Please note:

The following Principles for Offset Agreements are mostly adapted from the JISC guidelines "Principles for Offset Agreements"[1], with some input from the "Positions on creating an Open Access publication market which is scholarly adequate"[2] by the Alliance of Science Organisations in Germany.

Principles for Offset Agreements

Context

As Open Access (OA) publishing funded by article-processing charges (APCs) becomes more widely accepted, Swiss academic institutions face an increase in the 'total cost of publication', comprising subscription costs plus APCs and additional administration costs. Most APC payments are made to large 'traditional' commercial publishers who also receive high subscription income. We are asking publishers to introduce offset systems that will reduce this extra cost (also known as 'double dipping') to Swiss academic institutions.

Avoiding double dipping through offsetting is also the goal of a statement and petition of the League of European Research Universities (LERU). This statement was signed by several Swiss academic institutions, many researchers from Switzerland, and recently presented to the Dutch EU Presidency[3], who will make efforts to promote Open Access.

These principles are drafted for publishers of hybrid journals (these are subscription journals in which some of the articles are Open Access). They aim to provide these publishers with an understanding of the requirements of their customers from the Swiss academic sector. It is expected that publishers will adhere to these principles in their design of offset systems to ensure affordability and sustainability.

The following principles are to provide guidance to publishers introducing offset systems and to academic institutions (and the Consortium of Swiss Academic Libraries when negotiating on their behalf) in evaluating proposals for such systems:

Principles of offset systems

1. Systems should operate in the context of a transition to full gold Open Access and support that transition. These systems will be designed to enable the publisher's journals to become fully Open Access as soon as a tipping point is reached.
    a. Publishers should explain clearly on the websites of their hybrid journals if and under which conditions they are planning a complete conversion of the journal to Open Access.
    b. Publishers should report at least once a year on how the transformation of their hybrid journals is progressing and succeeding.

[1] https://www.jisc-collections.ac.uk/Global/News%20files%20and%20docs/Principles-for-offset-agreements.pdf
[2] http://doi.org/10.2312/allianzoa.009
[3] http://www.leru.org/index.php/public/extra/signtheLERUstatement/

2. Systems should be inclusive, remove barriers (both to authors and their institutions) to Open Access and ensure that all the outputs of a subscribing institution are immediately open on publication.
    a. Publishers should ensure that they identify Open Access publications as such via their publishing platforms. RSS feeds, independent websites and search engines should ensure the articles published can be accessed easily.
    b. Publishers should ensure that the Open Access publications they publish appear under the Creative Commons Licence CC-BY ("Attribution") or a more liberal licence and that this licence is recognisable on the front page of the article and in the metadata.
    c. The grantor of a licence should be the author of the publication.

3. Systems should ensure that publishers do not charge the same institutions twice, through the payment of subscriptions and the payment of APCs for the same journals.

4. Offset systems should not be restricted to institutions that subscribe to large collections of journals (the big deal) but should also apply to all institutions that subscribe to individual journals with a hybrid OA offering from a publisher.

5. Offset systems should apply at the level of each subscribing institution to ensure that the cost incurred by each institution for scholarly publishing is contained. A system which depends upon publishers passing on APC contributions to all subscribers will (i) be unverifiable from the point of view of the institutions making APC payments; and (ii) would so dilute the financial benefit to high APC-payers (such as Swiss institutions) that its effects would be negligible.

6. Systems should operate on a "cash basis" and avoid the additional administration and work involved in handling vouchers, particularly if those vouchers have an expiry date. Where an offset system does operate on the basis of vouchers, they must be available to the institution (which processes the transactions) rather than to individual authors.

7. Publishers are requested to provide all data and figures needed to follow and verify the financial flows.

Examples for offset systems

1. APC spend returned as deduction against future subscriptions: A system which returns to an institution, as a deduction from its subscription fees, the total amount of all APC revenue received by a publisher the previous year; or at least 95% of all APC revenue, in recognition that a publisher will bear some small additional cost of operating two charging models in a period of transition.

2. No extra charge beyond subscription payments [other than a modest capped surcharge to cover additional transitional costs]: A system which ensures that an institution which maintains its subscription payments to journals or to a collection of journals, pays no extra to have all the outputs from its researchers made Open Access in those same journals on publication at no additional charge.

3. Vouchers for spend against Article Processing Charges: A system that provides subscribing institutions with vouchers to spend on APCs. The number of vouchers awarded to each institution should be commensurate with the level of its subscriptions spend and to result in overall reductions in each institution's APC expenditure with each publisher by at least 95%.

