

CAUL Consortium: Principles & Framework for Pricing Digital Content

Objectives

The CAUL Consortium Principles and Framework for Pricing Digital Content has been developed by the Content Procurement Strategic Advisory Committee (CPC) to serve as a guide for consortium members in the acquisition of digital content in support of the learning, teaching and research programs of the institutions participating in the Consortium. It is also intended to inform negotiations with publishers and decisions regarding the pricing of digital scholarly content. The principles reflect the CAUL Consortium's commitment to facilitating satisfactory terms and conditions for its members when acquiring digital content.

While the Framework and the underlying principles focus on pricing and pricing models, they assume that purchasing libraries will take cognisance of other considerations when making decisions about the acquisition of digital content. These other considerations must include:

- assessment of the content vis a vis their institutional needs
- the format of the content including compliance with accessibility standards
- the search and discovery platforms used to facilitate access including supplier commitment to minimising system downtime
- licence terms and conditions, which should be clear and acceptable, as well as provide for perpetual or post-termination access to content in subscription journals
- licence and purchasing terms and conditions which must comply with copyright legislation, including exceptions available to libraries and users of the digital content
- support of open access and recognition of open access content

The Framework

The framework assumes that the subscribing institution and publishers, share a common goal of providing access to information to meet the needs of the diverse users represented by the subscribing or purchasing institution. The framework for a sustainable pricing model should address the following:

1. A pricing model which reflects the product (type, discipline covered, level) and the subscribing institution (size, weight, nature), constructed with parameters which are appropriate, readily available, transparent, and valid
2. Agreed annual price movements
3. An agreed framework for adding and removing content
4. An agreed framework for extending access to extra-institutional users such as alumni, partner institutions, short-course students, TNE students, etc.
5. An agreed timeframe for regular recalibration of the base model using the changed parameters, recognising that the numbers may decline as well as increase
6. A transition plan to the new model, dependent on the quantum increase or decrease for current subscribers, negotiated within the CAUL Consortium

The Principles

The above Framework is underpinned by the following principles:

1. License terms and conditions, charges and business models should be transparent and clearly communicated, with provision for one pricing model applicable to the vendor's entire suite of products
2. Pricing should be sustainable, based on criteria which are measurable, auditable, stable (not volatile as are usage and foreign exchange), clear and transparent, able to reflect changes in institutions and the environment over time
3. There should be a transparent commitment to open scholarship including full disclosure in agreements with publishers and content vendors in line with the [CAUL Statement on Open Scholarship](#)
4. Open access content should be free, easily discoverable and with re-use clearly defined using the most permissive Creative Commons licenses
5. Pricing should be independent of the geographic location of institutions' campuses or users.
6. Historical spending patterns should not be a factor in a price model
7. The annual price should be consistent with CPI
8. Content should be paid for only once^[1], with due consideration of demonstrable value added through any new format^[2]
9. The transition to open access through transformative agreements should not increase the total costs of licensing and publishing
10. Price increases must be justifiable, sustainable and evidence-based using measurable criteria, reasonable and communicated with clarity and transparency. A publisher's business choice to add more content does not automatically translate to consortium members being willing to pay more
11. Different types of products may lead to different models but should aim for standardisation across different models as much as possible
12. Consortium members have the right to drop out of a multi-year term agreement due to financial hardship

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^[1] If an article processing charge (APC) has been paid for immediate open access publishing in a hybrid subscription journal, then an appropriate proportion of the relevant subscription cost should be offset, for all subscribers.

^[2] A new format of the same content, e.g. a web-based version of previously purchased version that does not meet accessibility standards, may incur an extra charge only if there is significant value associated with the new format.