Press Release

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Major study released on the effects of Open Access on scholarly journals

The first substantial study of the quickly evolving landscape of Open Access publishing has been released today (Tuesday, 11 October 2005). The new study, 'The Facts About Open Access', was sponsored by the Association of Learned and Professional Society Publishers (ALPSP), the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) and HighWire Press/Stanford University Libraries, with additional data from the Association of American Medical Colleges. The research was conducted by the independent consultants Kaufman-Wills Group.

"Discussion of Open Access tends to be strong on rhetoric but short on facts," said Sally Morris, Chief Executive of ALPSP on publication of the report, "But we now have, for the first time, a substantial body of data about different forms of Open Access publishing, and a baseline of comparison with traditional subscription publishing."

There are now a significant number of journals being published under various variants of the Open Access publishing model, both by new players and by traditional publishers, and the study covered a good proportion of these. The extent to which traditional publishers are experimenting is particularly noteworthy. "The Open Access movement has compelled traditional subscription journals to respond," said Mark Frankel, Co-Director of AAAS’s Project on Science and Intellectual Property in the Public Interest (SIPPI), which helped fund the study.

Some of the findings confirmed what we thought we knew. By and large, Open Access journals are younger than subscription journals – though some of them are unexpectedly long-established. It is therefore unsurprising that most of them have not yet achieved the same level of impact as more established journals. The study clarifies, however, just how much less is published in the average Open Access journal, and how much lower the rejection rate is, than in subscription journals.

The study dispels the notion that Open Access journals do not carry out peer review or copy-editing; however, many more of them conduct peer review purely in-house, which is not what would generally be understood as classical peer review, and fewer do any copy-editing for style and grammar.

On the financial side, surprisingly few of the Open Access journals raise any author-side charges at all; in fact, author charges are considerably more common (in the form of page charges, colour charges, reprint charges, etc) among subscription journals. Open Access journals are generally far more dependent on other sources of income, such as advertising and, particularly, sponsorship – whether in kind (e.g. provision by their institution of equipment, computing resources, accommodation and staff time) or financial (e.g. from industry or from foundations). Over 41% of the Open Access journals are reporting shortfalls and 24 per cent breaking even. Among the journals surveyed that do not provide

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Full Open Access, 81 per cent of the HighWire and AAMC journals reported a profit and 75 per cent of the ALPSP journals were in the black. The financial future therefore seems somewhat uncertain for Full Open Access journals. Indeed, a number of the Open Access publishers made comments which suggested that financial sustainability was not high on their list of priorities.

From the evidence it seems by no means certain that Open Access publishing is a financially viable model for all; however, there is clearly widespread recognition that a better model (or models) is needed to provide wide and speedy access to research findings in the interests of science, and a considerable amount of experimentation with various alternative models is taking place.

Commenting on the publication, John Sack of HighWire Press said: "We hope that this report will aid further discussion of alternative publishing models by adding to the body of evidence-based research towards the goal of wide access to research findings in the public interest."

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See 'Notes for Editors' and 'Key-Findings' notes which follow.

Notes for Editors


The survey scope and methods

The survey was conducted by Kaufman-Wills in two phases. Firstly the researchers sent to four journal populations representing more than 9000 journals and received completed questionnaires from 128 ALPSP member journals, 34 journals of members of the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC), 85 from Delayed Open Access journals hosted by HW and 248 journals from the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ). In the second phase, 22 small and large publishers, representing all subject areas from across the globe, and between them publishing nearly 4,500 journals, were interviewed to provide a series of detailed case-studies. Given the deliberate emphasis on various models of Open Access in Phase 1, Phase 2 was especially helpful in providing additional information on Subscription Access journals.

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### The study’s objectives

1. To identify and describe the alternative business models for each population surveyed. Describe various alternative (to traditional subscription-based) models adopted by the respondents, record their frequency, identify model changes over time, and help define the many different models and experiments in use today.

