Progress Report on the Current State of European Research Libraries during the COVID-19 Pandemic

With the overwhelming impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused, research librarians are faced with several issues which affect their work and services. Budget struggles, offering access to research materials outside the premises, and free access to digital materials.

LIBER continues contesting current copyright legislation, arguing that it is insufficient to address the challenges being faced now as a result of the coronavirus. We have sent out statements aimed at publishers to lower their fees. In support of research libraries, we have petitioned to the European Commission to support us as well as co-signed statements contesting the European Parliament’s budget cuts. We have also appealed to governments, publishers and authors alike to help in making teaching and learning more accessible during COVID-19. As a major point of discussion, the Open Access movement finds itself being paramount in this ongoing crisis. LIBER has been actively involved in accelerating OA discussions, believing it a key aspect of navigating the crisis. Now more than ever, we are continuing our engagement.

We understand the situation in Europe to be extremely diverse, each country having its own approach to the reopening of research library services. In certain countries, such as in the UK, budget cuts for research libraries are being felt and are undermining the progress of making materials accessible, digitally or otherwise. In the Vaud District, Switzerland, [BCU Lausanne](https://www.bcu-lausanne.ch/) has reported to be almost back to a normal status, except for hygiene measures and less people present in the library at the same time. During the crisis, they were able to work from home reasonably well, as much of their services and materials had been made accessible digitally, about a year prior. The [Maastricht University](https://library.maastrichtuniversity.nl/collections/databases/free-access-to-resources-during-the-covid-19/) has been able to work out an arrangement with their publishers in which certain classes and materials are freely available online. LIBER has conducted interviews with librarians on the state of their particular library, however, we are still not clear on how the situation is everywhere.

In the coming weeks, LIBER will be sending out a survey to its European research libraries. This will serve to get a clearer and most recent status of libraries, how they are impacted by the pandemic, whether they are undergoing budget cuts and how their services are affected. LIBER’s reason for the survey will also be to get better insight on how we can best support our libraries.

While this is taking place, LIBER firmly believes that the success of Copyright reform and Open Access is an urgent matter, if research libraries are to continue supporting students, university staff and researchers with the high quality level that is expected, and necessary. Collaboration and leadership are crucial in creating a lasting and constructive relationship between researchers, publishers and research libraries.