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Statement on the Springer Nature Group license negotiations

In Denmark, we want immediate access to our own research publications as soon as they are published, and we will not accept price increases for read access for research publications from other countries.

In the negotiations with Elsevier in 2020, a united Denmark held our ground and the outcome was a national license agreement with read access to the Elsevier journal collection with a zero price increase and unlimited free open access publication for a significant proportion of the journal collection¹. The Elsevier negotiation and agreement has set a clear mandate and direction for future national license negotiations with other publishers, which the 2021 negotiations with Wiley² upheld, and a direction we wish to maintain.

This autumn a new agreement is being negotiated with Springer Nature. The Springer Nature contract accounts for approximately 10% of the total Danish costs for access to research literature. Denmark pays around 300 million DKK annually to scholarly publishers for licences to publications and databases: the equivalent of 5-6 scientific research centres.

The agreement with Springer Nature is particularly important because it is the next to follow the Elsevier and Wiley negotiations and agreements. However, Springer Nature is different from Elsevier and Wiley in several aspects, and the outcome of this negotiation is potentially even more determining in relation to future agreements with the large publishers.

The Universities of Denmark have issued a united mandate in partnership with the Royal Danish Library, which is responsible for the negotiations. The mandate includes significantly sharpened requirements for an agreement, and it is therefore essential to ensure understanding and support from the Danish research community, both nationally and locally.

There is a strong desire to open up research from both a societal and a political perspective, and so enable the full exploitation of the societal investment in research for the benefit of all. The Covid-19 pandemic is just the most recent example of how we are best able to solve global problems, and how much the open sharing of data and results has meant for vaccine research, but also other aspects of the pandemic.

In this respect the current system is vulnerable. A large amount of Danish and international research is locked behind paywalls, and scholarly publishers make a profit from both publishing and read access in a business model which entails very few costs for the publisher itself.

Denmark pays around 25 million DKK annually to Springer Nature alone for read access, the equivalent of 39 PhD positions. In addition, analysis carried out across Danish universities shows that annual Open Access publication charges amount to a double-figure million kroner sum, which is paid in addition to charges for read access. Denmark is only a

¹ <https://pro.kb.dk/licensservice/elsevier-aftale-2021-24>

² <https://pro.kb.dk/licensservice/wiley-aftale-2022-25>

minor customer for Springer Nature, which has an annual turnover of 1.63 billion EUR on their research publications and platforms alone, and a profit margin of 22%.

There are three challenges in particular, that inhibit the dissemination and sharing of scholarly knowledge to the rest of society:

- Researchers are subject to requirements from research funders for immediate Open Access availability, when they publish in a journal. They can therefore be forced to pay a publisher for expensive APCs. (Article Processing Charges typically cost 15,000-30,000 DKK, and for some journals as high as 70,000 DKK).
- Researchers are pressurized into giving away their copyright to publishers, because rewards and reputation affect their choice in terms of which publication will give them most prestige, and therefore recognition.
- Over a number of years, read access to Danish and international research publications has been subject to significant price increases, over and above the costs borne by publishers as part of the publication process.