

Maureen Duffy's Speech to the ALL Party Writers' Group on 19 October 2010

Ladies & gentlemen, honourable members of both Houses, fellow writers – when we planned this event, we had no suspicion that we were to be holding a wake instead of our usual celebration of PLR.

You have heard from Jim Parker about the proposed changes to PLR, changes that require an act of Parliament to get rid of the most efficient and cost effective PLR administration in Europe.

I have two points I want to make. The first is to pay tribute to Jim Parker and his small but dedicated expert staff in the PLR office who have administered the PLR scheme in accordance with the three requirements of Sir Frances Maude which justify the existence of a quango: 1) political independence, 2) a technical function and 3) the need to establish the facts independently.

The facts they establish are the use of their books in libraries of 42,000 registered writers, many with several titles; in my case alone 31. 23,000 of whom are paid their just due every year with valuable data about how their books are used.

To replace this with a body that has no expertise in this field of data collection and micropayments will mean expensive new IT systems, equipment, staff hire and training premises, all at huge cost and with absolutely no benefit in efficiency or savings.

My second point concerns PLR itself.

PLR is not a subsidy or a charity. It is a payment for use, a right under British and EU law, and backed by decisions of the European Court of Justice.

Literature, the work of our writers, acknowledged throughout the world as our greatest art, which underpins the 2nd largest publishing industry in the world, as well as film, television, theatre, cultural tourism...I won't bore you with the whole list...and contributes massively to the economy but receives only 1.6% of the Arts Council budget. Even with PLR it would be less than 4%, yet this poultry sum is lifeblood to the thousands of writers who receive it for use of their books in libraries.

We are assured that this miserable sum will be reinforced, but how much will be within the fence? We have already seen it eroded in the past three years by inflation.

We are told that the UK's future economic health depends on the knowledge economy, the creative industries and innovation. By threatening the livelihood of the literary content providers whose modicum income is a mere £4,000 a year from their writing you threaten all these crucial areas.

I therefore call on every honourable Member of Parliament present to help us protect the future of British Literature and its writers. Please protect our PLR. No further cuts to PLR.