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Alamy Stock Photo I would like to thank both the Guardian and George Monbiot for pointing out to the public what academics like myself have known for a long time Those who set knowledge free are heroes, not thieves , 13 September. No one pays for an article. In those circumstances, privatising the results should be considered criminal. But the real scandal is that the situation he describes has been allowed to persist for 20 years or more with no end in sight. This is despite several initiatives by researchers themselves to open up access to our published research. The arXiv is a free pre-print server where most important papers in maths and physics can be found. In-house-run publishing companies, such as Mathematical Sciences Publishers Berkeley , of which we two were initial movers, started at Warwick in and run under not-for-profit principles, provide an alternative to the big exploitative publishing companies such as Elsevier and Springer. But these initiatives have developed alongside the big pirate companies and have not affected their stranglehold. What is missing is direct government action. It needs to be illegal to profiteer and not just in academic publishing. All power to Sci-Hub. We wish it well. But it is not a substitute for a proper legal solution coming from united government action. When we received our first threatening letter from one of the big five publishers, we knew we had done the right thing. We carry out a rigorous peer-review process and have high production standards, all without charging exorbitant submission or publication fees. So the disruptive model can work. Prof Gordon McVie Founding editor, eCancer. Much research worldwide is indeed paid for by governments on behalf of the public, but funding that research is not the same as paying for publication. Subscription science-journal publishing was invented by Henry Oldenburg in not Robert Maxwell in the 20th century and today provides an ever-growing raft of services: Could things be better? Of course, but that requires investment, and that requires payment. The experienced editors who work hand in hand with authors throughout the process, making sure their research is reviewed by the best peer reviewers so that the published version does them proud and can stand up to scrutiny. The teams of production people around the world who make sure it can be accessed and read on multiple devices across multiple formats, then archived in perpetuity so it can be found by future researchers. The digital experts who ensure that the work is compatible with systems around the world. All those in science communication marketing, multimedia, press who ensure that everyone knows the research is there, that it reaches the widest possible audience and makes the biggest impact when it does. And actively encouraging people to download research articles from an illegal site? The characterisation of our industry is just wrong – there are many working within it who are striving towards an open-access future. But there are differing and legitimate views around the parameters of how to achieve this. Scopus Elsevier has attempted to generate an even playing field between specialist journals in different fields using metrics such as SNIP Source normalised impact per paper which allows an algorithmic approach towards assessing quality. Although there are some anomalies and potential conflicts of interest arising out of the way the normalisation is performed – covered by Jon Tennant in the Guardian Elsevier are corrupting open science in Europe , theguardian. The large costs of publishing in high-SNIP journals will continue to be met so long as managers can abrogate responsibility for judging scientific quality in this fashion. He may have a case when the original authors are not paid for their publications, as with scientific journals. I am now preparing a fourth edition of an page university textbook sold worldwide. This will take me about 1, hours to complete. How many are hacked I do not know, but my students have told me it is easy.

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