Widening access to research information: A response

John Houghton and Charles Oppenheim
January 2010

In late 2009, The International Association of *stm* Publishers commissioned Steven Hall to provide a critique of the recent JISC report *Economic Implications of Alternative Scholarly Publishing Models: Exploring the Costs and Benefits* (Houghton *et al.* and Oppenheim *et al.* 2009), hereafter “EI-ASPM”. That commission resulted in a paper and presentation at the Berlin7 Open Access Conference (Hall 2009). This document is a response to the points raised. It is produced for the purposes of clarification and to ensure that Hall’s misunderstandings and misrepresentations are corrected.

The JISC EI-ASPM report will not be the last word on the costs and benefits of alternative scholarly publishing models; it could certainly be improved by, for example, better, independently verifiable cost data. However, rather than offering this, much less offering a better approach and methodology for estimating the potential impacts of Open Access (OA), Hall’s analysis rests on such claims as:

“The fact is, researchers today have immediate access to the vast majority of the scientific articles that they could need for their research.” (Hall 2009, p15).

“The fact is, the report’s authors have failed to show that there is any real gap between the access that researchers have today to the scientific literature that they need and that which they might have under an open access model.” (Hall 2009, p18).

However, there is widespread evidence that such claims are baseless. Much of the evidence is clearly cited in the JISC EI-ASPM report, though some important studies have been published since which confirm, yet again, that access gaps remain a major concern of researchers. As the Research Information Network (RIN 2009, p23) recently noted:

“…access to research information content issues must be addressed if the UK research community is to operate effectively, producing high-quality research that has a wider social and economic impact.”

The importance of these access problems is highlighted in the current economic climate, because many universities and libraries are facing the prospect of budget cuts, while the evidence suggests that taxpayers’ money may be being wasted in inefficient scholarly communication systems.

In the following sections, we reproduce selected excerpts from Hall’s text followed by responses. In order that this response is made available as early as possible, there is no attempt to address every one of the errors in Hall’s paper.
Independence of the JISC EI-ASPM study

Since the release of the JISC EI-ASPM report, it has been a recurring theme of some publishers’ representatives that the study did not involve publishers, and therefore it cannot be correct. Not only is this claim incorrect, it demonstrates poor understanding of social sciences.

The issue has been addressed a number of times, including in the initial JISC response to publishers’ comments\(^1\) and in response to the recent *stm* report.\(^2\) However, to reiterate:

- On an informal approach to a publishers’ representative body, we were told that publishers would be unlikely to cooperate. Moreover, publishers have not previously given detailed cost data to researchers, for very understandable commercial reasons, and we had no reason to expect them to do so for this study.

- There is a vast and recognised literature on subscription journal publishing activities and costs, so there was no need to consult on those elements of the study. However, we did consult on a personal and informal basis with a number of people, including publishers, where we had specific questions (e.g. about book publishing and distribution, OA book and e-book publishing, library purchasing and distribution practices relating to e-books, etc.).

- As JISC pointed out, all parties (including publishers) were treated in the same way. We made no formal approaches to library groups, university management organisations, or to funders.

- However, the JISC EI-ASPM project was overseen by a steering group made up of experts, including: Matthew Cockerill (BioMed), Fred Friend (JISC), Malcolm Gillies (City University London), Paul Hubbard (HEFCE), Donald King (University of North Carolina), Danny Quah (London School of Economics) and Astrid Wissenburg (RCUK).

- Moreover, it is common in the social sciences to distinguish between the ‘emic’ or participants’ understanding, and ‘etic’ or observers’ understanding. The independent, outside observer’s understanding is typically accorded greater standing. For example, when nineteenth century anthropologists first studied tribal communities in Africa they went to live in the villages, and (i) observed what was happening and (ii) asked the villagers what they were doing. When asked why they dressed up and danced, the

---

\(^1\) [http://www.jisc.ac.uk/media/documents/publications/responseoneiaspmreport.pdf](http://www.jisc.ac.uk/media/documents/publications/responseoneiaspmreport.pdf)

\(^2\) [http://www.library.yale.edu/~llicense/ListArchives/0910/msg00056.html](http://www.library.yale.edu/~llicense/ListArchives/0910/msg00056.html)
villagers said they were dancing to ensure that it would rain. Unable to see the causal connection between dancing and rain, anthropologists couched their explanation of rain dancing in terms of community bonding and reaffirmation of sharing of community resources. One does not need to be a tribesman to understand rain dancing, one does not need to run a business to be an economist and understand the economy, and one does not need to be a publisher to understand publishing.

Bias and the baseline

Let me give you just one example of the report’s bias. In section 3.2.1 entitled Access issues and limitations the report states that ‘a number of authors have noted the particular benefit of open access for developing countries, where access to the subscription-based literature has often been limited’. It supports this statement with three anecdotes – yes, anecdotes. Now, no-one would claim that there is no knowledge gap between the industrialised world and the developing world, but for the report to publish three anecdotes in support of its own case and to make no mention of the efforts that publishers and others are making to bridge that gap is simply dishonest.

Three programmes, the first dating back to 2002, provide free or very low-cost online access to more than 7,500 peer-reviewed scientific journals, plus many books, indexes and databases, to researchers at 4,500 institutions in the developing world. These are, of course, the HINARI, AGORA and OARE projects under the umbrella of Research4Life, a public-private partnership between the WHO, FAO, UNEP, Cornell and Yale Universities and more than 130 science publishers, along with their technology partner Microsoft. Institutions in more than 70 countries have entirely free access, while institutions in another 36 countries have very low-priced access, with all income reinvested in local training initiatives.

Hall (2009, p2).

The JISC EI-ASPM report took the current situation (as at the end of 2007) as the baseline, so whatever was happening at that time was taken as given, and the evidence presented relates to remaining access gaps. Hence, the comparison at the heart of the EI-ASPM report takes these initiatives to address the problems of the subscription model as a part of the picture.

- The accusation of bias is unsubstantiated and untrue.
- Hall’s point about reliance on anecdotes is not correct. In addition to the anecdotes, from such sources as The Lancet and the President of Global Strategies for HIV Prevention, section 3.2.1 of the JISC EI-ASPM report reported on the findings of five studies, in which major access difficulties are noted in both the developed and developing worlds (pp122-123). Many more such studies could be cited. Laudable as the initiatives Hall refers to may be, there remain significant access gaps (we return to this point below).
- While Hall makes a great deal of the benefits of access through such schemes as HINARI, he does not draw attention to the eligibility criteria and restrictions. For example, access is limited to non-profit organisations in the very poorest countries:
Widening access to research information: A response

Houghton & Oppenheim

- Local, not-for-profit institutions in two groups of countries may register for access to the journals through HINARI. Institutions in countries with GNI per capita below $1250 are eligible for free access. Institutions in countries with GNI per capita between $1250-$3500 pay a fee of $1000 per year/institution.\(^3\)

- The License is exclusive to the Institution named at the head of the License and may not be extended to any other institution or party without the express written agreement of the Publishers, meaning that only those in participating institutions can access the material and vast numbers of practitioners who could use the content to the benefit of the peoples of those nations are denied access.

