Library Association of Ireland submission in response to *Better literacy and numeracy for children and young people: draft national plan to improve literacy and numeracy in schools.* (Dublin, Department of Education and Skills, Nov. 2010).

The Library Association of Ireland (hereafter the LAI) welcomes this draft plan as an important step in the right direction for literacy improvement and promotion in Ireland. The library community represented by the LAI is convinced that it is essential to adopt a holistic approach to addressing literacy in Ireland. Parents, teachers, children, families and public services working together to create a ‘culture of reading’ in all communities is the aim along with a continuous and unbroken provision of literacy and numeracy services for all citizens.

The LAI is disappointed with the plan’s lack of recognition of the role played by the public library service in the provision of literacy support for schools, families and communities. **A cross-departmental approach to this issue is of paramount importance if we are to utilise our strained public finances to our citizens’ best advantage.** Public libraries in Ireland provide many family reading programmes and literacy supports to schools and parents; these supplement the core business of making quality reading and learning material via multiple media available to all citizens of this state.

Promoting a ‘culture of reading’ is a key recommendation of the draft plan. The LAI considers that libraries should be integral to the process.

Libraries can:

- provide a wide-range of quality reading material to families (most families could not afford the expenditure involved). This is a way of using an existing community resource to make sure that all children have access to books and educational material at home — ‘high achievement was associated with the amount of books and educational resources in the home…’¹

It is worth noting that in Finland, a European leader in enabling the citizen, high literacy levels are linked with high library membership.

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¹ *Better literacy and numeracy for children and young people...: draft national plan...* (Dublin, Nov. 2010), Recommendation 7.1.
help achieve the goals of the draft plan by supporting schools in providing ‘text rich’ environments in the classroom either through internal school libraries (e.g. JCSP – the Junior Certificate School Programme) or through the engagement of public library authorities with schools which are ill-equipped to develop or maintain their own school library due to space and/or staff shortages. In the latter context, the LAI calls on the Department of Education and Skills in co-operation with the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government to consider reinstating the Schools Library Grant, or to revise the national policy on the provision of library services to schools.

The plan refers to the need for continuity of literacy support throughout a citizen’s formal educational life. The LAI believes that ‘cradle to grave’ literacy support is already available through our public libraries but that this could, and should, be enhanced by schemes such as ‘Babies love Books’, Library Membership from birth, library provision for pre-schoolers, library cards for all children starting school and a holistic national family literacy policy. Many of these programmes are already offered in public libraries across the country but a national policy with guidelines and standards would create an equal service for all citizens.

Finally, libraries should be positioned as strategic partners in any multi-agency committee responsible for promotion and improvement of literacy and numeracy. This would help harness existing literacy resources without having to increase state expenditure in the current economic climate. In the promotion and improvement of literacy the draft plan misses an opportunity to expand that definition of literacy to include information literacy and the technological skills which are imperative in our 21st-century lives.

Summary of recommendations:

1. A cross-departmental approach should be adopted to tackle effectively and efficiently the issues of literacy and numeracy.

2. The existing library services should be used to maximise achievement of the goal of 100% literacy.

3. The Department of Education and Skills in co-operation with the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government should consider reinstating the Schools Library Grant, or revise the national policy on the provision of library services to schools.
4. **A national policy setting guidelines and standards should be devised by an expert group which would include all of the key stakeholders.**

5. **Libraries should be positioned as strategic partners in any multi-agency committee responsible for promotion and improvement of literacy and numeracy.**

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