

Foreward

We are living in a knowledge society. Knowledge empowers people in their everyday lives and facilitates good governance and the development of democratic societies. Knowing your legal rights as a citizen, being well informed about a medical condition or having access to the latest travel, weather or leisure information enables people to take control, make informed decisions and to exercise choice. It encourages innovation, creativity and a competitive economy.

Libraries organise, collect and preserve all types of information, knowledge, cultural and learning resources for the purposes of making them available to library patrons and the general public of today and tomorrow.

Information technologies have provided libraries with opportunities to improve and develop innovative services and to serve our communities in new ways. Resources previously available only to those who could travel to the library can be accessed electronically by library users in the remotest areas. Scientists and students can benefit from access to world-class scholarly information and research data. Through digitising their collections, libraries are opening their treasures to the world.

The barriers to accessing knowledge, especially in developing and transition countries, are formidable. Financial, technological and legal “firewalls” hinder the development of the knowledge society with all its benefits. This Handbook is a practical guide to topical legal questions affecting the information work of libraries in the fast-moving digital environment. The range of issues illustrates the complexity of the world in which the digital librarian operates. Librarians should have some knowledge of the key areas, so that the library community can defend their position and can continue to fulfil their mission in the digital age. Each topic is described briefly, the main policy aspects for libraries are outlined, and there are links to library policy statements for further reading.

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We hope that you find the Handbook useful. If you do, please share, distribute, translate and build upon it!

Teresa Hackett
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Update

New sections “Copyright Exceptions and Limitations” and “Legal Deposit” were added. Sections “Orphan Works”, “Open Access to Scholarly Communications” and “International Policy Making: a Development Agenda for WIPO” were updated. Thanks to Barbara Stratton, and Iryna Kuchma (Ukraine) Melissa Hagemann (USA) for reviewing Open Access.

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