- Moreover, there appear to be exceptions to eligibility for some countries in the World Bank’s lower middle income (e.g. China and Indonesia).\(^4\)

While HINARI has no doubt helped some developing nations, and we welcome the HINARI initiative, it is unfortunately not available to a number of countries, such as China, India, Brazil and Indonesia, among others, that are excluded from the scheme because they represent potentially large revenue streams for publishers. These countries struggle with huge health problems, but because they could generate money for publishers they are denied access on the same terms as other developing nations. Consequently, such schemes have a long way to go before they can be seen as the panacea to access problems in the developing world. Moreover, there are readily available open access alternatives that would be likely to be more effective mechanisms for providing access as needed, than are schemes which aim to partially overcome the problems created by the subscription publishing model.

**Publishing cost savings**

One of the difficulties in responding to the study is its intermingling of the benefits of a move from today’s combination of print and online publishing to a future which is online-only with the estimated benefits from a move from subscription publishing to open access publishing.

In places the report acknowledges these difficulties:

**Perhaps, greater differences lie in the switch from print and dual-mode publishing to an e-only model** – although disentangling the essential cost differences of alternative publishing models from ‘print economics’ and the economics of digital delivery (Cockerill 2006 and OECD 2005) is by no means easy as OA publishing and self-archiving entail online delivery while toll access can be based on online, print or dual-mode delivery.

Houghton et al, 2009, p. 79

One of the keys to comparing the costs of alternative publishing models is to disentangle the cost impacts of format (i.e. print versus electronic) and model (i.e. toll versus open access). This is very difficult to do.

Houghton et al, 2009, p. 165

Cont’d.


Hall’s claims are not correct.

- In fact, and as commended by a representative of the Publishing Research Consortium, the JISC EI-ASPM report goes to great lengths to separate the e-only impacts from the OA impacts, and it does so clearly and transparently. However, there was considerable interest in the impacts of going all electronic or e-only, so those impacts were included.

- Moreover, the comparison between alternative models is done as if all were e-only, with the study’s conclusions based on comparing the cost-effectiveness of e-only subscription with e-only OA. Hence, there is no conflation, or even inclusion, of e-only impacts in the comparisons of alternative models presented in the JISC EI-ASPM report.

**Payment handling costs**

**Author-side payments processing**: For the author-side fee model of OA publishing the cost of processing author-side payments is estimated at £20 per article, based on CEPA (2008) estimates.

Houghton et al, 2009, p. 155

**Sales administration and online user management**: For the subscription model, sales administration and online user management are estimated to cost £10 per subscriber (CEPA 2008). Costs per article vary with the number of subscribers, but at an average of 1,200 subscribers this would be equivalent to around £100 per article published.

Houghton et al, 2009, p. 155

The report compares the cost of managing payments for tens of thousands of subscriptions to individual journals with the cost of managing payments from tens of thousands of article authors. What it misses, is the fact that publishers are not invoicing libraries for thousands of journals individually, but, rather, are issuing a single invoice in respect of all a library’s subscriptions or its Big Deal. In many cases, they are doing this through a subscription agent, further simplifying the process. It’s the wrong comparison to make. The cost of processing nearly 100,000 author
Hall claims that the assumptions are flawed and the cost given in the RIN/CEPA report (CEPA 2008) has been reduced. Hall is not correct.

- CEPA (2008 Annex C, p33) states that: “An additional £20 per article is assumed for author-side payment processing”. The claim that it was or should have been £30 is not correct.

- Many publishers offer articles on a pay-per-view basis, with a price of (USD) $30 being typical. PPV transactions are undertaken with individuals with whom the publisher may have no established or other contact and who may be located anywhere in the world. Hence it is readily apparent that publishers can and do conduct individual transactions for $30 – less if they are also making some revenue on the PPV content, rather than simply covering the cost of the transaction.

- The JISC EI-ASPM report focuses on 2007 prices and levels of activity, and in 2007 the annual average USD-GBP exchange rate was 0.499 (today the rate is 0.613). Consequently, the author-side transaction processing cost in the JISC EI-ASPM model is substantially higher than the prevailing PPV processing cost.

- As such: (i) the cost cited in the JISC EI-ASPM report is not an assumption, and (ii) it is not “flawed”. It is a parameter derived from evidence that is clearly and publicly available on publishers’ websites.

- Moreover, the costs discussed in the JISC EI-ASPM report are per article costs. We do not, as Hall claims, compare thousands of subscription with thousands author payments.

**Rights management**

*Rights management: Based on CEPA (2008), we estimate rights management costs at around £50 per article for toll access copyright-based publishing, and £10 per article for OA publishing – with standard licensing agreements progressively replacing individual copyright assignment.*

Houghton et al, 2009, p. 155

On what basis do publishers save 80% of their rights management costs? The fact is that today every corresponding author signs some form of agreement with the publisher, the vast majority with no problem whatsoever. Under an open access model every corresponding author will be required to sign some form of agreement. The volume doesn’t change. There is no justification at all for the claim of an 80% cost saving. This is another flawed assumption.

Hall (2009, p6).
Hall’s attempt to reduce rights management to authors signing copyright agreements misrepresents the issue:

- The main aspects of publisher rights management include author copyright agreements, user permissions to reproduce, etc. and monitoring and responding to possible breaches. Simplification, standardisation and a more open approach to licensing and rights management would reduce the costs associated with all of these activities.

- To reduce the issue to authors signing copyright agreements is mere artifice – all the more so when publishers emphasise the value of the service they offer authors in defence of their rights (stm 2007), a service that would be greatly simplified through the use of less restrictive, simplified and standardised Creative Commons licensing, such as that commonly used in OA environments.

Marketing

Marketing: Drawing on a range of sources, we estimate marketing costs at £120 per article for the subscription model and a conservative £40 per article for the OA publishing model (i.e. marketing to authors). Houghton et al, 2009, p. 155

I have no idea what sources the authors drew on, but they clearly weren’t in touch with the reality of journals publishing. The largest single marketing expense for any journals publisher is attendance at academic conferences. The main purpose of that attendance is to attract authors to the publisher’s journals. Another substantial part of a journal publisher’s marketing expenditure is in promoting usage, through indexing, search and discovery tools, promotion of articles to the user community, and so on. A relatively small part of a journal publisher’s marketing budget is spent on marketing to libraries; far more on marketing to authors and users.

Hall (2009, p8).

