

Briefing Note

Debate on the support for the Creative Industries and their contribution to the UK economy, 7th July 2016

Britain's authors play an essential role in helping to drive innovation and growth in the Creative Industries. The latest statistics published by the DCMS in January 2016 illustrate the success of the UK's Creative Industries with £84.1bn of GVA recorded for 2014, an increase of 8.9 per cent between 2013 and 2014, compared to 4.6 per cent for the whole of the UK.

Authors have contributed to this success in a myriad of ways; by supplying engaging content for interactive products and services, by helping to boost UK film and television exports, by writing the next literary blockbusters and by attracting millions of visitors from around the world to our theatres every year. Authors contribute to the richness of our diverse culture. We are a nation of readers and this is in no small part thanks to the contribution of Britain's writers.

Nevertheless, authors face an uncertain environment with challenges to their economic position which include falling advances, decline of the 'mid-list', diversion of funds towards celebrity titles, and uncertain public funding. The challenges facing authors were picked up in a study carried out in 2014 commissioned by the Authors' Licensing and Collecting Society which showed the median income of professional authors to be at £11,000 per annum. This is a drop of 29% since the last survey of its kind was published in 2005 when the median income was at £15,450 per annum in real terms. Figures published by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation show that single people in the UK need to earn at least £16,850 before tax to achieve a minimum income standard.

Moreover, writers - like all of us - face the uncertainty of Britain's relationship with the European Union following June's referendum. With no clear roadmap of where Britain's destination may be, writers will suffer if large producers and publishers put their investment plans on hold. Already, writers have had to fight to ensure that the copyright regime across Europe is not weakened, destabilising the balance between enabling access to written works and rewarding creators. Ongoing uncertainty as to who regulates the UK Creative Industries could lead to reduced rates of economic growth.

Even in these uncertain times, it is vital that the Government continues to focus on important issues writers' face, such as promoting fair contracts and enabling creators to share fully in the value generated from their works. Too often writers are presented with take it or leave it contracts which offer little scope for negotiation and demand full assignment of their rights or unnecessarily wide licences. Authors often find themselves in a weak position when negotiating with powerful commercial interests. Moreover, the UK is one of the few countries where moral rights and authorship can be waived entirely. To promote fairness and equality in the negotiation process, we believe it is possible for the Government to play a role by extending legislation on unfair contract terms to cover IP.

Writers live in an uncertain environment with new threats and opportunities to their economic position. In so many ways, authors are responding by providing more innovative creativity, meeting the needs of their readers and contributing towards the success of the UK's creative industries. With the support of the Government, UK writers hope to secure a supportive regulatory framework in which they may continue to thrive and prosper.

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