

# Ethel Writes

## PUBLISHING WOMEN

Clare Adamson MSP  
Convener  
Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee  
Scottish Parliament

19 October 2025

Dear Ms Adamson,

### **NATIONAL LIBRARY OF SCOTLAND**

We are grateful that the Committee has taken an interest in the exclusion of the book we co-edited, *The Women Who Wouldn't Wheesht*, by the National Library of Scotland from its centenary exhibition, following objections from some staff.

Last month, we accepted an apology from the Chair and Chief Executive of the National Library, and welcomed the reversal of the original decision to exclude our book from the exhibition.

We received a copy of the National Library of Scotland's independent investigation on Wednesday afternoon, shortly prior to its publication. We were pleased to see the independent report published in full without redactions. We welcome its rigour in examining the decision-making process and believe this is a watershed moment for Scottish cultural institutions more generally, with lessons for culture and practice beyond the Library.

However, comments made by the National Librarian to BBC Radio 4's *Front Row* on the evening of the report's publication have significantly reduced our confidence in how fully the Library's senior staff have taken the contents of the report on board. We attach a transcript of the interview and a short piece we published on Thursday, highlighting our concerns about elements of that interview.

Her comments underscore to us that the Library's leadership still does not seem to understand that in excluding our book as it did, they did not just demonstrate poor process, as the report concludes, but poor judgment in a greater sense, beyond the investigation's remit. We were shocked to hear the National Librarian still appearing to believe that, specifically because the book contains stories of the authors' own distressing experiences, that was a reason to consider excluding the voices of so many women from the exhibition.

We therefore hope the Committee will feel able to follow up its own correspondence with the Library. We would suggest that any further correspondence should now be directly with the Chair of the Board, as it is the Board which has responsibility for making sure that senior managers, up to and including the National Librarian, are responding properly to the findings of the report. We understand that its next meeting will be next month.

Questions which we think now fall to the Board include:

- Has the Board signed off any decisions about what action to take in relation to those staff who the report finds behaved in a “threatening and inappropriate” manner?
- Has the Board established that the planned training on freedom of expression and the Equality Act 2010 will be mandatory, at minimum for all those staff who were involved at any level in the decision to exclude our book?
- What further continuing steps will the Board take to ensure that staff and users of the Library do not experience any form of discrimination or hostile environment at the hands of the staff who disagree with them on any issue?

We hope these questions are helpful to have and we would of course be very happy to discuss any aspect of our experience here with you further.

We will be seeking a meeting with the incoming Chair, in the light of the comments made by the National Librarian following the publication of the report.

A copy of this letter goes to Sir Drummond Bone, Chair of the National Library of Scotland.

Yours sincerely,

Susan Dalgety and Lucy Hunter Blackburn

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