Response to the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee Report *Scientific Publications: Free for All?* from the SHERPA Project

The SHERPA Project welcomes the publication of the Science and Technology Committee Report and urges the government to implement its key recommendations.

The report provides a thorough and incisive analysis of the current problems associated with the scientific publishing market. In particular, it shows how normal price competition does not operate amongst journal publishers compared with most other markets. It highlights a number of systemic problems in the publishing process which mean that significant changes are required.

SHERPA supports the view of the committee that publicly-funded research should be widely available to researchers (recommendation 8) and members of the public (recommendation 11). Like the Committee, it sees open-access and dissemination of content as having the potential to make scientific communication more efficient and effective. Open-access publishing and open-access repositories are identified as important developments to ensure that society gets value for money from its investment in scientific research.

SHERPA welcomes the report's emphasis on the importance of institutional repositories (recommendations 42 - 58). It supports the recommendation that public research funders (such as the research councils) should mandate the depositing of papers produced as a result of public funding in open-access repositories (recommendation 44). Such a policy is likely to lead to rapid and major improvements in scientific communication in a highly cost-effective way.

SHERPA also welcomes the Committee's recommendation that Government should fund the establishment of a network of interoperable repositories building on work already carried out and that this development should be sponsored by a central co-ordinating body based on SHERPA (recommendation 55). SHERPA would welcome the opportunity to be involved in this important work and is happy to discuss with key stakeholders how this might be best achieved. Key technical capabilities are already in place such that significant advances could be made relatively quickly and with reasonable levels of funding. As the report states, what is needed now is a joined-up Government strategy (recommendation 48) which can facilitate the modernisation of scientific publishing and access to research results.

The report's emphasis on the importance of copyright is welcomed by SHERPA. The current practice of transferring exclusive rights to publishers is one which is not conducive to the widest access to research results and is unnecessary even with current publishing models. SHERPA welcomes the report's recommendation that Government funders should specify that the copyright of research output cannot be transferred to publishers (recommendation 50).

Peer review is identified by the report as a critically important part of scientific publishing. SHERPA shares this view and supports the recommendation that

repositories should identify ways to indicate quality more clearly (recommendation 54).

The report finds that institutional repositories have the potential to play an important role not only in the dissemination of scientific content but also its preservation for the future (recommendation 75). This mirrors the importance given to preservation by the SHERPA project. Further work in the area of digital preservation needs to be carried out as a matter of urgency with the appropriate stakeholders.

SHERPA hopes that the Committee's report will encourage the significant changes which are necessary in the scientific publishing environment. SHERPA is keen to play its part working with other stakeholders, in improving the publishing system for the benefit of the research community in particular and society in general.

Note
SHERPA - Securing a Hybrid Environment for Research Preservation and Access
www.sherpa.ac.uk