

Open access in the UK and what it means for scientific research

Joint statement

From the Academy of Medical Sciences, the Institute of Physics, The Royal Society, The Royal Society of Chemistry and the Society of Biology.

Joint statement

On Monday 25th February, representatives from Government, funders, libraries, university administrators, Learned Societies, publishers and researchers came together at a conference, sponsored by five of the leading British Learned Societies, to discuss the challenges of implementing UK Government policy on Open Access (OA) publication and the policies of research funders that have followed it.

In 2011 the Government established a Working Group, chaired by Dame Janet Finch, to examine how to expand access to published research findings.¹ In July 2012 the Government accepted the recommendations of the 'Finch' report, and set a clear policy direction for a shift in publication of publicly-funded research from a "reader pays" to an "author pays" model (also known as 'gold' OA²). Following this, the Research Councils UK (RCUK) have produced a revised policy on OA, to take effect from 1st April 2013, which sets out a preference for gold OA wherever possible, and are currently seeking views on their guidance to support this policy. The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) is currently consulting on their draft policy in relation to the post-2014 Research Excellence Framework and so policy in relation to OA is not yet set. At the meeting, Dr Tony Peatfield, Director of Corporate Affairs for the Medical Research Council, speaking on behalf of RCUK, noted their recognition of the challenges of implementing these policies, and that they would be flexible in the early stages, stating: "We see this very much as a journey, not an event." Dr David Sweeney, Director of Research, Innovation and Skills for HEFCE called for an end to the "friendly fire" that has often characterised the OA debate.

The UK is the first country in the world to set a clear preference for gold OA as a publishing model for publicly funded outputs. The reason for this decision was outlined at the meeting by the Minister of State for Universities and Science, Rt Hon David Willetts MP, with this route preferred because it "unambiguously achieves the objective of open access to taxpayer-financed research when it is published... and it honestly recognises that there are some costs to publishing." By contrast, the Minister highlighted that a wholesale shift to 'green' OA³, which appears to be the approach of the European Union, could be defective because it would not provide a financially sustainable business model to meet the legitimate costs of publishing, such as administering the peer review process. However, as the chair of the meeting, Dame Janet Finch, highlighted, although the stakeholders present were willing to make OA work, it was evident that there were a variety of views on the best way to achieve this. Michael Jubb, Director of the Research Information Network, emphasised that the transition to OA should be "accelerated in an ordered way" to limit the risk of adverse consequences to the delicate ecosystem of scientific publishing. He stressed that the publication ecosystem has different economies operating in respect of finance and of recognition and reward for academic achievement, which both require attention. It was clear that significant issues remain in regard to the transition, and that policy implementation will be challenging for all stakeholders.

Three key themes emerged from the day's presentations and discussions:

- **All stakeholders need to work together constructively to move away from the polemical to the practical.** There was strong agreement across stakeholders that although change is in motion, it is important to recognise that the exact future landscape is impossible to predict and that we must focus efforts on achieving sustainable solutions to the challenges ahead.
- **Clarity regarding the policies of research funders is essential.** A clear understanding of what policies require in terms of permitting the reuse of published information, and acceptable embargo periods, is crucial to enable all stakeholders to implement these policies effectively and sustainably. We welcome Government's and RCUK's efforts to achieve this through endorsing the 'decision tree' shown below, as the preferred guide for authors to ensure compliance with Government and RCUK policy. We also welcome the announcement by RCUK that they will make available to researchers a list of journals that comply with their policy.

¹ Report of the Working Group on Expanding Access to Published Research Findings (2012). *Accessibility, sustainability, excellence: how to expand access to research publications*.

² Gold OA: The final published version of an article is made freely available immediately on publication, usually on payment of a publication charge (APC) and under a licence granting broad rights of re-use.

³ Green OA: The deposit by the author of the original manuscript or the accepted manuscript (before editing and typesetting etc by the publisher) of the article in a subject or institutional repository, usually after an embargo period following publication set by the publisher according to the journal or discipline.

- The needs and concerns of researchers must be addressed.** Institutional stakeholders are nearing readiness to implement OA policies. However, many of those who will be most directly affected - the researchers themselves - are unaware of funders' requirements, or are concerned about the policy's implications for where they can publish, how frequently they can publish, the affordability of publication, and whether their intellectual property rights will be affected. Implementing OA policies will require a substantial shift in community attitudes and behaviour in some disciplines, and all stakeholders need to increase their efforts to communicate more effectively with researchers. Higher Education Institutions have a key role to play in facilitating the shift to OA by simplifying processes for researchers, and communicating the benefits of open access more effectively.

Recognising the important role that Learned Societies have to play in facilitating the further development and implementation of OA among the UK's scientific research communities, the five learned societies that organised and sponsored the event will work to build awareness of, and support for, OA amongst our members, and for those of us who have a publishing arm, our authors.

UK Government policy on open access from 1st April 2013



Media contacts

Meeting background

A full programme can be found at: royalsociety.org/events/2013/open-access-workshop

The Academy of Medical Sciences

The Academy of Medical Sciences (acmedsci.ac.uk) is the independent body in the UK representing the diversity of medical science. Our mission is to promote medical science and its translation into benefits for society. The Academy's elected Fellows are the United Kingdom's leading medical scientists from hospitals, academia, industry and the public service. We work with them to promote excellence, influence policy to improve health and wealth, nurture the next generation of medical researchers, link academia, industry and the NHS, seize international opportunities and encourage dialogue about the medical sciences.

Institute of Physics

The Institute of Physics (iop.org) is a leading scientific society. We are a charitable organisation with a worldwide membership of more than 45,000, working together to advance physics education, research and application. We engage with policymakers and the general public to develop awareness and understanding of the value of physics and, through IOP Publishing, we are world leaders in professional scientific communications.

The Royal Society

The Royal Society (royalsociety.org) is a self-governing Fellowship of many of the world's most distinguished scientists drawn from all areas of science, engineering, and medicine. The Society's fundamental purpose, reflected in its founding Charters of the 1660s, is to recognise, promote, and support excellence in science and to encourage the development and use of science for the benefit of humanity.

The Society's strategic priorities are:

- Promoting science and its benefits
- Recognising excellence in science
- Supporting outstanding science
- Providing scientific advice for policy
- Fostering international and global cooperation
- Education and public engagement

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The Royal Society of Chemistry

The Royal Society of Chemistry (rsc.org) is the leading society and professional body for chemical scientists. Supported by a network of over 48,000 members worldwide and an internationally acclaimed publishing business, our activities span education and training, conferences and science policy, and the promotion of the chemical sciences to the public. Our headquarters are in London and Cambridge, with international offices in the USA, China, Japan, India and Brazil.

The Society of Biology

The Society of Biology (societyofbiology.org) is the leading professional body representing individual biologists, learned societies and other organisations that make up the diverse landscape of the biological sciences. Our mission is to be the unifying voice for biology, to facilitate and promote new discoveries in biological science for national and international benefit, and to engage the wider public with our work. Our members include practising scientists, students at all levels, professionals in academia, industry and education bodies, and non-professionals with an interest in biology. Our vision is of a world that understands the true value of biology and how it can contribute to improving life for all.