

Establishing a workflow for assessing open monograph business models: a case study from Oxford

Open access (OA) monograph publishing is becoming increasingly important as new funder mandates – including UKRI's long-form OA policy – bring books and chapters into scope for compliance. For institutions, the challenge is not only financial but also strategic: how to engage with a rapidly evolving set of business models that vary in cost, transparency and sustainability. This case study describes how the Bodleian Libraries at the University of Oxford developed a structured workflow to assess and support OA monograph initiatives. Beginning as a one-year pilot project and now moving into 'business as usual', the work combined horizon scanning, evidence-based evaluation and collaborative decision-making across library committees. A key output was the development of an open monograph scheme evaluation form, providing consistency and transparency in decision-making. The study highlights both the benefits and limitations of different OA models, the tensions around funding and the lessons learned for building sustainable support. It offers practical insights for other libraries navigating similar challenges.

Context

Open access (OA) publication of long-form works, including monographs, has been steadily growing over the past decade. Recently, however, the importance of this topic has risen within academic publishing considerations, driven especially by new funder mandates.

A key driver is the UKRI long-form policy, which came into effect on 1 January 2024 ([UKRI, 2024](#)). This requires that monographs, book chapters and edited collections derived from UKRI-funded research be made open access within 12 months of publication under a Creative Commons licence. Alongside UKRI, funders such as the Wellcome Trust ([Wellcome Trust, 2025](#)) and Horizon Europe ([ERC, 2026](#)) also have long-form OA requirements.

The significance of this shift is especially acute for the humanities and social sciences, where monographs are a primary mode of scholarly communication and have historically remained outside the scope of OA mandates ([Shaw et al, 2023](#)). With monographs now included in multiple funder policies – and lined up for inclusion in the REF cycle following REF 2029 ([REF, 2024](#)) – supporting sustainable OA monograph publishing has become a strategic necessity.

The broader context also includes ongoing policy alignment efforts across Europe. Initiatives such as PALOMERA (Policy Alignment of Open Access Monographs in the European Research Area) ([PALOMERA, 2024](#)) and the Plan S principles from cOAlition S ([Plan S, 2026](#)) highlight monographs as a growing focus for open access reform.

In anticipation of these developments, the Bodleian Libraries launched a pilot project that, amongst other workstreams, sought to develop a sustainable, structured workflow for assessing OA monograph business models. This article outlines the workflow as it stands, including its ongoing transition into a business-as-usual (BAU) practice.



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Project background and aims

The University of Oxford is one of the UK's largest research institutions, with a significant proportion of its research funding coming from UKRI Research Councils – £181.9 million in the financial year 2023/24, or 23% of the University's total external research income ([University of Oxford, 2024](#)).

In 2022, the Bodleian Libraries received funding from the Research England 'Enhancing Research Culture' fund to undertake a one-year pilot project to assess OA monograph publishing initiatives and to develop support and guidance for researchers' publishing activities and requirements. Funding supported a dedicated project officer and contributions to OA monograph initiatives. This project was coordinated by the Bodleian's Open Scholarship Support (OSS) team, formed to provide strategic and practical guidance on OA across the university.

Two groups oversaw the work: the Open Monograph Working Group, a small team meeting regularly to guide project activity, and the Open Monograph Advisory Group, a wider stakeholder body providing strategic input. This project was framed by a growing need to adapt institutional support for OA to reflect the evolving publishing environment.

Key project strands included identifying and assessing OA business models from both traditional and new publishers, and developing tools such as an evaluation checklist to support decision-making. Findings and recommendations were shared with the Bodleian's Collections Management Strategy Group (CMSG).

Following the pilot, the Bodleian extended funding through its internal strategy fund for a second phase, 'Sustainable Open Monographs'. This phase emphasized embedding OA monograph work into BAU workflows, with a focus on analysing the University's monograph publishing profile across publishers and funders, assessing OA business models from established and new publishers, analysing the performance of Oxford-supported schemes to ensure a focus on the academic needs of Oxford academics and researchers and supporting those that give us long-term benefits.

The challenge of evaluating OA business models

Whilst 'gold' OA – where authors pay a book processing charge (BPC) to publishers to make their work OA – is the most established route to publishing work OA, this poses affordability and equity concerns. Many BPCs are prohibitively expensive, and cost transparency is inconsistent. The UKRI supports up to £10,000 (including VAT) per in-scope monograph, but requires universities to pay the charge upfront and claim reimbursement after publication. Costs above £10,000 must be met by the institution or researcher ([UKRI, 2024](#)).

