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Seeking Open Access Deal, 60 German Academic Institutions Ditch All Subscriptions With Elsevier

from the *united-we-stand* dept

Glyn Moody, 20th December 2016

In the struggle to provide [open access](#) to academic research, one company name keeps cropping up as a problem: [Elsevier](#). Techdirt has written numerous stories about efforts to rein in the considerable -- and [vastly profitable](#) -- power that Elsevier wields in the world of academic publishing. These include [boycotts](#) of various kinds, mass [resignations](#) of journal editors, as well as access to millions of publicly-funded papers in [ways](#) that bypass Elsevier altogether.

Alongside these grassroots actions, some universities and research institutes have tried taking a different approach. They are making common cause by banding together in order to strengthen their negotiating hand with the global publishing giant. The aim is to get a better deal from Elsevier, particularly in terms of providing open access to papers. Last year, a group of universities in the Netherlands [used this strategy with some success](#), as Science reports:

A standoff between Dutch universities and publishing giant Elsevier is finally over. After more than a year of negotiations -- and a threat to boycott Elsevier's 2500 journals -- a deal has been struck: For no additional charge beyond subscription fees, 30% of research published by Dutch researchers in Elsevier journals will be open access by 2018.

The Science article points out that this win had limited impact, because only about 2% of all academic papers are produced by Dutch authors. That makes the [following move by the much larger German academic community](#) of considerable importance:

The DEAL project, headed by HRK (German Rectors' Conference) President Prof Hippler, is negotiating a nationwide license agreement for the entire electronic Elsevier journal portfolio with Elsevier. Its objective is to significantly improve the status quo regarding the provision of and access to content (Open Access) as well as pricing. It aims at relieving the institutions' acquisition budgets and at improving access to scientific literature in a broad and sustainable way.

In order to improve their negotiating power, about 60 major German research institutions including Göttingen University cancelled their contracts with Elsevier as early as October 2016. Others have announced to follow this example.

According to the post, Elsevier made its first offer to the group, but it was considered inadequate, and so the German institutions have ditched all their subscriptions with the publisher. As they say:

All participants in this process are aware of the imminent effects this has on research and teaching. However, they share the firm conviction that, for the present, the pressure built up by the joint action of many research institutions is the only way to reach an outcome advantageous for the German scientific community.

Let's hope they are able to preserve their united front in order to win open access to the articles their researchers publish. After all, a win for the DEAL project is also a win for the rest of us.