

Transition metrics – working draft

Introduction

Transition agreements

The National Library of Luxembourg has a consortial section¹ which is planning to transition its agreements to the new realities of Open Access. The past years have been spent setting up an integrated administrative structure that allows for flexible shifting of costs and devising entirely new models.

We envision the transition to play on two levels:

1. Our subscriptions contain more and more Open Access content, hence the subscription costs should fall proportionally, the “Transition credit”;
2. Our consortial partners pay increasing amounts for Open Access publications, these costs should be covered by the savings of the subscription part.

Goals for transition agreements:

1. Transparent and sustainable for both publishers and libraries
2. Long term commitment (3-5 years)
3. Data-driven

Once the infrastructure for producing the data is in place, we will communicate key results to the most relevant publishers, consortial partners and directly to scientists. Such pro-active negotiation seems the best way to overcome publisher passivity.

¹ www.consortium.lu/about

Subscription costs

The monitoring of Open Access is impossible because there is a lack of data about usage. After a successful pilot project in, we intent to use a new metric² as an indicator of subscription value. The reference, historic, model is based on publisher-provided COUNTER usage data. Public communication of the evolution of both models is planned from the start, as the main leverage against publisher passivity. Any such communication will honour price confidentiality.

Example (with fake numbers)

COUNTER usage for 2018

50.000 articles (JR1), cost per article 2 EUR

Articles used in 2018

	Total number of articles ³	50 400	100%
a	Only 2018 publication year	39 452	78%
b	Only non-OA content	33 451	66%
c	Only one download per user	25 245	50%

After analysis, the number of downloads has shrunk to 25 245 articles and cost per article has doubled. Based on this information, the cost of the subscription should be half its original price. This substantial “Transition credit” is used for discounts or paying publishing costs (see below). The above percentages and the amount of the “Transition credit” are all non-confidential and can be used in communications to stakeholders. Numbers can be targeted for specific subject areas⁴ to make it easier to address scientists directly.

Details for the table:

- a. First we limit to a given publication year (similar to JR5). Previous years have in most cases been paid for already and must therefore be excluded for value assessment of any yearly subscription cost.
- b. Open Access articles are excluded, based on querying the Unpaywall API (also useful can be Crossref, DOAJ, WoS, Scopus and Romeo/Sherpa APIs). Only version of record articles (Gold or Hybrid OA) are excluded for now. (It would be trivial to add, for informational purposes, available OA pre- or post-prints of the publisher version.)
- c. COUNTER rejects repeat downloads within 30 seconds⁵. Per design, most publisher article landing pages require an HTML download before the PDF link becomes available. We have therefore extended the repeat download time frame to the duration of a user session, irrespective of the article format (PDF, HTML).

² The new metric is based on analysis of usage data at article level, using as a starting point ezProxy log-files, article parsing by ezParse (www.ezparse.org) and further inhouse analysis.

³ Both ways of counting total number of downloads will never exactly add up

⁴ Subjects of the used articles are available through metadata enrichment. This allows monitoring of Open Access usage not only by consortial member but also by subject.

⁵ COUNTER Code of Practice, Release 4, Appendix D, Section 5 <https://www.projectcounter.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/APPD.pdf>

Publishing costs

Knowing the total cost

It is notoriously difficult to identify all payments made to publishers outside of subscription costs, although publishers themselves are increasingly able and willing to help. These include APCs but also page and colour charges (irrespective of OA status). We hope to incentivise consortial members to provide such costs, as without knowledge of costs, we cannot recoup them. It is important to record these expenses following their budget years and not rely on publishing dates only.

Knowing local publications

Publications are easier to obtain, the only major issue is with pre- and post print copies harvested from repositories without proper identifiers, such as DOI. Versioning of article copies is an ongoing problem, as is quality control for metadata (aka cataloguing...).

Calculating and spending the Transition credit

The “Transition credit” identified above (in this example roughly half the current subscription cost) is calculated ex-post, for an arbitrary 12 month period ending in time for the renewal discussions⁶. To calculate the corresponding publishing spent, all expenditures are simply pro-rated to this period.

As all analysed periods are in the past, we can negotiate with facts and adjust payments year after year. Minimum & maximum variation ceilings are defined to ensure long-term planning security for both sides.

The transition credit is entirely used to pay for any past APCs (plus colour/page charges). The remaining credit (or due additional spent) is negotiated. If no discount is given, the APCs are “virtually” increased to account for the actual sum spent and may suddenly look rather expensive. As this is a “virtual” spent, it is also not confidential. Again, the sums can be aligned to subjects and consortial members for targeted communication towards scientists.

If APC discounts are negotiated, they would apply to future expenses. The system would need to adapt to such realities by adopting a price for next years APCs and adopt a model of pre-payment or pre-negotiated prices. Comparing such expenditure to future transition credits remains of course a useful and integrated exercise. It is essential that such negotiated APCs are not confidential.

Further cost-value data

Having article level usage data, licence lifecycle information and local publications in one system allows for relevant insights based on citation analysis of both sets of articles.

Example: Which titles are cited most by local scientists? Are titles cited which are not subscribed?

Incoming citations add another level of insight: Do we subscribe to all titles, which cite local publications, are we missing any? Further citation analysis to identify of so-called “hidden institutes” and possibly “citation cartels” are further possibilities.

⁶ To have numbers ready for the 2019 renewal discussions, we would take the twelve month period from 1st September 2017 until 31st August 2018.



Identifying how many unique articles are downloaded per year, and related to this, how often each article is downloaded, points to an interesting, if longshot, evolution of subscription licences towards DDA/PDA like licences for articles, similar to pay per use purchases.

Requirements for consortial management system

Flexible budget allocation mechanisms between consortial partners are necessary, for example through the use of an invoicing intermediary (either internal or external). A management tool⁷ that can handle the licence lifecycle, local publications and different types of statistics is necessary. Moving into publishing costs, a new cost type is required as publishing costs are not necessarily related to any existing publisher licences.

Interest of publishers

Usage data of their competitors may be of interest and value for publishers, especially if larger library networks start building up such datasets.

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www.consortium.lu/about

⁷ In Luxembourg we currently use ConsortiaManager.com, together with Primo, SFX and Leanlibrary.com as access tools.