

## RLUK Content Statement

COVID-19 has had a significant impact on higher education institutions and their libraries; the negative financial effects will continue throughout 2020/21 and well beyond. This is reflected in projected budgets for the next academic year, with many libraries being asked to model budget cuts of up to 40%. This will require libraries to cancel existing subscriptions and reduce their investment in new content. The focus of RLUK libraries over the next few years is on affordability of content and accessibility of resources for teaching and research.

RLUK wholly endorses the joint UUK/Jisc letters recently sent to publishers in the light of the coronavirus pandemic. In developing this statement, RLUK reaffirms its support for the many initiatives that Jisc and others are carrying out. It also seeks to provide support for librarians and their higher education institutions as they make decisions on purchases, new subscriptions and renewals. This is intended both as a position statement for RLUK, and as a guide for those who are involved in the management and negotiation of content licences within libraries, irrespective of whether they are RLUK members.

RLUK asks publishers to recognise the scale of the financial challenge facing the sector and to help us at this difficult time by working with us to make the scholarly communications ecosystem more sustainable, transparent and open. We appreciate the temporary access to content that many publishers have given us recently. We now need to use this crisis point as an opportunity to review established business models and long-standing unaffordable practices.

If we do not see concrete action towards the requirements listed below, RLUK member libraries will be forced to cancel valuable resources. We want to work productively with our closest partners, publishers and content suppliers, to develop sustainable business models which work for all stakeholders.

### *Database/journal subscriptions*

We require:

- Reductions in annual subscription costs, not increases or price freezes. This supports the Jisc and Universities UK joint call for publishers to reduce their fees to maintain access to essential teaching and learning materials<sup>ii</sup>.
- The combined cost of the read and publish elements of transitional deals to result in a reduction on existing subscription expenditure. This supports Jisc's requirements for transitional OA agreements<sup>iii</sup>. It is no longer acceptable to base transitional agreement costs on both uplifted historical subscriptions expenditure and historical APC expenditure, without constraining or reducing costs going forwards.
- A permanent move away from historic print spend underpinning the pricing of large subscription packages. We expect fairer and more innovative pricing models which reflect the current scholarly communications and budgetary landscapes.

- More flexibility in content selection and a permanent move away from the outdated 'big deal' model. Tying valuable content up in large packages has been incredibly damaging to library budgets and collections.
- All multiyear deals to have clear, no-penalty opt-out clauses which can be invoked 30 days before the renewal date. Notice periods for resource cancellations should also always be 30 days, rather than 60 or 90 days.

### *E-books/E-textbooks*

We require:

- Increased transparency and sustainability in e-textbook costs and models. The market for e-textbooks is currently unregulated, as evidenced by vastly inconsistent and unfavourable pricing and dubious practices employed by some large e-textbook aggregators (for example, asking customers to sign 'exclusivity' licences to secure better pricing).
- A deep discount on e-books and e-textbooks where their print equivalents have been purchased in recent years.
- A liberation of licences, with Digital Rights Management free content.
- Publishers to make all currently available and forthcoming books and textbooks available in electronic format.
- More flexibility in content selection to allow institutions to disaggregate collections. The model of tying content in bundles has damaged our access to journal subscription content, and we do not want to see this happen with e-textbook/e-book content too.
- That all content should be available to all an institution's users, as is the case for print collections.

### *Access*

We require:

- Publishers who have made their content temporarily freely available during the COVID crisis to consider significant extensions throughout 2021, and to work with institutions interested in maintaining access to such content to deliver fair and sustainable pricing and licence terms.
- That any restrictions on remote access are lifted, so that teaching activities and research can continue online and remotely.
- That no future models should be based on campus only access, as there are robust authentication models available which are accepted by the majority of publishers.
- That overseas usage should not lead to price increases.

*On behalf of the RLUK Collections Strategy Network, August 2020*

---

<sup>i</sup> <http://londoneconomics.co.uk/blog/publication/impact-of-the-covid-19-pandemic-on-university-finances-april-2020/>, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-53280965>, <https://www.niesr.ac.uk/publications/economics-uk-university-system-time-covid-19>

- 
- ii <https://www.jisc.ac.uk/news/jisc-and-universities-uk-call-for-publishers-to-reduce-their-fees-to-maintain-access-to-essential-teaching-and-learning-materials-17-jun-2020>
- iii <https://www.jisc-collections.ac.uk/Transformative-OA-Reqs/>