

ALCS response to Labour Party: Our Digital Future consultation

The Authors' Licensing & Collecting Society (ALCS) is a not-for-profit organisation for the benefit of all kinds of writers. Set up in 1977 and owned by its members, ALCS collects money due for licensed secondary uses of authors' work and currently has over 100,000 members. At Westminster, it is also proud to provide support for the All-Party Parliamentary Writers Group (APWG).

We would like to ensure that crucial policy issues which affect our membership, such as copyright and authors' earnings, are considered when the Labour Party is deciding its position.

Digital Innovation

Question 1: How can we promote digital innovation across all of the UK's regions and nations? How can we ensure it generates good, fulfilling jobs for everyone as we build back, better?

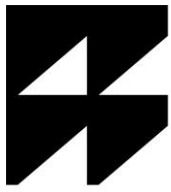
Authors' earnings, diversity and representation

Our cultural and creative industries should represent our society and to achieve this it must be viable to make a living as a creator. Authors' incomes need to be fair and sufficient to ensure that creative work is not elitist. Authors' incomes have been in decline for many years, with the most recent findings showing a 42% fall since 2005ⁱ, despite the creative industries being a sector that has seen consistent growth. The *Room of My Own* reportⁱⁱ indicated both; what authors feel they need to sustain a career as a writer and the barriers that are preventing them from doing so. This centred around pay gaps, due to social class, gender and ethnicity, present within the writing profession which are greater in comparison to employment outside of it. The barriers faced by some were explored in more detail in the *Gender Inequality and Screenwriters* reportⁱⁱⁱ which found no marked improvement in female representation in the industry over the last decade. These reports, alongside numerous studies, have raised concerns that this could lead to a deterioration not only in the range of work created, but also the diversity of creators in the country.

The fact is that with an industry booming and creative content being consumed more than ever, not least online, there is no fair reason for such a sharp decline in earnings. In order to combat this trend, there needs to be consistent work around issues such as fair contracts, tax and benefit rules and digital rights for authors – most of whom are freelance – that will ensure that writing in all its forms is not reserved for the independently wealthy.

We are calling for support for the priorities set out in the 2019 All-Party Writers Group Inquiry in Parliament on authors' earnings^{iv}. This includes:

- The establishment of a Creators Council to advise the Government on policy-making from the perspective of creators.



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- Securing ongoing support for the creative industries to replace that offered by the 'Creative Europe' programme, from which the Government is withdrawing.
- A review of the tax and benefit rules for authors and writers.
- A level playing field between high street and online booksellers.

Cultural policy also needs to ensure that our creative industries go beyond London, to where they have trended. Talented creators are found across the country and can be held back by a lack of opportunity in many regions. Publishing could be brought closer to broader audiences and more entry points to the creative industries for talent throughout the UK should be established.

New policy developments could provide much-needed opportunities for overcoming barriers and incentivising partnership work through public funding and regional initiatives.

We are calling for support for the recommendations made in the recent *Common People* report^y, which showcased working class writing talent in a collaboration involving all the regional writing development agencies supported by Arts Council England. These recommendations include:

- New public and private investment to support new publishing ventures outside London.
- Increased investment in regional writing development agencies.
- Improved access to the publishing industry through clearer progression routes into the industry, as well as transparent pay and employment opportunities.

Digital Inclusion

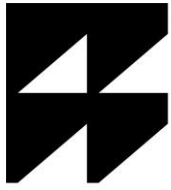
Question 5: How can we ensure that no-one is excluded from the digital revolution. What are the main barriers to digital inclusion and how can we remove them?

Modern remuneration rights for authors

The UK invested significant effort in supporting measures in the European Union's new Directive on Copyright in the Digital Single Market, which incorporates measures to ensure fairer remuneration for creators – including authors and writers – in the digital age. This can be seen in Article 18 of the Directive which ensures authors and performers are entitled to receive appropriate and proportionate remunerations for their works when they give license or transfer rights for its use.

It also tackles what was often characterised as a “transparency triangle”, so that authors would have a right to clear and transparent accounting of how their work had been used, a right to claim additional remuneration if payment received drastically differed from the economic worth of their work and an effective mechanism to agree those fair, additional rewards.

The UK has now decided not to implement the Directive on its departure from the EU, meaning that authors and other creators will now not automatically enjoy such enhanced rights.



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While the UK does not need to adopt the exact approach taken by the Directive, it is clear that there is a need for clearer rights for UK authors to be more fairly rewarded for the ways in which their works are consumed in the digital age, like their counterparts in the EU.

We are calling, therefore, for the establishment of an unwaivable right to transparency and remuneration for digital uses of an author's works.

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ⁱ Authors and Licensing Collecting Society (2018) *Authors' Earnings, A survey of UK writers*
allpartywritersgroup.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/ALCS-Authors-earnings-2018.pdf

ⁱⁱ Royal Society of Literature (2019) *A Room of My Own, What writers need to work today*
allpartywritersgroup.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/RSL-A-Room-of-My-Own-Report-19-June-2019-1.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ The Writers' Guild of Great Britain (2019) *Gender Inequality and Screenwriters*
allpartywritersgroup.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Gender-Inequality-and-Screenwriters.pdf

^{iv} All Writers Party Group (2018) *Supporting the Writers of Tomorrow*
allpartywritersgroup.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Authors_Earnings_Inquiry_Booklet.pdf

^v New Writing North (2020) *Common People: Breaking the class ceiling in UK publishing*
newwritingnorth.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/NWN_CommonPeople_36ppA4_Web2.pdf