

countries.

Open access stirs regulation

But the shift from traditional subscription-paid journals to researcher-paid ones has also shifted something that's much more fundamental to science; the quality control, says Burchardt.

“The system used to regulate itself. If a journal began publishing poor science it lost subscribers and vice versa,” he says.

That's how it was ensured that only the best science was published – but that's not how it's regulated today, says Burchardt, who believes open access journals require more governing:

“Someone needs to be in control and make sure the system works.”

'Big deals' grant publishers big revenue

Bjørnshauge disagrees. The open access system is perfectly capable of tending quality itself, he says, adding that “serious researchers will always choose serious journals.”

He calls Burchardt's understanding of the subscription-based publishers' business model outdated.

“Nowadays publishers sell their journals exclusively through 'big deals' where the universities in practice are forced to buy access to all publications offered by the publisher,” says Bjørnshauge.

And it's been like this for the past 15 years – he himself was at the negotiation table when some of the first million-dollar deals were signed between publishers and Danish universities.

The self-regulating effect described by Burchardt simply doesn't exist anymore, says Bjørnshauge.

Profit margin witness “utterly unsound market”

The annual revenue of academic publishers is estimated at between 6 and 12 billion dollars.

Of those billions, it is widely assumed that a lot of it is turned into profit.

According to an article in *The Economist*, the world's biggest publisher, Elsevier, netted a 2011 profit margin of 36 percent – and has been doing so repeatedly for the past many years.

Problematic, says Bjørnshauge:

“It's a clear indication that we have an utterly unsound market – or no market at all. There's no competition right now and that's why the big publishers can have profit margins of more than 30 percent.”

Open science requires more money

And it might be that some predatory open access journals are more interested in profiting from the scientists rather than actually verifying the quality of their science but according to Bjørnshauge, this is only a minimal problem.

The reality is that only around 30 percent of all open access journals charge scientists with a publishing fee, he says.

He believes we are in a transitional period:

“In a shift from one model to another there will always be minor hiccups and then it’s a matter of finding the best solution. But it should never remove focus from the actual problem: that there is no open access to scientific research.”

Burchardt has a further request:

“There’s an imbalance in the system. Open access has many positive sides but we need to take the negative aspects of the financials into account as well,” he says.

“I hope the government and research councils will live up to their responsibilities. More money is needed, otherwise we’ll lose science.”

[Read the Danish version of this article at videnskab.dk](#) [6]

 [By 2011, almost half of published articles in academic journals could be read for free on the internet, according to a recent EU study. A cause for worry, say Danish science editors who fear that open access could tip the scales in favour of bad science. \(Photo: Shutterstock](#) [7]

 [open access.jpg](#) [8]

Fact box

Publishers adhering to the golden open access model require scientists pay a fee up front if they want their article published.

After publication, the article is freely available for anyone to read but this might come at a cost, warns Jørgen Burchardt. Some scientists might not be able to pay the fee and then we risk losing science, he argues.

Fact box

In the green open access model, articles are first published in a closed subscription journal, but in parallel a free copy is published by the research institution. Not surprisingly, publishers don’t have much confidence in this model.

Lastly, there is a hybrid model where a researcher’s article is published in a subscription-based journal and if the scientist then wants open access, he or she can pay the publisher a fee to buy free his article.

Lars Bjørnshauge opposes the hybrid model since it practically allows the publishers twice the income, he argues.

[Open access working papers not good enough](#) [9]

[Jørgen Burchardt's website](#) [10] [Lars Bjørnshauge's profile](#) [11] [The Directory of Open Access Journals](#) [12]

['Access to Research and Technical Information in Denmark', Forsknings og Innovationsstyrelsen 2011](#) [13] ['Proportion of Open Access Peer-Reviewed Papers at the European and World Levels - 2004-2011', Science-Metrix 2013](#) [14]

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