



About - Public Lending Right

Chris Longmuir did some research on how PLR works, and that is what she wants to share with you.

“So what was my comment on Facebook? Here it is, written in the heat of the moment, *“Spitting nails this morning. Just got my PLR (Library loans) statement and there are no payments for Night Watcher or A Salt Splashed Cradle despite the fact that Angus libraries’ waiting lists for both books are massive.”* I knew my third book in the Dundee Crime Series would not earn anything because it wasn’t in the libraries during the qualifying period, but the other two books should have earned something. So that set me off on my research trail.

To start with, perhaps I should clarify what PLR is. PLR is short for Public Lending Right. Until fairly recently PLR funding was managed by the Registrar of Public Lending Right, but from 1 October 2013 the UK PLR office became part of the British Library.

On the British Library website, it says, “Public Lending Right (PLR) is the right for authors to receive payment for the loans of their books by public libraries.”

This is governed by legislation, and payment is made from government funds. In order to be eligible for inclusion in the PLR scheme, authors are required to register, but that is easily done either by post or online at the British Library website. You will find the conditions for registration on this link as well as a downloadable application form <http://www.plr.uk.com/registrationservice/apply.htm>

However, it is not enough to have your books available for loan in a library, because the PLR system works on the basis of statistics taken from a sample number of libraries. So, if your books are not available in any of the sample libraries, then your income will be nothing, irrespective of how popular your books are in other libraries. Now, I’m afraid this is where I have to admit that my understanding of statistics is abysmal. I have a creative brain rather than a logical mathematical one, so you can understand why statistics remain a mystery. So I will quote what the web site says “Payments are made annually on the basis of loans data collected from a sample of public libraries in the UK.”

This sounds simple enough but when they mention how they gross-up the loans, I am lost. The best I can do is quote again, “Because PLR loans are

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derived from a representative sample of library authorities, a grossing up calculation is applied to the actual loans at the end of each PLR reporting year, in order to provide a national estimate of loans for the whole of the UK and Ireland.”

There must also be a calculation taken from previous data as well because when I checked whether my own books were in the sample set of libraries for Scotland, I was not surprised to find that none of them were stocked. However I did get a small payment for Dead Wood, despite the fact it was not in the sample libraries. This must have been calculated from a previous sample set of libraries. The payment, however, was only half the amount of previous years.

To look further at book loans data. This is collected over a twelve month period, from 1 July to 30 June. So this year's payment is based on July 2012 to June 2013. This is why I know Missing Believed Dead would not have been included in the sample because it was published and registered in July 2013. The payment for each loan is the massive sum of 6.2 pence per loan, and a librarian friend told me that on average a reader will keep a book for a month so that would work out at twelve loans per year. I have had 79 loans in Angus libraries for my non-earning books. I have not included the one which did earn the massive amount of £8.18. I'm still pondering what to spend this on. I wonder if it would buy me a ream of paper?

My PLR Payment this year - I wonder what I'll squander it on?

I did wonder why, in this technological age, the PLR system was based on statistical sampling, rather than collecting information from all libraries, but according to them it would be impracticable and expensive to do this, although I don't quite see the rationale for this given the vast improvements in technology. However, the size of the sample has improved over the years, apparently starting off with 16 individual library branches in 1982, to the current 30 library authorities, with approximately 1,000 individual branches.



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For the purposes of PLR the country is divided up into regions into which library authorities are grouped. Each grouping may include between two to four different library authorities. The libraries included for sampling have to be public libraries operating as part of the statutory library service, provided by local authorities. Community libraries and those set up by independent groups are not included.

There are nine PLR sample regions in England, one in Scotland, one in Wales and one in Northern Ireland. The current English PLR regions are East, East Midlands, London, North East, North West & Merseyside, South East, South West, West Midlands, Yorkshire & The Humber. The majority of these regions cover several library authorities with London having the majority listed under London Libraries Consortium.

Scotland is a single PLR region, and because I live in Scotland I was interested in which library authorities were included. The grouping is, Midlothian, North Lanarkshire, and Scottish Borders.

Wales, also a single PLR region has three local authorities included. But the one I found most interesting was Northern Ireland, because the whole of Northern Ireland is included in the sample. If you want to check the authorities included for 2013-14 you can do so here <http://www.plr.uk.com/libraryInformation/current.htm>

I checked back on the previous year 2012-13, this is the year which applies to present payments, and Scotland's region included East Ayrshire, North Lanarkshire and Scottish Borders, a change of one local authority. The last time Angus (my library authority) was included was the PLR sample year 1996-97. Gulp, that was 17 years ago, I wonder how long I will have to wait for Angus to be included again. Edinburgh and Glasgow are featured fairly regularly, although unlike London, they are not included every year. Here is the archive of sample authorities from 1982 to 2013 <http://www.plr.uk.com/libraryInformation/sampleLibraryArchiveIndex.htm>

That begs the question – how often do they change the sample authorities? Well, according to the web site, at least seven of the library authorities are replaced each year, and no authority can stay in the sample longer than four years.

So there you have it. If you are lucky enough to live in one of the sampling authorities and the libraries in that authority stock your books, then you will get PLR payments. However, if like me, the reverse is the case, then I reckon you should not count on PLR as part of your writing income.

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But in conclusion, if you were to ask me whether it is beneficial to register for PLR in the knowledge you may get nothing, then my answer would be yes. You see, if an author does not register then this reduces the amount of authors on the PLR database, and who knows whether a future decision might be that these payments are no longer necessary, and as a result, the scheme will be scrapped. So, I would encourage you to register.

Before I go, can I just say that if you like a specific writer's books and want to support them, then please put a request into your local library for their books, irrespective of whether you have the paperback or kindle version already. It will get the books onto the library shelves, and hopefully they will be included in a sample, sooner or later. After all, every little £8.18 helps! I'm off to check the price of computer paper now, I might just have enough to pay for a couple of reams if I'm lucky, but certainly not for a full box!"

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