Hall’s claims are not correct.

- The claim that our report’s findings are out of touch are ill founded – our conclusions were based on substantial research and the sources included CEPA (2008), Tenopir and King (2000) and the subsequent ‘tracking studies’, King (2007), Clarke (2007), etc. These sources are referred to in the JISC EI-ASPM report, and are widely seen as authoritative sources.

- It is common for marketing costs to be relatively high when firms enjoy monopoly power. For example, Elsevier reports that 34% of its total workforce is employed in ‘sales, marketing and customer services activities’ (compared with 25% in editorial activities). OA publishers often report substantially lower marketing costs. For example, Hindawi recently reported having 10 ‘marketing and design’ staff out of a

5 http://www.reedelsevier.com/investorcentre/Documents/Annual%20Reports/2009%20Downloads/Reed_ARA_EURO.pdf
Widening access to research information: A response  

Houghton & Oppenheim

total of 267 (4%), compared with 130 (49%) employed in content selection and production activities.6

Costs relating to indexing and the development and maintenance of search and discovery tool are a separate issue, as the process model described in detail in the JISC EI-ASPM report makes abundantly clear to the careful reader (pp95-102). Hall’s conflation is mere artifice.

Online hosting

Publisher – distribution costs could be reduced in OA publishing through the use of OA repositories (e.g. PubMed Central) or hosting services (e.g. HighWire) instead of using proprietary in-house systems for distribution. Houghton et al, 2009, p.81

Online hosting: Following CEPA (2008) we estimate online hosting costs per article at £200 for the subscription model, and £100 for the OA publishing model – with less use of proprietary access systems and no need for access control and authentication in the latter. Houghton et al, 2009, p.155

This demonstrates again a fundamental lack of understanding of how online scholarly publishing works today and how it would be likely to work under an open access model in which there were competition between providers; and it possibly stems from a misunderstanding of the CEPA data. Publishers will want to differentiate their services from those of their competitors, through value-added services to users, authors, reviewers, etc. They will not want simply to deposit articles on a platform like PubMed Central. The reference to Highwire here also shows another misunderstanding of how publishers deliver their online journals today. They don’t all use ‘proprietary’ systems. A good number use platforms like HighWire – OUP and Sage, for example – and others use third-party services like Metapress – Springer, for example. They choose their platform on the basis of functionality, cost and other similar measures. They don’t choose HighWire because it is inexpensive; as a highly functional platform, it isn’t.

Hall (2009, p6).

Again a number of points can be made:

• Proprietary access systems focus on branding and creating a ‘walled garden’ that influences citation and impact factors. In the early days of commercial computers, we saw the same phenomenon, with each of the main suppliers investing many millions in developing entirely proprietary and incompatible systems. The aim was to lock customers into their proprietary systems and make switching costly. The strategies failed, and replicating this mistake suggests a fundamental misunderstanding of the networked environment. Proprietary systems are replaced by inter-operable systems, which are in turn replaced by more open systems. Much of the money invested by publishers in proprietary access systems has been wasted, and much of the ongoing

costs associated with maintaining these systems can be saved as more open *de facto* and/or *de jure* standards emerge.

- Access control is an important part of the costs, not simply in the sense of authentication. The proprietary access systems are first and foremost designed to prevent access (by non-subscribers), and secondarily to facilitate access (by subscribers). There are many areas in which a shift of focus to the latter can reduce the costs involved, including system design and development, maintenance, hosting and the related communication costs and bottlenecks created by the centralisation of hosting, etc.

- Of course OA publishers would seek to differentiate and provide value-adding services in the process of competition, but in competing for authors and/or clients of the value-adding hosting services directly, publishers would be doing so in a more competitive environment and not simply shifting the costs of proprietary platforms to subscribers.

- Moreover, there are many studies that show the significant costs imposed on users by the publishers’ proprietary systems.
  - For example, RIN (2006) concluded that: “The main frustration is not with the research discovery services themselves but with the problem of subsequently accessing identified sources and materials. The ‘last mile’ of the process which actually delivers the document or other source that has been searched for is the focus of concern, with lack of access to journal articles because of a subscription barrier being the most frequently-expressed difficulty experienced. Librarians agree with researchers that the key problem is accessing online journals rather than problems with the discovery tools themselves.”
  - Similarly, the time and user behaviour costs associated with this ‘walled garden’ approach have been amply demonstrated by the UCL CIBER group. Their deep log analysis shows the long and fragile pathways that users have to negotiate to access content, even if they do use Google Scholar to help.7
  - Imposing such costs on users is important because, as Nilsen (2007) noted, “Opportunity costs apply equally to consumers, and the imposition of these costs (e.g. in dollars and time) on information users can reduce the social net benefit of an information product or services.” (We return to this point below).

Hall demonstrates a lack of understanding of the issues and costs from a users’ perspective.

---

7 [http://www.ucl.ac.uk/infostudies/research/ciber/projects/]
Customer service and helpdesk

Customer service/helpdesk: Following CEPA (2008) we estimate the cost of operating customer service/helpdesk at £50 per article for the subscription model, and £10 per article for the OA publishing model – with no subscriber access problems to deal within the latter.

Houghton et al, 2009, p.155

The report assumes that in this brave new world publishers will simply throw their content over the wall and leave users to get on with it. There may be some small saving were authentication no longer to be required, but again this is a small part of costs. Or will all platforms function perfectly all the time for every user in the open access world? Once again, the assumptions about how online publishing works today, and in this case about how it might work in the future, are flawed.

Hall (2009, p7).

There are a number of points that can be made:

- Numerous studies show that user difficulties and help desk enquiries often relate to login and access problems. For example, RIN (2009, p7) reports that 26% of researchers unable to access the content they needed cited login and authentication problems.

- In the toll access model, user instruction and help desk activities are also focused on a multitude of proprietary access systems that all work differently and offer limited cross-platform access. As noted above, a reduction in the use of proprietary access systems clearly offers potential savings.

Hall’s reducing the issue to authentication is misleading and unhelpful.

Management and investment margins

Management and Investment: Following CEPA (2008) we allow a management and investment margin of 20% for management and investment. This accords with industry consultation. For the OA publishing model we allow a margin of 15% due to reduced overheads in relation to such things as pricing, proprietary hosting systems, legal and licensing, reduced investment as author fees materialise immediately, etc.

Houghton et al, 2009, p.157

and

The development of more sustainable business models, as subscription revenue is becoming difficult to sustain in the face of declining subscriptions (e.g. moving to ‘author-pays’ OA publishing would make revenue more predictable and stable as it scales more easily to research output than have library budgets, growing with research expenditure and providing a revenue stream that is growing) (e.g. Wolfram 2006b). This reduced level of risk should, over time, be reflected in a reduced user cost of capital for OA publishers.


