling of the matter as part of our stage two complaints process, which is being led by a Junior Counsel. We expect the full report will be submitted to us by 10 October, and that we will respond to all of those who have made formal complaints in the week beginning 13 October. The report will also be made available on our website, and I will forward the link to the committee as soon as it is available.

I do not want to prejudge any observations or recommendations that might come from the report, but I will answer the question as stated and would welcome any further opportunities to discuss the matter with the committee.

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The process of reaching decisions in the context of different perspectives:

- **Collections**

As Scotland's [legal deposit library](#), the National Library of Scotland has a right to claim, by law, a copy of every book published in the UK and Ireland. 2025 marks the 100th anniversary of the Library, but the collections date back many centuries, thanks to the Faculty of Advocates, which has collected copyrighted material since the Act of 1710, adding to their renowned collections of manuscripts, archives, and printed books.

Today, the National Library receives an average of 2000 print and digital items under Legal Deposit each week, and these are added to the collections, which are now over 64 million in number, and made freely available for consultation in the reading rooms and, where legislation allows, online. We do not make decisions about access to these items, unless instructed to do so by law. We have a very small number of published items (245) in the collections which have a restriction associated with them. In most cases, these are related to libel actions, specific copyright issues, or data protection. The rationale behind any restrictions is described in our [Sensitivity Appraisal Framework](#) and our [Access Policy](#). This includes further details on our commitment to making the collections as accessible to as wide a range of people as possible. Anyone with a library membership has unrestricted access to over 64 million items. In 2024, the Library had 53,000 visitors to the Reading Rooms in Edinburgh.

- **Exhibitions**

In addition to our collecting activity, we also put on exhibitions in the Library on George IV Bridge in Edinburgh, and in the Moving Image Archive at Kelvin Hall in Glasgow. Our exhibitions have grown in popularity over the last four years and we had 30% more visitors in 2024 than our pre-covid figures. There are three main exhibition spaces: one for our Treasures displays, one for 'Collections in Focus' and one Special Exhibition space, which usually has a major exhibition each year. This year, we have also been working with cultural venues across Scotland to tour collections as part of our *Outwith* programme.

An EQIA is always completed ahead of any exhibition and is used as a guide to support the staff who are involved in creating the displays. In most cases curators are involved in exhibitions and they provide interpretation for each item included. The *Dear Library* exhibition, which aimed to

bring people together to celebrate all types of libraries, took a different approach. It was produced with the input of many external partners and included a public bookshelf with titles nominated by members of the public. Over 500 nominations were received, and 200 titles were selected for inclusion. As this section was intended to reflect choices and stories supplied by the public, the books were presented without an institutional 'voice' or curatorial interpretation. The books instead include a personal story behind the nomination on the inside page. A catalogue was included that listed all the books nominated, inviting people to read them in our reading rooms.

As our collections are vast, span centuries and are in multiple formats: film, sound, image and text, we have a statement on our website which explains the diversity of the collections: [Equalities, diversity and inclusion | National Library of Scotland](#). We specifically note that:

While we can change the way we interpret and present the collections, we also believe all items have research value. So we are also careful not to censor or erase any part of the original material, no matter how problematic.

Instead, we want to make sure that people are aware of the nature of this content before they see it.

The Library has previously had exhibitions of banned books and covered sensitive subjects, often including material which could be deemed offensive or represent different perspectives. Our 2023 exhibition, [Blood Sweat and Tears](#) included controversial material relating to HIV and Aids from the 1980s, and was produced in close collaboration with Waverley Care and people with lived experience. The Treasures space has included material from the political archives, including the 2014 Scottish referendum, with views from both sides represented. The richness and diversity of the national collections allows for a limitless number of areas to be explored. Such displays and exhibitions are usually accompanied by curatorial interpretation and narrative context, and careful thought is given to balance and risk and to our public duty to ensure that the National Library is a welcoming and safe space for all.

How decisions are made:

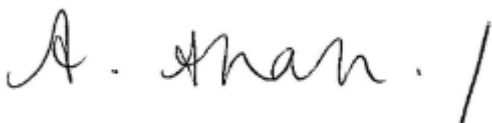
As a public body, the Library has a formal process of reporting and decision-making. Strategy is overseen by our [Board](#), management decisions are taken by the [Library Leadership Team](#). Our new five-year strategy *The Next Chapter*, due to be launched next month, has three key strategic priorities: Responsible Stewardship, Connection and Sustainability. These priorities are underpinned by four values: Integrity, Inclusion, Innovation and Inspiration.

We have a number of internal strategic boards linked to our strategy which oversee and drive activity. The Library's staff are experts in their fields and have a deep knowledge of the collections, strong relationships with partners and a dedication to our users. Staff are empowered to make decisions related to their work and supported by formal mechanisms such as the EQIA processes and policy documents, which are backed up by training.

As part of our commitment to inclusion, we have three staff networks: LGBT+, Parents and Carers, and Disability. These networks exist to support staff and to widen our organisational understanding of the challenges faced by staff with various protected characteristics. Representatives from each of the networks are part of the Library's EDI Working Group. It is important to note that the groups do not devise or drive policy or decision making, but they can provide feedback and perspectives on occasion which are taken into consideration in addition to other more formal representative groups such as the Trade Union.

I hope this overview of the Library's policies and structures around decision making is useful. I appreciate that the committee could have additional specific questions around the *Dear Library* exhibition, which I would be very happy to discuss after the publication of the independent investigation.

Yours sincerely



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