# UK artists unite against government plan to weaken copyright protections for AI use



For months, stalwarts of the UK’s creative industries—from music icons to literary figures—have rallied against a controversial proposal from the new Labour government that poses a serious threat to copyright protections. A government consultation aims to regulate artificial intelligence with a concerning bias toward allowing AI companies to exploit copyrighted work by default unless creators actively opt out. This alarming initiative raises profound worries, as many artists lack the necessary transparency to know who is using their work, when it’s being used, and for what purpose. Critics argue that without adequate safeguards, this proposal effectively legalises theft, unraveling the very foundation of creative rights.

Elton John, among others, has vehemently opposed these changes, stating, “The government have no right to do this to my songs. They have no right to do it to anybody’s songs, or anybody’s prose.” His sentiments resonate deeply within the creative community, which fears that this legislation will jeopardise their livelihoods and the vibrancy of artistic expression across the UK. The implications for young and emerging artists are particularly troubling, considering that such individuals often lack the financial and legal means to stand against corporate giants.

In response to these alarming developments, members of the House of Lords sought to introduce emergency transparency measures in the data (use and access) bill currently making its way through Parliament. These amendments were intended to ensure copyright owners can identify when, where, and how their work is exploited by AI. However, they were ultimately dismissed by the government, which appears determined to push its agenda forward regardless of the mounting dissent within the creative community.

Amidst these concerning developments, the Secretary of State for Technology, Peter Kyle, conceded in a recent session that “much content has already been used and subsumed by AI models, usually from other territories and under the current law.” This admission exposes the troubling reality that, despite claims of consultation and oversight, government policies are alarmingly misaligned with the interests of creators. The rhetoric pledging support for the creative sector rings hollow amid widespread opposition from numerous artists, including bands and solo musicians who have protested through a collaborative album titled *Is This What We Want?*. This unique project, featuring silent tracks recorded in studios, symbolises the impending loss of creativity and control over their works.

The creative industries are vital to the UK economy, contributing approximately £126 billion and employing over 2.4 million individuals. This sector has outpaced the overall economy in growth, underscoring its importance. However, the unchecked practices of AI present an existential threat to these achievements. With calls for a visionary industrial strategy, robust government policies must be adopted to protect artists while fostering responsible AI innovation. The government’s move to relax copyright laws disproportionately favours large tech companies at the expense of individual artists, a decision many in the industry deem shortsighted.

Paul McCartney has also expressed his concerns, asserting that the government should safeguard the rights of creators to maintain a fair balance between artistic integrity and technological advancement. These sentiments resonate powerfully across the creative community, where many fret about the long-term repercussions of the proposed changes. As the consultation period nears its conclusion, the stakes have never been higher, with the future of Britain’s artistic legacy hanging in the balance.

