



Records of the All Party Writers Group (APWG) AGM

Held on Wednesday 29 June 2011

Business of the Annual General Meeting: Election of Group Officers

John Whittingdale MP was re-elected unopposed to the position of Chairman of the Group. Denis MacShane MP was re-elected Vice-Chair of the Group unopposed. Jim Dowd was re-elected Treasurer of the Group unopposed, and Baroness Rendell of Babergh was re-elected Secretary of the Group unopposed.

The Hargreaves Review

Richard Combes delivered an overview of the recent Hargreaves Review of Intellectual Property and Growth in which he highlighted issues for writers and the reality of how access to written material and their use, is evolving in the digital world. Richard also addressed how pragmatic licensing solutions may be used to increase access to works referring to the recommendations in the report concerning the Digital Copyright Exchange, Orphan Works and Extended Collective Licensing.

Jim Dowd MP reminded the Group that a debate on the Hargreaves Review was taking place on Thursday 7 July inside Westminster Hall at 2.30-5.30pm.

Don Foster MP returned to the issue of Orphan Works and queried how licence fees for orphan works would be applied in practice. Richard Combes suggested that in part unclaimed fees could be used to fund searches and improved rightsholder databases, to reduce the overall number of orphan works. He also referred to the proposals put forward by the British Copyright Council under which licensing bodies could take advice from their members on applying unclaimed fees for the wider benefit of their sector.

The importance of literacy in the UK today

In his address to the Group Jonathan Douglas, Director of the National Literacy Trust, outlined the importance of literacy skills and linked these with social mobility. Jonathan spoke about a massive drop of book ownership in recent years (even taking into account digital books) and of an increasing gender divide with significantly more girls preferring to read than boys. Children are twice as likely to read if they have books of their own. Jonathan also spoke of a need to promote the enjoyment that can be received through book-reading.

The situation regarding libraries

Annie Mauger, Chief Executive of the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP), discussed the situation facing libraries in the context of government cuts. About 20 per cent of libraries are to shut whilst the statutory provisions under the 1964 Public Libraries and Museums Act are being re-interpreted by local authorities. In addition, 30 school library services have been closed and professional librarians are being replaced by administrators and volunteers. However, libraries are embracing new technology as readers are given access to digital books as well as internet browsing services.