Cont’d.
We can take issue with two more suggestions here. The first is that revenue would be more predictable under an open access model. One of the big attractions for those who invest in the scholarly publishing industry today is the predictability and stability of subscription income; that’s, frankly, one of the things that the opponents of commercial scholarly publishing least like about it. The second is the idea that investment will be reduced as ‘author fees materialise immediately’. Can the report’s authors explain to me in what way the payment of author fees shortly in advance of publication compares favourably with the advance payment of annual subscriptions, up to six months before the start of the subscription cycle? The cash flow implications of the proposed open access model are, in fact, negative, not positive. Yet again, the estimated 25% saving here is a fantasy based on a profound misunderstanding of how scholarly publishing works.

Hall (2009, p7).

Again Hall is mistaken.

- It is widely accepted, including by publishers, that the author-pays model would be more sustainable as it scales to research funding more directly than subscription prices have to library budgets (with the number of papers produced closely correlating with R&D spending). In the publishers’ response to JISC, this fact was acknowledged, and it has been noted elsewhere (e.g. House of Commons Science and Technology Committee 2004).

- The sustainability of the author-pays model and opportunities that it afford publishers have been summarised most recently from direct experience in the publishing industry, with Outsell Inc. noting that: “It is almost ten years since BioMed Central (BMC) was launched, and one year since the largest commercial Open Access (OA) publisher was acquired by Springer Science+Business Media. At the time Derk Haank, Springer’s CEO, said: “This acquisition reinforces the fact that we see open access publishing as a sustainable part of STM publishing, and not an ideological crusade.” Today, a publisher of 250 OA journals (59% with ISI Impact Factors), over 60 thousand published articles, and a submission rate of 7500/quarter, BMC can proudly say that it has proven that the OA business model is commercially robust…” (Bousfield 2009).

- The JISC EI-ASPM report focuses on predictability of revenue over the medium to longer term and reduced overhead costs, increasing competition for authors (House of Commons Science and Technology Committee 2004; SQW 2004, etc.) and reducing risk and, thereby reducing the user cost of capital. Hall has confused this with predictability of current revenue streams over an annual billing cycle.

**Surplus and profit margins**

---

*Surplus/profit: Operating margins are relatively high in scholarly publishing, and we allow 20% for toll access publishing and for the OA publishing model we allow a margin of 15% due to lower risk and reduced cost of capital.*

Houghton et al, 2009, p.157

On what basis are we to accept that commercial open access publishers – and the assumption here is that commercial publishers would continue to provide publishing services – will accept a lower profit margin than they enjoy today? We have already seen that there is no lower risk. This is simply wishful thinking.

Hall (2009, p8).

Some of the larger commercial *stm* publishers record relatively high operating margins, while many record more normal margins and some struggle.

- The original 20% is a generous margin for publishing firms. For example, over the last year Reed Elsevier plc reported 16.55% and Wiley 13.56% – although the margins from journal publishing are typically higher than these company averages.

- As noted, it is generally accepted that author-pays publishing scales more readily to R&D spending than do library budgets, reducing uncertainty of longer term sustainability of subscription income and reducing the associated investor risk margin.

- As noted, it is also generally accepted that competition for authors would be greater under an author-pays model than is that between articles in the toll access model, thus putting downward pressure on margins.

Hence, the publishers will accept a lower profit margin than they enjoy today because competition would be introduced into the market and they would have to. This is a view that financial analysts specialising in the publishing industry agree with. However, the average operating margin of 15% used in the OA model is still relatively high and is certainly commercially sustainable.

---

*...OA journals are more visible and more likely to attract submissions and advertising revenue, as well as readers and citations, thereby increasing potential revenue growth opportunities.*

Houghton et al, 2009, p.131

Where is the evidence to support this, other than in a very partial reading of the literature on the impact of open access on citations, which I will come back to later? There is, simply, no evidence whatsoever to support the assertion that open access journals are more likely to attract more submissions or more advertising revenue.

Hall (2009, p8).

---

While it is not clear how Hall could possibly (genuinely) think the issue here is citations, a reference that is clearly parenthetical, the possibility of increased revenues from growth in submissions and a wider readership offering increased author and advertising revenue opportunities is clear.

- There are many examples of increasing submissions (e.g. Sahu 2006; Marincola 2003; etc.), which allows an increase in papers published at a given level of quality, thereby increasing revenue.

- The possibility of increased advertising revenue is mentioned by a number of analysts (e.g. Kaufman-Wills 2005; Crow 2009; etc.), and with a wider readership beyond the major subscription customers, there are obvious opportunities to expand advertising (and sponsorship) revenues.

In passing, it’s worth noting that a good part of the analysis of current costs in the report appears to be based on the research published in 1999 by Halliday and Oppenheim on the Economic Models of the Digital Library. 1999 is a very long time ago in digital publishing, only two or three years into the online publishing of journals and well before the advent of the Big Deal, the ebook, Google Scholar and Scopus, and so on. The research is, quite simply, out-of-date.

Hall (2009, p8).

Here Hall is indulging in another falsehood as any reader of the JISC EI-ASPM report could readily see.

- A summary list of the sources on publisher costs is given in a box (p63).

- The section identifying journal publisher activities and related costs (pp64-74) contains 19 references, not including Halliday and Oppenheim.

- The section quantifying journal publisher costs (pp153-159) contains 19 references, as well as summarising the major sources in Box 4.5 (p154), and again Halliday and Oppenheim are not mentioned.

The sources of journal publisher and all other costings are clearly and transparently reported, and Hall’s claim is, quite simply, a mischievous falsehood.
Misunderstanding publishing costs

Hence, on average estimated costs, a shift from all toll access e-only to OA e-only publishing for all journal articles produced in UK higher education during 2007 would have directly saved around £80 million, and for authored and edited books around £94 million. A shift from all toll access e-only to OA self-archiving e-only with overlay services for all journal articles produced in UK higher education during 2007 would have saved around £116 million (an additional £36 million), and for authored and edited books around £102 million (an additional £8 million).

Houghton et al, 2009, p.184

So we have estimated direct savings of £80M on journals and £94M on books for UK higher education from a move to open access publishing and of £116M on journals and £102M on books from a move to self-archiving with overlay services.

Where are these savings to be realised?

They must be set against UK university library spending in 2007, according to the SCONUL figures, of £113M on serials and £56M on books. So under the open access model the UK would be saving 71% of its current expenditure on journals (without any subscription cancellations) and would be saving £38M more than it is actually spending on books. Under the self-archiving model, the UK would be saving £3M more than it is currently spending on journals (again without any cancellations) and £46M more than it is spending on books. And this is all before any author-side payment costs.

Hall (2009, pp8-9).

Hall has misunderstood the analysis and is confusing two quite distinct issues.

