

## Conservative Party Conference Debate 2010: What is the future of the Book?

Publishing is undergoing a 'dramatic shift' from print to digital, John Whittingdale MP told a packed audience at the What is the future of the book? debate held at the Conservative Party Fringe Conference in Birmingham on 3 October.

Organised by the All Party Writers Group (APWG) and the Authors' Licensing and Collecting Society (ALCS), delegates and MPs heard from Chair of the APWG, John Whittingdale; Richard Charkin, Executive Director of Bloomsbury Publishing; Sarah Hunter, Head of UK Public Policy at Google; Damian Collins MP for Folkestone and Hythe and writer and journalist Ray Connolly who recently published his first e-book.

Led by consumer demand, the online distribution of books will become the dominant way of reading in the future Google's Sarah Hunter stated, adding that buying books online is easier, less time consuming and avoids issues with storage.

The view was endorsed by publisher Richard Charkin who stated that while the printed book remains useful, portable and 'giveable', it is now the secondary medium to digital distribution - which has transformed the market for academic journals.

Accepting the advance of technology, Damian Collins MP emphasised the importance of 'fair exchange' where users receive products at a reasonable price and the rightsholders are also rewarded for their creative work. Writer Ray Connolly stated that if creativity is available for free people will not pay for it, Sarah Hunter argued that things would be very different from the piracy that has plagued the music industry as the publishing sector has responded well to consumer demand for sensibly priced and technologically innovative products.

A word of caution was sounded by Damian Collins MP who summed up the debate saying:

*"Technology has democratised opportunities to write and discover new audiences online. However, who eventually makes money from their creative endeavours is a different question."*