

“Gold” Open Access Publishing

Research Communications Strategy Project

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Introduction: routes to open access

Open Access (OA)¹ is about making the results of high-quality research carried out in HE institutions readily available to other people who can benefit from the information. There are many advocates, and University senior managers are interested in the potential of OA to raise the profile and impact,^{2,3} of the research work carried out in their own institutions.

The majority of research-driven UK HEIs have an institutional repository (IR) available for self-archiving of papers (known as “green” OA), but some researchers are also interested in pursuing open access publishing (“gold” OA) for some of their material.

Why support “gold” OA publishing?

Here are some of the reasons researchers and university managers in UK HEIs have given for enabling researchers to choose this route alongside the option of self-archiving:

- OA is an experiment with a new business model for academic publishing. Economic modelling by Houghton, Swan and others,^{4,5} indicates that there would be a net benefit to research and higher education overall if there was a wholesale flip to OA publishing. Article processing fees would be charged instead of subscription fees, to cover the necessary costs of peer-review and publishing. As the major producers and consumers of research publications, HEIs need to be part of this experiment, taking steps along this road, influencing developments, and monitoring the costs and impacts.
- Embargo periods on self-archiving (often imposed by publishers, where the article may not be released via an IR for several months or even a year or two after publication) delay the availability of a publication. A researcher’s most recent publications (the ones they want people to read) are often the very ones that are the least accessible, so some authors believe it is worth paying a fee for the article to be released immediately. However, it is important that researchers know how much it is costing, so that they can judge whether that fee represents value for money. Making an article openly accessible on a publisher’s platform usually permits an author also to self-archive the full text immediately, thus taking advantage of all possible routes to OA.

- A small number of research groups work on hugely expensive high-profile projects. Publicity is important and in these cases, a few thousand pounds in OA fees to open up the results of the project immediately via the “gold” route is a good way of marketing the project.

- A common practical difficulty with self-archiving is that authors are not accustomed to keeping a final draft of the paper, suitable for the IR. Until this becomes a new habit, OA publishing fits more readily with established workflows. Some academics have reservations about using self-archived papers, e.g. they are uneasy about using an author’s final version and do not know which version to cite. These reservations can be addressed,^{6,7} but some people are more comfortable with using a known journal interface and “brand”.

Practical questions to consider within an institution or research group

Source of funds?

There is a financial cost to “gold” OA publishing. Charges can often be met from live research grants, but there needs to be a mechanism for paying OA publication fees that may come about long after the project has finished. HEIs may be able to use full Economic Costing (fEC) and overhead charges, and may want to use their financial systems to keep a link between the project and the cost of publication. HEIs may also want to decide at the outset whether certain categories of activity are eligible for support, e.g. unfunded research or postgraduate research. What proportion of the HEI’s publications is it possible or desirable to make openly accessible by the “green” and “gold” routes?

Who can provide advice to researchers on their publishing options, and the costs?

Libraries, repository teams and research offices often have staff with knowledge about self-archiving options and different OA and hybrid journal publishers. These staff can often advise on how well these options meet the OA requirements of research funders. Each discipline, though, will have its own publishing culture, and some would argue that authors should not be pushed to publish in journals that they would not otherwise choose. Often, authors are not interested in a journal's business model, nor in copyright or the rights of the author, employer, funder or publisher; they regularly choose a journal for their paper based only on its academic reputation. It is important that staff members are available to provide information in this area, and that contact details are publicised within the institution so that researchers know who to ask for individual advice.

What systems are in place for paying and monitoring costs?

HEIs need to consider how they would handle this change. In some disciplines, journal publishers have for years required page charges and extra fees for illustrations etc, so some groups of authors are already accustomed to paying publication fees. Some hybrid journals are not always clear about what the OA fee buys, so it is important to check that it does buy the rights you expect, and that articles are released on time. OA publishing activity needs to be tied in with other activities at the HEI, such as returning end-of-grant reports to funders, ensuring that library staff members who negotiate with publishers about subscriptions to hybrid journals are aware of OA payments made, and ensuring that "gold" articles are also included in the IR.

Do you need a central fund and/or central administrative support?

The answer to this will depend on several factors, including: the expected amount of activity and the associated budget estimate; whether funds for OA are likely to be available in research grant budgets; whether there are economies of scale to be gained from institutional memberships available for some publishers/journals; and whether it is helpful to centralise invoice processing, follow-up, and the tie-in with other aspects of supporting research.

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