- The primary question addressed in the JISC EI-ASPM report is the cost-effectiveness of the alternative models at the overall system level, loosely, at the level of the UK economy (i.e. effectively, the question ‘what is in it?’). Once answered by the EI-ASPM report, many stakeholder groups understandably want to ask a secondary question, which is about the cost implications for them (i.e. effectively, the question ‘what is in it for me?’). These are two quite different questions.

- We agree with Hall that toll and OA publishing perform very different roles, and even a cursory reading of the EI-ASPM report reveals that the point is made clearly there (p211). To the limits of affordability, toll access seeks to provide UK researchers with access to the worldwide research literature, whereas OA seeks to provide worldwide access to the UK research literature. These are very different things, and much of the analysis in the EI-ASPM report is intended to deal with this issue.

- To compare cost-effectiveness it is necessary to compare like with like. Consequently, as clearly stated, the comparisons relate to “a shift from all toll access e-only to OA e-only publishing for all journal articles produced in UK higher education during 2007” (i.e. we compare the costs associated with publishing UK article output under different models). As stated in Table 4.16 (p184) toll access acquisition costs are excluded to avoid double counting.
Hall’s statement “They must be set against UK university library spending in 2007” is quite simply wrong. To do so addresses a quite different question, namely the question ‘what is in it for me?’, in this case for research libraries and research institutions.

Hall’s analysis is mistaken, because he has confused and conflated two fundamentally different questions.

For the record, to address the question of the cost implications for UK higher education (i.e., what’s in it for me?), one should set the cost of alternative publishing models’ publishing (UK articles) against the costs of subscription (to world articles, within the bounds of affordability) (Figure 1).

**Figure 1. Cost implications of worldwide adoption of alternative OA publishing models for UK higher education, 2007 (GBP millions).**

Note: This comparison is of costs alone and takes no account of the benefits of more open access arising in the form of increased returns to R&D.
Source: JISC EI-ASPM.

Not only does Hall confuse the issues, he fails to correctly address the question he poses.
Assumptions and the online model

Much of Hall’s critique rests on the assertion that one should choose different cost variables (for whatever purpose). Again, Hall’s criticisms are misguided and misleading:

- The JISC EI-ASPM project page has included an online version of the underlying cost model since the report’s release, which allows anyone to experiment with alternative values for the major parameters.\(^\text{10}\)

- Our own sensitivity testing suggests that the bottom-line answer does not change for any plausible values that we have tried, such that (i) Hall’s alternative assumptions would be likely to make little difference to the results, and (ii) Hall, or anyone else, could try their preferred parameters – and we encourage them to do so.

Library and research performance savings

The study estimates potential savings for UK higher education libraries of £34M from a move from e-only publishing and an additional £11M from the move from subscription publishing to open access publishing. In the response to the Houghton report from the Publishers Association, ALPSP and STM, it was pointed out that to realise the savings of £11M more than 200 librarian jobs would have to be lost. The JISC response to the publishers’ comments countered that ‘savings realized would release resources to more research and research support activities, and would not be clawed back in funding cuts.’ Well, jobs are being lost in libraries right now, because of the recession, and it’s hard to see the Government not wanting to realise these savings if the opportunity came along. You cannot have your cake and eat it. You either realise real savings or you don’t.

Hall (2009, p9).

Hall is simply repeating a misrepresentation made by other publishers’ representatives, and which has been dealt with many times. However, to reiterate:

- There are two ways to realise efficiency gains: (i) by producing the same output with fewer input resources, or (ii) by producing more output with the same resources.

- European countries, including the UK, have set and are committed to ambitious R&D spending targets. In such an environment, there is no suggestion that there would be substitution at the margin.

- The savings realised would release resources and enable more research and research support activity. Such savings are just as real as those realised by clawing money back from research activities as they are available to fund additional/alternative activities.

- For example, the savings suggested by the JISC EI-ASPM report indicate the level of resources that could become available to libraries (and publishers) to address the challenges of the digital age (e.g. curating and sharing data, improving information literacy and dissemination, building tools to enable researchers to do their work better

\(^{10}\) [http://www.cfses.com/EI-ASPM/](http://www.cfses.com/EI-ASPM/)
and more efficiently, and do new kinds of work based on text mining, data mining, complex research workflows and so on).

- The benefits to the UK economy of being able to address these challenges effectively, within current resources (i.e. those released by OA), could be considerable.

There is also a contradiction in Hall’s position. Many publishers claim to be keen to move to electronic-only publishing, but do not seem concerned with the library job losses implied by that change (e.g. in physical handling, checkout and shelving, etc.).

Furthermore, the study itself is highly equivocal about the role that libraries play in enabling easy access to the right content for the users they serve.

**OA e-only journal handling expenditure could be considered discretionary, as user communities could discover and access the material independent of their research libraries. However, it is included to provide a basis for cost comparisons between publishing models.**

Houghton et al, 2009, footnote to p.170

One the one hand, the report suggests massive savings in research performance through the easier discoverability of relevant content in an open access world (which I will address shortly); on the other hand, it suggests a kind of free-for-all in which users are left to their own devices to find the content they need. Once again, you can’t have it both ways. Libraries play an essential role in providing access to the content that their specific user communities need. Increasingly the librarian’s role is about enabling discovery of content rather than physically collecting it. The study simply doesn’t get this.

Hall (2009, p9).

Perhaps Hall’s purposes can only be served by selective citation and misrepresentation?

- It is difficult to imagine how one can be perceived to be highly equivocal, while clearly stating that an ongoing role for research libraries is included and when a paragraph describing OA journal library handling costs appears on the same page (p170) and is followed immediately by Table 4.10 and Figure 4.7 which both contain OA journal library handling costs.

- Research performance savings are not “massive”, they are small savings in a big activity – 1% of a large number is bigger than 1% of a small number.

- As noted, the JISC EI-APSM report clearly includes research library services in an all e-only OA publishing environment, providing equivalent user services (pp170-171).

- The research library’s role in the OA environment is about enabling discovery of content and the increasing role for libraries in addressing digital and information literacy, data curation, etc., noted above, rather than negotiating licensing conditions with publishers and helping users deal with access difficulties and navigate the many different publishers’ proprietary silo access systems.
Widening access to research information: A response

Houghton & Oppenheim

A more careful reading of the JISC EI-ASPM report would reveal that special library handling costs and savings are not included in the modelling (e.g. note to Table 4.17, p186), due to limited and somewhat conflicting data about special libraries.

- The sentence quoted clearly begins with the clause “assuming similar library handling times and costs...” and reports what might be the case under that assumption.

