

Review of Copyright Collecting Societies launched

- *Is there music playing in your local pub or restaurant?*
- *Is an article you wrote being photocopied for college students?*
- *Do you need to get blanket clearance to reproduce text and images for your company website?*

These are just some of the issues dealt with by the 12 UK copyright collecting societies that are subject to an independent review launched today. The societies exist to enable people who want to use copyright material to pay for a licence, distributing that money to those who have created the work that is being re-used. Walter Merricks CBE who is conducting the review is asking for the views about how the system is working.

The societies are private bodies but should they be more transparent and accountable? Two years ago the societies decided to be more open and to put in place codes of conduct detailing how they operate. The Government has also set out standards and is taking powers to ensure societies have adopted satisfactory codes and to discipline societies where necessary.

Now the societies – through the British Copyright Council, have asked Walter Merricks, the former financial ombudsman, to carry out an independent review of how their codes are working.

Walter Merricks said:

“The creative industries and the rights they generate form a significant contribution to the UK economy, and the internet has changed many of the business models that used to make copyright protection simpler. In the digital age the work of the societies is more complex and it is vital that they are seen to operate to the highest standards.

There are many different rights interests involved from individual artists and writers to huge music labels and book publishers, and among licensees there are small high street businesses, schools and colleges as well as massive corporations and government departments. So it’s not surprising that people have different views on how well things are working.

I’ll be looking to see whether the codes form a self-regulatory framework in which not only rights holders and licensees, but also the public, the government, and other copyright bodies, can have justifiable confidence.”

To help my Review I want to hear from anyone with experience of or views about the collective management of rights and how well the societies’ codes are working.”

Notes for editors

1. The societies – also known as collective management organisations – under review are: Authors Licensing & Collecting Society (ALCS), British Equity Collecting Society (BECS), Copyright Licensing Agency (CLA), Designers and Artists Collecting Society (DACs), Directors UK, Educational Recording Agency (ERA), Newspaper Licensing Agency (NLA), Publishers Licensing Society (PLS), Phonographic Performance Ltd (PPL), Printed Music Licensing Ltd (PMLL), and PRS for Music.
2. The Codes of each society can be found on its website.
3. The Government’s powers to intervene in societies are contained in Schedule 22 of the Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Act 2013, and are to be implemented in regulations soon to be laid before Parliament.
4. The British Copyright Council (BCC) exists to offer a forum for the discussion of copyright law and related issues and provides a representative voice for the copyright community.
5. Walter Merricks CBE was appointed following an open competition by a selection panel convened by the BCC comprising interests of both rights holders and licensees.
6. The Review’s website is at www.independentcodereview.org.uk
7. Contact: Janet Ibbotson on 07788413807 or on 01986 788 122.