Recommended next steps

- The Consortium of Swiss Academic Libraries (CSAL) should negotiate deals with publishers according to these Principles for Offset Agreements.
- These Principles for Offset Agreements should be communicated to swissuniversities and the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNF).
- For the SNF, a cover letter should be prepared where the SNF is invited to follow these Principles as well and to reconsider its policy and its decision to pay only for pure Gold Road articles. The SNF should be ready to pay for hybrid Gold APCs under the condition that the publisher fulfils these Principles for Offset Agreements, e.g. by reducing the licencing costs vis-à-vis the CSAL.

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Principles for Offset Agreements

Appendix: Current examples of offset systems

Model 1

APC spend returned as deduction against future subscriptions: A system which returns to an institution, as a deduction from its subscription fees, the total amount of all APC revenue received by a publisher the previous year; or at least 95% of all APC revenue, in recognition that a publisher will bear some small additional cost of operating two charging models in a period of transition.

No extra costs

Institute of Physics Publishing (IOP) and Taylor & Francis pilot agreements with FWF (Austrian Science Fund) and KEMÖ (library consortia) in Austria: article processing charges (APCs) for hybrid OA paid in one year by FWF are fully subtracted the following year from the licence price paid by KEMÖ.

Some extra costs

IOP pilot deal with UK libraries: at a low level of hybrid OA, IOP will offset 90% of a university's expenditure in one year on APCs or the total cost of their subscriptions, whichever is the greater. As Open Access grows, all institutions will expect subscription prices to reduce, and the balance of offsetting will shift towards all of IOP's customers.

Model 2

No extra charge beyond subscription payments [other than a modest capped surcharge to cover additional transitional costs]: A system which ensures that an institution which maintains its subscription payments to journals or to a collection of journals, pays no extra to have all the outputs from its researchers made Open Access in those same journals on publication at no additional charge.

Some extra costs

- Electrochemical Society (ECS) general policy: Subscribing institutions can publish unlimited articles with hybrid OA. However a surcharge of 18-54% applies.
- SAGE pilot agreement with JISC in UK: APCs are significantly reduced (to £200) but not down to a modest capped surcharge.
- Pilot Big Deals of Springer and Wiley with the Association of Universities in the Netherland (VSNU): Prizes are not public, "a limited price increase for the title package has been agreed upon". The League of European Research Universities (LERU) recommends the following in the statement "Christmas is over. Research funding should go to research, not to publishers!": The sum of previously paid subscription plus hybrid Gold APC costs could set the prize for such Big Deals, which now make ALL articles from affiliated corresponding authors hybrid Gold OA without cap. A concrete example could thus be the following: a Dutch university previously paid annually for Springer subscription and published 500 articles in these journals. 50 of these articles were OA with APCs paid by the researchers, using university money. In the current Big Deal, the university overall pays the same sum, but all 500 articles – and more if researchers publish more – are Open Access. This translates

into at least 90% offsetting of APCs. The LERU statement was signed by many researchers and several research organisations in Switzerland.

- Pilot Big Deals of Springer with other institutions, e.g. JISC in UK: “the total cost as well as the administrative burden of Open Access publishing and continuing access to the 2,000 Springer subscription journals are significantly reduced”.
- Comments about Big Deals:
    - There are reservations that this model perpetuates the traditional subscription model and implies long-term hybrid is the future rather than the transition to Open Access. Under this model, Swiss academic institutions would require clarity about the proportion of OA that would trigger the tipping point in the transition from subscriptions to Open Access.
    - The current price increase in total ownership (= subscription licences paid by libraries plus hybrid APCs paid by researchers – both rising) would at least be reduced.
    - There are further concerns that this system, while efficient, makes the actual cost of APCs less visible to authors and puts pure Open Access publishers in competitive disadvantage (unless their APCs are equally covered by library memberships or funder payments).
    - However, under current research evaluation models, which favour big publishers and thus force researchers to publish with them, it is necessary to find some form of agreement with these publishing houses. The Dutch model produces much Open Access for Dutch research and is at least financially reasonable.

Model 3

Vouchers for spend against Article Processing Charges: A system that provides subscribing institutions with vouchers to spend on APCs. The number of vouchers awarded to each institution should be commensurate with the level of its subscriptions spend and to result in overall reductions in each institution’s APC expenditure with each publisher by at least 95%.

No extra costs

Royal Society of Chemistry (RSC) Gold for Gold vouchers: this is a voluntary service of RSC, not based on a contract with libraries. RSC’s policies about vouchers have changed in the past, are open for further changes in the future or immediate cancellation. RSC rose the price for licences recently and now plans to stop the current Gold for Gold program and to replace it with “an OA component that will better fit the requirements of the respective client or consortium”.

Some extra costs

Taylor & Francis pilot with JISC in UK: “the offsetting agreement offers discounted article processing charges via a voucher system determined by expenditure.” (p. 38)

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