Defend your library money

IF YOU HAVE a book published, you are entitled by UK and EU law to a payment each time that book is lent by a library. This compensates you for the reduction in sales, and therefore royalty payments, when people can borrow your book.

Until now, this “Public Lending Right” has been administered by a remarkably efficient little office, staffed by twelve people in Stockton-on-Tees. But it’s a quasi-non-governmental organisation, so the incoming coalition government announced that it had to go.

At about the same time the coalition announced a cut in its budget from £7.58 million in 2009-2010 to £6.956 million in 2014 – protesting that this would be dealt with by “efficiency” measures. Now it seems that administration of Public Lending Right will be handed over to the British Library – which prompts the Freelance to ponder both the ethics of foxes in chicken-coops and their London lifestyle expenses.

And the Department for Culture Media and Sport has launched a consultation on how to cut the amounts paid to authors in PLR. Their proposed plan is to cut the payment per loan from the current 6.25p to 6.05p for the February 2012 payments. The deadline for responding to the consultation is 23 December.

The Freelance presents one author’s response as a model at www.londonfreelance.org/fl/1111plr.html – and please do respond in your own words, rather than just cutting and pasting. To register for PLR, go to www.plr.uk.com

The Rate for the Job

WHERE NOW for children’s non-fiction?

WHAT CAN writers do when the medium they work in is disappearing? That was the agenda for a meeting of members of NibWeb, an email network for writers of children’s non-fiction (CNF) sponsored by the NUJ and Society of Authors, on 1 November.

Inevitably, we began with a short discussion of the state of the industry: it’s dire, with few commissions and pay that has gone down over the last decade or so.

But the meeting had positive thoughts on making a living from traditional books.

Though work on series of CNF books is scarce, and the UK market shrinking, there is some demand for: books for reluctant readers; one-off titles (not part of a series); work for non-traditional outlets such as museums; and books that mix genres – for example fiction and non-fiction. We may have to be more proactive than we have been in the past and approach outlets (publishers, museums, and so on).

There is also a need, if not to demand, for materials that demonstrate research and worked-out argument. CNF still has too low a profile and needs a “champion”.

Electronic publishing is not a panacea, since it suffers the same distribution problems as paper books, magnified by the large numbers of titles on offer.

Internet-based publications tailored for individual schools have worked for some people and, with the right profile, it might be possible to persuade schools and other bodies to subscribe to such things as online information packs.

Self-publishing would seem to have a limited value. Beware of producing work unedited! Local subjects and outlets such as newsgagents and cafes can work – especially with print-on-demand.

The meeting discussed ideas for collectively marketing the expertise of members; discussion will continue on the email list: see www.londonfreelance.org/nibWeb

Jenny Vaughan

I don’t work for less than 50 Euro!

The suicide of Italian journalist Pierpaolo Faggiano – who left a note explaining how his precarious working conditions had driven him to such an extreme act – unleashed a wave of protests by freelance journalists across Italy. Many try to survive on fees of 4-20 Euros per article.