

Understanding the implications of open access publication in humanities and social sciences disciplines

INTRODUCTION

The Humanities and Social Sciences Learned Societies and Subject Associations Network,¹ convened by the British Academy, brings together academics from across the HSS disciplines to discuss a range of issues and policy developments. The most recent event, chaired by Professor Nigel Vincent FBA, discussed the recommendations of the Finch Group and the new policy on open access from Research Councils UK (RCUK), and their potential effect on publishing, funding and research assessment in the humanities and social sciences (HSS).

Listen to the discussion online

SPEAKERS

Dr Michael Jubb, Executive Director Research Information Network

Professor Mark Llewellyn, Director of Research, Arts and Humanities Research Council

Professor Chris Wickham FBA, British Academy Vice President with responsibility for publications

Professor Paul Rowlett, Head of Humanities, Languages and Social Sciences at the University of Salford and editor of the *Transactions of the Philological Society*

David Sweeney, Director (Research, Innovation and Skills), Higher Education Funding Council for England

Dr Audrey McCulloch ACMI, Chief Executive, Association of Learned and Professional Society Publishers

1. www.britac.ac.uk/policy/HSS_learned_societies_subject_associations.cfm



THE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE FINCH GROUP

The brief of the Finch Group, as explained by Michael Jubb, was to look at how best to expand access in a sustainable way to peer-reviewed research publications, with a deliberate focus on journal articles and conference proceedings.

The group established that there are about 2 million research publications produced globally every year, and the number is increasing at a rate of about 4% per year. There are around 25,000 journals globally – the vast majority subscription-based – although in recent years the number of open access journals has risen to approximately 8,000. There has also been a growth in the number of ‘hybrid’ journals.² Learned societies and their publications form a larger part of the academic publishing landscape in the UK than elsewhere in the world. A report published on behalf of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills two years ago found that the UK was responsible for around 6% of the overall global production of research, though this figure was in decline. Approximately 16% of this output was in the humanities and social sciences.³

The Finch Report concluded that no single mechanism could meet all of the criteria it had set for success, and envisioned a ‘mixed economy’ for the foreseeable future. Transition towards open access that was already taking place should be accelerated, but this process of acceleration should be carefully managed. The gold model was

seen as the most desirable method of building an open access system. As such, it would be necessary for new funding arrangements to be put into place in order to enable universities to meet the cost of article processing charges (APCs). There should be minimal restrictions on the use and reuse of publications. Licensing should be expanded and rationalised, both in the short term and more broadly. Other recommendations included: investigating an open access model for monographs; further development of repository infrastructure; and setting embargo periods at a level that was sustainable for publications and journals (when considering the green model for open access).⁴

A POST-FINCH WORLD OF OPEN ACCESS

The Arts and Humanities Research Council is currently looking at how best to ensure open access to monographs and edited collections via the OAPEN project on open access books; data arising from that project will be available from the JISC website. However, as noted by Professor Mark Llewellyn, the new RCUK policy deals specifically with peer-reviewed journal publications, and does not cover monographs or book chapters.

RCUK has been working to make the results of publicly-funded research available to the public for their use, interrogation and scrutiny, and to ensure rigorous peer review of this research since around 2005. They have advocated that research

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2. A ‘hybrid’ journal is one that still operates on a subscription basis, but which offers an open access option for any article for which an article processing charge is paid.
 3. www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/science/docs/i/11-p123-international-comparative-performance-uk-research-base-2011
 4. In the gold model, publication is through open access or ‘hybrid’ journals, with the publisher’s version of record of the article being freely and immediately available; the cost is met by an article processing charge paid to the journal publisher. In the green model, the peer-reviewed and accepted (but not typeset) version of the article is made available in an institutional or subject repository, after an embargo period has elapsed since the article appeared in the journal (thereby allowing the journal publisher a window in which to exploit the article commercially).

fundings should regard dissemination as part of the research process and, as such, it should be paid for. The Government's recent push towards a transparency agenda has given new impetus to the move towards open access.

The new RCUK guidelines will apply to all peer-reviewed research that has received any funding from research councils and which is submitted for publication from 1 April 2013. Journals will be asked to provide either gold open access, or offer a green open access option with a maximum embargo of six months, or 12 months for research funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council or the Economic and Social Research Council.

Research councils will provide funding to cover article processing charges (APCs) through block grants to (some) institutions, who will then be responsible for establishing processes for the payment of APCs. The size of this fund and the mechanism by which it will be allocated is to be the subject of consultation with institutions.

IMPLEMENTING OPEN ACCESS: THE CHALLENGES FOR HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

WHAT ARE WE AIMING FOR?

