

22 March 2010

Graham Taylor
The Publishers Association

JISC
Northavon House
Coldharbour Lane
Bristol BS16 1QD

phone +44 (0) 117 931 7403
website www.jisc.ac.uk

Chairman
Professor Sir Timothy O'Shea

Deputy Chairman
Professor David Baker

Executive Secretary
Dr Malcolm Read OBE

Direct line: +44 (0) 117 931 7403
email: m.read@jisc.ac.uk

Dear Graham

Thank you for your letter of 15 March. You mainly repeat a well rehearsed debate about the Houghton report which has been covered in previous correspondence with JISC staff and with the report authors. A meeting with our Chairman and Vice Chairman would be useful but only if it covered first order issues. Two concerns in relation to scholarly publishing are:

1. How can the dissemination of research outputs be made more effective through the Internet and Web technologies? The current mechanism only effectively reaches other researchers who can afford (usually through their employing organisation) to subscribe to relevant journals. This restricts the impact and benefit of research.
2. Why are subscription costs continuing to rise at rates above the level of inflation when most other industries can, in the long term, reduce costs through efficiency gains? The market does not seem to work well and we would welcome your views on why this is.

Turning to the points you raised in your letter: we believe that where there is evidence that new technologies may improve the efficiency and effectiveness of research, teaching, learning or administration in further or higher education, then we have a responsibility to consider how to realise the potential benefits. Your letter suggests that the Houghton report is deeply flawed. However, Professor Danny Quah, Professor of Economics at the London School of Economics, has described the JISC-funded Houghton report as "the best evidence so far on the questions it addresses". Among other things, it models significant societal benefits that may arise from a move toward more open access, which should not be ignored at a time of considerable stress in the UK economy. JISC is exploring the implications of this evidence, and of wider policy initiatives, for example at the European Union and US Federal Government level, that support greater access to research outputs. As a part of this exploration, JISC has worked with the Research Information Network and others in establishing the joint portfolio of work to which you

refer. JISC is deeply committed to this portfolio of projects, seeing them as a natural next step to build on the evidence collected by JISC and others so far. However, it was never the intention to limit the work of any of the stakeholders to the portfolio, and publishers – like JISC and RIN – have commissioned unilateral work during this time, which JISC welcomes as further evidence to inform the debates.

The recent JISC report that is the immediate subject of your letter, “Modelling Scholarly Communication Options: Costs and Benefits for Universities”, is a rigorous application of the Houghton model in the context of universities. It presents a complex picture, and clearly acknowledges that any transition to open access presents challenges to the sector as a whole, to publishers, but also to research-intensive universities, to research funders and to libraries (among others). Contrary to your assertion, the report clearly states that the figures presented rest on an assumption of universal open access (page iv in the Executive Summary). The report is balanced, for example noting that publishers have a legitimate fear that the availability of material via open access repositories may impact subscriptions (p57), though noting that there is as yet no evidence to support that fear. In no way can the report or the JISC publicity around it reasonably be construed as JISC acting against publishers.

Sir Tim O’Shea, Professor Baker and I very much look forward to meeting with you to discuss the critical issues of research outputs and their dissemination; in particular how these can be addressed in a period of declining university budgets. Sue Ehmann is currently seeking a suitable date.

Yours sincerely



Malcolm Read
Executive Secretary

cc Sir Tim O’Shea
Professor David Baker