

Copy right!

By Mark Baker



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Tuesday 10th July saw the official launch of copyrightandschools.org, created by the Copyright and Schools working group. This group is made up of representatives from the 12 licensing bodies which between them oversee 14 different licences.

The launch was addressed by the CEO of the Copyright Licensing Agency, Kevin Fitzgerald, Richard Hooper CBE of the Intellectual Property Office (IPO, trading name of the Patent Office) and Baroness Wilcox, Parliamentary Undersecretary of State at the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills.

The copyrightandschools.org website follows on from the report "Rights and Wrongs - Is copyright licensing fit for purpose for the digital age?" published in March 2012 by the IPO. Education was one area chosen for particular attention because of the complexity faced by schools trying to keep within the law.

The website provides an excellent first stop for schools that have a question about copyright, covering when and why you need a licence and where you can go to get it. The landing page has a graphic of a teacher beside an interactive whiteboard, saying "In my school, I want to..." and once you have clicked the start button, you are presented with 8 options, for example "Make copies of digital resources" and "Watch all or part of a film".

Depending on your choice, you are presented with a brief information summary along with links to the appropriate licence provider(s). There are various blanket licensing schemes that hugely simplify matters by removing the need to request permission every time a copyright work is used. For example, regarding collective worship in schools the site points you towards the Collective Worship Music Reproduction Licence (CWMRL)".

The site clearly flags up where special concessions exist for education, such as "The free Newspapers for Schools Licence gives you the right to copy Cuttings from newspaper websites for teaching purposes and send or receive links to Cuttings by email."

Screening a film as part of the curriculum is covered by an educational exemption that means that a copyright licence is not required. However, schools should be aware that this does not covers things such as extra-curricular use, eg film clubs.

When I first entered the teaching profession in the 1980s, I do not remember much heed being paid to copyright, especially in the newly emerging area of computer studies/IT. There were any number of justifications, not least of which being the complexity surrounding getting hold of permission or an appropriate licence. The final trump card was that we were not making any money from copying material and it was all in the interests of our learners' education.

I had a completely different perspective after I wrote some education software which I managed to sell in small volumes, initially as shareware and later via the internet. I lost count of how much I spent acquiring the skills, hardware and software needed to write these programs. Then there were the many hundreds of hours invested, not forgetting all the marketing effort required. It did not seem unreasonable for those benefiting from these tools to pay a few pounds for the privilege!

The digital age has thrown up many challenges as content is so easy to copy, amend and re-publish and there is so much that we might choose to use it for. One clear benefit of taking a responsible line is that it gives us another lever to try and encourage learners away from being relatively passive consumers of digital media and towards creating more of their own content – when they become the copyright holders and can use the material as they wish.

Baroness Wilcox clearly felt that the new website was a valuable first step, but there is more work to be done to develop a system truly fit for the digital age. Part of the current vision is a digital copyright exchange, a single online site where different licences can be acquired quickly and easily, as needs arise. This will be an area worth keeping an eye on over the next few years.

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