2. To develop financial and non-financial profiles for the journals studied, describing various characteristics including location and type of publisher, subject area; peer review, copyright, and copy-editing policies; type of content published; frequency; online hosting; authoring tools; numbers of submissions and articles published; acceptance rate; citations; and circulation and usage. Financial data indicate whether the journal experienced a surplus or a shortfall, as well as revenue expectations and trends.

### 16 things you never knew about Open Access:

#### A selection of key findings from the survey

**Journal characteristics**

- **Location:** ALPSP journals were heavily weighted toward Europe/UK (84%), with smaller percentages from North America (12%), Australia (3%) and Africa (1%). All the AAMC respondents were from North America, whereas the HighWire subset journals were split 70:30 between North America and Europe/UK. 48% of Directory of Open Access Journals were published in North America and 41% in Europe/UK; the remainder were widely spread. Many Full Open Access journals are relatively new, with a small staff and organizational structure.

- **Publisher:** In Phase 1 of the study, 305 of the journals studied (62%) are published by non-profit organizations and 189 (38%) by commercial publishers. Of the approximately 4490 journals represented in Phase 2, 4100 (93%) are published by commercial publishers.

- **Subject area:** 54% of the HighWire Delayed Open Access journals are in medicine, and almost all the rest in science and technology; about half (49%) of the ALPSP journals and AAMC journals (50%) are in science and technology, with most of the rest in medicine. 74% of the DOAJ Journals cover science, technology and medicine, while the remainder (21%) cover arts & humanities, social sciences, or other areas.

- **Content:** All of the journals publish research articles, but the DOAJ journals publish substantially fewer editorial features such as reviews, editorials, perspectives, letters to the editor, and news.

- **Age:** The ALPSP, AAMC and HighWire journals are well established; on average, they published their first print issues 40 years ago. The DOAJ journals are much newer; half started publication during the last decade.
• Print edition: Virtually all of the ALPSP, AAMC, and HighWire journals have always published a print version and plan to continue to do so. A majority of the DOAJ journals (74%) have never published a print edition.

• Online hosting: Nearly 80% of the DOAJ respondents use their own service to host their online journals, compared with 29% of the ALPSP cohort.

Financial aspects
• Financial support: Grants, industry support and author-side fees are the most significant sources of financial support for the DOAJ journals; volunteer labour also figures prominently in their ongoing operations. For non-OA journals, print-plus electronic subscription payments are the most important (ALPSP 54%, AAMC 59%, HighWire 79%). Of the DOAJ journals 52% do not charge any sort of author-side fees, whereas 75% of the other groups do.

• Financial health: A majority (81% each) of HighWire and AAMC journals made a surplus in the last financial year. Most ALPSP journals also made a surplus (75%). 41% of FOA journals made a loss; 24% broke even, and 35% made a surplus.

• Plans for change: More than half of each of the AAMC, HighWire, and DOAJ groups are planning to test or adapt a new online business model sometime in the next three years. For the ALPSP group, the figure is 34%.

Non-financial aspects
• Submissions: The other journal cohorts receive more than 10 times as many original article submissions as do the DOAJ Full Open Access journals; they also have higher rejection rates.

• Usage: Circulation and usage among ALPSP, AAMC and HighWire cohorts are higher than for the DOAJ journals.

• Impact factor: Not all of the DOAJ journals yet have an impact factor; those that did have lower impact factors and citation rankings than the other cohorts.

• Copy-editing: Only 72% of the DOAJ journals carry out copy-editing; however when the OA journals published by BioMed Central and Internet Scientific Publications (ISP) are excluded, the percentage rises substantially to 93%. In all the other cohorts virtually every original research article is copy-edited.

• Peer review: All groups have all of their original research peer-reviewed. 28% of the DOAJ journals use editorial staff only for peer review; this practice was extremely uncommon among the other groups (1-3%).

• Author copyright: 88% of AAMC journals, 67% of HighWire and 40% of ALPSP require authors to transfer copyright as a condition of publication; the remainder rely on a license to publish. 14% of the DOAJ journals require authors to transfer copyright; 35% require a license to publish. 17% of FOA (35% when BMC and ISP are excluded) do not obtain any formal copyright agreement whatsoever from authors.

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