

Statement by the Council of Australian University Librarians (CAUL) to publishers and vendors

1 July 2021

CAUL members represent the 39 Australian universities and 8 New Zealand universities, all of which participate in the CAUL Consortium along with 16 other non-academic members of the CAUL Consortium. All members of the CAUL Consortium have been significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects on the Australian economy. Moreover, the university members have been affected by impacts on the higher education sector more specifically and these impacts are expected to continue well beyond 2021.

In early 2021, [Universities Australia estimated](#) a \$1.8 billion reduction in the operating revenue of Australian universities in 2020 and a projected \$2 billion revenue reduction in 2021, compared to their actual operating revenue in 2019. They also reported that [at least 17,300 jobs were shed](#) by Australian universities in 2020. [More recently, the CEO of Universities Australia \(UA\) noted:](#) “Through border closures and bushfires, curriculums moved online overnight, revenue hits and job losses, universities have worked on. Change in higher education, as for the rest of the nation, has been deep and wide over the past 18 months.

While some universities recorded a modest operating surplus for 2020, most did not. Regardless, all outcomes resulted from significant disruption and were achieved through a range of measures that included significant staff and budget cuts, deferral of both capital and operating expenditure, and restructuring of organisations and operations. Austerity measures imposed on Australian universities in 2020 included reduction in the government contribution to local students’ fees and increasing the cost of education for many local students.

Despite showing great resilience in continuing to deliver world class research and teaching outcomes during 2020 and into 2021, the challenges the sector now faces have necessitated a pivot to more sustainable procurement models. Access to scholarly content forms part of critical infrastructure for research, teaching and learning. To ensure both student success and world class research performance, universities engage with publishers and content vendors both directly and via consortial agreements negotiated by CAUL. CAUL seeks to ensure that all publishers and content vendors are aware of the situation in 2021 and the long term lingering impact of the pandemic on the forward years of 2022 and 2023. It is critical that all publishers and vendors are aware that the situation in Australia and New Zealand is very different to that in North America, Europe and other parts of the world. In particular, institutions in the US higher education sector received significant government funding to cope with the impacts of the pandemic, while this did not occur in the ANZ region.

To address the challenges of the current straitened financial climate, CAUL seeks the best possible procurement outcomes for all members of the CAUL Consortium and supports the direct endeavours

of university and research libraries to optimise the value of agreements and ensure they are sustainable within institutional budgets.

“For many of our members, the level of purchasing previously undertaken by the university library sector can no longer be maintained. The reality is that scholarly content and other providers will need to move to more affordable and creative offerings to optimise access to resources and content essential for student success and excellent research outcomes.”

Jill Benn, Chair of CAUL and University Librarian, University of Western Australia

CAUL requests publishers and content vendors to:

1. Acknowledge the loyalty and goodwill the university sector has provided to vendors and suppliers during less challenging times
2. Note the critical role that universities play in the publishing ecosystem. Researchers need access to world class research in order to conduct the world class research that is critical to the success of the current publishing business models
3. Provide due consideration to the financial situation universities find themselves in and reduce pricing for 2022 wherever possible
4. Consider requests being made by CAUL to vendors to provide new and innovative strategies for sustainable business models to address challenges that are expected to continue beyond 2021.

Jill Benn, Chair of CAUL, University Librarian – University of Western Australia

Bob Gerrity, Chair of CAUL’s Content Procurement Committee, University Librarian – Monash University

About CAUL

CAUL is the peak leadership organisation for university libraries in Australia. CAUL members are the University Librarians or equivalent of the 39 institutions that have representation on Universities Australia and the 8 members of the Council of New Zealand University Librarians (CONZUL). CAUL makes a significant contribution to higher education strategy, policy and outcomes through a commitment to a shared purpose: To transform how people experience knowledge – how it can be discovered, used and shared.

www.caul.edu.au

caul@caul.edu.au