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ARE READING HABITS REGIONAL?

PLR Data Reveals a Nation Divided

The annual Public Lending Right (PLR) data released today reveals some intriguing regional variations in the nation's reading habits. Richard & Judy's Channel 4 Book Club has had a profound effect on the books we buy and now its influence is showing up in our library borrowing habits. But only in some parts of the UK.

PLR's latest figures reveal that whilst Southern England's library borrowers have embraced Richard & Judy's Book Club choices; the North, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have spurned their recommendations in favour of crime thrillers and good old-fashioned romance.

In London and the South-East, South-West, East Midlands and Eastern regions, Richard & Judy Book Club recommendations accounted for over 50% of titles appearing in the Top 10 Most Borrowed Books. Yorkshire and Humberside's readers were also keen to take out the recommended titles, with no less than eight making the Top 10.

However in the North-West and Merseyside, North-East, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, readers preferred crime novels and thrillers by the likes of James Patterson (who retains his title as the UK's Most Borrowed Author for the second year running), Michael Connelly and Lee Child. Romantic novels by such authors as Josephine Cox, Nora Roberts and Danielle Steel were also more popular than elsewhere in the country.

There is however one author about whom the nation remains united: JK Rowling. Her final Harry Potter novel, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* is the No 1 Most Borrowed title in the majority of the twelve UK regions.

1979-2009: PLR Celebrates 30 Years

Over the last three decades writers have become increasingly dependent on their annual PLR payments and in spite of reduced funding in 2008, PLR has managed to maintain this year's rate per loan at 5.98 pence.

It is no surprise that PLR is so important to authors. As the price of books has dropped on the high street, the average writer has seen both advances and royalties dwindle. By 2007 the average writer's earnings had dropped to less than 25% of the national average wage with the top 10% of writers earning more than 50% of the total income available to writers. PLR is a source of income that writers do not share with publishers or agents; it does not discriminate according to sales figures or celebrity status. Its principles have not changed in 30 years, and the income it provides for writers is needed now more than ever.

Analysis of National Reading Trends

PLR's sophisticated data analysis system (LEWIS) offers public libraries a vital tool to support effective and efficient business decisions. It is also potentially relevant to other cultural sector decision-makers, the reading industries and publishers. The analysis gives them a comprehensive picture of national reading trends, changes in our national and regional reading habits and a fascinating insight into our preferences, pastimes and obsessions.

Ends/06/02/09

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Editors' Notes

1. PLR was established by an Act of Parliament in 1979. It gives authors the legal right to receive remuneration from government for the public's use of their work through the public library system.
2. PLR is funded by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). Funding for 2008/09 stands at £7.43 million. Following the government's recent Comprehensive Spending Review, PLR's funding for 2008-11 is as follows: 2008/09 (£7.43 million), 2009/10 (£7.58 million) and 2010/11 (£7.68 million).
3. The UK writing economy: a typical writer has seen their income drop by £3000 pa since 2000; a typical writer earns 33% less than the national average wage; the top 10% of writers earn 50% of total income (cf other equally skilled professions where the bottom 50% earn almost 40% of total income); nearly 80% of authors need a second job to survive; in 2004 the publishing industry exports contributed £1.5 billion to the economy; the creative industries currently contribute 8% of GDP. (Source: ALCS *What Are Words Worth?* & the DCMS commissioned report *Staying Ahead: the Economic Performance of the UK's Creative Industries*)
4. In February 2009 - relating to book loans during the period July 2007-June 2008 - PLR is distributing £6.63 million to 23,773 authors at a rate per loan of 5.98 pence.
5. Authors are eligible for payment if their PLR earnings reach a minimum of £1. There is a maximum payment threshold of £6,600 for the top-lending authors. This year 232 authors will receive the maximum payment. In a recent survey of PLR's top earners, 80% specified that their annual PLR payment is core to their income.
6. Since its inception in 1979, PLR has distributed over £113 million to authors.
7. Authors living in other European Union countries also qualify for payment from the UK scheme for loans of their books from public libraries in the UK. Authors living in Ireland are the principal beneficiaries. British authors currently qualify for payment from PLR schemes in France, Germany, Austria and the Netherlands. Payments are distributed by the Authors' Licensing & Collecting Society (ALCS).

