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Elsevier licence offer contravenes open access and fair pricing for scientific publications

Following several months of intensive negotiations, academic publisher Elsevier has submitted an initial offer for a nationwide licence for access to scientific publications to the Alliance of Science Organisations in Germany. In the opinion of the Alliance, this offer does not comply with the principles of open access and fair pricing.

Despite its current profit margin of 40 percent, the publisher is still intent on pursuing price increases that are higher than the licence fees paid until now. The publisher rejects more transparent business models that are based on the publication service and would make publications more openly accessible.

"Elsevier is trying to exploit its dominant market position and has threatened all scientific institutions whose contracts expire at the end of 2016 that it will disable their access to its services," says Prof. Horst Hippler, President of the German Rectors' Conference (HRK).

The Alliance of Science Organisations in Germany rejects Elsevier's offer. It calls on the publisher to submit a transparent and sustainable offer and to resume negotiations. The Alliance goes on to say that the reputation of the publisher is largely based on the mostly unpaid work of scientists and that this should be reflected in the business relations.

Information on the DEAL project:

The negotiations were prepared as part of the project DEAL – nationwide licensing of the products offered by major science publishers, which was launched by the Alliance of Science Organisations in Germany at the initiative of the HRK. The negotiations with Elsevier on a nationwide licence agreement are headed by HRK President Prof. Horst Hippler. The objective is to sign an agreement with a term beginning on 1 January 2017. Initial exploratory talks with the publishers Springer Nature and Wiley are scheduled for January 2017. The business models agreed on are to be used as blueprints for agreements with further publishers.

Safeguarding adequate provision of up-to-date literature for research and teaching has been an issue at most research locations in Germany for many years. The ongoing consolidation among major international science publishers has continued to reinforce the market power of providers and has caused prices to rise dramatically. The acquisition budgets of academic libraries have not been able to keep pace for many years, and for a long time now they have not been able to provide researchers and students with everything they need.

The objective of the DEAL project is to conclude licence agreements for the entire range of electronic journals offered by the major science publishers. At the same time, plans are to implement an open access component which means that the costs of open access publications born by the research institutions will be taken into consideration within the scope of such licences. Several hundred institutions, including universities, universities of applied sciences, research institutions, state and regional libraries, have expressed their support for these kinds of licence agreements.

Further information on DEAL: www.projekt-deal.de

The Alliance of Science Organisations in Germany is a union of the most important German research organisations. It regularly issues statements relating to research policy and funding and the structural development of the German research system. Members of the Alliance include the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, the German Academic Exchange Service, the German Research Foundation (DFG), the Fraunhofer-Gesellschaft, the Helmholtz Association of German Research Centres, the German Rectors' Conference (HRK), the Leibniz Association, the Max Planck Society, the German National Academy of Sciences Leopoldina, and the German Council of Science and Humanities (Wissenschaftsrat). In 2016, the Leopoldina is chair of the Alliance of Science Organisations in Germany.

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