

15 March 2010

Dr Malcolm Read OBE
Executive Secretary
Joint Information Systems Committee

Dear Malcolm,

JISC has recently published *Modelling Scholarly Communication Options: Costs and Benefits for Universities*, a report from Key Perspectives that reprises the Houghton study which we discussed extensively with JISC at this time last year. You have also released two accompanying briefing papers aimed at researchers and senior university administrators, and we understand that these are the first steps in a broader campaign targeting university leaders that will include regional workshops and a flagship event with Universities UK. We also note that JISC has been posting videos on YouTube promoting the contested Houghton study as the cornerstone of your case for open access.

These actions risk deeply misleading the UK Higher Education sector and are inconsistent with the collaborative approach on which we jointly embarked with JISC last summer.

- It is simply inaccurate to say that “the difficulty most frequently expressed by researchers within universities is their inability to access journal articles... because of a subscription barrier.” On the contrary, recent rigorous research shows that 94% of UK university researchers find access to journals “easy or very easy.”¹ Getting access to journal articles is considered the easiest of all university researcher information needs². “Immediate access to journals” is 14th on university researchers’ list of concerns, with “not enough funding” being their top concern, “not enough time to perform research” being their second, and “too much bureaucracy” being their third greatest concern³.
- It is misleading not to acknowledge the relative value for money that UK universities get under the current system. The £113m spent on journal subscriptions for higher education in 2007 resulted in researchers and students downloading 102 million full text articles at an average cost of 80 pence per download⁴ (based on the proportion of subscription costs associated with e-journals) giving UK universities some of the lowest per article download costs in the world. As such UK Publishing is one of the UK’s most successful, dynamic and innovative industries at the forefront of Digital Britain.
- It is potentially dangerous to their interests to tell UK universities that they can “spend less” by moving to an open access journal system when *your own report* says they would have to spend much more:

¹ Mark Ware Consulting Ltd (2009) *Access by UK small and medium-sized enterprises to professional and academic information*. Publishing Research Consortium at <http://www.publishingresearch.net/documents/SMEAccessResearchReport.pdf>, p14.

² Mark Ware Consulting Ltd (2009) *Survey of access to professional and academic information in the UK, Companion Report*, Publishing Research Consortium at <http://www.publishingresearch.net/documents/SMEAccessCompanionReport.pdf>, p28

³ Rowlands, I. & Olivieri, R. (2006) *Journals and scientific productivity: A case study in immunology*

and *microbiology*. Publishing Research Consortium at http://www.publishingresearch.net/overcoming_barriers.htm, p22.

⁴ Research Information Network (2009) *E-Journals: their use, value and impact*. at <http://www.rin.ac.uk/our-work/communicating-and-disseminating-research/e-journals-their-use-value-and-impact>, p8.

- Open access funded by article processing charges ('gold') would require UK universities to spend at least £250 million, i.e. an increase of 121% compared to today (£150 million to make all UK articles 'gold', and around £100 million to keep subscribing to the 93.4% of research published outside the UK).
- Open access based on self-archiving in repositories ('green') would require UK universities to spend at least £131 million, i.e. an increase of 16% compared to today as universities pay for a system of institutional repositories in addition to journals.
- It is misleading to tell UK universities that they can make large scale "savings" to offset these increased costs without telling them that the hypothesized "savings" would only be achieved through large scale job losses. The hypothesized "savings" in the report result from a monetary value that has been attributed to "time saved" by supposedly more efficient researchers and librarians. But UK universities would only actually save money if they made several thousand librarians and researchers redundant.
- It is misleading not to explain to UK universities that the hypothesized "savings" require the rest of the world to support open access. The rest of the world accounts for 93.4% of published articles, only 1-2% of which are 'gold' and only 7% of which are 'green' today. Until the rest of the world follows UK universities, which would likely take decades based on the current pace of change, UK universities would pay significantly more with no extra benefit.
- It should be acknowledged how questionable these hypothesised savings are. The Houghton study has been widely criticised for (amongst other things) (1) dramatically over-estimating achievable cost savings, (2) conflating the benefits of open access with the benefits of the transition to online journals and (3) taking no account of the impact on research productivity that must already be evident from the significantly enhanced access that has already been achieved in recent years (through innovations in licensing such as the 'big deal') if the economic gains hypothesised by Houghton for open access are to be credible.
- In summary, it is misleading to tell UK universities that "it is possible to get a better system for less money" when there is no serious evidence for such a claim, especially at a time when UK university budgets have never been under greater pressure.

We raised all these points with you a year ago when the Houghton study was first released. After prolonged discussion we agreed that collaboration, not unilateralism was the best way to harness our joint capabilities for the benefit of researchers and students. We agreed that we have objectives in common, including to keep driving the adoption of electronic content and to close any remaining access gaps sustainably using all available dissemination methodologies, including the various forms of open access. After all, as publishers we are not opposed to open access – we are enablers of it.

We have dedicated considerable senior leadership time and resources to moving forward with the 'Transitions' portfolio of work with JISC, RIN and others. The four work-streams are intended to build shared understandings and to deliver rational evidence-based recommendations to achieve our shared objectives. We have contributed our expertise and resources to this work in the belief that you had sincerely wished to work with us to deliver initiatives that would benefit UK Higher Education and beyond.

However, JISC's recent advocacy activity is clearly inconsistent with the good faith that we have shown in trying to work with you. You have undermined our efforts to work collaboratively, and moreover you have publicly portrayed us as being the source of a problem to the UK Higher Education sector. You apparently see publishers neither as a valued stakeholder in the landscape of UK research, nor as a partner to help achieve your objectives. You have acted unequivocally and unilaterally against us in front of the UK Higher Education sector that we serve.

Most concerning of all, you are using significant sums of UK tax-payers' money not to fund objective, balanced and rational research into effective scholarly communication, but to fund reports widely acknowledged as deeply flawed yet repeatedly used as evidence to support an ideological position.

A decade or so ago JISC worked constructively with publishers to craft a model licence that has become the basis for collaboration between publishers and libraries around the world. We had hoped that our latest collaboration could bring significant new benefits to the sector that we both serve, including closing any access gaps that remain and enhancing the utility of the information being accessed, but your recent activity would seem to put our good work so far at risk.

In conclusion therefore, we ask that you urgently arrange a meeting when we can discuss these matters with yourself, Professor Baker and Professor O'Shea.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

Graham Taylor, The Publishers Association

Ian Russell, Association of Learned and Professional Society Publishers

Michael Mabe, International Association of Scientific, Technical & Medical Publishers

cc:

Dr Neil Jacobs, JISC

Dr Michael Jubb, RIN