

Journal Price Increases

Richard Young

It is claimed by journal publishers that one of the significant reasons for price increases is the added number of pages for an annual subscription.

While this may be true in some cases, it is not always valid. The actual rise in cost per page is often considerable and, even if a 10% rise (well above inflation) in subscription price is allowed as well, the increase is often well beyond what might be reasonably expected. In fact, of course, 10% is

optimistic; Southampton University Library's overall 1987 increase was over 11%. In some cases we actually pay more for fewer pages!

The small selection of UK-published titles included here has been chosen from our records here at Southampton University Library to illustrate this. Foreign journals have not been considered because, even though some would display the same trend, the exchange rate effect is difficult to quantify accurately.

Title	Subscription price		No. of pages		Price per page		% increase in sub- scription price
	1986 £	1987 £	1986	1987	1986 £	1987 £	
1. Contemporary Physics (Taylor & Francis)	84.00	99.00	597	617	0.14	0.16	17.8
2. Behaviour Research & Therapy (Pergamon)	103.00	115.00	702	539	0.14	0.21	11.6
3. International Journal of Heat & Mass Transfer (Pergamon)	286.65	336.00	2010	2697	0.14	0.12	17.2
4. Journal of Terramechanics (Pergamon)	48.75 (1984)	64.35 (1985)	382 (1984)	256 (1985)	0.13	0.25	32
5. X-Ray Spectrometry (Wiley)	126.00	194.25	296	267	0.42	0.73	54.1
6. Journal of Atmospheric & Terrestrial Physics (Pergamon)	241.00	280.00	1283	1173	0.19	0.24	16.1
7. Journal of Archaeological Science (Academic Press)	64.00	84.00	606	672	0.11	0.13	31.2
8. World Development (Pergamon)	168.00	195.00	1373	1394	0.12	0.14	16
9. Accounting Organisations & Society (Pergamon)	133.00 (1984-85) (2 yr. sub)	267.90 (1986-87) (2 yr. sub)	925	1202	0.14 (1984)	0.22 (1986)	101.4

Comments on the examples

Title No. 1

If we take the number of 1987 pages and calculate the cost at the 1986 price, we get 617 x 14 = £86.23. Add a 10% annual mark-up and we might expect a 1987 subscription of £95.02.

But, for this title, in 1985 there were 632 pages @ 10p per page. So in 1986 we paid £19 more for 35 fewer pages!

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Title No. 2

On the same basis of calculation as No. 1, the expected cost for 1987 might have been £83.

The 1984 and 1985 figures are interesting. In 1984 there were 716 pages @ 11p per page; in 1985 717 pages @ 13p.

The price per page has risen dramatically between 1984 and 1987 while producing fewer pages.

Title No. 3

In spite of the large percentage increase 1986 to 1987, this title must subsidise the others!

On the No. 1 calculation, expected 1987 cost would have been £415.34.

In 1985 we received 45 pages fewer than in 1984 at £47.77 more. In 1986, 382 pages fewer than in 1985 for £19.50 more. The position has improved in 1987, but the 1988 subscription has risen again by over 13%.

Title No. 4

On the No. 1 calculation, expected 1987 price would have been £36.61.

In 1987 there were 312 pages for £78, fewer pages than in 1984.

Title No. 5

On the No. 1 calculation, expected 1987 price would have been £123.35.

Here there are 29 fewer pages for £68.25 more.

Title No. 6

On the No. 1 calculation, expected 1987 price would have been £245.16.

110 fewer for £39 more.

Title No. 7

On the No. 1 calculation, expected 1987 price would have been £81.31.

66 extra pages for £20 more.

Title No. 8

On the No. 1 calculation, expected 1987 price would have been £184.

Only 21 more pages for an extra £27.

Title No. 9

On the No. 1 calculation (but add 20%) expected 1987 price would have been £201.94. However, a 2-year subscription is difficult to judge.

International Journal of Theoretical Physics

This is an American publisher, but in the last (December) issue of 1987, there was an "Important notice", which stated:

"Due to the increased flow of excellent papers

from research workers throughout the world, International Journal of Theoretical Physics will be expanding in 1988, with the number of pages published increased by 10%. Thus, the subscription price for volume 27, 1988 (12 issues) is \$410.00 (outside the U.S. \$457.00)."

When we looked back into our records they revealed that we received fewer pages in 1987 than in either 1986 or 1985 (1248, 1302, 1262 respectively).

In 1985 the 29 more pages than 1984 cost an extra £68.80. In 1987, due to the fluctuating exchange rate, we paid £17.98 less than 1986, but received 54 fewer pages.

It seems obvious that publishers' claims of "more for more money" is not always quite what it might seem. Where we do receive more pages, the number is often relatively insignificant, or the cost heavy, or sometimes both. In any case the Government-estimated rate of inflation has very little to do with the world of periodical publishing.

On a slightly different angle this library recently received a letter from Pergamon Press in answer to our complaint about the very large (40%) increase in the cost of *ABSEES (Abstracts Soviet & East European Series)*, for 1988 which gave the reason for this increase: "as an international company our prices are set in West German Deutsche Marks and fluctuations in exchange rate have caused an increase in Sterling price."

In fact the DM fluctuation between the dates of the 1987 and 1988 invoices has been between 2.92 and 2.95, with UK inflation under 5% and German inflation almost zero. We have written asking for a more satisfactory explanation of what seems to be just another way in which the publisher is protecting himself at the expense of the customer.