

SUPPORTING A CREATIVE NATION

Whose loan is it anyway?

Public Lending Right - Serving Authors for 25 Years

'PLR plays an important role in supporting authors' livelihoods thereby contributing to the government's overall objectives for the cultural sector.'

Tessa Jowell, Culture Secretary,
in PLR's 2001-02 Annual Report

'We were all fighting in the first instance on a matter of principle but also bore in mind the dire poverty of many respected authors in every genre.'

Lady Antonia Fraser *

Public Lending Right – a matter of principle

'One cannot sufficiently emphasise the pure justice of the Scheme.'

Authors campaigned for 30 years for the right to receive remuneration for the lending out of their books by public libraries. A statutory public lending right would recognise their legal right to receive a fair return for the public's free use of their works through the library system.

On 22 March 1979 the Public Lending Right Act received royal assent. The Act gave authors the legal right to receive payment for the borrowing of their books from public libraries.

'Public Lending Right is still the best thing to happen to authors since copyright.'

The Benefits

For authors Public Lending Right is a right that is uniquely theirs, and theirs alone – it doesn't need to be negotiated and they don't need to share it with their publisher or their agent.

Its benefit is twofold: economic and emotional. The income itself is vital to the majority of authors; 61% of UK authors earn less than half the national average wage.*

It also offers recognition of the public's use and enjoyment of their work, building confidence in their own creativity and self-esteem in what for many can be an isolated existence.

'Public Lending Right remains a magnificent concept – just great for morale and a welcome contribution to a writer's income.'

In many cases Public Lending Right payments ensure writers can afford to continue working, contributing to our rich and varied literary culture.

'I have good years and bad years, but my income is never high and it is no exaggeration to say that I completely rely on my PLR payment.'

'If it hadn't been for PLR I couldn't have afforded to carry on as an illustrator.'



Public Lending Right

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The Scheme's Delivery

After 25 years there are approximately 36,000 authors, illustrators, editors and translators registered for Public Lending Right.

Since its inception Public Lending Right has distributed £83 million to authors and other contributors to books.

In order to ensure that the distribution of funds is as fair as possible, Public Lending Right imposes a ceiling on what authors can earn. The ceiling of £6,000 allows the Registrar to redistribute £1 million a year to authors whose books are borrowed less frequently. Even modest payments make a difference to young and emerging writers.

Public Lending Right is non-judgemental. If a book is borrowed it qualifies for payment regardless of its subject matter, length or popularity.

'PLR provides approximately half my income. I benefit from readership rather than sales which I find very encouraging.'

Public Lending Right - a success story

At home the Scheme is run by the Registrar of Public Lending Right and is funded by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. The Fund currently stands at £7.38 million a year.

PLR has always kept the administrative cost of the Scheme to a minimum to ensure the maximum pay-out to authors. In Spring 2004 the Registrar was able to distribute £6.4 million to 18,763 authors and other contributors, with administrative costs held at 11%.

In Autumn 2003 Public Lending Right introduced its e-registration service allowing authors to register their books for PLR on-line. Future plans will enable them to access information about their registered titles, book loans and payments.

'PLR has always been the shining light of government departments, efficient, competent, polite. it has always worked.'

... and abroad Public Lending Right is now an international phenomenon, with 17 countries operating PLR systems. The UK's scheme is seen as a role model for developing countries, and the Registrar's advice is sought around the globe.

Under a growing number of reciprocal arrangements UK authors now receive payments from other European PLR schemes for loans of their books from those countries' libraries. Payments are currently received from Germany and the Netherlands and are distributed by PLR's partner organisation, the Authors' Licensing & Collecting Society.

....a last word from one of the UK's best-known writers:

'Even in the lean years before 'The Rector's Wife', I was enormously grateful to PLR. Not only did it provide an annual cheque in the bleak month of February, but more importantly it proved to me that there were thousands of people out there borrowing and reading my books, which was, and remains, both comforting and stimulating.'

Joanna Trollope

Notes *

- The national average wage: £20,919. 61% of UK authors earn under £10,000. From 'Love Not Money', a Society of Authors survey of authors' earnings, 2001, by Kate Pool.
- Lady Antonia Fraser was one of the early campaigners for Public Lending Right. There were many others, too numerous to mention here, led by Maureen Duffy, Brigid Brophy and Ted Willis.
- All other quotes are taken from a recent PLR author survey and are anonymous.