

REVIEW SUPPLEMENT

How Much do Science Books Cost ?

NEARLY every other review of a scientific book these days carries some criticism about the high price of the book. This criticism is especially levelled at proceedings of symposia and conferences and at books designed to be student texts. A justification of these criticisms would require an analysis of the economics of publishing which cannot easily be carried out, but there seems very little doubt that scientific and technical books have increased in price more or less at the same pace as books in other fields.

Table 1. RECENT PRICE CHANGES

Category	Average price		% increase or decrease over 1966-67
	1966-67	1967-68	
	£ s d	£ s d	
Adult fiction	17 0	16 4	-3.9
Adult non-fiction (including reference books)	2 3 10	2 12 3	+19.2

Although individual scientists often air their criticisms of book prices, librarians—in academic, public and special libraries—are usually the most vociferous. With slim budgets, librarians are forced to keep watchful eyes on price increases of books and periodicals, and they do everyone a service by publishing an analysis of prices of books each year in the *Library Association Record*.

Since 1965, an analysis has been made each year at the British National Bibliography at the request of the Library Association's research committee. It is based on publications listed each week in the *British National Bibliography*—a classified list of books published in Britain (with a few exceptions), and deposited under the Copyright Act at the British Museum. This year's analysis (*Library Association Record*, 70, 233; September 1968) covers the period from July 1, 1967, to June, 30, 1968. The survey is not comprehensive. Pamphlets and reprints, for example, are excluded, but it does include all new books and new editions. The most recent comparisons are no doubt affected, but to an unknown extent, by the British devaluation. Even so, there has been an increase of some 50 per cent in the price of adult non-fiction books since 1964-65 and an increase of 19.2 per cent (Table 1) since 1966-67.

How do scientific and technical books fit into the picture? Table 2, extracted from the full analysis

Table 2. ADULT NON-FICTION BY SUBJECTS (Dewey Decimal Arrangement—Classes 300, 500 and 600. Only some subjects in 300 and 600 are shown.)

Category	Average price		% increase or decrease over 1966-67	No. of volumes 1967-68
	1966-67	1967-68		
	£ s d	£ s d		
Social science	1 17 6	2 8 7	+29.5	286
Politics	1 16 10	2 6 1	+25.1	488
Economics	1 0 9	2 5 2½	+117.9	1,176
Law	2 14 4	5 16 10½	+115.1	352
Total—Class 300	1 9 5	2 10 4	+71.1	3,369
General science	2 15 11	3 0 6	+8.2	80
Mathematics	2 2 3	2 12 1	+23.3	493
Astronomy	2 10 4	2 17 6	+14.2	88
Physics	3 3 4	4 3 9	+32.2	393
Chemistry	4 1 10	5 2 1½	+24.8	330
Geology, meteorology, palaeontology	3 4 8	3 17 5½	+19.8	147
Prehistory, anthropology	2 8 9	3 5 10½	+35.1	91
General biology	3 6 0½	3 14 8	+13.1	213
Botany	3 9 3	2 19 2	-14.6	91
Zoology	2 17 0	3 15 7½	+32.7	314
Total—Class 500	2 19 9	3 13 6	+23.0	2,240
Medicine	3 0 7½	3 15 5½	+24.5	767
Public safety	1 4 9	2 10 8	+104.7	16
Engineering and general technology	2 11 4½	2 16 0	+9.0	931
Agriculture (including horticulture, forestry, livestock)	1 13 9½	2 0 1½	+19.3	333
Total—Class 600	2 9 5½	2 17 10	+16.9	3,163

in the *Library Association Record*, is a good guide. There seems to be quite a considerable variation from one subject to another although scientific and technical books seem not to be significantly more expensive than books in other subjects. A scientific library of any size will, however, subscribe to several hundred different periodical titles a year. Prices here seem to have been increasing faster than those of books. A guide to such increases has also appeared annually in the *Library Association Record* (70, 202; August 1968), and includes periodicals published outside Britain, including those in languages other than English. Mrs W. I. Veasey, who has compiled it, shows that journals in science and technology appear to have increased most rapidly in price. The most highly priced journals, including abstracting and indexing services, have gone up more than the cheaper publications. Devaluation, it seems, has caused an overall increase of 20.1 per cent in the price of journals in 1968 (see Table 3).

Table 3. PRICES OF PERIODICALS—TOTALS ALL SUBJECTS

Subject	Journals priced between 10s and £25				All prices					
	No. of titles	Average price 1968		% increase on 1967	Increase on 1965 (100)	No. of titles	Median price 1968		% increase on 1967	Increase on 1965 (100)
		£ s d					£ s d			
Humanities and social sciences	663	4 3 5		16.7	132.1	671	4 11 1		16.7	134.7
Medicine	188	7 16 3		17.2	136.5	197	9 19 6		17.7	137.3
Science and technology	810	7 13 9		18.5	133.8	898	12 17 3		21.4	144.1
Total	1,661	6 5 11		17.8	133.6	1,766	9 5 3		20.1	141.3