

Written PQ Answer given by Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster on Future Administration of Crown Copyright

9 February 1996

Question

'To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on the arrangements proposed for the administration of Crown copyright.'

Statement by Chancellor of the Duchy

'The Government propose to privatise HMSO during the summer of 1996. We shall retain a residual body, which will keep the title 'HMSO', to administer Crown copyright and to fulfil certain statutory responsibilities and oversight of the Gazettes. The residual body could also administer Parliamentary copyright if Parliament so wished. Irrespective of the privatisation, we intend that administration of Crown copyright should be further separated from official publishing functions.

The residual HMSO will continue to administer Crown copyright with a view to making official information as widely and readily available as possible, taking into account the need to protect the interests of the taxpayer.

The Government will continue the existing arrangements for non-exclusive licensing of Crown material. These include concessionary arrangements for certain education and non-commercial purposes. The Government will continue the existing policy of allowing secondary publishers, without charge or prior permission and on a non-exclusive basis, to reproduce in value-added print formats Acts, Statutory Instruments and Statutory Rules and Orders. I have decided that this concession should now be extended to electronic and microform formats.

Reproduction in printed format of quasi-legislative material will continue to be licensed on a non-exclusive basis, according to the policy described in HMSO's Dear Publisher letter of 6 February 1995 (Reference QLM/2) and the Cabinet Office circular DEO (PM) (95) 4, copies of which have been placed in the Library of the House.

Protection and enforcement of Crown copyright will be a function of residual HMSO, in collaboration with the originating Department or Agency. Where material created in Government has inherent commercial value and the interests of the taxpayer in recovering the costs of preparation and production can best be ensured by a commercial approach to copyright licensing and charging, this will be continued. The existing delegations covering Ordnance Survey and the Hydrographic Office will remain unchanged.

Copyright and charging policy on the Statute Law Database, a value-added electronic version of the whole Statute Book now in preparation by the Statutory Publications Office, will be decided nearer the time of implementation in 1997.

On privatisation, Crown copyright will be retained by the Crown for all the Crown copyright material in the back catalogue of HMSO publications. The new owner will be licensed to reprint back list titles, but will have obligations to make them readily available. The aim will be to ensure the continuing availability of official publications in response to public demand. In respect of future Crown copyright material, the privatised Stationery Office will be required to be licensed, in the same way as other private sector publishers.

Arrangements for printing and publishing government material are already designed to secure best value for money in making information available to the public at least cost to taxpayers and purchasers of publications. Except for current arrangements covering certain documents published by order of Parliament, Departments are not tied to HMSO, and there will be no change in competitive purchasing arrangements after privatisation of the Stationery Office. There will also be no change in the need to recover where appropriate the costs of

preparation, production and dissemination of material. As now, some official publications will be made available free of charge, others will be priced.

In addition to paper publications, I shall continue to encourage developments in publishing suitable information by electronic means, including the Internet, other on-line services and CD-ROMs. HMSO is now releasing onto its Internet service the summaries of over 200 Acts of Parliament from 1984 to date, and is planning to publish henceforth on the Internet the full text of all new Acts.

Parliament, rather than Government, is responsible for the policy on charging for reproduction of Parliamentary material including Hansard, and Select Committee reports.'