

OA in the UK: State of the nation

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Abstract

This paper provides an overview of the current status of UK national open access (OA) policies, their implementation, and the responses of HEIs (Higher Education Institutions) and other key players. Prior to 2012 a number of funders' OA policies had been published. Although many medical scientists were publishing OA articles and subject pre-print repositories were active in some disciplines (for example ArXiv and RePEc EconPapers), most academics were not complying with their funder's OA policy, the policies were not being policed, and in many disciplines, OA was not on researchers' radar.

The article concludes that OA in the UK has changed considerably in recent years and is continuing to evolve rapidly, mainly due to the effect of UK funder OA policies. There is an urgent need for increased automation to support greater accuracy and efficiency which needs input from, and will benefit, the major players: researchers, universities, funders and publishers. Sustainable funding needs to be coupled with efforts to drive down costs. The reasons behind the push for OA needs discussion with researchers, some of whom view OA as an additional burden. The value placed on OA needs to be weighted more towards the benefits of OA within a less compliance dominated environment. There is a long way to go, but reflecting on the last 4 years, the UK has made enormous strides towards widespread OA.

Introduction

This paper provides an overview of the current status of UK national open access (OA) policies, their implementation, and the responses of HEIs (Higher Education Institutions) and other key players. The focus is on OA for 'publication-type' research outputs and not research dataset outputs.

Prior to 2012 a number of UK funders' OA policies had been published. These included policies from the Wellcome Trust¹ and RCUK (Research Councils UK)², both major UK research funders. Although many medical scientists were publishing OA articles, and subject pre-print repositories were active in some disciplines (for example ArXiv³ and RePEc EconPapers⁴), most academics were not complying with their funder's OA policy, policies were not being policed, and in many disciplines, OA was not on researchers' radar.

UK OA policy overview from 2012

In mid-2012 there was a sea-change in OA activity in the UK (see Table 1). A key event was the publication of the so-called 'Finch' report (Finch et al, 2016), '*Accessibility, sustainability,*

¹ Wellcome Trust. Accessed 1/9/2016. <https://wellcome.ac.uk/>

² RCUK. Accessed 1/9/2016. <http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/>

³ ArXiv. Accessed 1/9/2016. <https://arxiv.org/>

⁴ Econpapers. Accessed 1/9/2016. <http://econpapers.repec.org/>

excellence: how to expand access to research Publications.' The Government response⁵ was published soon after, with the Minister accepting the recommendations. During the same period, the Wellcome Trust reinforced its existing OA policy and RCUK announced a revised OA policy that was to be implemented on 1st April 2013.

In September 2012 the Government reiterated its support for *Finch* by announcing £10M pump priming for OA⁶. A number of HEIs were invited to bid for a portion of the available money. In November 2012 RCUK announced that it would be providing transitional funding to pay for OA publication via block grants⁷ made to HEIs. Prior to this flurry of activity, many UK HEIs had implemented some form of institutional repository, OA was being promoted within HEIs, usually by their libraries, but most of the existing OA activity within HEIs was being run on a shoe-string. All of a sudden money was being made available to many, but not all, institutions. Funding was distributed according to algorithms and calculations, such as RCUK's estimate of the total number of publications, as the basis for amount of funding.

The next major OA event was the launch of the HEFCE post-2014 REF⁸ OA consultation in July 2013. HEFCE indicated that it supported OA and would be including an OA requirement for the next, post-2014, REF (expected to take place around 2021). The final version of the HEFCE REF OA policy⁹ was published in August 2014 to be implemented for research accepted for publication from 1st April 2016. This was a major 'game-changer' for most UK HEIs as it would apply to such a large proportion of research publications, not just those funded by a particular funding agency. Publication of the HEFCE REF OA policy prompted much feedback, mainly around precise details of procedures and interpretation. Policy adjustments and clarifications (FAQs) were published in July 2015.

