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Addressing the 'double dipping' charge

These pages are exploring the issues of payment for publication including the high cost of hybrid publishing. Concerns about expense can be further exacerbated by the perception that publishers offering hybrid open access are 'double dipping' – that is, receiving payment to make an article open access and receiving a second payment for the same article in the form of a subscription to the remainder of the journal.

Publisher response

Many publishers respond that they reduce the cost of subscriptions in proportion to the number of articles they have published open access under their hybrid scheme. Here are a few examples of specific statements about the double dipping issue:

Oxford University Press

According to a presentation from Wellcome Trust on 30 October 2008, Mandating Open Access – Slide 11 – the average price increase (2007-2008) across all Oxford Journal titles was 6.9% whereas the average price increase for *Oxford Open* titles (with open access uptake in 2006) was 1.7%. Eight Oxford Open titles saw an absolute reduction in price from 2007 to 2008.

Royal Society

In April 2013 the Royal Society published its Transparent Pricing Mechanism stating that they noted the percentage change in the number of non open access published over two three year periods. If that percentage drops they will adjust the price accordingly. Each year they publish the percentages and articles counts on their web site.

Wiley

On 28 March 2013, Wiley's released its Subscription Pricing for Hybrid Journals. This states they will exclude articles published as Open Access following payment of an article publication fee in their subscription prices. They will also vary the price of titles proportionately for any shift from subscription-funded articles to gold open access articles.

Elsevier

Elsevier has a No Double Dipping Policy which "is not to charge subscribers for open access articles and when calculating subscription prices only to take into account subscription articles – we do not double dip."

Elsevier states that they "do not count open access articles when setting subscription prices for titles. Subscription prices are therefore not affected by the volume of open access articles published in the journal." They make the distinction between individual subscriptions and payment for Collections. The no dipping policy for Collections is less clear.

Private correspondence from Elsevier has noted that in 2014 they have adjusted the list prices of 27 titles downwards. These include Molecular and Biochemical Parasitology, where they have reduced the list price by 3.7% in 2014, due to a decline in the number of subscription articles and a subsequent increase in open access articles in this journal.

Is this verifiable?

The UK House of Commons Business Innovations & Skills (BIS) Committee report, *Open Access: Fifth Report of Session 2013–14* made some observations about the issue of secrecy in the publishing industry, noting the non-disclosure clauses in subscription contracts which prevent subscribers from disclosing the terms and conditions of their arrangements with publishers (par 16). These clauses prevent universities from negotiating better subscription rates, The BIS report recommended "genuine price transparency from publishers" (par 78).

This secrecy has prompted some commentators to challenge the no double dipping argument from publishers.

Stevan Harnad, in an interview by Richard Poynder, noted that it is impossible for anyone to verify the "no double dipping policy". He cites the secrecy around the subscriptions paid by any given library and the reality that almost all libraries subscribe as part of a Big Deal. The 'Big Deal' refers to the way libraries subscribe to journals, where a large number of titles are included in the subscription price, so there is no delineation of cost per journal title.

A comprehensive analysis of the Big Deal from the perspective of the researcher, the publisher and the library was published in June 2013 by a librarian called David Rosenthal and in 2013 Walt Crawford published a (very cheap) book “The Big Deal and the Damage Done” .

Another commentator, Caltech Director of Library Information Technology, Eric F. Van de Velde, has argued that hybrid gold open access is one in a series of what he describes as ‘market distorting prices’ in the scholarly publishing landscape. He highlights issues such as site licensing which forces a university to make uniform decisions for a large and diverse group, and that these licenses are held under non-disclosure clauses. Like Harnad he points to the bundling of journals into large deals which subsidise new and marginal journals. He concludes that: “All of these practices make it impossible to assess prices.”

But there are many who argue that the issues are more nuanced. Even if we accept that the no-double dipping policy is in place and being enacted, the benefit is not felt by the institution publishing the work. That institution pays the full cost for the publication, but shares the reduced fees with all other institutions subscribing to that journal, so receives only a tiny fraction of the benefit. The long-range outcome of a fully gold open access solution to scholarly communication is that institutions with a high research output will end up supporting the scholarly publication system for the remainder of the world.

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