

THE PUBLISHERS ASSOCIATION

25 January 2010

Rt Hon Margaret Hodge MBE MP
Minister for Culture and Tourism
2-4 Cockspur Street
London SW1Y 5DH

Dear Minister

Empower, Inform, Enrich - the modernisation review of public libraries

I am writing to thank you for taking the time to meet the Publishers Association and some of our members on 13 January, and to highlight what I felt to be some of the most constructive points that were raised in the course of the discussion, as well as adding some further comments of my own. Please note that I am also copying this letter to your libraries team so that these thoughts can be formally input into your consultation.

Publishers strongly support the role libraries play in the 21st century. It is vital they offer digital services if they are to remain an important and relevant resource in local communities. We believe that for this to happen, publishers' continued innovation in licensing must be accompanied by investment in training and skills for library staff, as well as a clear focus on the strategic importance of the supply chain.

Digital sales in the UK only account for approximately 1% of the market. In the US this number is nearer 10% and in both instances it is expected to rise exponentially. It is fast becoming apparent that lending models will need to adapt quickly if they are to keep pace with consumer expectations.

One publisher, Bloomsbury, already offers an online library of its own titles. Others are experimenting with different licensed propositions, and are still in a developmental stage. This is one reason why it is right not to extend Public Lending Right to remote downloads. Beyond the scope of PLR, licensed-based lending models will need to develop organically. Digitally published content, unlike its physical counterpart, is highly conducive to unauthorised copying and onward exploitation. This is combined with a lack of certainty around libraries' future lending models, and evidence of certain trends which heighten the associated risks of e-lending, such as the gradual erosion of residency requirements.

Whilst hard copy audiobooks or pre-loaded ebooks can be 'lent' in a meaningful sense of the word, libraries do not currently have the controls or the infrastructure in place to protect loans of digital book files, or enforce temporary access to books in

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digital formats which are downloaded for a short time but not retained. The digital threats of virtually zero-cost copying and dissemination need to be effectively managed or they will make significant inroads into the commercial market.

Nevertheless, organic growth can be encouraged by strong leadership. The sector is itself fragmented and would benefit from a stronger unity of vision. For many publishers, digital rights management is a core component of any prospective digital lending model, and interoperability is a major practical challenge due to the increasing proliferation of devices and platforms, some with proprietary formats. We would strongly urge Government to take an active role in brokering conversations between publishers, libraries, device and platform owners and other intermediaries to help develop a workable vision and a frictionless supply chain.

Reading Partners initiatives in recent years have demonstrated that libraries can be a focal point for activity, bringing readers and authors together, helping writers to find new audiences and recruiting new library members. An effective strategy could place libraries at the forefront of digital engagement, by providing a showcase for new devices and technologies, and acting as an essential access point within communities through which digital literacy can be promoted. Digital initiatives could be piloted across local authorities, with the results informing a broader national strategy and driving discussion and sharing of best practice.

There is little doubt that for many library staff across the country, new technologies and trends driving the way books are published and read can be unfamiliar territory. Any national digital strategy would need a network of trained library staff across local authorities able to introduce, champion and – crucially – administer it. We believe there is scope for those at the forefront of these developments, publishers and other digital specialists, to share their expertise with the library community, and we would welcome further discussions with you about how to take this forward.

On a final note it is unfortunate that, at a time when renewal is needed most urgently, library acquisition budgets have reduced dramatically in real terms over the past decade, and book stocks have declined correspondingly. We believe that real investment is needed in this area if libraries are to keep pace with public demand and retain their relevance at the heart of local communities.

We look forward to reading your final review.

Yours sincerely,

cc Libraries and Archives Team, Department of Culture, Media and Sport