In October 2014 the Wellcome Trust joined with other charities to launch COAF (Charity Open Access Fund)¹⁰ for a two-year pilot. The charities that form COAF award block grants to some institutions to cover article processing charges (APCs) for OA publication of the research they fund.

The downside of these policies is, although they aim in essence to be simple, in practice, after adding numerous clarifications and definitions, answers to queries, details of what is and is not eligible and compliant, the result is multiple lists of instructions, scattered over a number of web pages, documents, and even emails. This makes it complex for practitioners and HEI advisors to understand the multiple policies – never mind the academics. It also results in a massively complex administrative challenge for HEIs to ensure awareness, payment, deposit, compliance and systems and staff to run the procedures.

⁵ Government response. Accessed September 1, 2016. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/letter-to-dame-janet-finch-on-the-government-response-to-the-finch-group-report-accessibility-sustainability-excellence-how-to-expand-access-to-research-publications>

⁶ Government announcement. *Government invests £10 million to help universities move to open access*. Accessed September 12, 2016. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-invests-10-million-to-help-universities-move-to-open-access>

⁷ RCUK block grants. Accessed September 1, 2016. <http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/media/news/121108/>

⁸ HEFCE (Higher Education Funding Council for England) REF (Research Excellence Framework) is a regular exercise for assessing the quality and impact of research in UK HEIs, and which governs a significant proportion of central government funding allocated to universities.

⁹ HEFCE. Policy for open access in the post-2014 Research Excellence Framework (HEFCE 2014/07, updated July 2015) Available at <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/rsrch/oa/Policy/> Accessed September 12, 2016

¹⁰ COAF (Charity Open Access Fund). Accessed September 12, 2016 <https://wellcome.ac.uk/funding/managing-grant/charity-open-access-fund>

A slew of major government and other reports in late 2015 and early 2016 (see Table 1), together with the Government comprehensive spending review of November 2015¹¹ all had a bearing on the direction of national UK OA policies, funding and requirements.

The key date of 1st April 2016 was a major milestone for most HEIs when the critical HEFCE REF OA policy became active, and HEIs had to ensure all eligible items would be compliant for next REF (expected to be around 2021).

Given the close coupling of compliance with major funders' OA policies and the risk of non-compliance on future funding, OA in the UK is inextricably associated with funding and compliance. OA is frequently viewed as a compliance activity, rather than as a 'good thing' in its own right.

Table 1: UK national OA policy timeline

Year	Policy, report or other event
2012	12 June 2012: <i>Finch Report. 'Accessibility, sustainability, excellence: how to expand access to research Publications.'</i>
	June 2012: Wellcome Trust OA policy reinforced
	16 July 2012: BIS – Government response
	July 2012: RCUK new OA policy
	7 Sept 2012: BIS – pump priming £10M
	8 Nov 2012: RCUK block grants announced
2013	1 April 2013: RCUK OA policy implemented
	July 2013: HEFCE Post-2014 REF OA consultation
2014	March 2014: REF OA policy published
	Oct 2014: COAF (Charity Open Access Fund) OA policy & fund
2015	[1 May 2015: EPSRC research data policy implemented]
	July 2015: REF OA updated policy published
	July 2015: The metric tide Report [Wilsdon for HEFCE]
	Aug 2015: UUK Report – Monitoring the transition to OA
	Nov 2015: Review of Research Councils [Nurse for BIS]
2016	Feb 2016: <i>Tickell Report</i> – OA to research publications
	1 April 2016: REF OA came into effect
	July 2016: <i>Stern</i> review of university research funding published [BIS]

KEY: Blue = Report

Green = Policy

Yellow = funding

Major funders' OA policy key points

Key points of the main UK research funders' OA policies are as follows:

Wellcome Trust, COAF, RCUK

- [RCUK] The transition to OA is described as a 'journey' rather than an 'event.'
- Applies to 'Research papers' i.e. journal articles and conference papers
- Preference for 'gold' route to OA (immediate OA on publication provided by publisher, usually on payment of an APC)
- A block grant (or similar) is provided by the funder to a number of HEIs to pay APCs
- The medical-focused funders require deposit in EurPMC¹²