Looking ahead, the data (use and access) bill is set to return to the House of Lords on 2 June. While the Labour government may boast a strong majority, the increasing pressure from influential voices within the creative sector indicates that this battle is far from over. A nation that disregards its storytellers and artists risks losing not only its cultural identity but also its status as a global leader in creative innovation. The fight for the future of copyright in the age of AI continues, highlighting the ongoing tension between progress and preservation in an increasingly digital landscape.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/may/24/ai-britain-creative-industries-government-data-bill> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.reuters.com/business/media-telecom/criminal-elton-john-condemns-uks-ai-copyright-plans-2025-05-18/> - Elton John has strongly criticized the UK government's proposal to relax copyright laws, allowing AI developers to train models on creative content without guaranteed compensation to original creators. This proposal, backed by Prime Minister Keir Starmer's ambition to establish the UK as an AI leader, would permit developers to use material with lawful access unless creators opt out. John, along with other prominent artists like Paul McCartney, Andrew Lloyd Webber, and Ed Sheeran, argues that such a move undermines the livelihood of young artists who lack the resources to protect their work against large tech firms. Calling the plan 'criminal,' John emphasized the irreplaceable emotional and human qualities of art that machines cannot replicate. Despite his support for the Labour Party, John expressed feeling betrayed and pledged to continue defending creators' rights. The government, meanwhile, insists it is consulting stakeholders and will not proceed with any policy change unless it benefits both AI development and the creative industry. The UK has traditionally excelled in the creative sector, employing thousands across various artistic domains.
3. <https://www.ft.com/content/9ad226ad-e90b-45a6-b479-12fd93f701ad> - The UK's creative industries, valued at £125 billion and employing over 2.4 million people, are a vital yet often underappreciated economic sector. Despite their rapid growth—1.5 times faster than the overall economy—these industries face considerable threats, notably from unregulated artificial intelligence (AI) usage. Current UK policy has sparked concern over the potential misuse of intellectual property in AI training, risking devaluation of creative works and future loss of content creators. The upcoming industrial strategy aims to position the creative sector as one of eight key growth areas, emphasizing investments in AI-led innovation, skills development, and financial accessibility for small businesses. Regional creative clusters—like games in Dundee and TV in Cardiff—should be supported alongside London's global pull. Additionally, advertising contributes significantly, with 1.7 million jobs and £109 billion in GVA in 2024, making the UK the world’s second-largest exporter of advertising services. The newsletter urges the government to adopt a comprehensive, long-term policy with leadership that can champion and scale the creative economy, ensuring its sustainability in the face of global and technological challenges.
4. <https://www.ft.com/content/4cae1fa6-2e27-4000-b48c-b078a20bfea9> - Is This What We Want? is a protest album created by 1,000 UK Artists, a supergroup composed of over 1,000 artists including Kate Bush, Annie Lennox, Damon Albarn, and Hans Zimmer. The album protests the UK government's plan to change copyright laws to assist tech companies in training AI programs. Each of the 12 tracks is nearly silent and lasts about four minutes, inspired by John Cage's silent piece 4'33". The album targets the data-mining practices of AI models and includes subtle ambient sounds recorded in studios. The project was organized by Ed Newton-Rex to highlight the risk of artists' rights being violated. It reflects broader concerns about the impact of AI and low streaming revenues on the music industry.
5. <https://www.musicradar.com/music-industry/stealing-the-work-art-and-livelihoods-of-lyricists-songwriters-and-composers-ivors-academy-warns-suno-ai-over-its-lyrics-generator> - The Ivors Academy has formally objected to Suno AI's new 'lyrics generator' tool, ReMi, claiming it infringes on the copyrights of songwriters and composers. ReMi is marketed as generating original lyrics based on user prompts, but investigations by Complete Music Update reveal that it can replicate existing copyrighted lyrics, such as those from Midnight Oil’s “Beds Are Burning.” This suggests the AI model was trained on copyrighted material without consent, violating UK copyright laws. The Academy’s CEO, Roberto Neri, condemned the tool as an example of unethical AI exploiting the work of music creators without permission or compensation. He demanded its removal and warned of further calls for legislative reform if AI firms continue such practices. Meanwhile, in Germany, collecting society GEMA has initiated legal action against Suno for using copyrighted content without consent. Despite this pushback, the UK government appears inclined to amend copyright laws to allow AI training on protected works by default, placing the onus on artists to opt out.
6. <https://apnews.com/article/b260a4c6f0fdf732fb4994cdeb1710a4> - Paul McCartney has expressed concerns over potential changes to UK copyright laws that may allow artificial intelligence (AI) companies to use copyrighted materials unless creators opt out. McCartney argues this could lead to artists losing control of their work and damage Britain’s creative industries. The UK government is consulting on new copyright laws intended to balance creators’ control and compensation for AI use of their works, while supporting AI development. McCartney insists that the government should protect artists’ rights to their creations, preventing tech companies from profiting unfairly. Many organizations, including The Associated Press, support maintaining strong copyright protections under the Creative Rights in AI Coalition.
7. <https://apnews.com/article/dc80620c1c226a816048b87fb30309c4> - A silent album titled 'Is This What We Want?' has been released by over 1,000 British musicians, including notable artists like Kate Bush and Elton John, to protest proposed changes to U.K. AI laws that could allow tech firms to use copyrighted material to train AI models without creators' consent. The album's 12 tracks are recordings of empty studios symbolizing the potential loss of creative control. The protest aims to protect the interests of musicians and preserve the integrity of Britain's creative industries. Profits from the album will support the charity Help Musicians. The consultation on these law changes closes on Tuesday, with strong opposition from artists and media companies. The UK government insists the new approach will favor both AI developers and right holders.