

PRESS RELEASE

Journal availability in African universities is high – but accessing them is still problematic

A new report reveals that researchers in east and southern African universities are still hampered by online access problems, but that journal availability continues to improve dramatically in many universities.

Although researchers in sub-Saharan Africa commonly highlight poor journal access as a serious hindrance to their academic work, the problem of availability – the provision of affordable or free journals and other resources in online form – has been widely and successfully addressed over several years.

The study shows that usage of these journals amongst staff and students remains low, however, due to difficulties in accessing these – both in terms of technology and individual skills. Comparatively low levels of research activity, insufficient ICT resources, and a lack of awareness of available journals all contribute to a common perception that journal availability is poor. Related issues include insufficient promotion and communication of what is available, and the complexities of online access and multiple entry routes.

The study, commissioned by Arcadia and carried out by the Association of Commonwealth Universities, looked at four universities in east and southern Africa. Jonathan Harle, author of the report, said ‘The study showed that there is a fantastic volume of high-quality information available – with the availability of top titles approaching that of major European universities. But awareness of what’s available amongst staff and students is low. Stronger relationships need to be forged between libraries, academic departments and university managers to increase awareness and ensure that researchers can get to what they need. Librarians are critical to this, and still very much needed – but they do need to tackle the problem in new ways’.

ENDS

Notes to editors:

1. The study was commissioned by Arcadia, and undertaken by the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU) in conjunction with the University of Nairobi, the University of Malawi (Chancellor College), the University of Dar es Salaam, and the National University of Rwanda.
2. Formerly the Lisbet Rausing Charitable Fund, Arcadia is a grant-making fund established in 2001. Lisbet Rausing and Peter Baldwin form the Donor Board. As at May 2010, Arcadia had awarded grants totalling USD 192 million. For further information, visit www.arcadiahfund.org.uk
3. The Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU) was established in 1913 and is the oldest inter-university network in the world, with over 500 members in six continents. Its mission is to strengthen the higher education institutions within its membership through international co-operation and understanding. The ACU operates a series of professional networks for staff in key roles, undertakes research and policy analysis on key issues in international higher education, and has active programmes in libraries and information, research management, gender and university governance. Her Majesty the Queen, the Head of the Commonwealth, is Patron of the ACU. For further information, visit www.acu.ac.uk
4. The full report – *Growing knowledge: access to research in east and southern African universities* – can be downloaded from www.acu.ac.uk/growing_knowledge. ACU member universities and libraries in Africa will receive a printed copy of the report directly.
5. For further information, please contact:
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