- Major pharmaceutical companies are an exception. In general, one might expect special libraries to be smaller and have fewer journal subscriptions than the universities. UK SCONUL library reporting for the individual libraries suggests that there are economies of scale, with libraries that have a higher number of subscriptions generally reporting lower average per title handling costs. Hence, assuming similar library handling times and costs to provide a ballpark estimate of costs and savings for special libraries would, in fact, tend to err on the conservative side (i.e. in general, special libraries would not benefit from such economies of scale).

- Market analysts Morgan Stanley (2002, p7) noted that the corporate market for Reed Elsevier represented 25% of the customer base and academic libraries represented 65%, and while some corporate customers may be large, such customers are relatively few and far between.

- Other than AstraZeneca plc., GlaxoSmithKline plc. is the only major UK pharmaceutical firm, and as such hardly represents a typical example. It must be remembered that the scope of the EI-ASPM report is the UK economy. While large pharmaceutical companies are important players, they are not large enough in that market to affect the analysis at the UK level.
Widening access to research information: A response

Houghton & Oppenheim

19

Hall (2009, p10).

Again, a number of points can be made.

- All of the examples of publishers’ content archiving are well known, but hardly relevant to the core issue of cost differences between toll and OA publishing models.

- There are a number of studies of preservation costs (e.g. The LIFE Project), which show that ingest costs are but one element of life-cycle costs and that they are an area where relatively large savings could easily be made through standardisation.\(^\text{11}\)

- It is also worth noting that (UK) PMC has been a significant driver in achieving consistent files formats for journal articles, based on the NLM-DTD, precisely to address the preservation issue. Hence, OA is driving this and, if anything, will make preservation easier.

\(^{11}\) http://www.life.ac.uk/
Author fees

One of the largest single figures in the study is that for the cost of author-side payments in relation to UK published output: £170M, or £150M in higher education.

There is an enormous range of author-fees, but based on a ‘straw poll’ of eight major OA publishers we find fees being charged ranging from around £800 to £1,600, with a consensus in the sample and literature of around £1,500. It has also been noted that author fees are coalescing around USD 3,000 (around £1,500 at 2007 average annual exchange rates) (Kiley 2007). These reported fees triangulate well with the OA publisher cost estimates outlined above, which were derived independently from a bottom-up costing of publisher activities, in which OA e-only costs per article were estimated to average £1,448. At 2007 levels of article publishing by UK researchers, author-side fees (or producer-side fees) would have cost the UK around £170 million nationally for all journal articles published, of which around £150 million would have related to higher education.

Houghton et al, 2009, p. 180

Moreover, with author-fees charged converging at around USD 3,000 or £1,500 (at 2007 annual average exchange rates), our estimate of £1,525 per article for e-only OA publishing would seem reasonable given that it includes full commercial margins.

Houghton et al, 2009, p. 157

There is very little more in the study on the level of these fees. The subject required much more than the cursory analysis it was given.

So the study is simply wrong in presenting £1,500 as a reliable and sustainable author publishing fee, and to suggest that this figure includes a full commercial margin. It’s more wishful thinking, based on a flawed understanding of the economics of scholarly publishing.


Again Hall misunderstands and/or misrepresents the analysis of the JISC EI-ASPM report.

- The Scholarly Communication Life-Cycle model, based on the IDEF0 modelling standard typically used in business process re-engineering, is used to identify activities and workflows throughout the scholarly communication life-cycle, including the activities of publishers.

- The section on ‘publish as a journal article’ (A31 pp49-58) contains 34 individual activities, each with their related inputs, outputs, controls and supporting mechanisms. These translate into 37 activities that are individually costed for each of the publishing models (as described in detail on pp153-159).

- Summing these individual activity costs for author-pays publishing gives £1,524 per article published for e-only production. This includes a commercial 15% management and investment margin and a further 15% operating/profit margin.

- Checking against other independent sources, we found that this figure triangulated very well with surveys of OA publisher activities and costs (e.g. Hedlund et al. 2004), matched or exceeded what was being charged by OA journals at the time, and matched with the consensus of £1,500 or (US) $3,000 that was widely reported in the literature at the time.
There was nothing cursory about the analysis in the JISC EI-ASPM report, it does include commercial margins, and it triangulates very well with a number of other independent sources.

| If the appropriate fee were closer to $4,000, which might still be conservative, then those UK costs would increase from £170M to £226M at the exchange rate used in the study. If we then applied the current exchange rate instead of one from two years ago, those costs would further increase to £272M. But what’s £100M between friends? |
| Hall (2009, pp11-12). |

Hall’s knowledge of the economics of scholarly publishing reveals to us that, if the author-fee were higher, it would cost more to publish using author-pays.

- Here we really do see “wishful thinking…”, but perhaps not wishful enough to make the point. A cursory reading of Table 4.8 (p166) reveals that even at Hall’s imaginary $4,000 per article, author-pays publishing would cost the UK less than subscription publishing the same number of articles.
- OA publishing would also enable the UK to be in a position to realise an increase in returns to R&D, which even if Hall’s imagination could dream up a still higher author-fee, would contribute towards returning a net benefit for the author-pays publishing model.

**Research performance savings and increased returns to R&D**

| I am going to address the research performance savings and the increased returns to R&D together because they are both based on the same assumptions and estimates of the benefits of improved access to research information. |
| Hall (2009, p12). |

Once again Hall is simply wrong.

- Research performance savings relate to the activities identified in the Scholarly Communication Life-Cycle Model (pp38-47), with approximately 300 activity items costed (pp145-152). Savings come from activities that would take less time (e.g. search, discovery and, above all, access) or would no longer be necessary (e.g. seeking and obtaining permissions, inter-library loans and document delivery, etc.).
- The increase in returns to R&D comes from increased accessibility and efficiency – as described in detail in Section 5 (pp193-210).

Hall has not understood the analysis in the JISC EI-ASPM report.
The study suggests that annual savings of £108M could be realised in the UK on research performance and research funders’ costs, through speedier access to scientific information; and that a gain of £329M could be achieved in the annual return to investment in R&D. Together, these savings and returns dwarf the savings on publishing and library costs.

Hall (2009, p12).

Again Hall is wrong.

- Table 4.18 (p187) and Figure 4.10 (p188) report the research performance savings relating to journal articles – namely £106 million nationally, of which £73 million within higher education.

- Table 5.2 (p209) and the related text (pp208-209) show estimated increases in returns to R&D – namely £172 million from publicly funded R&D, of which £124 million from higher education R&D.

- As noted elsewhere, activity savings in research performance scale with the level of activity expenditure, and library and publisher activity costs are a relatively small element in overall scholarly communication system costs (p.xiv).

- The estimated increase in returns to R&D resulting from a 5% increase in efficiency is modest. For example, if researchers worked a standard 35-hour week, a 5% increase in efficiency would be equivalent to saving 1 hour and 45 minutes per week.