An increasing number of publishers are adopting 'diamond' OA models. These shift the financial burden from authors to institutions via mechanisms such as library membership schemes, Subscribe to Open (S2O) and consortia support. These collective action models often provide additional benefits – e.g. perpetual access to frontlist or backlist content – and aim to lower the overall cost of OA publishing. However, they depend on sufficient institutional buy-in.

The models under which long-form works are made OA include (but are not limited to) those described in [Table 1](#):

Model	Description
Book processing charge (BPC)	A fee is charged by the publisher in order for the e-book to be made open access.
Institutional subsidy / new university presses	An institution subsidizes publication at an open access press based at, or associated with, the institution. Academics based at the institution may receive discounts or fee waivers.
Library consortium ('institutional crowdfunding')	Libraries pledge a fee towards making a collection of books open access, covering some or all of the costs between them. Once enough libraries have confirmed participation and the target amount is achieved, the collection is made open access.

(Contd.)

Model	Description
Library membership	Libraries or other institutions pay an annual membership fee to a publisher that underwrites some costs of making books open access.
Flip to Open	The book is initially sold as it would be under traditional publishing. Once the book meets a set target sales figure it is made open access.

Table 1. Open Access Monograph Business models

(Additional information about open monograph business models can be found at [Ferwerda, E. \(2014\)](#)).

Each of these models has downsides as well as positives, and every scheme is unique in its details and coverage. Institutions cannot support every new scheme, particularly as the number of publishers and models continues to grow.

Institutions should therefore find structured, evidence-based ways to assess value and decide where support should be directed.

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Open access collection management principles

An assessment model works best when it is founded upon clearly stated principles, which can give clear guidance on what the priorities and goals of the institutions' collections management policy are regarding OA.

The Bodleian Libraries maintains a collection management policy ([Bodleian Libraries, 2015](#)) covering all collections management procurement – section 9 of this covers OA and emphasizes the ethical and sustainable provision of OA content. The principles articulated in this policy inform the assessment of OA schemes.

Collections management policy, section 9

Open Access

The Bodleian Libraries supports the principles of ethical and sustainable Open Access in information provision. As the Open Access movement is maturing in the external publishing environment, the Bodleian is adapting its response to new product packages and publisher finance models. This is realized by, for example, aligning purchasing decisions on information provision with associated publishing requirements, and by subscribing to journal packages which combine subscription costs ('read') and Open Access publishing costs ('publish') in a single agreement. Other models include Subscribe to Open and Diamond (pledging). These are achieved through the strategic use of the Bodleian Materials Budget and funder Open Access block grants. When selecting information resources, Open Access formats are sourced where appropriate and such material made discoverable for use in teaching and research.

The Bodleian library also contributes towards the RLUK ([RLUK Networks - Research Libraries UK, 2016](#)) 'Shared Principles for the Evaluation and Acquisition of Open Monograph Models', in a draft status at the time of writing, and is internally working on a wider and more specific internal document on enabling equitable and sustainable OA/open purchasing principles at the University of Oxford.

These documents, once finalized, will provide greater clarity and focus on the assessment of OA monograph schemes.

Horizon scanning

The OA monograph landscape has grown rapidly in recent years. Alongside the rise of new OA publishers and university presses, many established publishers have also introduced OA options. While this expansion is positive, it has also produced a complex and often opaque

4 ecosystem. There is no centralized registry of OA monograph schemes, making it difficult for institutions to track, assess and support them in a coordinated way.

To address this challenge, the Bodleian project embedded horizon scanning into its workflow. The project officer conducted proactive scanning for new OA monograph policies, schemes and publishers, while the working group and the Open Scholarship Support team contributed through ongoing monitoring of sector news, publisher updates and mailing lists.

'There is no centralized registry of OA monograph schemes, making it difficult for institutions to ... support them'

This process included:

- regular review of platforms such as Jisc Monitor and the Open Access Tracking Project (OATP)
- monitoring communications from publishers and sector networks
- input from subject librarians and the Open Scholarship Librarian, who also tracked wider OA policy and publishing developments.

The combined approach allowed the team to identify and prioritize schemes based on relevance, transparency and alignment with institutional goals. Findings were maintained in a live spreadsheet, which has since been adopted into ongoing library workflows.

