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COPYRIGHT LITERACY IN THE UK: RESULTS FROM A SURVEY OF LIBRARY AND INFORMATION PROFESSIONALS

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This paper reports on a survey of “copyright literacy” amongst librarians and others working in the cultural heritage sector in the United Kingdom. This study is timely following reform of the UK copyright legislation in 2014, but also as an understanding of copyright and licensing issues becomes increasingly part of wider digital literacy support. Librarians are increasingly called upon to provide expert advice for open education projects and initiatives such as Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), so arguably have a greater need for an understanding of copyright.

This study is the first of its kind in the UK, although an earlier study (Oppenheim and Woodward, 2004) surveyed a small population of higher education librarians. This survey was distributed far wider and received over 600 responses. It aimed to highlight gaps in knowledge and training requirements in the sector and to provide comparative data to other countries participating in the survey. This research originated from a project funded by the Bulgarian Ministry of Education and Science and presented at ECIL 2014 (Todorova, 2014). The UK survey was part of a second data collection phase, extending the survey to Finland, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Mexico, Norway, Portugal, Romania and USA.

The survey aimed to establish the knowledge and awareness of the respondents on a variety of issues associated with copyright and their attitudes towards the development and application of copyright policies in their own institutions. It gathered data about attitudes towards the education and continuing professional development (CPD) of information professionals, including the inclusion of copyright training in professional qualifications. Finally the survey gathered demographic data about the respondents.

Findings suggest that the level of knowledge about copyright across sector is mixed. They back up results from Oppenheim and Woodward (2004), suggesting copyright is a small part of many information professionals’ roles. Consequently many respondents expressed a desire to develop their knowledge in this field. Evidence from the UK suggests there is a reliance on colleagues, books, journals, websites and professional associations for guidance on copyright matters. Encouragingly 63 percent of institutions surveyed had a copyright policy and 64 percent had a named individual dealing with copyright queries. Over 93 percent of all respondents believed copyright should be included in the professional training and education of librarians and other cultural heritage sector professionals. Additional analysis will be presented to compare UK responses to other countries.

The findings provide an insight into how those providing copyright support within information, educational and cultural institutions, are best able to deliver the greatest value to users and communities within the UK’s new copyright regime. The survey comments are illuminating, suggesting specific topics related to copyright and Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) that are included in professional qualification and CPD for the sector. Finally this paper will present recommendations for further research in the UK.

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