

Joint Understanding of Offsetting

In March 2016, an international group of librarians, consortium leaders and negotiators met on invitation of the ESAC initiative to discuss new types of agreements currently labelled as “offsetting” or “open access big deals”. As a result of the two-day workshop¹, the participants agreed upon the following objectives, mechanisms and required tools with regard to offsetting.

This document should serve as a reference and starting point for research institutions and libraries in order to jointly work on sustainable parameters for the global open access transition.

Objectives of offsetting agreements

- Offset deals are **pilot models**. They cannot be regarded as properly established agreement types yet. They are rather transitional models in order to pave the ways to a fully open access business model. Since an actual offset of costs is not a consistent component of the current agreements and since there are also further non-APC-based models to conceive, the term ‘transitional model’ would be preferred.
- Offset deals (or transitional models) should therefore lead to a proper open access model. This includes to fully omitting subscription costs or other access based costs components. With regard to publishing fee based business models, they must **lead to a “pay as you publish” agreement** between institutions and publishers.
- Offset agreements must lead to **differentiated pricing models** that replace standard prices for publishing fees for all journals of a publisher. This requires working on reasonable criteria such as citations, compliance, dissemination or publishing services. Price caps have also to be discussed.
- Offsetting implies the opportunity to **overcome dysfunctionalities as known from the current subscription system** and to improve the business for scholarly publishing in terms of transparency and efficiency rather than to perpetuate it. Offset deals should therefore take these objectives into account by including appropriate mechanisms.

¹ See <http://esac-initiative.org/activities/offsetting-workshop-2016/>

Mechanisms of offsetting agreements

- Agreements should include definitions of workflows and process **to adjust the eligibility of authors** to publish under an offset agreement.

This particularly includes mechanisms for author identification by the publisher, such as

- Email suffix;
 - IP authentication;
 - Provision of a drop-down menu to select the institution;
 - The validation of the institution as stated in the publication by the authors;
 - Publishers should introduce systems and notification processes in order to enable institutions to properly verify and confirm eligible authors.
 - Agreements should clearly define publication and article types covered. Publishers should ensure to be able to track submissions by their systems for all journals within the scope of an agreement.
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- Publishers and institutions must work on the **harmonization of payment and reporting workflows** such as:
 - In case of co-authorship, and to avoid multiple allocations of publications, the corresponding author's institutions should be billed.
 - Publishers should state the paying institution in the publication.
 - Reconsider membership schemes and define conditions for prepayment. Publication based payment schemes should be offered by publishers by default.
 - Publishers and institutions must work on the availability of reliable publication output data in a standardized format to be able to properly negotiate and evaluate agreements.
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- Agreements should include **mechanisms to foster "pay as you publish"** such as
 - Gradual implementation of publication based billing procedures instead of upfront payments;
 - "Penalties" to come into effect when articles were not processed correctly by publishers, in order to include incentives for working on an improvement of workflows.
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- Public expenditures for scholarly publishing should be **transparent**. This implies the releasement of payment data as well as to avoid confidentiality clauses.

Tools and infrastructure

In order to share information and to monitor the availability of offsetting as well as to synchronize its progress towards the open access transition, a network of users and negotiators has to be established. Workshop participants therefore constitute a starting point. For now, the ESAC initiative may serve as a hub to this purpose. The initiative can furthermore collect and disseminate requirements and discussion outcomes.

Beyond that network, the following tools are needed:

- Guidelines and requirement documents supporting the communication among the parties involved;
- A matrix which is publicly available to indicate the agreements currently in place;
- Procedures and platforms (such as Open APC) to share and to aggregate cost information and to allow empirical statements on average prices and price developments;
- Access to publication output data and bibliometric information or an independent infrastructure providing institutions with such data upon request.

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Contact

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