



House of Commons
Science and Technology
Committee

**Responses to the
Committee's Tenth
Report, Session
2003–04, Scientific
Publications: Free for
all?: Responses to the
Committee's 14th
Report of Session
2003–04**

Third Special Report of Session 2004–05

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The Science and Technology Committee

The Science and Technology Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration and policy of the Office of Science and Technology and its associated public bodies.

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A list of Reports from the Committee in the present Parliament is included at the back of this volume.

Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are: Chris Shaw (Clerk); Emily Commander (Second Clerk); Alun Roberts (Committee Specialist); Hayaatun Sillem (Committee Specialist); Ana Ferreira (Committee Assistant); Robert Long (Senior Office Clerk); and Christine McGrane (Committee Secretary).

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Third Special Report

On 8 November 2004 the Science and Technology Committee published its Fourteenth Report of Session 2003–04, Responses to the Committee’s Tenth Report, Session 2003–04, Scientific Publications: Free for all? On 18 January 2005 the Committee received a memorandum from the Government which contained a response to the Report. The memorandum is published without comment as an appendix to this Report.

The Committee also received a response from the Office of Fair Trading which is also published without comment as an appendix to this Report.

Appendix 1

Government Response

The Committee should be aware that the report was read and considered carefully and that the Government’s response incorporated the views and interests of all the Government departments and bodies involved.

The Government is looking to get the best system to communicate information from researchers to those interested in the research. The Government should be supporting the best and most cost effective way possible to channel scientific outputs and at the moment it is not demonstrable that the ‘author pays’ model is the better system.

1. It is clear to us that, in the Government Response, DTI has sought to neutralise some of views put forward by the Joint Information Systems Committee and other organisations and departments. This will prevent the Government from making any significant progress on this issue. (Paragraph 7)

All contributors were consulted at each stage and given the opportunity to review how their contributions were reflected in the text, and amendments were made in response to their comments.

DTI has not sought to neutralise the views of JISC. We have worked in consultation with JISC throughout the exercise, including on how their views were reflected in the Government’s response. The Government decided that it should set out clearly its current views on this important subject. This does not mean that if new information emerges the Government will not take account of it.

2. Rather than engaging in the complex issues posed by the Committee’s Report, the Government has clearly decided against the author-pays model ahead of the further investigation that it was urged to pursue. This approach prejudices the issue. (Paragraph 8)

The Government has given considerable thought to the complex issues raised in the Select Committee’s Report. It was made clear in the Government’s Response that the Government welcomed the Report which was very helpful in the significant way it widened and deepened the debate. Much thought and effort went into the Government’s Response

looking at the wide range of issues raised. Many stakeholders were consulted and a range of Government Departments and organisations contributed to this consideration and to the Response.

The Government has not decided against the author-pays model, but does not want to force a premature transition to a different system.

To strongly endorse or reject the author-pays approach would not be in the interests of allowing the market itself to evolve to meet the needs of authors and the wider academic community.

3. Following completion of the European Commission study into the market for scientific publications, to which the OFT response refers, we request that the Director General of Fair Trading agrees to write again to the Committee setting out the actions he proposes to take on the basis of the Commission's findings and the concerns expressed in our Report. (Paragraph 10)

As an independent, statutory organisation, the OFT have submitted a separate response.

4. We are disappointed that the Government has missed the opportunity to take more decisive action in response to our Report. We recommend that the Government reconsider its position on this important issue in the light of the other responses to our Report published here; the forthcoming RCUK policy on the publication of, and access to, research outputs; and in view of the support for the Committee's stance from the Wellcome Trust, an important research funder. In this context, we do not believe that Government should continue to refuse to provide the modest funds necessary to make institutional repositories workable, and to allow the experimentation necessary to properly test the feasibility of the author-pays publishing model. (Paragraph 12)

The action the Government has decided on is to facilitate a level playing field, which will enable authors who wish to publish in author-pays journals to do so. This includes working with RCUK on a common policy that allows scientists to publish in an author pays journal where they want to do so.

The Government will, of course, consider all evidence as it becomes available and is looking forward to the results of studies being undertaken by the JISC and others, as well as the RCUK policy paper expected early 2005. In the meantime funding through the JISC is encouraging some experiments in author pays publication and there are also new initiatives by commercial publishers, such as Springer.

The Government recognises the potential benefits of Institutional Repositories and sees them as a significant development worthy of encouragement. But it believes that each Institution has to make its own decision about Institutional Repositories depending on individual circumstances.

January 2005

Appendix 2

Response from the Office of Fair Trading

Science and Technology Committee Report: Scientific Publication: Free for all?

In the Committee's Report of 8 November on the Government response to the above Report, you request that, following completion of the European Commission study into the market for scientific publications, to which my letter to you of 7 September referred, I should write again to the Committee setting out the OFT proposes to take on the basis of the Commission's findings and the concerns expressed in your report.

The Commission has stated that the findings of its study will be available in 2005, and I will be happy to write to the Committee shortly thereafter.

I am sorry that your Committee found my letter of 7 September disappointing. Please be in no doubt about the OFT's concerns over the issues that you have been considering; indeed we have been at the forefront of those raising and analysing those concerns. I decline to commit the OFT to biennial reporting on the market not because of a lack of concern but because I cannot be certain that it will be the most sensible way forward. We do best, I suggest, to wait and see first what the European Commission says. These are, after all, international problems.

December 2004

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