The Impact of Electronic Publishing on the Academic Community

Session 2: Legal and political issues

Introduction

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Although the working group originally felt that the workshop should address legal and ethical issues related to electronic publishing, we quickly realised that it was completely impossible to cover the ground in a serious way given the time available. We therefore limited this session to legal and political aspects of copyright and related rights, and indeed these subjects alone deserve devoted workshops.

The following three papers discuss different aspects of copyright. Amédée Turner, an experienced legal practitioner who has seen action on the political and parliamentary scene, expresses his views on how the legislation should be managed, particularly in Europe. Thomas Dreier concentrates on copyright principles and Jon Bing discusses how copyright can be managed in a digital environment.

In this workshop, unfortunately, we were not able to address the separate issue of patent rights; the question of the appropriate balance between academic freedom to publish or use information and patent rights, an area of great importance to the academic community. Nor were we able to discuss the fact that digital information is easily copied or modified, which raises academic issues somewhat separate from those of copyright, such as those of plagiarism, precedence disputes, etc., which the community will almost certainly have to address.