This is all largely predicated first on researchers and others having access to less than 50% of the research output that they need:

*By no means all serials are journals and there are likely to be duplicate subscriptions within institutions, but even if they were all journals, all peer reviewed and there were no duplicate subscriptions the mean of SCONUL library subscriptions would represent around 39% of titles and the median 27% – suggesting that perhaps 60% to 70% of possible titles are not being made available in this way.*

Björk et al. (2008) suggested that around 11.3% of articles are green OA and a further 3.5% delayed OA, so perhaps 15% of full access content is already available OA and should not be included in estimates of the accessibility differences between toll and OA publishing and self-archiving models. Hence, as a simple proxy, perhaps 50% of possible journal titles are not readily accessible to higher education researchers in the UK.

Houghton et al., 2009, p. 201

The report assumes that 50% of journals equal 50% of articles. This is simply wrong.


Again Hall is wrong.

- It is perfectly clear from the paragraphs cited that the report is discussing journal titles, *not* articles.
• The basis for the model parameters is outlined in Box 5.1 (p202), and it does not include any metric relating to SCONUL library access to journal titles as a share of possible titles.

**Citation advantage**

Now let’s look at the citation advantage where the report seems to me to have been very partial in its selection and review of the relevant literature.

*as [a] starting point one might take 25% as a conservative estimate of the potential citation advantage of OA publishing models.*


Hall (2009, p13).

Hall is very partial in his selection, quoting the last line and half of a long paragraph.

• The paragraph Hall sees fit to largely ignore mentions a number of studies exploring the OA citation advantage (pp201-202).

• Hall notes (p2) that: “The report’s authors have clearly engaged in a very wide-ranging and detailed review of the literature, and for that they must be commended.”

• Hall claims (p13) that: “the report seems to me to have been very partial in its selection and review of the relevant literature.”

• It seems, therefore, that the JISC EI-ASPM report is good when it agrees with the publisher representatives’ position and flawed when it does not.

Hall cites four studies that question the OA citation advantage.

• The most complete bibliography of citation studies to date can be found at [http://opcit.eprints.org/oacitation-biblio.html](http://opcit.eprints.org/oacitation-biblio.html).

• The great majority of items listed suggest that there is an OA advantage, which can materialise as a citation advantage among other forms. In general, the ongoing debate has turned from if there is an advantage to why. In a recent large-scale study, Gargouri et al. (2010) have demonstrated that the reason is that OA materials are more easily available than toll-access materials.

• The bibliography mentioned above also reports comments and critiques, including of some of the studies favoured by Hall. Some of the commentary is less than entirely favourable.

• Further commentary on the debate can be found in the Blogosphere (e.g. via [http://opcit.eprints.org/oacitation-biblio.html](http://opcit.eprints.org/oacitation-biblio.html)).

• We understand that a detailed review of the literature on citation advantage will be emerging in 2010.
On balance, we are not inclined to change from our position stated at the beginning of the paragraph that Hall chose not to cite in full, namely:

“…there are many studies and active discussion of a possible OA citation advantage, with general agreement that there does seem to be an observable advantage and argument focusing mainly on why (EPS et al. 2006).”

We would also reiterate the point that citation is but one indicator of use (i.e. use by research authors). The advantages of OA lie in making the research literature more widely available to researchers in private and public sector settings who do not typically publish, the many professionals who do not publish, students and independent researchers who do not publish, and researchers and users in developing countries who have limited opportunities to publish in that subset of the literature exposed to citation analysis. Citation is a very poor proxy indicator of use, and increasing the returns to R&D expenditure depends upon lowering the costs of, and extending use far beyond those who might cite. Thus, even if there were no citation advantage, wider and easier accessibility and greater usability would contribute to realising the full value of research results.

Accessibility and efficiency

Let’s look then at the supposed savings in research performance. Here’s a selection:

As noted, the main areas of cost impact of alternative publishing models relate to accessibility and usability – content costs, search, discovery and retrieval time, and permissions to use and re-use as required. These include:

- Possible cost impacts on search and discovery (e.g. proprietary access systems used to control toll access involving use of multiple interfaces and imposing learning and switching costs on users, etc.). Halliday and Oppenheim (1993, p17) reported that the variety of systems proved frustrating to users.

- Possible differences in the timeliness of retrieval (e.g. delays caused by authentication slowing download, payment barriers and transaction time, document delivery, etc.).

- Potential for OA to reduce or eliminate the delays, costs and frustration caused by access barriers when trying to follow hyperlinks.

- Self-archiving allows user choice – immediate free access to the pre- or post-print versus access to the value-added version in a journal (Green OA).

Cont’d.
Halliday and Oppenheim (1999) provide one example of many reports that show access difficulties and frustrations with the diversity and complexity of proprietary silo access systems. Sadly, little has changed.

- As noted in the JISC EI-ASPM report (pp13-114): “Jubb et al. (2007) noted the frustration expressed by researchers over problems gaining access to the sources and materials they identified by searching, saying that their most frequently expressed difficulty was their inability to gain access to journal articles because of a subscription barrier. An issue noted by many (e.g. Swan 2008). Meaningful (i.e. identifying) filenames are also important, with some publisher systems still offering .pdf files with unhelpful default filenames like ‘sarticle.pdf’ (Science Direct), which adds to the burden imposed on readers when filing for future use. Nilsen (2007) noted that “Opportunity costs apply equally to consumers, and the imposition of these costs (e.g. in dollars and time) on information users can reduce the social net benefit of an information product or services.”

- Most recently, RIN (2009) concluded:
  - “This RIN report finds that many researchers are encountering difficulties in getting access to the content they need and that this is having a significant impact on their research.”
  - “The report’s key finding is that access is still a major concern for researchers. Although researchers report having no problems finding content in this age of electronic information, gaining access is another matter due to the complexity of licensing arrangements, restrictions placed on researchers accessing content outside of their own institution and the laws protecting public and private sector information. This means that research into important information resources can be missing. Researchers report that they are frustrated by this lack of immediate access and that this slows their progress, hinders...”
collaborative work and may well affect the quality and integrity of work produced.”

There are many such examples, with a number of independent studies currently underway still finding accessibility difficulties and costs.  

The list of these supposed savings in time seems to go on and on, and they are then all repeated later in the study in the list of supposed benefits to R&D of open access, though they are supplemented there by some wilder claims still.

The fact is, researchers today have immediate access to the vast majority of the scientific articles that they could need for their research. This is thanks to two things, the first being years of fine-tuning of collection development by librarians to ensure that their users have access to the core journals for their disciplines; and the second is the impact of the Big Deal, under which the number of journals to which the average academic researcher in the UK has immediate access via his or her university library has more than doubled in the UK over the last ten years.  

Hall (2009, p15).

