

Universities will cancel deals with publishers if they don't respond to current financial pressures – warn major sector bodies

A price freeze on journal subscriptions will not be enough to avoid UK researchers losing access to key academic content, warn three major sector bodies representing academic library directors and higher education managers.

[Research Libraries UK](#) (RLUK), [SCONUL](#), the professional association for academic and research libraries and Jisc say that immediate reductions are necessary if institutions are to retain access to content. Universities are under heavy pressure to reduce all expenditure and divert financial resources to areas of immediate concern including online teaching and implementing measures to limit the spread of COVID-19.

Stella Butler, University of Leeds' librarian and keeper of the Brotherton collection says: "The pandemic has put extraordinary pressure on university budgets. In the new normal that has yet to emerge libraries will be forced to prioritise their spending. Publishers should be focussing on supporting research by reducing journal costs not on maintaining profit levels. If prices do not come down, cancellations are inevitable."

Liz Waller, director of library services and librarian at Durham University says: "At this time of crisis we are having to take extremely difficult and unwelcome decisions and reduce costs that necessitate a comprehensive review of our subscriptions. We have already identified titles which we will be pausing next year, and this will be extended to select "big deals". Publishers must understand the need for price reductions and a full transition to open access to put libraries in a position to maintain subscriptions."

Last month, [Universities UK](#) and Jisc already called on major academic publishers to seek reductions of 25% on all agreements due to the grave financial impact of the pandemic.

David Prosser, executive director at RLUK says: "The global pandemic is increasing costs and reducing budgets in an unprecedented way. Libraries will need to make cuts and the only place where there will be enough money to make large enough savings is 'big deals' with publishers. Unless there are significant price reductions, these big deals will inevitably be cut - to the detriment of scholarship and publishers alike."

Ann Rossiter, executive director at SCONUL says: "It would be very short-sighted of publishers to seek to continue charging prices which were already subject to serious challenge on the basis of value even before the current crisis. Universities want to provide the maximum access to research outputs, but this cannot be at any cost. Companies which do not adapt to the new post-Covid 19 reality will be judged harshly. It is time for publishers to bring prices into line with value, and to rethink their business models with a much stronger focus on service."



Universities will cancel deals with publishers if they don't respond to current financial pressures – warn major sector bodies

Caren Milloy, Jisc's director of licensing: "Whilst the response from publishers to our call for price reductions has been constructive, offers to implement a 0% price increase will not meet the need to reduce expenditure to the levels of cuts institutions are facing. Our negotiations would have been seeking 0% price increases regardless. As in any business, libraries are now working to align costs against the prospective budgets that have been set and as we approach the renewal season for journal agreements, if a publisher has not provided a discount, their agreement will be top of the list for cancellation."

Jisc has asked major publishers to resubmit their budget proposals for the next academic year before mid-August. The proposals will be reviewed by a Jisc content expert group on the 10th September and will be circulated for wider consultation with universities.

ENDS

About Jisc

Jisc's vision is for the UK to be the most digitally advanced education and research nation in the world. At its heart is the super-fast national research and education network, Janet, with built-in cyber security protection. Jisc also provides technology solutions for its members (colleges, universities and research centres) and customers (public sector bodies), helps members save time and money by negotiating sector-wide deals and provides advice and practical assistance on digital technology. Jisc is funded by the UK higher and further education and research funding bodies and member institutions.

For more information, contact media@jisc.ac.uk, or call 07443 983571.