¹¹ UK HM Government Spending Review and Autumn Statement 2015 <https://www.gov.uk/government/topical-events/autumn-statement-and-spending-review-2015> Accessed September 12, 2016

¹² Europe PubMedCentral <https://europepmc.org/> Accessed September 12, 2016

- A Creative Commons¹³ CC-BY licence should be applied to publications
- Respect publishers' embargoes
- RCUK Maximum embargoes of 6 or 12 months (working towards universal 6 months but with flexibility for embargoes of 12 (science & medicine) or 24 months (social sciences & humanities) during transition period. 6 months maximum for biomedicine. Wellcome Trust 6 months maximum.

HEFCE REF OA Policy

- Applies to journal articles and conference papers (with ISSNs)
- Applies to papers accepted from 1st April 2016 that will be submitted to the next REF
- Focus on 'Green' route to OA
- No additional funding provided *"Institutions can achieve full compliance without incurring any additional publications costs through article processing charges."*
- Deposit in an institutional repository (IR) within 3 months of acceptance and made OA within 1 month of deposit
- Until 1st April 2017 it is possible to deposit in IR up to 3 months from publication
- No licence specified
- Maximum embargoes of 12 (science & medicine) or 24 months (social sciences & humanities)
- Respect publishers' embargoes

Response 1: HEIs

HEIs are making considerable efforts to support their researchers towards compliance with funders' OA policies. Many HEIs have adopted internal local OA policies, but at the time of writing, most are focused on ensuring compliance with funders' OA policies. OA activities require close collaboration between separate units such as central research offices, libraries, and IT Services. Senior colleagues such as Pro-vice Chancellors and members of Research Committees are often actively involved to lead and oversee OA implementation. Major communications activities have been implemented to inform, guide and engage researchers. For some researchers, a major culture change is underway.

In many HEIs, processes have been adopted to enable easy compliance by researchers, to remove the administrative burden, and to ease the time pressure on academics. This is particularly necessary with the confusion resulting from multiple policies applying to a single item, coupled with the complexity of publishing permissions imposed by publishers. Design and implementation of OA processes and procedures have also required training and appointment (or re-deployment) of staff to support them. This includes receiving and processing deposits into the institutional repository (IR), setting embargoes from publication date, APC payment processing, and compiling engagement and audit reports in addition to communications activities.

Response 2: UK national and other bodies

A number of tools and services are either available or are in development to support UK HEIs, both in running OA services and in gathering business information for strategic planning. The Jisc¹⁴ is a major actor in this area. Jisc tools and services include:

- Negotiating national deals and consortia, for example for APC offsetting
- Development of a reporting template for monitoring OA costs nationally across HEIs (also used by RCUK for its compliance reporting)
- Provision of SHERPA FACT & SHERPA REF (Beta) for publishers' policies information
- Monitor (UK & Local) to manage APC payments [expected Aug 2016]

¹³ Creative Commons <https://creativecommons.org/> Accessed September 12, 2016

¹⁴ Jisc open access services and support. <https://www.jisc.ac.uk/content/open-access> [Accessed September 14, 2016]

- Publications Router aggregator for automated repository population [expected Aug 2016]
- CORE (Connecting repositories) content aggregator
- Documents such as Desiderata for Publishers and principles for offsetting agreements for OA publishing¹⁵
- Manage the UK ORCID consortium¹⁶ membership
- OA good practice information

Other organizations involved with OA related tools and services include Crossref¹⁷ which announced that it will be possible to assign DOIs at acceptance (rather than waiting for publication) (expected August 2016), and Edina that developed the RIOXX metadata profile for RCUK (and REF)¹⁸

Many publishers have changed or are developing new services in response to the increased emphasis on OA. A mixture of transitional APC deals and offsetting models have been launched, of varying complexity and value. Some embargo periods have been amended (not always shorter), with some publishers adding to the complexity by offering a selection of embargo periods depending on the nationality or funder. Some such as OUP will be offering DOIs at acceptance, which will greatly assist UK HEIs (and therefore authors). There have been a number of acquisitions and takeovers of research focused organisations related to OA such as the Elsevier acquisition of SSRN and Mendeley.