The open monograph scheme evaluation form

A structured analysis form was developed to support consistent and transparent evaluations of OA monograph schemes. This drew on sector resources – including blog posts from the COPIM project (COPIM 2023) – as well as the Bodleian Libraries' own infrastructure evaluation template and read and publish assessment framework. The form was refined iteratively throughout the project, ultimately becoming the Open Monograph Scheme Evaluation Form V2.2 (see [Appendix 1](#)).

The final checklist contained 37 criteria, grouped into five thematic categories:

- Scheme Overview
- Open Ethos
- Costs
- Content
- Technical Standards.

One of the key challenges during development was finding a balance between comprehensiveness and usability. The form needed to accommodate a wide range of OA models without becoming unwieldy or overly complex. The resulting structure included two sections:

- a set of core fields that directly informed decision-making
- an additional information section to provide useful context.

Priority was given to fields such as UKRI policy compliance, Oxford author involvement and cost-effectiveness, which frequently proved decisive in funding discussions.

Some criteria that were initially assumed to be central – such as elements under Open Ethos and Technical Standards – often ended up being less critical in practice and were moved into the additional information section.

Each criterion was assessed using a Red/Amber/Green rating system to signal overall risk or suitability at a glance. This made the form a practical tool not only for the project team but also for committees potentially reviewing multiple schemes in parallel.

Workflows

Evaluation of the scheme using the Open Monograph Scheme Evaluation Form was carried out by the project officer. Once a scheme was evaluated, it progressed through a series of committees, with updates and reappraisals being made to the form as necessary until a decision was made.

During phase one of the project, schemes were primarily assessed through the groups set up to manage and monitor the open monograph project. Horizon scanning and initial discussion were undertaken by the Open Monograph Project Group, with schemes deemed relevant being taken for further review by the Open Monograph Advisory Group. Additional commentary was sought from subject librarians and the Committee on Library Provision and Strategy (CLiPS), with a final decision on support being taken by the Collections Management Strategy Group (CMSG). (Figure 1).

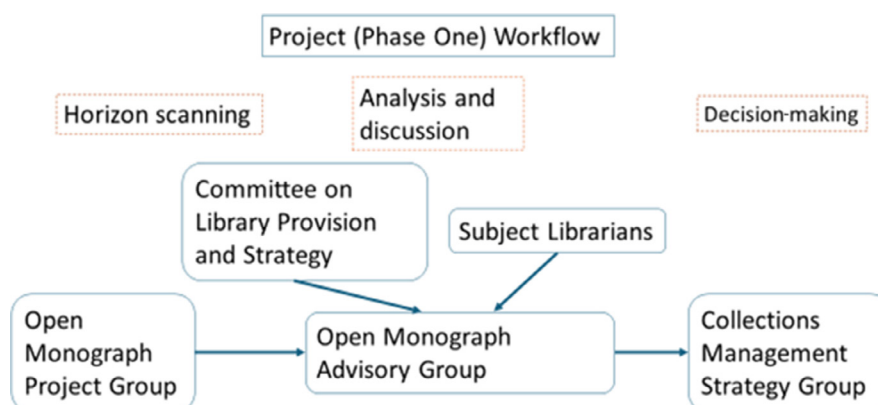


Figure 1. Operational Workflow for Open Monograph Assessment (Project Phase One)

During phase two of the project, progress was made in bringing OA monograph scheme assessment into the 'business as usual' practice of the Bodleian Libraries, and so rather than the Open Monograph Advisory Group being the core forum for discussion, this role was taken by the OA Publications Review Group (itself formerly the Read and Publish Review Group). This group also contained the budget-holding decision makers.

Initial discussion and horizon scanning were still undertaken by members of the Open Monograph Working Group, and input was sought from additional groups such as the E-book steering group, HOSAs (Head of Subject Areas) and Subject Librarians. (Figure 2).