The end point is unclear: will all journals be open access; or hybrid journals; or will there be a mixed economy of open access journals and purely subscription-based journals?

Other open access models have not worked without substantial external funding and, of the various models that had been tried, gold is perceived as presenting particular difficulties. The green model is closer to the existing subscription models under which many journals currently

published. The gold model will likely exist alongside other publishing models for some time as an additional model for those who can afford it, but learned society publishers need to ensure they reach a broader audience.

MAINTAINING ACADEMIC GOODWILL

Academics may well be willing to explore the potential of open access as a model, and in some cases are enthusiastic about the prospect. However, Professor Chris Wickham FBA argued that the Finch recommendations are not generally felt to constitute the best way to approach the topic. There now needs to be negotiation about implementation to produce a system that would both allow quality publications to receive funding and make their output easy to access. STEM disciplines are likely to find it much easier to adapt than HSS disciplines, which will be far more likely to want to make use of embargoed open access rather than immediate open access. The length of the embargo periods thus becomes a key issue.

MANAGING PUBLICATION BUDGETS

How will academic managers make decisions about APC payments? It is possible that we will see a number of unintended consequences. For example, pressure to publish in journals with lower APCs, 'fast' publishing academics receiving a greater proportion of any APC budget, discouragement from publishing in high-esteem journals because of high APCs, or a set limit on publications for individual academics.

AFFORDABILITY AND ACCESS FOR ALL RESEARCHERS

Academics from less wealthy countries and postdoctoral students will very often be unable to afford these charges, so their research opportunities could be limited if immediate gold access became the only journal publication method.

Some academics (e.g. in countries without stable internet connections) might still find print to be the most accessible method of distribution. It is also important to consider how copyright in works of art, photographs, illustrations and other supplementary information that an author might wish to attach could be respected as part of an open access system.

THE REPUTATION OF UK RESEARCH

UK research is well regarded abroad, and very many UK academics publish their research in non-UK journals, which may be not be in compliance with RCUK guidelines on open access. If the consequence of the RCUK policy is that work funded by them could not be published in non-compliant journals, the UK's international reputation as a centre of research will suffer.

THE RISKS TO LEARNED SOCIETY JOURNALS

High-status learned society journals are expensive to run, partly due to the inevitably high turn-down rate. Setting an APC rate at £2,000 is unlikely to cover these costs for many journal.

Learned society publishers are engaged in most of the same activities as commercial publishers, but without the benefit of economies of scale, therefore margins are notably tighter. The expense of this process is unlikely to decrease with any move towards an electronic system of distribution, as new costs, such as the need to sustain online platforms, will arise.

THE CONSEQUENCES FOR AND OF THE NEXT RESEARCH ASSESSMENT PROCESS

If REF 2020 insists on open access publication as one of the criteria for all assessment, the REF in turn might lose the confidence of the academic community.

FUTURE RESEARCH FUNDING AND ASSESSMENT

HEFCE is firmly committed to open access publishing, but there are a number of issues to address before a sustainable system could be implemented. The Finch Report formed a basis for consultation, but academics are now being asked to recognise that the present system is not sustainable. There is a broader argument for open access: the widest possible dissemination of research represents the maximum possible contribution to the sum total of human knowledge. Although there were practical concerns around how this is to be implemented, the principle HEFCE has adopted is that research should be distributed as widely as possible. The volume and cost of publication were rising, and research budgets are effectively fixed. Therefore less research is being undertaken in order to fund more publishing and, as such, the Government is receiving less return on its investment of public funds.

PREPARING FOR IMPLEMENTATION

The British Academy will continue to explore the challenges posed by the new policies on open access through a series of commissioned essays on how humanities and social sciences academics, learned societies and university managers will deal with the new publishing environment from April 2013. The aim will be to look at the impact in different disciplines and gain further understanding about some of the potential risks involved in a rapid move to open access publication. The first set of essays will be published in spring 2013.

USEFUL REFERENCES

[The proposals from the Finch Group](#)

[The Government's response to Finch](#)

[RCUK policy on Access to Research Outputs](#)

[HEFCE announcement of plans to make research outputs more freely available](#)

[Government announcement of additional £10m to support open access](#)

[RCUK comments on the additional £10m to support open access](#)

[British Academy statement July 2012](#)

[Royal Society letter to BIS July 2012](#)

[Russell Group statement July 2012](#)

[1994 Group statement Sept 2012](#)

[League of European Universities Road Map to Open Access June 2011](#)

[Leverhulme Trust policy on open access](#)

[Wellcome Trust policy on open access](#)

[Open Access Status of Journal Articles from European Research Council Projects June 2012](#)

[Open Access guidelines for researchers funded by ERC July 2012](#)

[Letter from the President of the Royal Historical Society](#)



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