# UK government retreats on AI bill after artists secure stronger copyright protections



The ongoing debate around the UK government's proposed AI bill has taken a significant turn, particularly regarding plans to implement an "opt-out" framework for generative model training. Critics have voiced serious concerns about the implications of allowing technology companies to use copyrighted works without explicit permission from creators. Following substantial opposition from the music and wider creative industries, the government has faced what has been described as a heavy defeat with a key amendment to the bill.

The proposed legislation initially aimed to simplify the process for AI developers, permitting the usage of protected works as training data unless copyright holders actively opted out. However, prominent figures such as Sir Paul McCartney, Elton John, and a host of other industry leaders have rallied against this approach, fearing it would undermine creators' rights and jeopardize the UK's esteemed creative sector. A notable letter signed by over 400 artists and media executives urged Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer to advocate for stronger copyright protections in response to the potential exploitation of creators' work by AI firms.

As the backlash grew, a revised amendment gained momentum, designed by Baroness Beeban Kidron. This amendment proposes that AI developers must now disclose the specifics of the copyrighted materials used in training their models. More crucially, it shifts the burden onto developers, requiring them to seek approval from copyright owners before including any of their works—a significant departure from the original opt-out model. This legislative change reflects mounting pressure from artists, who argue that stronger protections are not just necessary for their rights but integral to preserving the UK's creative economy, estimated at a remarkable £125 billion annually.

In a striking protest against the legislation, over 1,000 musicians—including Kate Bush and Cat Stevens—released a silent album entitled 'Is This What We Want?', which symbolically underscores the silence that could fall over the arts due to these changes. The album showcases empty studio recordings, illustrating the potential void left in the creative landscape should artists’ rights be undermined. As musicians unify in their opposition, the protest extends beyond music, with voices from across literature and film echoing the call for sensible legislation.

Many argue that the proposed changes illustrate a troubling trend towards prioritising corporate interests over creative integrity. Experts from the University of Cambridge cautioned that the government’s proposed "rights reservation" model communicates a disconcerting message: that the profitability of the tech industry is more valuable than the work of individual creators. They advocate for a system that enshrines the rights of individuals, ensuring that original creators remain at the forefront of any discussion regarding AI and copyright.

As the amended bill makes its way to the House of Commons for further debate, the fate of the UK’s artists hangs in the balance. The industry remains adamant that any regulatory framework must not only protect their works but foster a sustainable environment that encourages creativity and innovation in both the art and technology sectors. With the stakes believed to extend far beyond immediate profits, the call for a more equitable approach to copyright amid the rise of generative AI has become increasingly urgent. The conversation surrounding this issue will likely intensify as negotiations unfold, reflecting broader societal values regarding creativity, ownership, and the future of artistic expression in an age increasingly defined by artificial intelligence.

**Reference Map**

1. Paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7
2. Paragraphs 2, 4, 6
3. Paragraph 3
4. Paragraph 6
5. Paragraph 6
6. Paragraphs 1, 5
7. Paragraph 1, 5

