The Rate for the Job

Authors average annually £11k pa – ALCS

THE AVERAGE writer earns just £11,000 a year, according to research carried out by the Authors’ Licensing & Collecting Society (ALCS) and published in July. The report concludes that a “rapid decline in both author incomes and in the numbers of full-time writers could have serious implications for the economic success of the creative industries in the UK.” (See www.alcs.co.uk/About-us/News/News/What-are-words-worth-now-not-much.aspx)

The report was launched at an ALCS debate in July at the House of Commons. This emphasised the sheer difficulty of making creative work pay the creators.

Present were Adam Singer, ALCS Chair (who outlined the report’s findings); Baroness Floella Benjamin; the poet Wendy Cope; novelist Joanne Harris (Chocolat); Richard Hooper, chair of the Copyright Hub, who carried out a review into copyright licensing; and Richard Mollet, Chief Executive of the (book) Publishers’ Association – a reminder that the threat posed by the likes of Google and Amazon (even more than the pirates) to income from creativity was bothering the publishers as much as the authors.

An intervention by Writers’ Guild General Secretary Bernie Corbett did bring screenwriters and playwrights into the picture. Some of what was said could be extrapolated into journalism. Everyone agreed creators need to be paid and that a public expectation that everything on the internet ought to be free miltigated against this.

What to do about this? Ideas floated included a rather hopeful call for better education about what copying is legal and what not. Would that make a noticeable difference? Everyone agreed that making online clearance of rights easier was vital. Richard Hooper had an idea for an electronic system of making micro-payments, which seemed to rest on the fact that people would pay if they could do so easily by pressing a button on a screen. A sort of electronic honesty box? I found this unconvincing as well as dubious in other ways – surely there could be a conflict with authors’ moral rights? Would authors want to lose control of who used their material?

Also proposed was taxing Amazon and Google (“top-slicing”) and paying the money to writers. How to do this? Not easy…

In the end, I don’t think anyone there thought much that was original was said – though launching the results of ALCS’s findings managed to clarify that not all authors command JK Rowling-like incomes. Most of us are in the “creative industries”, and tend to forget that the rest of the world imagines we are rich.

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Photographers: do sign DACS agreement

THE DESIGN and Artists Copyright Society (www.dacs.org.uk) distributes income to visual artists – including photographers – for such “secondary uses” as universities photocopying pages of books that feature their work.

This includes some photocopying abroad as well as in the UK.

Photographers who have already signed up to the DACS Payback Scheme for 2014 should have received a letter from DACS sometime this summer which asks for “an exclusive license to negotiate, claim and administer… secondary rights”. In July, the NUJ advised members who had received letters from DACS to delay responding to this letter while it raised with DACS some questions about the terms of this year’s Payback Scheme.

The NUJ is now satisfied with the answers provided by DACS and is advising members to make claims, and to go ahead and sign the agreement with DACS.

For more on registering to claim your share of royalties revenue from DACS, and also for details of how to claim from ALCS (for authors), please see www.londonfreelance.org/fl/1310alcs.html