The first meeting of the UUK/Jisc content negotiation strategy group brought together senior leaders from across UK institutions to consider how to achieve sustainable, affordable and innovative research publication agreements. A broad range of skills and experience are represented in the group.

Dr Sam Roseveare of UUK gave a presentation on the strategic issues and challenges facing the sector.

Group members and the institutions that they represent intend to communicate with the Government and their advisers in a coherent voice using a common vocabulary.

Liam Earney of Jisc gave a presentation on UK open access negotiations.

Discussion of the issues with the current scientific communication system including the fact that rising costs for both subscriptions and open access charges are depleting university funding and limiting access to research to the benefit of commercial enterprises. Universities need to evidence greater fiscal responsibility and cost effectiveness across all university services. Acknowledgment that what is sustainable now may not be in 10 years’ time.

The group will be provided with detailed briefings on agreements and negotiations in other jurisdictions to inform the UK’s response.

The group discussed the current agreement with Elsevier which runs until 2021.

It is important that publishers hear and gain a clear understanding of the needs of institutions. Several publishers have responded and provided proposals that better reflect university finances and policy requirements.

Members discussed the timescales and deadlines of the OA policies of Plan S signatory funders. Wellcome Trust Open Access policy applies from Jan 2021 which is the first major deadline as the Wellcome Trust will not support open access publishing in hybrid journals after this point, unless that publisher has implemented a transitional agreement.

The group agreed to respond to UKRI’s proposed open access policy.

The group reviewed membership and planned to make this as diverse as possible, representing all UK nations. The group will invite a library director from a post 92 band 5A or 5B to join the group to ensure that there is representation from a broader range of institutions.

Journals will be the initial focus for the group with expansion into research materials in the longer term.

There was discussion about cost effectiveness and transparency and the group agreed some amendments to their terms of reference which would be approved at the next meeting.

The group will agree a communications plan.

The group will remain aware of what they want to achieve in the negotiations, there are several options to be explored including potential new approaches and long term cost effectiveness is crucial.
There is a greater understanding of the importance of the research not the journal venue (aligning with DORA) but author behaviour will take time to change.

The REF (Research Excellence Framework) in 2021 will assist the sector in obtaining better open access agreements as it will include OA policy compliance.

Plan S sits outside of universities’ direct control. Funders need to work in partnership with other funders, and with institutions. Plan S is a coalition of funders with a shared policy objective, but expenditure on subscriptions represents by far the largest spend and institutions hold significant power and influence with publishers.

The potential effects of the transition to open access are financially significant and there are structural challenges. A move from paying for subscriptions to paying for publishing service will affect institutions differently and options may be required within agreements. All institutions have their own research and publishing practices which differ year to year.

The group will consider more specific approaches to particular negotiations at the next meeting.