

A publisher publishes an article. At what price?

Experience with the offsetting deals in the Netherlands.

Two models

The essence of the publishing offsetting deals is that the publisher is no longer paid for providing a service to the reader (giving access to articles), but to the writer (publishing articles). In both cases, the institution to which the reader respectively the writer is affiliated, pays the bill: in the reader model through the library, in the writer model through the research project. However, these cash flows are intertwining.

In the reader model, it is not possible to determine the price paid for publishing an article. Although the price of a journal subscription is known and also how many articles are published in that journal, the total number of subscriptions to that magazine is secret, hence the price of the article is.

In the writer model, it is possible. The simplest situation is that a writer approaches a publisher directly for publishing her article in a journal. The price is then on her invoice. Sometimes institutions settle bulk contracts for publishing larger numbers of articles due to the discount that may result. Institutions require these articles to be published in open access, not just for social reasons, but also to combat double dipping. This is the technique to make one country pay for publishing an article via the writer model and another for giving access to this article via the reader model.

Offsetting deals in the Netherlands

The offsetting deal with **Elsevier** includes all 6000 articles published by Dutch first authors annually with this publisher. The Netherlands pays M € 12. This would amount to a price of € 2000 per published article. But that number is misleading. In 2018, Elsevier will make only 1800 of the 6000 articles open access (in 420 of their 2500 journals). The remaining 4200 articles are placed behind a toll wall. Thus, additional money may be requested elsewhere for access: a case of double dipping. Only via a surcharge of € 500 to € 5000 per article¹, Elsevier will collect these articles from the toll wall and make them open access. For all 4200 articles, it will be over M € 12. Then the average price will be **€ 4000 per published article**.

To **Springer** the joint institutions pay M € 2.8. For this amount, up to 2200 open access articles can be published in its 2000 hybrid journals. This covers the total Dutch production with this publisher (2113 articles in 2016), resulting in an average of **€ 1300 per published article**. Springer has kept their 400 open-access journals outside of the deal. Publishing in these journals costs \$ 2200 per article². Also 400 journals of learned societies fall outside the deal. Their prices vary enormously.

All 1350 hybrid journals of **Taylor & Francis** are included in the M€ 2 deal. The number of articles published in these journals in open access is not limited. In 2016 that were 1340 articles. This amounts to **€ 1500 per published article** (or less if the number of articles is higher than foreseen). Authors publishing in one of the 160 open-access journals, which are not included in the deal, pay € 2150 per article³.

The deal with **Wiley** is equivalent to the one with T&F: an unlimited number of open access articles in all their 1450 hybrid journals. In 2014, it were 2300 articles, according to Wiley rising to 2600 in 2019. The joint institutions pay M € 4. This leads to **€ 1600 per published article** (or less if the number of articles is higher than foreseen). Publishing in one of their 60 open-access journals costs € 455 - € 4163 per article⁴.

Résumé

Publisher	Price per OA article via offsetting deal	Price per loose OA article
Elsevier	€ 4000	€ 500 - € 5000
Springer	€ 1300	€ 2200
Taylor & Francis	€ 1500	€ 2150
Wiley	€ 1600	€ 455 - € 4163

Conclusion

For these four largest publishers, together covering over 40% of the Dutch article production, the price paid via the offsetting deals is within the amount assessed by the Max Planck Society, i.e. from € 3800 to € 5000⁵. The statement in their study that the transition to open access can be paid from existing library budgets seems correct, at least if publishers will not calculate higher prices in other countries. That is unknown. There are not many offsetting deals outside the Netherlands and, in so far they are, they are secret.

Future

The foregoing is a powerful plea to continue with the offsetting deals (even though the negotiations between Elsevier and Germany/Austria/Finland are unfriendly because of the publisher's exorbitant pricing scheme). Conditions are (1) that these deals are disclosed and (2) that the academic world is prepared for a no-deal. (In The Netherlands the bad deal with Elsevier had to be accepted because the institutions were not prepared for a no-deal.)

Only thus, competition between publishers is under way.

14 augustus 2017

Leo Waaijers.

leowaa@xs4all.nl

¹ https://www.elsevier.com/_data/promis_misc/j.custom97.pdf

² <http://www.springer.com/gp/open-access/springer-open-choice>

³ <http://authorservices.taylorandfrancis.com/publishing-open-access-with-taylor-francis/>

⁴ <https://authorservices.wiley.com/author-resources/Journal-Authors/licensing-open-access/open-access/article-publication-charges.html>

⁵ http://pubman.mpdl.mpg.de/pubman/item/escidoc:2148961:7/component/escidoc:2149096/MPDL_OA-Transition_White_Paper.pdf