

NEWS RELEASE

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Funding and Bureaucracy, Not Access to Journals, Are Chief Obstacles to Scientific Productivity

Study cites 90% of respondents are more effective researchers because of access to online journal content

Oxford, UK and Boston, USA – May 12, 2006 –The single most important issue obstructing the productivity of biomedical scientists today is the culture of research funding. This finding challenges the belief of some that the lack of “open access” to journal content is a major barrier to scientific productivity.

A survey of 883 biomedical scientists – in Europe and North America - commissioned by the Publishing Research Consortium found that aside from lack of resources, a ‘stop-go’ funding culture prohibits scientists from initiating new ideas, choosing research projects that contrast with funders’ priorities, and recruiting and retaining qualified staff.

Conversely, the study found that 90% of respondents reported access to publishers’ online content had increased their productivity by saving them significant time in locating research articles and enabling them to become more effective researchers.

“This study reinforces the critical role that publishing plays in advancing research and scholarship,” says René Olivieri, CEO, Blackwell Publishing. “Major improvements in journal accessibility over the last few years have not only improved research productivity but they have also helped to maximize return on investment in scientific research.”

A number of recommendations to address the non-financial barriers to productivity were highlighted in the study including help with recruiting suitable research and administrative staff, autonomy in setting research direction, and technical help in writing proposals.

“More than anything, the study shows the need for policymakers to listen more carefully to its scientists,” says Dr. Ian Rowlands, Centre for Information Behaviour and the Evaluation of Research (CIBER). “By making small changes in work practices and addressing the sources for productivity bottlenecks, we can ensure the future of scientific and economic progress.”

This study was conducted by CIBER in 2005. It utilized one-to-one interviews to find out what researchers thought were the main issues affecting their productivity. This, together with an analysis of the peer-reviewed literature enabled the team to identify a list of 16 key factors.

Online polling methods in conjunction with conjoint analysis techniques were used to establish the relative priority that researchers place on each of these 16 factors. The results were highly consistent and represent a strong consensus view of the biomedical research community.

A PRC Summary Paper entitled “Journals and Scientific Productivity – a case study in immunology and microbiology” and the full report of the study entitled “Overcoming the Barriers to Research Productivity” can be accessed from the PRC site: www.publishingresearch.org.uk

About PRC

The Publishing Research Consortium is a group representing publishers and societies supporting global research into scholarly communication, with the aim to provide unbiased data and objective analysis. Our objective is to support work that is scientific and pro-scholarship. Overall, we aim to promote an understanding of the role of publishing and its impact on research and teaching. For more information, visit www.publishingresearch.org.uk.