# British artists urge Keir Starmer to modernise copyright law against AI exploitation



A coalition of over 400 prominent British musicians, writers, and artists—including global stars like Dua Lipa, Sir Elton John, Sir Ian McKellen, and Florence Welch—has written to UK Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer, urgently demanding the modernisation of copyright laws to protect creators from the potential exploitation by artificial intelligence (AI). The correspondence highlights a growing concern within the creative community about the implications of not securing robust legal protections against the use of their works in AI training.

In their letter, the artists warned that without such protections, they risk "giving away" their intellectual property to technology companies that utilise their creations to train AI systems without proper compensation. This scenario, they argue, poses a threat not only to individual creators but also to the reputation of the UK as a global "creative powerhouse." Notably, this initiative coincides with Baroness Beeban Kidron’s proposed amendment to the Data (Use and Access) Bill, which seeks to enforce transparency from AI developers regarding the use of creators' works. The amendment aims to establish a framework for equitable licensing that ensures artists are compensated for their contributions.

A government spokesperson has responded, asserting a commitment to fostering both the creative industries and AI sectors. They stated that any amendments will only be considered after thorough consultations assure that creators' interests are adequately protected. This cautious approach reflects the government's awareness of the delicate balance required in navigating the intersection of technology and creativity.

High-profile signatories to the letter, including literary figure Kazuo Ishiguro, playwright David Hare, and musicians Kate Bush and Robbie Williams, echo concerns previously raised by other industry leaders. Sir Paul McCartney, for instance, has consistently underscored the risks of an exploitative "Wild West" scenario emerging from AI technologies. He cautioned that new artists could see their work appropriated without any ownership or credit. "You get young guys, girls, coming up, and they write a beautiful song, and they don't own it," McCartney lamented, emphasising the importance of safeguarding the rights of emerging talent.

As discussions about copyright reform progress, the letter reflects wider anxieties regarding the utilisation of creative works in generative AI, tools increasingly adept at producing content based on existing literature and music. This technology’s rise has led to calls for stricter measures to protect artists’ rights, with many in the creative sector worried that existing proposals that allow developers to use content freely could further erode artists' protections.

The burst of activity and advocacy from the arts community is not unprecedented. Previous protests against proposed changes to copyright laws included a silent album released by artists like Annie Lennox and Damon Albarn, who vehemently opposed plans that would allow developers to leverage copyrighted content without seeking permission from creators. This has led to a collective push for a more balanced regulatory framework, where rights holders are not only recognised but actively involved in negotiations with AI companies.

Amidst the debate, industry experts remain divided. Julia Willemyns, co-founder of the Centre for British Progress, cautioned against potential negative economic repercussions of the artists' proposals, arguing they could hinder innovation and allow foreign firms to exploit British content unchallenged. This reflects a broader concern that restrictive measures on AI could stymie the very creativity they aim to protect.

Baroness Kidron has articulated a vision for the UK to emerge as a leader in the global AI landscape, but stresses that this requires establishing transparent, fair partnerships between tech firms and creators. As the government prepares to release an impact assessment based on public consultations, the looming questions regarding how best to protect artistic livelihoods while facilitating technological advancement remain at the forefront of public discourse.

Ultimately, the coalition of artists and creators stands firm in their resolve, advocating for a legal framework that not only safeguards their rights but also cultivates an environment where creativity can thrive. As they put it, "We are wealth creators, we reflect and promote the national stories, we are the innovators of the future." The outcome of this ongoing debate will likely set a precedent for how the UK navigates the challenges and opportunities presented by AI in the creative sectors.

### Reference Map

* Paragraph 1: (1)
* Paragraph 2: (1)
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* Paragraph 9: (6)
* Paragraph 10: (1), (7)

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## Bibliography

* <https://en.royanews.tv/news/59535> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
* <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2025/feb/22/elton-john-calls-for-uk-copyright-rules-rethink-to-protect-creators-from-ai> - Sir Elton John has called on the UK government to reconsider proposals that would relax copyright rules, aiming to protect creative talent from AI exploitation. He emphasized that such changes could undermine the UK's leadership in the creative industry and urged for robust regulations to prevent technology companies from bypassing traditional copyright laws that safeguard artists' livelihoods.
* <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2024/dec/10/paul-mccartney-ai-warning-uk-debates-copyright-laws> - Paul McCartney has cautioned that artificial intelligence (AI) could exploit artists and urged the UK government to ensure copyright reforms protect the creative industries. He expressed concerns that AI models could produce content based on popular works without compensating the original creators. In December, Britain proposed a way for artists to license their work for AI training but suggested an exception for large-scale use where rights aren't reserved.
* <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2024/dec/19/uk-arts-and-media-reject-plan-to-let-ai-firms-use-copyrighted-material> - The creative industries want the onus to be on generative AI developers to seek permission, agree licences and pay rights holders if they want to train algorithms with the power to write, and make moving images, pictures and music. The joint statement from the creative industries, shared with the Guardian, said: “Rights holders do not support the new exception to copyright proposed.
* <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2025/mar/18/performing-arts-leaders-issue-copyright-warning-over-uk-governments-ai-plans> - In a statement, 35 signatories from dance, theatre and music industries express concern about ‘fragile ecosystem’. More than 30 performing arts leaders in the UK, including the bosses of the National Theatre, Opera North and the Royal Albert Hall, have joined the chorus of creative industry concern about the government’s plans to let artificial intelligence companies use artists’ work without permission.
* <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c8xqv9g8442o> - Sir Paul, one of the two surviving members of the Beatles, said there was a risk that AI would create a 'Wild West' in which artists' copyright is not properly protected. 'You get young guys, girls, coming up, and they write a beautiful song, and they don't own it,' he said. 'They don't have anything to do with it. And anyone who wants can just rip it off.'
* <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2023/may/21/ai-music-danger-artists-universal-jeremy-hunt> - Universal Music Group, led by Sir Lucian Grainge, has raised concerns about the use of AI leading to infringement of copyright. Senior music industry figures have been lobbying Downing Street to tighten rules around the nascent technology, warning Britain risks becoming 'less committed to basic property rights than the Chinese Communist Party'.