Jisc content expert group  
Summary of the 2nd meeting (10.09.20)

Sector survey and member feedback on institutional budgets

The group considered the sector survey on renewals and financial information. Members shared their own experiences and learnt of the SCONUL consultation launched earlier in the year which was in line with the survey results. It was clear that there would not be a "return to normal" following the current academic year.

Institutions were experiencing high levels of uncertainty around student numbers, especially international student numbers and the increased costs of provision, making spaces safe and losses to revenue, all of which contribute to extreme financial turbulence. There are also significant concerns about student retention. Institutions need to invest in the student experience including significant investment in e-textbook and courseware provision.

COVID-19 has amplified the existing issues of cost, transparency and sustainability and costs of subscriptions to university leaders and the discussion will continue. Members discussed the longer-term implications such as having to switch to e-textbooks and not being able to buy print, Brexit, staff salary freezes and significant outlays for pensions. COVID-19 has brought about a change to all working practices with greater challenges to what would have been expected expenditure previously. Institutions are concerned that publishers view this as a short-term reduction/challenge when there are clearly longer-term challenges and volatility.

Cancellations are a real possibility for institutions and members discussed how to share and record cancellations and noted the SPARC database.

Dissemination is being recognised as a cost of research and part of the OA publishing structure which needs to be supported by a new funding mechanism. It cannot be assumed to be supported by rerouting existing levels of subscription spend.

Jisc confirmed that this information was helpful to understand institutions needs in order to support these effectively in the negotiations.

Publisher proposals

The group discussed negotiations around transitional agreements. Feedback confirmed that the larger agreements are at risk of cancellation as this is where the scale of savings required are most likely to be met.

In relation to short term savings, the group noted that while a 0% increase does provide a benefit to the sector, what happens in consequent years is much more significant.

Both Jisc and SCONUL are having discussions with Unsub.

The group discussed the difficulty with the corresponding author approach. Due to collaborative structures, most articles would have only about 60-70% corresponding author status so that frequently transitional agreements cannot be used to make this research available. It would be helpful if publishers would clarify their approach around non-corresponding authors. It would be beneficial if the matter was addressed at the
collaboration agreement stage. It would be useful if corresponding author data versus other author data was provided in the metadata received from publishers up front rather than the sector trying to obtain this information.

The latest proposal from Taylor & Francis was discussed. The group were keen clear in recognising that a consortial approach is what the sector wants in negotiating an agreement with Taylor & Francis which must demonstrate better value and a firmer commitment to a transition to OA.

The group noted that those publishers with transitional agreements in place have demonstrated their commitment to Open Access in the long term and this should be recognised if possible when making collection management decisions.

In relation to re-negotiation of any existing agreements with publishers the group provided a strong steer that the loss of PCA should not be entertained. Any discount should not be contingent on any other commitments.

The group discussed native OA journals recognising the value of these and noting that PVCRs should lead on this for academic adoption and recognition.