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8 November 2024

Dear Sheila Bennett,

PLR Rate per Loan 2023/24 year

Thank you for your letter of 21 October 2024 regarding the rate per loan. We note that there will be a decrease on the rate per loan from 13.69 to 11.76 pence per loan for the 2023/2024 year.

Given the fixed nature of this fund and how the rate per loan is calculated, we appreciate that this decreased rate signifies an increased number of loans, which is positive and shows how vital and attractive libraries are. However, we also wish to note that because of the way the rate per loan is calculated, this signifies a decrease in the amount that authors receive individually and will negatively impact their income.

We do not feel it is acceptable for authors to see their income diminish, however marginally, at a time when author incomes are lower than ever, with the median income just over a third of the living wage.

We understand that the British Library administers the PLR Scheme on behalf of Government, and that the central fund is part of the overall funding for the British Library, which is set for each Spending Review period.

We urge the Department for Culture, Media and Sport to consider an uplift to the PLR central fund.

Our five asks:

- 1. Increase the overall fund size:** we strongly advocate for an increase to the central fund so that authors can be fairly paid for the free loans of their books.

We understand that the 2021/2022 rise in rate per loan was exceptional but this was caused by the restricted access to public libraries during the Covid lockdowns and the commensurate decrease in loans during that period.

We are delighted that libraries have fully reopened and that the number of loans has continuously increased since then. However, considering that the 2021/2022 rate was almost cut in half last year, a decrease in the rate per loan for the second consecutive year – after another consecutive increase in overall loans – is hugely disappointing and we urge DCMS to urgently review the PLR fund.

PLR is an important source of earnings for authors, particularly those whose books are sold mainly to libraries and those whose books are no longer in print but are still being read. The scheme ensures that funds reach a wide range of authors, beyond top sellers, which is especially important if we want to encourage diversity in writing and reading.

PLR is a simple and effective way by which Government can support writers and do it fairly, in a targeted way, and at a modest cost. We urge Government to ring-fence and increase the (already meagre) PLR Fund.

We were disappointed that this was not addressed in the new Government's spending review, particularly in view of the comments we make below in relation to audiobooks and ebooks, and the general duties in relation to library lending.

We understand that PLR funds vary greatly from country to country, but the UK is well below that of comparable countries. At £6 million net of administration costs, it compares badly with the £14 million annually in Germany (£11.2 million on a population-adjusted basis at current exchange rates). We repeat our request that the fund is increased.

- 2. Allocate additional funds to the lending of ebooks and audiobooks:** we are delighted that Government included in the Digital Economy Bill a clear and narrowly defined statutory solution agreed by all stakeholders extending PLR to ebooks and audiobooks while maintaining frictions. We note that no extra funds have been allocated either for payments to authors or for the work of the British Library in implementing the new payments and we urge this to be corrected. This is particularly important in view of libraries' increased investment in ebooks and remote lending systems during the pandemic and the huge rise in borrowing from this source.
- 3. Include translators:** we also request an update on the position of paying translators the full amount of the PLR for translations when the underlying work is in the public domain and translators are the sole copyright holder.
- 4. Extend PLR to all libraries:** it remains a breach of Government's obligations, as well as being unsatisfactory and unfair, that all libraries other than public libraries should be exempt from remunerating authors for loans. Government should rectify this as a matter of urgency by making appropriate regulations under Section 40A (2) Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 to ensure that school and all other libraries, including volunteer-led libraries, are included in the PLR scheme so that true figures for library lending can be recorded and remunerated.
- 5. Protect our libraries:** we urge Government and local Governments to increase the funding for public libraries including additional funds for buying book stock. We ask Government to demonstrate its commitment to supporting a sustainable long-term future for public libraries in England, and to take seriously the statutory duty to superintend and promote the improvement of library services in England, and to ensure that library authorities in England meet their own statutory duty to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service.

We understand that public libraries' policy is a devolved matter in respect of Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, but in England, under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964, library authorities are responsible for providing – and funding – comprehensive and efficient local public library services. They are expected to provide public library services, including by making decisions relating to provision of book stock, while considering local needs and available resources.

Thank you for considering our views on the recommended PLR rate per loan for the Scheme year 2023-2024.

Yours sincerely,

Anna Ganley
Chief Executive