Covid-19 pandemic
The group discussed the challenges brought by the Covid-19 pandemic and opportunities for the sector to further coordinate. Liam Earney provided an overview of the actions undertaken by Jisc to support UK higher and further education members and sought endorsement from members for a national digital learning licensing initiative. The initiative seeks to provide access to digital textbooks and support the student learning experience. The group confirmed their support for this approach, which is also supported by SCONUL. The group identified some matters to be addressed in the initiative and the subsequent procurement process.

Requirements for transitional open access agreements
Caren Milloy introduced the sector’s Requirements for transitional open access agreements which have been modified following review by the Jisc’s content expert group. The requirements reflect the severity of the financial challenge the sector is facing and the need to improve efficiency and secure financial sustainability. This document was agreed subject to some amendments. Jisc will update its marking criteria against which to check publisher proposals so that it is clear whether the proposal can be accepted and why. This will be provided to the publisher and to institutions alongside any rejection or consultation on a publisher proposal.

The forthcoming price and service transparency requirements of Plan S will require that publishers adhere to at least 1 of 2 pricing frameworks. Wiley, Sage and IOP Publishing have agreed to share their data and longer-term vision for transitioning to open access with the Transformative Agreements Oversight Group which will review progress on implementing transitional agreements and ‘flipping’ journal portfolios to open access.

Elsevier
Caren Milloy introduced the Elsevier papers provided to support the groups discussion with regards to agreeing a starting mandate for the UK’s negotiation position, around which a sector wide consensus should be built. Members discussed the approach, strategy and tactics of other institutions and countries/consortia as presented and the recommendations from the Content expert group with regards to negotiation scenarios and principles. Members agreed with the underlying principles and the recommendations of the content expert group. Communication was identified as critical to the negotiations across all UK HE.

Jisc will consult with institutions at different levels in order to ensure that the approach taken fully represents member’s views. The consultation will be based on the approach of re-baselining fees, in line with the sectors Requirements for transitional agreements, and will seek to obtain institution’s red lines and support for negotiation scenarios. A number of work streams to support the negotiations were discussed and approved.

Affordability and value
There is concern about costs and value for money across the sector including the need to reduce spend as institutions face significant reductions in budgets. UUK have carried out
work as part of a joint task force on sustainability of research knowledge and exchange activity. This group has been flagged to the task force. Members discussed current journal agreements and the need for cost reductions being intensified further with Covid-19. Members requested that Jisc seek reductions to both subscription and publishing expenditure for all agreements.

The group agreed the terms of reference subject to a small amendment to reflect a wider remit with a broader content related discussion.

The group agreed to invite a representative of ARMA to join the group.

The new name for the group will be the UUK/Jisc content negotiation strategy group.

The group will hold extraordinary meetings and members will have additional discussions where this is required to progress the group’s aims.