

Announcement to the academic staff of the University of Münster

Cancellation of the current Elsevier contract as of 31 December 2016 – Emergency back-up plan to take effect on 1 January 2017 – Ensuring continued access to the latest publications

The “Alliance of Science Organisations in Germany” (MPG, Fraunhofer, Leibniz Association, Helmholtz Association, DFG and HRK) launched the DEAL Project under the aegis of the German Rectors’ Conference (<https://www.projekt-deal.de/>). The aim was to secure nationwide licensing rights to information services provided by the major scientific publishers, such as Elsevier, Wiley and Springer/Nature. The DEAL Project represents more than 100 negotiation mandates by German universities. The Head of Administration of the University of Münster granted a corresponding mandate.

Since June 2016, the DEAL project group has been conducting negotiations with Elsevier Publishing. The objective was to broker a new contract which would provide permanent access rights to **all Elsevier journals for all German universities and research organisations**, including an automatic **open-access switch for all publications by German institutions** and an **acceptable pricing model based on publication quantity**.

Elsevier categorically rejected the future-oriented, cost-transparent conversion to open-access service on the grounds that it did not correspond with its business model. The publisher aims to continue its policy of strictly separating subscription-based access and open-access to its electronic journals. Elsevier insisted that its subscribers extend their contracts, which are due to expire at the end of 2016, by 14 October 2016. In close consultation with the DEAL project group, all universities decided against prolonging their individual contracts with Elsevier after 2016. With regard to the University of Münster, the Head of Administration cancelled all 166 current subscriptions and access to the “Freedom Collection”, comprising more than 2,000 online journals (licensing fees totalling approx. 830,000 euros) within the notice period. Elsevier accepted the cancellations and notified the universities that access to all issues of the 166 journal subscriptions released after 1 January 2017 and the “Freedom Collection” with more than 2,300 journals would be blocked as of 1 January 2017 if negotiations failed to result in a national licensing agreement by that time.

During negotiations on 29 November 2016, Elsevier submitted an initial proposal for a national licensing agreement which rejected the principles of open access and all arguments for implementing a fair and transparent pricing policy. For this reason, negotiations were called off until further notice. In response, Elsevier has threatened to abruptly discontinue service to all academic and research institutions whose contracts are expiring at the end of 2016. For the University of Münster, this means that **Elsevier will effectively block access to all current and future issues of its journals at the beginning of 2017. This will also result in denial of access to the majority of Elsevier journals published between 2003 and 2016**, as it was only possible to secure licences to a relatively small number of subscriptions with archive rights; the publisher only offered licenses for the “Freedom Collection” without archive rights. However, the issues of 1,500 Elsevier journals published between 1907 and 2002 will remain permanently accessible via a DFG-financed national licence.

We are acutely aware that the loss of access to these publications may significantly impact your work. The DEAL project group has therefore developed an **emergency back-up plan** to provide an **acceptable supply of Elsevier publications during this contract-free period**. These will be made available through diverse document-delivery services – from traditional interlibrary loans to direct delivery – which have proven reliable for decades. The University Library will cover the resulting expenses. In this way, we hope to limit the impact on your work as much as possible until an agreement with Elsevier Publishing is reached.

We kindly ask you to understand the reasoning behind the decision to cancel the contract. Only by uniformly boycotting the present contractual forms can we succeed in renegotiating the contracts with the market-dominant publishers/providers.

If you have ties to Elsevier Publishing as an editor, member of the Editorial Board, assessor in peer-review processes or as an author, we urge you to stand behind the decision of the University of Münster and the majority of German universities in your dealings with Elsevier.

We will provide you with detailed information on continuing developments as soon as we know more. If you have any questions, please contact Dr. Peter te Boekhorst (email: Peter.te.Boekhorst@uni-muenster.de; tel.: +49 (0)251 83-24023) at the University Library.

Matthias Schwarte
Head of Administration

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