In fact, research and professional users confront very real, time consuming and costly access barriers. Just to take one example, RIN (2009) recently reported that:

- “The ALC study used a web-based survey to assess the nature and scale of the difficulties researchers face in gaining access to licensed content. Not surprisingly, most of the problems focused on e-journals. Of the 800 respondents, over 40% said that they were unable readily to access licensed content at least weekly; and two-thirds at least monthly” (p7).
- Interestingly, key reasons for failing to gain access included: “technical limitations such as log in/authentication problems (26%) or problems with proxy servers and off-site access” (p7).
- “Over 80% of ALC survey respondents said that the difficulties they encountered in gaining access to content had an impact on their research, and nearly a fifth said that the impact was ‘significant’” (p8).
- “The most common impacts are delays in research, and inconvenient and disruptive interruptions to workflow” (p9).
- “Lack of access is also a hindrance to collaborative working... It can also lead to delays in the submission of papers and of bids for funding” (p9).
- “But researchers are also concerned that lack of access creates bias in the sources they use, and that it may compromise the quality of their work, particularly in relation to literature reviews (and more especially systematic reviews)” (p9).

---

12 See, for example, [http://ie-repository.jisc.ac.uk/333/](http://ie-repository.jisc.ac.uk/333/) and [http://ie-repository.jisc.ac.uk/337/](http://ie-repository.jisc.ac.uk/337/)
• “Peer reviewers are also hindered when they cannot access sources cited by an author” (p9).

• Scientists worry that lack of access to the latest findings and methodologies may lead them to undertake redundant work” (p9).

• “The key message from this report is that access to research information content issues must be addressed if the UK research community is to operate effectively, producing high-quality research that has a wider social and economic impact” (p23).

There are many such reports with similar findings (e.g. Ware 2009; Jubb et al. 2007; etc.). Moreover, the nature of the access problems reported is just as described in the JISC EI-ASPM report. The list of these supposed savings seems to go on and on, because the access problems faced by researchers go on and on.

The fact is, the report’s authors have failed to show that there is any real gap between the access that researchers have today to the scientific literature that they need and that which they might have under an open access model. And all that follows is therefore, as I said earlier, science fiction. Hall (2009, p18).

In fact, a very substantial access gap is plain for all to see. Even The Publishing Research Consortium confirmed this. Ware (2009) looked at Access by UK small and medium-sized enterprises to professional and academic literature. He found that:

• 73% of UK-based SMEs reported difficulties accessing the journal articles they needed, as did 53% of large firms and 27% of university researchers (p13).

• Just 2% of SMEs, 7% of large firms and 17% of higher education-based researchers reported having access to all the articles they needed for their work (p13).

• Ware notes that these numbers accord with those from a much larger CIBER study published in 2004 (p13).

• Ware also notes that 71% of SMEs reported using open access journals and 42% reported using institutional repositories (p22).

• The report also noted that “Several firms were enjoying access via the libraries of the universities where they had previously worked. It was not entirely clear whether this use would have been legitimate under the terms of the libraries’ licenses” (p30).

• One can only speculate as to whether there was any overlap between the 2% of SMEs that reported having access to all the articles they needed and the ‘several firms’ enjoying illegitimate access or the 70% plus that reported using OA journals and articles.

What Ware’s report, and others like it, makes clear is that there are very substantial access gaps, OA is about access and permission, and it is also evident that there are very substantial permissions barriers facing research users.
Staying on topic

Finally, on the topic of this study of the UK, I’d like to draw your attention to one important general statement in the study:

Of course, it is most unlikely that an entirely funder supported producer-side OA publishing system would arise.
Houghton et al, 2009, p. 145

Why, oh why, wasn’t this eminently sensible statement borne in mind throughout the study? Why model a purely open access world if you accept that it is not going to come about? If you believe that some sort of mixed model will continue, with perhaps different proportions to those that pertain today, why not try to model for that? Because if you did model for that, many of the assumptions that you make about the purported savings and efficiency gains would disappear, and that wouldn’t suit the case that your sponsors want to make.

Nor does the study bother itself with how we might get from A to B, from this less than perfect world we inhabit to that promised land. But it’s not really interested in relating the study to the real world, is it? If it had been, it might have invited a broader participation in its development.


The topic of the JISC EI-ASPM was to estimate the costs and potential benefits of alternative publishing models.

- Title of report: Economic implications of alternative scholarly publishing models. Definition of Alternative: “The choice between two mutually exclusive possibilities”. 14
- The JISC EI-ASPM project resulted in a report of some 260 pages and a cost model. Analysis focused on the core question relating to the relative cost-effectiveness of alternative publishing models. It would be possible to explore a mixed models situation, but (i) that was not the topic we were studying, and (ii) it seems purely speculative to guess what mixes to model.
- Transitions from A to B are the topic of an ongoing series of studies, and again, was not the topic of our research. Nevertheless, the cost-benefit analysis modelled a transitional period.
- The JISC EI-ASPM report is very focused and very thorough on the topic it does address.

Hall’s assertions about JISC’s intentions in sponsoring research are little short of libellous. Both JISC, and the Report’s authors, entered into this research with an open mind.

14 http://www.thefreedictionary.com/alternative
Conclusions

In his peer-review of the JISC EI-ASPM report Professor Danny Quah, Head of Economics at the London School of Economics, noted:

“The report addresses an important and difficult problem, and is clearly the result of a lot of very careful thinking about the issues. The methodology is sound and the analysis is extremely detailed and transparent. The multi-stage model of production that is used is complex, and does require calibration according to a large number of parameters, many of which are necessarily estimates, where possible taken from published sources or the wider literature. If demonstrably better estimates become available then these could improve that calibration still further. The report represents the best evidence so far on the questions it addresses.”

Rather than offering better, independently verifiable data, or suggesting an alternative methodology for estimating the potential impacts of more open access, Hall’s analysis rests on unsubstantiated claims, misunderstandings and misrepresentations.

The evidence suggests that taxpayers’ money may be being wasted in inefficient scholarly communication systems and we are failing to realise the benefits of public investment in research. As the Research Information Network (RIN 2009, p23) recently concluded: “…access to research information content issues must be addressed if the UK research community is to operate effectively, producing high-quality research that has a wider social and economic impact.” More progress could be made if, rather than denying their existence, there were greater willingness to address access problems.

JISC and the EI-ASPM report’s authors remain open to further dialogue and research with publishers. Indeed, as Hall notes (though he underplays the key roles of both the EI-ASPM report and of JISC in making this happen), a portfolio of related research projects is being taken forward in partnership with a range of stakeholders in the UK. It is to be hoped that more data will be made available through those projects.

15 http://www.jisc.ac.uk/media/documents/publications/responseoneiaspmreport.pdf
References


Widening access to research information: A response

Houghton & Oppenheim


