

Joint Letter to Pearson, Higher Education Services

To: Marlene Olsavsky, Senior Vice President, International Higher Education, Pearson
Cc: Neil Broomfield, Sales and Commercial Director, Higher Education Services, Pearson
Anna Jackson, Head of Customer Insights, Higher Education Services, Pearson
John Knott, Head of Strategic Partnerships, Higher Education Services, Pearson

21 December 2021

Dear Marlene Olsavsky,

On behalf of our members, all UK universities and colleges, and their students, we request that Pearson take urgent and immediate action to reconsider and reverse the price increases to titles which are unacceptable to UK education institutions announced via 'Pearson Library Price Review Announcement'.

We acknowledge Pearson's approach of maintaining different routes to purchase content and welcome this continuation. We also recognise the pricing and access models that have been in place for libraries have been on the whole, at the lower end of the market rates and therefore remained affordable. However, the price rise of up to 500% imposed with immediate effect represents a significant and unbudgeted increase. For instance, one institution with an annual spend of £2-4k is now looking at charges of £20k. An institution that spent just under £7k in 2020-21, is now looking at costs of £32k. Another institution consulted has reviewed its exposure to the price increases and foresees an extra £2.5k of unbudgeted spend. One aggregator has stated that of the 2,567 titles available for sale in the UK and Ireland, the average price change is £31.73 to £190.38 (approximately a £158 increase). For further education colleges, especially those delivering HE in FE, price increases of up to 500% are simply unfeasible to absorb.

An increase, of such scale, applied part way through an academic year and with no prior warning, is unreasonable. The expectation that institutions will be able to find additional unbudgeted spend or afford to move to other concurrent or one to one access models, speaks to the lack of consultation with your customers. Of immediate concern is the student experience as the increase will result in institutions and their libraries being unable to provide content to support students and further deny inclusive access to learning materials.

In a recently published [joint statement](#) signed by UK sector partners, it was made clear that the pricing models being applied by publishers, are unsustainable and that the practices of publishers in rolling out new pricing, is often imposed without consideration of impacts on libraries and the students they serve. UK universities, colleges and their libraries, understand the need for publishers to return profits, however they seek for publishers to work with them to devise models and pricing that is fair, transparent and affordable.

The recent announcement of price increases coupled with the roll out by a set date, part way through a year, once again, highlights the imbalance in this marketplace. UK universities and colleges feel a decision is being inflicted upon them with little or no acceptable justification and without the courtesy of consultation. This bears close resemblance to the unreasonable decision by Pearson to make textbooks available to UK and Ireland customers for purchase with 0% copy and download rights in November 2020. That decision had significant repercussions for student access well beyond the decision to revoke the policy. This type of unreasonable behaviour, in a pandemic climate, is poor business practice.

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We urge you to take immediate action now on behalf of all UK universities and colleges and their students to reconsider and reverse the immediate price increases to titles as part of the 'Pearson Library Price Review Announcement'. If no further action is taken, there is a very real risk that students and teachers will go without much needed online access to e-book and e-textbook content, not to mention risking considerable damage to Pearson's reputation.

We request that Pearson works with Jisc and the education sector to establish new pricing that is affordable and sustainable in full consultation with the sector in preparation for the new academic year.

We request an urgent meeting with you and Higher Education Services at Pearson to discuss what can be done to rectify the current unacceptable situation and to better serve and support universities and colleges, your customers, and students going forward.

Yours sincerely,

- [Advanced Procurement for Universities & Colleges \(APUC\)](#)
- [BUFDG: British Universities Finance Directors Group](#)
- [CILIP: The library and information association](#)
- [Jisc](#)
- [National Acquisitions Group \(NAG\)](#)
- Procurement bodies including [Southern Universities Purchasing Consortium \(SUPC\)](#)
- [Research Libraries UK \(RLUK\)](#)
- [Scottish Confederation of University & Research Libraries \(SCURL\)](#)
- [Scottish Higher Education Digital Library \(SHEDL\)](#)
- [Society of College, National and University Libraries \(SCONUL\)](#)
- [The Wales Higher Education Libraries Forum \(WHELF\)](#)
- [#ebooksos](#)