

Rt Hon Oliver Dowden CBE MP
Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport
Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport
100 Parliament Street
London
SW1A 2BQ

24 April 2020

Dear Secretary of State,

We are writing in our respective capacities as Chairmen of the All Party Parliamentary Groups for Writers and on Publishing. We hope to take this opportunity to outline the ways in which the book sector has reacted to the Covid-19 crisis, and to emphasise the important role that copyright has played in this response.

We understand the scale of the challenge that society faces in adapting to the current situation, and the wide-ranging impact that it has on people's ability to access content through conventional channels. Publishers and authors are responding to this challenge, and are doing so with a sense of public responsibility that goes far beyond the commercial imperative.

A summary of their key actions are as follows:

- Academic publishers have made all vital research and data relating to COVID-19 freely available and are fast-tracking the publication of new research in this field. Publishers are also expanding institutional access more broadly to assist researchers and students who are now working from home.
- To assist teachers, parents and pupils in making the transition to remote teaching, publishers have made many primary, secondary and revision resources freely available online. These free resources include eBooks for students, fun activities for young learners and interactive education tools.
- In addition to this extensive offering, authors and publishers have agreed to temporarily expand the Copyright Licensing Agency's schools licence to allow expanded copying during this period of crisis. In increasing the agreement from 5% to 30%, teachers will be able to legitimately and efficiently copy a term's worth of content as required.
- Publishers and authors are facilitating online readings of books as part of children's story time. This includes author-led sessions from publishers' own channels, and through partnerships with public libraries and schools. For example, Penguin Random House have temporarily allowed schools and libraries to replicate live storytelling through virtual platforms, and Bloomsbury has relaxed the license fee typically required for recording *Harry Potter* readings.
- Publishers and authors have worked quickly to release a variety of resources that help children understand the implications of the pandemic, such as Axel Scheffler's free digital book that was accessed by over 100,000 families within the first 24 hours of its release.
- Where possible, different publishers are offering free ebooks to NHS staff and key workers, with physical books also being distributed to vulnerable families through foodbanks.

With these examples in mind, it is important to underline how **copyright** has adapted during these difficult times – allowing publishers and authors to be generous with their content whilst still maintaining their economic viability.

As you are no doubt aware, total publishing industry revenue in 2018 was £6 billion. This in turn sustained up to 70,000 jobs and provided countless authors with a vital source of income. However, as is the case for most of the UK's retail sector, the crisis is already causing a significant decline in revenues and unfortunately many businesses in the sector will struggle to stay solvent this year. According to a recent Society of Authors survey of their members 41% have seen an immediate decline in income.

It is therefore absolutely crucial that the UK's gold-standard copyright framework is honoured and protected throughout the pandemic. Fast-moving licensing solutions are providing the flexibility required for teachers and learners, whilst ensuring that the digital sharing environment remains robust in the face of piracy. These solutions are also considerate of the longer-term sustainability of this key cultural sector, and the authors who rely on their writing to earn a living.

We equally suggest that HM Treasury should revisit the scope of the existing **business rates holiday** provisions, to include publishing businesses. Whilst bookshops are receiving this benefit, the wider publishing sector still relies on physical sales for approximately 70% of its revenues. Indeed, as the largest exporter of books in the world, the UK's publishing sector is keenly feeling the current limitations on exports to crucial markets such as China and the US. It seems only fair that, as publishers are experiencing the same impact as other retailers, they can access the same rate relief. This in turn would do much to protect author's livelihoods, and the future proliferation of British writing across the globe.

Equally, whilst we welcome the various schemes put in place to help both the employed and self-employed, many **freelancers** would draw their income from a range of sources. We therefore ask that the existing measures are revisited with this community in mind.

To conclude, publishers and their authors are making huge efforts to facilitate access to materials in the public interest. We welcome your Department's support for their exertions, and for your serious consideration as to how we can provide the most hospitable policy environment possible for one of our largest creative industries through this unprecedented period.

Yours sincerely,



Andrew Lewer MBE MP, Chairman of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Publishing



Giles Watling MP, Chairman of the All Party Parliamentary Writers Group