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

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.newsbreak.com/digital-music-news-296091106/4005877410974-uk-s-opt-out-ai-training-bill-suffers-amendment-setback-following-ample-music-space-criticism> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/5a6601f7-a9c9-4f3b-a205-b4f8fe3e688d> - Over 400 leading UK musicians, artists, and media executives, including Sir Paul McCartney, Elton John, Dua Lipa, and Richard Curtis, have signed a letter urging Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer to support stronger copyright protections against unauthorized AI usage. They advocate for an amendment to the Data (Use and Access) Bill, proposed by Baroness Beeban Kidron, which would require AI developers to disclose which specific copyrighted materials—such as music, books, and films—have been used to train their models. The amendment aims to ensure transparency and prevent what is described as the mass theft of creative works by AI firms. Although the amendment was recently defeated in the House of Commons, it faces another vote in the House of Lords. While the government has proposed its own amendments and insists that all options remain on the table, many creators fear that without explicit legislation, tech companies will bypass copyright protections. The letter cautions that neglecting creators’ rights could undermine the UK’s global standing in the creative sector and damage long-term economic prospects. Advocates argue that the proposed measures are vital to foster a robust licensing market and maintain the UK’s leadership in both creative and AI industries.
3. <https://www.reuters.com/lifestyle/musicians-release-silent-album-protest-uks-ai-copyright-changes-2025-02-25/> - Over 1,000 musicians, including prominent names like Kate Bush and Cat Stevens, released a silent album titled 'Is This What We Want?' as a protest against changes to Britain’s copyright laws. Proposed by the government, these changes would allow tech firms to use artists' work to train AI models without compensating the creators, unless they proactively opt out. The creative industry fears that this could undermine the rights of creators. Amid a public consultation, the government maintains that current laws hinder the potential of the creative and AI sectors and has not yet finalized any decisions. The protest album features recordings of empty studios to symbolize the adverse impact on artists' livelihoods. Notable musicians are urging a rethink of the proposal, advocating for the protection of creators' rights against unregulated AI exploitation.
4. <https://www.ft.com/content/304d660f-6cac-4e38-a6d5-d8d98f5770fb> - Generative AI technology has advanced rapidly, able to compose music, summarize legal documents, and create TV ads, all by training on human-generated content. However, legal frameworks governing AI's use of copyrighted material are lacking, endangering the technology’s progress and the rights of original content creators. Disputes over AI's 'fair use' of copyrighted content have sparked global litigation. The UK government’s recent consultation suggests allowing AI firms to use copyrighted work without consent unless creators opt out, a move fraught with issues. A more viable solution is promoting licensing markets, granting creators control over their IP and ensuring fair compensation while providing AI models with quality data. Such a system would foster trust and incentivize creativity, paving the way for sustainable AI innovation.
5. <https://www.ft.com/content/38585a82-cffd-4144-9969-82e94cbb2168> - Thousands of musicians, artists, authors, and journalists in the UK protested against government proposals that would facilitate tech companies' use of their work to train AI models. The government's consultation suggests a 'rights reservation' system where each creator must opt out to prevent their work from being used. The creative sector responded with the 'Make it Fair' campaign, highlighting the dangers of this proposal. Over 1,000 musicians, including Kate Bush and Damon Albarn, released a 'silent' album titled 'Is This What We Want?' to demonstrate the risk these proposals pose to the music industry. Artists like Paul McCartney also opposed, and hundreds of creatives signed a letter expressing their disagreement. The debate pits creative industries, seeking transparency and licenses, against tech companies desiring free access to content for training algorithms.
6. <https://ai.cam.ac.uk/news/government-s-proposed-opt-out-model-for-training-ai-goes-against-the-spirit-of-copyright-law-asserts-new-report-from-cambridge-researchers> - The UK government’s proposed ‘rights reservation’ model for AI data mining tells British artists, musicians, and writers that 'tech industry profitability is more valuable than their creations,' say leading academics. The UK government should resist allowing AI companies to scrape all copyrighted works unless the holder has actively ‘opted out,’ as it puts an unfair burden on up-and-coming creative talents who lack the skills and resources to meet legal requirements. This is according to a new report from University of Cambridge experts in economics, policy, and machine learning, who also argue the UK government should clearly state that only a human author can hold copyright – even when AI has been heavily involved. A collaboration between three Cambridge initiatives – the Minderoo Centre for Technology and Democracy, the Bennett Institute for Public Policy, and ai@cam – the report argues that unregulated use of generative AI will not guarantee economic growth and risks damaging the UK’s thriving creative sector. If the UK adopts the proposed ‘rights reservation’ for AI data mining, rather than maintaining the legal foundation that automatically safeguards copyright, it will compromise the livelihoods of many in the sector, particularly those just starting out, say researchers. They argue that it risks allowing artistic content produced in the UK to be scraped for endless reuse by offshore companies. 'Going the way of an opt-out model is telling Britain’s artists, musicians, and writers that tech industry profitability is more valuable than their creations,' said Prof Gina Neff, Executive Director at the Minderoo Centre for Technology and Democracy. 'Ambitions to strengthen the creative sector, bolster the British economy and spark innovation using GenAI in the UK can be achieved – but we will only get results that benefit all of us if we put people’s needs before tech companies.'
7. <https://musically.com/2025/02/25/uks-creative-sector-pushes-back-against-opt-out-ai-training-proposal/> - The music industry and wider creative sector in the UK have launched a vigorous pushback on the British government’s potential changes to copyright law in relation to AI training. It is launching to mark the final day (25 February) of the government’s consultation seeking views on its plans, including the proposal that AI firms be allowed to train their models on copyrighted content unless the rightsholders have opted out. Today’s moves include the launch of a ‘Make it Fair’ campaign to drum up support from the general public. It will be promoted in hundreds of news outlets over the coming week, including an identical cover wrap and homepage takeover in daily newspapers and their websites today. While news companies are leading the charge, the British music industry is fully behind them. 'We stand behind today’s Make It Fair campaign, which calls on Government to protect human creativity in the age of generative AI,' said BPI CEO Dr Jo Twist OBE, pointing to the creative industries’ £125bn annual value to the British economy. 'The sweeping changes to copyright law currently being proposed would completely undermine this growth opportunity, essentially making it legal for international AI firms to plunder the UK’s music, books, film and more, all for their own profit and without the need for authorisation or compensation.'