

What does it cost and who pays?: Scholarly communications globally and in the UK

A Research Information Network event

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Presentations: available at www.rin.ac.uk/what-cost

Donald King	Distinguished Research professor, School of Information and Library Science, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill	<i>Keynote speaker: Why is the cost of scholarly communications important? What does the RIN report add to the current literature on scholarly communications?</i>
Daniel Hulls	Director, Cambridge Economic Policy Associates	<i>Introduction to the RIN report and the workings of the scholarly communications tool.</i>
Mayur Amin	Director of Research, Elsevier	<i>The challenges for commercial publishers.</i>
Paul Ayris	Director of Library Services & UCL Copyright Officer, University College London	<i>The challenges for librarians.</i>
Michael Jubb	Director, Research Information Network	<i>Taking it forward.</i>

Notes from the panel discussions

There was a good discussion during the panels, and interesting comments made during the breaks. Below are some of the key points were highlighted; both in terms of general discussion points and potential areas for follow up.

The report

- The report has flexibility within the assumptions which enable one to examine the sensitivity of these parameters
- The report characterises all participants in the scholarly communications process, including the different types of journals, publishers and libraries
- The report identifies different units and the costs per unit, which is unique
- The report does not take into consideration different disciplines and may be an area for further use as different disciplines are at different stages in regards to open access and electronic only publications. For example those in science primarily only access electronic articles, where as the humanities still use a mixture, therefore their access costs will be different.
- What is the impact of alternative technology, such as the espresso book machine?

Context of the report/user value

- The context of the report is important for policy/decision makers especially when thinking of the impact the process has on human resources
- Where do journal articles fit in the dissemination process? The majority of academics get information from other sources such as conference proceedings, and personal communications, as there is often a substantial time lag between obtaining the results

and getting them published. But researchers do use journal articles as a source and they are a major source of citations.

- User value/benefit – what is the impact on science, technology and medicine, on the economics of reading journals?

With regards to the scenarios

- For an author-side payment model to predominate there would need to be consensus amongst all publishers.
- As a result of the processing costs may decrease so that in a few years time, the RIN model would be incorrect as it would over estimate costs.
- There is a mild concern that collecting author-side payments is very time consuming and it may increase the time to publish, though not all agreed.
- Publishers should not limit themselves to the “gold” route for open access as it will limit the number of people who can contribute. Other models or combinations of other models may be the best option and allow unfunded researchers to publish in open access journals.
- AT the BMJ, research is open access but the content is accessed via subscription only.
- Open access: where are the funds going to coming from to cover the fees: libraries funds, universities, funding agencies?
- It takes time to collect open access payment fees, which could increase the time to publish. Though it is felt this wouldn't happen, but there could be a problem with bad debt, and having to chase people for payments which would increase the staff time costs.
- Author-pays model merely shifts cost to fewer institutions, how do you best distribute the costs across all those that get value from it:
 - o does electronic-only publishing simply shift the printing costs to readers, as how many actually read on-line?
- Electronic-only and author-side payments for publishing will only work in certain discipline like STM, as they predominantly use journal articles and have the funding to cover access fees, which those in the arts and humanities do not. Also people do want print copies still, e.g. in medicine doctors want print copies of specialist journals/magazines
- VAT is a serious problem for libraries:
 - o often libraries purchase both print and electronic copies and throughout the print copies, as cannot get VAT exemption on electronic only.
- What are the risks of shutting down paper tomorrow?
 - o Realistically will customers cancel subscriptions?
- The migration costs are a problem as you are running two very different systems in parallel and different organizations are at different stages.
- Top tier journal have multiple funding streams, how do you make the transition from this system to open access
- There is a role for linking journal articles to the experimental data sets, which leads to the question about whether the data should undergo peer review. However if it did, the process would take a lot longer and therefore cost more.

Other areas of concern

- Impact of exchange rate changes is substantial
 - o need to have a better understanding of the impact this has/could have on library budgets , e.g. will book budgets get used to fund the shortfall in journal subscription costs?
 - o an institutional level account of currency fluctuations is needed to get an accurate overview.
 - o can HEFCE realistically provide transitional funding for libraries in times of tight HE budget?
- Often the importance of the editors and their contribution to the journal article is overlooked
 - o does it always add value?
- Impact of REF: a large number of articles are read outside of academia and can have real impact, raising further risk to using bibliometrics:
 - o what percentages of journal article subscriptions are for commercial sources vs. academic sources?

Panel discussion themes:

- What effect does the user's expectation of immediate and ubiquitous access to journals and online resources have on the process of scholarly communications and its future?
- Should peer review continue to be free of charge if publishers are making profits off it? The model propounded in the RIN report shifts the cost of peer review from a non-cash cost to a cash cost reflected by an increase in subscription costs to maintain the profit margins of the publishers. Are there alternative ways to cover the cost of peer review? What would the economic impact of alternative funding models be?
- Do pre-print and or post-print publications have an economic impact on the cost of scholarly communications?
- Are there alternative scenarios for the scholarly communications process? What impact would they have on the current economics of publishing and distribution of scholarly communications?
- What impact do university repositories have on the current scholarly communications process?
- What are the implications of web based publication of unfinished results/ draft manuscripts? Does this jeopardize the publication of the complete research/manuscript in a peer review journal/publication?
- Currently there are two different models of open access. To what extent are they being used? How successful are they? What impact do they have on the current economic model of scholarly communications?
- What is the researcher's perspective on open access? Does this have any bearing on the discussion and implementation of different open access policies?
- What impact, financially or otherwise, does open access publishing have on the revenue of learned societies?