CRIS (Current Research Information Services), or CRIS-like providers such as Symplectic Ltd¹⁹, have developed tools and modules for the new environment such as Symplectic Elements OA settings and Open Access Monitor (not to be confused with Jisc Monitor).

Where to from here?

The UK OA landscape is in a state of flux with many players attempting to influence the direction of travel, together with ongoing technical and standards development. This means many researchers are being bombarded with complex and conflicting instructions from their funders and publishers, whilst their local institutions attempt to offer advice and support services. As stated above, in the UK OA is in danger of becoming a tangled web of compliance with new additional costs, rather than a vehicle to transform traditional models of research dissemination.

During the course of 2016 the UK government and political environment have experienced major events resulting in changes in government departments and their leaders. As a result of the 'Nurse' review of the research councils, a new body is being set up to replace the seven research councils, Innovate UK and the knowledge exchange functions of the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). The new body is UKRI (UK Research and Innovation)²⁰. Despite these major changes, it is understood that the new OA requirement for the next REF and the funding council's commitment to OA will remain. RCUK is in the process of setting up a new OA Practitioner Group, including representatives of HEIs, to advise on OA matters, and that will have its inaugural meeting in October 2016. UUK also has an advisory group "to support the move

¹⁵ Jisc desiderata for publishers <https://scholarlycommunications.jiscinvolve.org/wp/2015/03/26/how-publishers-might-help-universities-implement-oa/> and principles for offsetting <https://www.jisc.ac.uk/blog/offsetting-agreements-for-open-access-publishing-13-apr-2015> Accessed September 13, 2016.

¹⁶ Jisc. UK ORCID consortium membership <https://www.jisc.ac.uk/orcid> Accessed September 13, 2016

¹⁷ Crossref <http://blog.crossref.org/2016/05/members-will-soon-be-able-to-assign-crossref-dois-to-preprints.html>

¹⁸ RIOXX metadata profile <http://riox.net/>

¹⁹ Symplectic Ltd. <http://symplectic.co.uk/> Accessed September 13, 2016

²⁰ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/527803/bis-16-291-ukri-case-for-creation.pdf

towards open access ... the Universities UK Open Access Coordination Group, which brings together representatives from across the scholarly process, including research producers, funders and publishers, to coordinate and monitor progress.”²¹

Universities are currently preparing their 2015/16 OA compliance reports for RCUK. Together with the outcomes of the Government spending review, the results will be used to decide the next tranche of funding (block grants) for HEIs to support RCUK OA publication. It should be noted that some HEIs, particularly smaller institutions, do not receive block grants to cover RCUK APCs. Nor do some have an IR.

HEFCE has instituted additional temporary exceptions to its OA policy in recognition that technical systems are not yet mature enough to meet its original requirements. The original stipulation that papers should be deposited within 3 months of acceptance has been amended until April 2017 to allow papers to be deposited within 3 months of publication. This policy will be reassessed and reviewed to reflect improvements or otherwise in the infrastructure.

All HEIs are working to implement the various conflicting policies. Some smaller institutions encounter difficulties because they may not be in receipt of block grants to support OA and/or may not have the resources or size to warrant offering an institutional repository. Large, research-intensive institutions have a different challenge of working at scale and managing many thousands of researchers and their publications.

The matter of cost and future sustainability of OA is taxing most institutions. Most HEIs are fully supportive of OA to increase the visibility, impact and readership of research outputs, but are having to tackle the problem of costs in addition to existing subscriptions and for new staff responsibilities (although some costs are being supported by block grants). At current prices most institutions could not afford to pay APCs for all the articles produced by their researchers. As a result, many HEIs have a preference for the ‘green’ route to OA in their OA policies.

