

Executive summary

The report documents work undertaken by LISU that was commissioned by the Oxford University Press (OUP) in 2003 to undertake an analysis of trends in journal pricing and related issues amongst a selection of scholarly publishers.

The output of twelve scholarly publishers, including OUP, was studied. A combination of methods was employed to assemble the various data used for the analyses. Price data between 2000 and 2004 were purchased electronically from Swets Blackwell. Other data were gathered manually from a variety of independent sources. Titles were included in the analysis only where they had remained with the same publisher throughout the period being considered. Those which ceased publication during this time, or which were newly introduced, were excluded.

Detailed analyses of prices in relation to number of pages and impact factors were undertaken for biomedical titles. As none of the appropriate information was available in a suitable electronic format, it was gathered manually from a variety of sources. For some publishers, there was insufficient data for a complete analysis; in particular, data on number of pages published in 1993 was not readily available. In addition, a correlation analysis was carried out for each publisher between price, impact factor and number of pages, to examine any inherent relationships between these features.

The following important points emerge from the work.

- Median overall journal prices vary widely between the publishers studied and range from £124 (Cambridge University Press) to £781 (Elsevier) in 2004.
- The range of price increases over the period 2000 to 2004 also varied considerably, from 27% (Cambridge University Press) to 94% (Sage).
- Median values for prices of Humanities and Social Sciences titles tend, on the whole, to be lower than those in other subject categories. It is notable that Elsevier has the highest median price in every subject area.
- Median biomedical journal prices range from £186 (Johns Hopkins University Press) to £731 (Elsevier) in 2004. Biomedical journal price increases over the period 2000 to 2004 ranged from 27% (Johns Hopkins University Press) to 92% (Sage).
- Increases in median prices of biomedical journals over the period 1993 to 2004 ranged from 80% (Taylor & Francis) to 352% (Sage).
- OUP displayed the lowest median price per page of biomedical titles from 2001 to 2004, with only Cambridge University Press lower in 2000. In 2004 the median price per page for OUP was 31 pence; in the same year the highest median price per page was 98 pence (Taylor & Francis).
- At 25%, Springer displayed the lowest increase in median price per page of biomedical journals from 2000 to 2004. This compares with the highest increase of 69% for the same period (Taylor & Francis).

- The range of biomedical journal impact factor values is quite wide both within and between publishers. Within publishers, the greatest range in 2002 (the latest year for which data were available) was from 0.333 to 32.890 (Lippincott Williams & Wilkins).
- Mean impact factor values of biomedical journals ranged from 1.47 (Kluwer and Springer) to 4.84 (Nature) in 2002.
- Overall, there is little evidence of a relationship between impact factor and price of biomedical journals. Examination of the data reveals that the few correlations which exist appear to be very weak and all indicate that higher prices tend to be associated with higher impact factors.
- With one exception, there has been an overall increase of between 22% (Kluwer) and 77% (Lippincott Williams & Wilkins) in mean impact factor values of biomedical journals over the period 1992 to 2002. The exception is Taylor & Francis, which recorded a fall of 4.1%.
- On the basis of price per point of impact factor of biomedical journals, OUP displayed the lowest median with a cost of £156 compared with the highest, Kluwer, at £525 for the most recent year.
- The increase in price per point of impact factor of biomedical journals for the period 1993 to 2003 ranged from 40% (Springer) to 183% (Taylor & Francis).
- No evidence was found to suggest that different rates of price increases had prevailed in the 1990s compared with those experienced after 2000.
- There is some evidence of the application of ‘blanket’ price increases by some publishers across the range of titles and subjects.