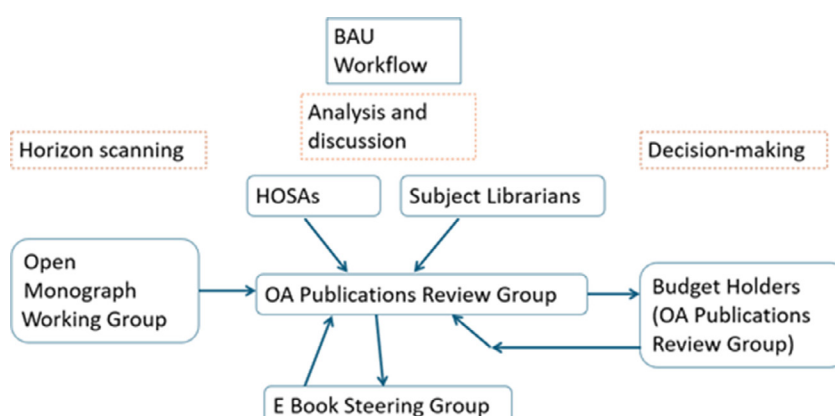


Figure 2. Operational Workflow for Open Monograph Assessment (Business as Usual)

1. Initial discussion within the Open Monograph Working Group.
2. Review by the OA Publications Review Group.
3. Input from subject librarians (via subject-reps mailing list).

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4. Endorsement by the E-book Steering Group.
 5. Final decision by budget holding members of the OA Publications Review Group.

Decision-making

Decisions about which schemes to support were shaped in part by the absence of a dedicated OA collections budget. Instead, contributions had to be coordinated across individual subject budgets, which are also used to fund traditional (non-OA) acquisitions. This naturally created tension: supporting OA initiatives could reduce the funds available for paywalled or teaching materials.

In evaluating schemes, the group considered a range of criteria, with particular attention to the following questions:

- Does the scheme meet UKRI OA policy requirements?
Models like Subscribe to Open or Flip to Open can be unpredictable in their OA delivery or may impose embargoes, making compliance with UKRI policy uncertain.
- Is the scheme good value for money?
What is the average cost per OA book produced? Are there tangible benefits for contributors, such as access to a backlist or perpetual access to additional content? This criterion often favoured larger publishers with greater production capacity and more extensive backlists.
- Is the scheme relevant to Oxford authors or readers?
Demonstrating a clear benefit to Oxford's academic divisions – either through author participation or direct subject relevance – greatly increased the likelihood of support.
- Does the scheme contribute to a more diverse and sustainable OA landscape?
Supporting smaller publishers or under-represented disciplines was seen as a way of encouraging bibliodiversity and long-term resilience in OA publishing.

Identifying Oxford-affiliated authors proved unexpectedly difficult. In some cases, even publishers were unsure of author affiliations, highlighting the limitations of available metadata and publisher workflows.

There was no fixed weighting for the criteria, nor a set threshold that guaranteed support. Each scheme was evaluated on its individual merits, with Red/Amber/Green assessments used as indicators rather than strict cut-offs. Nonetheless, a greater number of 'red flags' in a submission typically led to more cautious or critical discussion. There was a tendency towards caution – discussions on a scheme would regularly be parked in order to gather more data or feedback.

Ultimately, during the project, Oxford opted to support, through project funds and content budgets, a number of schemes. These included diamond model schemes from traditional publishers, library memberships of OA publishers and OA infrastructure.

Evaluation of supported schemes

Supporting a scheme was only the beginning, with evaluation of the supported schemes needed to decide on renewal and the support for OA schemes in general. Key metrics included:

- usage statistics (gathered from publishers, aggregators such as JSTOR and OAPEN)
- presence of Oxford-affiliated authors
- appearances on Oxford reading lists

'supporting OA initiatives could reduce the funds available for paywalled or teaching materials'

'Supporting a scheme was only the beginning, with evaluation of the supported schemes needed to decide on renewal'

- number of books published during the support period
- other evidence of publisher growth or service improvement.

Usage data was treated with caution: IP-based data is incomplete and geolocation metrics do not map neatly to institutional readership. The goal was to triangulate multiple data sources to form a coherent picture. A form has been drafted to collate these metrics (see [Appendix 2](#)). This evaluation would be passed to the OA Publications Review Group when discussing renewal of support for schemes or publishers.

Next steps and final thoughts

This project highlighted the importance of a structured, collaborative approach to supporting open access monograph publishing.

One key insight was the complexity of sustaining diamond OA models. These rely on collective institutional support but may suffer from a ‘tragedy of the commons’ – where fund-limited institutions delay or withhold contributions in the hope that others will fund the model, even though all benefit from the resulting open content. Addressing this challenge requires advocacy and shared commitment across the sector.