The Wellcome Trust is closely monitoring compliance with its OA policy by both researchers and publishers. The trust has acted in response to some concerns of some publishers over adherence to its requirements by the planned launch of a new online publishing platform, in addition to supporting the journal eLife, Wellcome Open Research²².

As this landscape evolves, all the major stakeholders are monitoring costs (such as total cost of publishing, and the impact of hybrid OA), administrative burden, benefits, and emerging areas of difficulty (such as dealing with international co-authors). Jisc plays a key role in collating and interpreting national data.

This article has focused on UK based funders, but additionally, the EC (European Commission) Horizon 2020²³ and ERA (European Research Area)²⁴ have been keen proponents of OA, and have imposed OA requirements for those UK researchers awarded European research funding. The future of collaborations with EU research partners, brought about by the recent UK EU referendum, are as yet unknown.

²¹ UUK OA advisory group <http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/Pages/research-policy.aspx> Accessed September 13, 2016

²² Wellcome Open Research <https://wellcome.ac.uk/news/why-were-launching-new-publishing-platform> Accessed September 13, 2016

²³ EC Horizon 2020 <https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/horizon2020/en/h2020-section/open-science-open-access> Accessed September 13, 2016

²⁴ ERA access to knowledge http://ec.europa.eu/research/era/index_en.htm Accessed September 13, 2016

Automation is critical to enabling OA to work at scale as an efficient and effective well-oiled machine. Too many of the processes are currently manual. There is too much inaccuracy and duplication caused by the inability to exchange data efficiently. Key factors to resolve this problem include unique identifiers for authors (such as ORCIDs), identifiers for publications (such as DOIs) at acceptance, for funders (such as FundREF), and for institutions. In the UK there are moves afoot to further some of these initiatives such as the UK-ORCID consortium, the launch of a CASRAI UK chapter²⁵ to inform discussions, and bodies such as Jisc, HEFCE and RCUK working with publishers and institutions. Further work to explore how subject and institutional repositories can interoperate would be of benefit. Difficulties are not always technical – sometimes policy decisions are the stumbling block.

Non-technical considerations are also under discussion within HEIs, including control of research outputs and business information. This includes raising awareness and understanding with authors of their rights and permissions, control of access to research, opportunities with new publishing models, the roles of social networks, and opening up the discussion around the benefits of OA with researchers in disciplines not traditionally associated with OA. Some researchers are becoming more aware of the cost of publishing now that they interact with the payment process with APCs. It is unclear whether this will have an effect on researcher publishing practice. These matters are being discussed at a national level within the context of OA compliance.

Future funding to support OA is critical. Costs of OA including total cost of publishing, APCs, publisher's deals and memberships have to be balanced with existing subscriptions and the staff to process and support a dual system.

Conclusions

The OA environment in the UK is changing markedly and rapidly. There has been a significant effect of UK funder OA policies in recent years. At my own university, the University of Oxford, we have seen a 10-fold increase in deposits to the institutional repository in the last year, as well as a huge increase in applications for APCs from the block grants received by the university. However, there is a general urgent need for increased automation to support greater accuracy and efficiency. Such development needs input from, and will ultimately benefit, the major players: researchers, universities, funders and publishers. It also requires consultation with support providers such as Jisc, and infrastructure suppliers. Sustainable funding, whether new funding streams or re-allocation from existing activities, needs to be addressed, with efforts to drive down costs. The reasons behind the push for OA needs discussion with researchers, some of whom currently view OA as an additional burden. The importance placed on OA needs to be weighted towards the benefits of OA within a less compliance dominated environment. There is still a long way to go, but reflecting on the last 4 years, the UK has made enormous strides towards widespread OA.

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²⁵ CASRAI UK Chapter <http://casrai.org/uk> Accessed September 13, 2016