



All Party Parliamentary Writers Group:

Annual review

Public Lending Right (Digital Economy Act)

Following a successful campaign by the APWG the Digital Economy Act (2010) (DEA) included provisions to amend the relevant parts of the Copyright Act and Public Lending Right (PLR) legislation to extend the current lending remuneration scheme to cover audiobook and ebook loans.

Although the funding for this extension was relatively modest (around £300k), when the result of the autumn 2010 Spending Review were announced the PLR extensions were suspended. DCMS consider it unlikely that the extension will now be actioned before 2013.

Public Lending Right (Future of the scheme)

The Spending Review had a further impact on the PLR scheme when the PLR Registrar was included in the Government's programme of rationalizing the number of 'Quangos'.

The Government plans to incorporate the PLR function within the operation of an existing public body using powers set out in the Public Bodies Bill.

At a meeting in October APWG members expressed concern at the impact on writers of moving PLR away from its current, well-established operation and queried the genuine level of savings to be made from this.

The Culture Media and Sport Select Committee inquiry into arts funding was subsequently expanded to consider the implications of the proposals for the PLR scheme and the views of the APWG were represented in written and verbal evidence.

The Committee expressed concern at the lack of consultation that led to the decision and stressed the importance of entrusting the administration of PLR to an organisation with the interests of writers at heart such as the Authors' Licensing & Collecting Society (ALCS).

Libraries and literacy

The October APWG meeting included a presentation from the National Literacy Trust (NLT) on the subject of a 'national year of writing'. In light of the recent media coverage around poor literacy standards amongst the schoolchildren the group will continue to work with the NLT to urge Government to recognise and support the vital role that writers play in promoting literacy standards. An issue common to both PLR and literacy is the programme of library closures resulting from the Spending Review and members of the group have been active in questioning government on the wider implications of this process.

Hargreaves Review of IP and Growth

In May, a Government-commissioned report into the UK intellectual property system was published (the Hargreaves Review). It is anticipated that the Government will publish its response to the report before the Parliamentary summer recess. Members of the group have been sent a briefing note, summarising the core recommendations in the report and the possible implications for writers.

The report is phrased in fairly high-level terms and much will depend on the detail that will emerge subsequently, however it is clear that there is an overall ambition to enhance access to content in the digital-use environment. Managing the balance between support for new licensing models, such as the proposed 'Digital Copyright Exchange', and a more liberal approach to copyright exceptions (introducing new concepts like 'non-consumptive-use'), will be crucial in terms of how these measures will ultimately impact on writers.

Following the Government response we anticipate a period of consultation later this year on the various recommendations, particularly those requiring legislative interventions.