# Concerns grow over AI and copyright regulations in the UK



Recent discussions surrounding artificial intelligence (AI) and copyright laws in the United Kingdom have revealed significant concerns from policy experts regarding proposed regulations that may restrict companies such as OpenAI, Google, and Meta from training AI models on copyrighted material. Addressed during a webinar held by the Centre for Data Innovation think tank, these experts highlighted that prohibiting AI development based on copyrighted content could have counterproductive effects on model quality and economic outcomes.

In December 2024, the UK government initiated a consultation aimed at assessing the protection of artists, writers, and composers whose creative works are utilised for training AI systems. The proposal suggested a framework allowing AI developers to employ digital content unless a rightsholder actively opts out. This proposal has faced substantial pushback from various bodies representing the creative industries, who argue that such a system shifts the burden onto creators to prevent the use of their work instead of requiring AI developers to obtain explicit consent.

Policy expert Benjamin White, founder of copyright reform advocacy group Knowledge Rights 21, expressed the concern that any regulatory framework impacting AI training transcends the creative sectors, affecting a wide array of industries reliant on copyright. “The rules that affect singers affect scientists, and the rules that affect clinicians affect composers as well,” White explained. He pointed out that the existing exceptions in copyright law fail to facilitate effective data sharing among institutions, particularly in academic research and healthcare, potentially curtailing advancements that could benefit society at large.

Bertin Martens, a senior fellow at the economic think tank Bruegel, underscored the contradictory stance of media industries who currently leverage AI models to enhance their productivity while simultaneously seeking to withhold data from the training process. He argued that if AI developers were to rely solely on consenting publishers or rightsholders for data licensing, the resulting models would likely suffer from bias and incomplete information due to the impracticality of acquiring consent from a wide array of smaller publishers.

Julia Willemyns, co-founder of the tech policy research initiative UK Day One, echoed concerns about the effectiveness of an opt-out regime, suggesting that jurisdictions with less restrictive laws would capitalise on the same content for AI training. Such scenarios could hinder the UK's access to high-quality AI models, impede technological diffusion, and negatively affect productivity within the UK economy.

The webinar also touched upon the economic implications for artists in the context of AI licensing arrangements. Willemyns stated that the value of individual pieces of data in the vast landscape of AI models is limited, suggesting that even in a global framework requiring explicit consent, the monetary returns for creators may remain negligible. “We’re trading off countrywide economic effects for a positive that seems very negligible,” she noted, indicating a potential disconnect between expectations for economic benefits and the reality of AI development.

The discussion highlighted recent controversies, including an incident involving AI-generated artwork mimicking the style of Studio Ghibli, the renowned Japanese animation studio. Critics raised concerns about the appropriation of artistic styles without permission, prompting some companies like OpenAI to implement refusal mechanisms for generating images in the style of living artists. However, experts at the webinar opined that the attention generated by such AI artworks could, paradoxically, boost interest in the original creators' works.

In light of these ongoing debates, experts advocate for a more adaptable approach to copyright that permits AI training on publicly available materials while preventing direct reproduction of copyrighted content. They contend that flexibility in AI development is crucial to harness the potential benefits that these technologies can offer across various sectors. As the UK government continues its consultation process, the implications of these proposed copyright regulations remain a focal point for policymakers, industry stakeholders, and creative professionals alike.

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

## References

* <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/copyright-and-artificial-intelligence/copyright-and-artificial-intelligence> - This UK government consultation document discusses proposed changes to copyright laws for AI development, including the challenges faced by AI developers and rightsholders, and how the current framework needs reform to support both sectors. The proposal includes allowing AI developers to use digital content unless a rightsholder actively opts out.
* <https://www.ropesgray.com/en/insights/viewpoints/102k537/ico-publishes-response-to-the-uk-governments-copyright-and-ai-consultation> - The UK Information Commissioners Office response to the government's copyright and AI consultation highlights the balance needed between supporting AI development and protecting creators' rights. It discusses data mining, web scraping, and transparency in AI training data use.
* <https://www.cepa.org/article/copyright-blocks-the-uks-ai-ambitions/> - This article discusses how the UK's restrictive copyright laws hinder AI development, contrasting its status with the EU and US. It highlights the need for reform to balance creativity protection with AI innovation, considering the economic implications and global competitiveness.
* <https://www.whitecase.com/insight-our-thinking/ai-watch-global-regulatory-tracker-united-kingdom> - This report provides an overview of the UK's regulatory landscape on AI, including government initiatives to clarify copyright laws for AI and creative industries. It touches on legislative plans for AI regulation and international partnerships for AI safety standards.
* <https://www.insideglobaltech.com/2025/01/03/uk-government-proposes-copyright-ai-reform/> - This article outlines the UK government's proposal for copyright and AI reform, focusing on creating exceptions for text and data mining and promoting transparency in AI development. It explains the potential for labelling AI-generated outputs and supporting AI innovation.