

A joint statement by The Publishers Association, the Association of Learned and Professional Society Publishers and the International Association of Scientific, Technical and Medical Publishers on the JISC-sponsored report 'Economic Implications of Alternative Scholarly Publishing Models: Exploring the costs and benefits' (Houghton et al. & Oppenheim et al.)

13th February 2009

We read with interest this JISC report on the costs and benefits of alternative publishing models. We had hoped and expected that this study would add to the primary evidence base, but instead the report represents a thinkpiece resting on a number of assumptions mostly derived from the authors' own estimates applied to a theoretical model of the scholarly communication system. From this it concludes that there could be a substantial net benefit to the UK of switching from the current, stable, mainly reader-purchase business model to some variant of universal open access, either producer-funded journals or self-archived repositories with overlay services.

Open access publishing in all its variants is the subject of a series of experiments already running with our membership in what has become a challenging and dynamic economic environment for scholarly communication. However claims that if adopted universally an exclusively open access business model would generate large savings in the system costs for scholarly communication in the UK in our view remain unproven. We expect that there will be a more detailed critique in due course, but in the meantime we note that several assumptions are based on 'industry consultation', yet none of the publishing trade associations or any of the major commercial or society publishers were consulted in advance of publication.

We also wonder how the savings proposed are to be realised by the UK when 92% of research articles published derive from outside the UK. As the report itself acknowledges, "it is very difficult to make meaningful comparisons between toll and open access as they are very different things. Toll access seeks to provide UK subscribers with access to worldwide content, whereas open access provides worldwide access to UK content".

We look forward to the opportunity to discuss this report with its sponsors and the community it represents. The extended workflow analysis is potentially a useful basis from which to analyse the real costs involved, perhaps to inform producer- side sponsorship of publication costs.

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