Looking ahead, the following actions will help embed and extend the work undertaken during Oxford’s open monograph project:

- sharing evaluation criteria, workflows and outcomes with the wider academic library community to support transparency and sector-wide learning
- refining and formalizing institutional principles for supporting OA monograph initiatives, ensuring they reflect Oxford’s values and operational realities
- exploring the development of a dedicated OA fund, or clearer processes for coordinating subject budgets in support of OA schemes
- continuing strategic support for collective action diamond models, recognizing their role in promoting bibliodiversity, equity and long-term sustainability in scholarly publishing.

This work will remain an evolving part of the library’s response to open access, helping Oxford researchers – and their readers – navigate the increasingly complex world of OA monograph publishing.

‘This project highlighted the importance of a structured, collaborative approach to supporting open access monograph publishing’

Appendix 1

Open Monograph Scheme Evaluation Form (Version 2.2).

Publisher	# of Go
Scheme title	
URL	# of Watch
Date received	
Deadline	# of Stop
Dead accepted / rejected	
Date of Review	Recommendation
Date of Decision	

OVERVIEW

Description

Open publishing model (e.g. membership model, Book Processing Charge)

How many other UK HEIs have signed up to this?

Red Amber Green Rating
(G = Go, A = Watch, R = Stop)

(Contd.)

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Publisher	# of Go
	Red/ Amber/ Green
UKRI Compliant	
Oxford Involvement (Have Oxford authors published with scheme/ press? Will Oxford have editorial input?)	
Is scheme covered by existing JISC agreement?	
Open Ethos	Red/ Amber/ Green
Overview	
Costs	Red/ Amber/ Green
Overall Annual Cost	
Duration of deal	
Content	Red/ Amber/ Green
Number of titles	
Frontlist? Backlist?	
Which disciplines? Multi-disciplinary?	
Non Book content /membership benefits	
ACTIONS	
Queries and comments	
Comments of the E-book steering Group	
Comments of the Open Monograph Advisory Group	
Recommendation of the Open Publishing Review Group	
ADDITIONAL FIELDS	
OVERVIEW	
Publisher category (e.g. traditional book publisher, Open Access publisher, scholarly society)	
Publisher background (how well established is the publisher?)	
Review Process (are the books peer reviewed?)	
Red Amber Green Rating (G = Go, A = Watch, R = Stop)	
Open Ethos	Red/ Amber/ Green
Rights	
License	
Publisher Governance structure (publicly available?)	
Is the publisher Open Access mission focused?	
Does the publisher produce an annual report on funding and usage?	
Sustainability	
Costs	Red/ Amber/ Green
Cost per book	
VAT payable	
Content	Red/ Amber/ Green
Number of titles in frontlist (if relevant)	
Number of titles in backlist (if relevant)	
Number of titles by Oxford authors	
Level of choice of content	
Will we own all the offer content in perpetuity (regardless of if the open access funding target is met?)	
Technical Standards	Red/ Amber/ Green
Content channeled via DOAB? If yes, assume preservation & metadata harvesting ok. If not, list how metadata, etc. dealt with	
Preservation Policy (will the content be reliably preserved in the event of the publisher going out of business)	
Location of hosting	

Appendix 2

Evaluation of supported schemes form.

Scheme/ Publisher

Analysis Form	[A link to the relevant Open Monograph Scheme Evaluation Form]
Publishing Model	
Description	
Content	
Cost	
Oxford authors	
STATS (calendar year)	
Usage stats (publisher)	[Stats provided by the publisher, with a top five books list and a link to a larger publisher provided counter report]
Usage stats (DOAB)	[Stats found via the Directory of Open Access Books dashboard, for both IP and region – though not combined as these are different methods of counting the same usage]
OTHER INDICATORS	
ORLO citations	[How many times books from this publisher/ scheme are cited on ORLO, the University of Oxford's reading list service]
ORLO Usage	[How many times citations on ORLO are accessed, with a top five list.]
How many books added during support?	
Other	[Other indicators of scheme performance, such as whether the scheme raised the requested amount in the initial offering].

Abbreviations and Acronyms

A list of the abbreviations and acronyms used in this and other *Insights* articles can be accessed here – click on the following URL and then select the 'full list of industry A&As' link: <http://www.uksg.org/publications#aa>.

Competing Interests

The author has declared no competing interests.

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