

An Open Access Payments Service for the University of Oxford

Facilitating Open Access through funder block grants

Introduction

The University of Oxford¹ receives a small number of funder block grants each year to support Open Access (OA). These block grants help support: Read & Publish deals (R&P), infrastructure and staffing required in the support of OA, diamond and mission-lead OA schemes, and OA Payments in the form of article processing charges (APCs)² or, more recently, book processing charges (BPCs)³.

The decisions of how these funder block grants are spent is shared across the University of Oxford, but the administration processes are managed by the Bodleian Libraries⁴.

Administration processes can be complex and require constant management of the allocation of funding where it is necessary to manage ‘split’ invoice payment, publisher ‘discounts’, R&P, OA Payments, and reporting - internally and externally – regarding spend.

As such the Bodleian Libraries’ teams have developed an application to assist with the management of these funds, covering aspects of OA Payment requests (APCs and BPCS), processing of applications, monitoring spend, and reporting.

OA Payment processes - past

The Open Access Collections team facilitates OA Payment applications within the Bodleian Libraries. The team works closely with other colleagues in the Bodleian Libraries and the University of Oxford, in particular Heads of Subject Area Libraries, Open Scholarship Support, and Finance Administration / Accounts.

The historic management of OA Payments by the OA Collections team has involved the administration of several spreadsheets to record and track data. This has included separate spreadsheets for each block grant administered – for the University of Oxford four core block grants are received and managed by the OA Payments team (UK Research and

¹ [University of Oxford](#)

² [Glossary | Open Access Oxford](#)

³ [Glossary | Open Access Oxford](#)

⁴ [Home | Bodleian Libraries \(ox.ac.uk\)](#)

Innovation (UKRI)⁵, Wellcome Trust⁶, Cancer Research UK (CRUK)⁷, British Heart Foundation (BHF)⁸, R&P deals, and a ‘master’ list of OA payments.

Additional spreadsheets have been maintained or produced semi-regularly for reporting internally to university groups, as well as back to the funding bodies.

This has been a far from optimal situation for managing this data as it is manually intensive to maintain. It has also meant that much of the data has been restricted to a few people to access or edit, to ensure that the risk of human error is reduced.

The application process for Oxford academics has also been less than optimal with the online application forms being sometimes difficult to locate on websites, sometimes saved by applicants and therefore not the correct version when received, lacking control to fields and information collected, and often sent to individual email addresses rather than the dedicated Open Access Payments team channel for communication.

Whilst improvements have been made to these processes over the years of maintaining this manual process it has been clear that a new mechanism has been required.

Jisc Monitor

The Bodleian Libraries have explored different tools to assist with the processing of OA Payments. The most prominent of these has been Jisc Monitor⁹. The OA Collections team trialed Jisc Monitor, working by additionally adding content to Jisc Monitor whilst maintaining the separate spreadsheet processes.

This was done over many months, regularly meeting with Jisc to suggest improvements, provide feedback and work through bugs. However, it was determined that for the University of Oxford Jisc Monitor would not be able to provide the solution required.

[It now transpires from recent communications that Jisc Monitor will be ‘shutting down’, which will leave many who have been able to use the service without a platform to continue to manage the OA Payment processes¹⁰]

⁵ [UKRI – UK Research and Innovation](#)

⁶ [Home | Wellcome](#)

⁷ <https://www.cancerresearchuk.org/>

⁸ [Welcome to British Heart Foundation - BHF](#)

⁹ [Monitor UK Welcome \(jisc.ac.uk\)](#)

¹⁰ see announcement - <https://www.jisc.ac.uk/monitor-local>

OA Payment processes – current

To address the needs of managing OA Payments at the University of Oxford, the Bodleian Libraries have developed an internal online database.

The tool serves two main purposes. Firstly, it provides an easy-to-use interface for researchers to make funding applications. This interface can be accessed at <https://apc.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/> (restricted to University of Oxford Single Sign-On (SSO)).

The tool streamlines the application process, making it more efficient for researchers to request funding. For example, when logging in by SSO person details are automatically added to the application form.

Secondly, the tool offers a dashboard for OA Payments administrators to process these applications. This eliminates the dependence on multiple spreadsheets and allows administrators to efficiently handle the applications. The dashboard provides a centralised location for managing the block grant funds and read-and-publish deals through a multi-tabbed interface for applications; tracking invoice payments, re-imbursements, publication information, licensing, and fund balance.

Online application form

The form has been designed to be user-friendly, with responsive features and auto-complete capabilities. The form also ensures that the correct information is collected, and that funding eligibility is clear at the start to avoid incorrect applications being made.

New APC Request Cancel

Choose your funder/s and the grant/s associated:
Please note, if your funder does not appear, it is not eligible for a block grant funding from the University.

Funder: Select funder Grant Number:

Remove Grant Add Grant

Confirm Eligibility

☐ Please check this box to confirm that you are the grant holder/s, or persons with permission to apply on their behalf. Kindly note that this is a request for funding, and it does not guarantee your work will be covered. Your Open Access payment request will be processed shortly:

☐ Please check this box, if the corresponding author is an academic at the University of Oxford.

Work Information

Article Type: Select work type

Snapshot of the initial form upon entry to the application process

In the first section of the form the applicant selects which of the funder block grants they are applying for funds – this allows for multiple to be selected – on selection of the funder the applicant is presented with the appropriate criteria for eligibility and any specific information on actions that they need to take, such as inclusion of a statement in their Author Accepted Manuscript (AAM)¹¹.

New APC Request Cancel

Choose your funder/s and the grant/s associated:
Please note, if your funder does not appear, it is not eligible for a block grant funding from the University.

Funder: UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) Grant Number:

Remove Grant Add Grant

Confirm UKRI Statement

For UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) funded works, please confirm you have included the following **recommended statement** within the work:

This research was funded in whole, or in part, by the UKRI [Grant number]. For the purpose of Open Access, the author has applied a CC BY public copyright licence to any Author Accepted Manuscript version arising from this submission.

☐ Confirm you have included the recommended statement.

¹¹ [Glossary | Open Access Oxford](#)

Snapshot of the responsiveness of the form after funder selection – in this instance asking for further confirmation of the UKRI statement on rights retention

The form continues to collect information from the applicant about the work within the application, providing information with regards to any specific licence that may need to be applied, and providing the applicant with the opportunity to attach any relevant files, such as an acceptance letter, email or invoice.

Work Information

Article Type:

Select work type

Authors can apply for OAP, if the work has been accepted for publication:
☐ Please check this box, if this work has been accepted for publication.

Article Title:

Licence:

Select work licence

By completing this application for funding you acknowledge that the funder mandated CC BY licence will be applied. Note that for some CC BY-NC-ND may be applied. This must be confirmed with the funder before submission. If this is the case, please select the appropriate option and provide details.

Applicant Information

Applicant Name:

Jason Partridge

Please use the name of the author if you are applying for someone else.

Applicant Email:

jason.partridge@bodleian.ox.ac.uk

Please use the address you would like further correspondence sent to.

Applicant Type:

Non-academic/research staff

Institution:

University of Oxford

Attachments

Files

Choose files No file chosen

Only PDF, JPG, JPEG, PNG files are accepted

Save Request

Further information can be collected, and files uploaded

Once submitted, notifications are generated for both the applicant and the administration team. Applications are delivered to the OA Payments team shared mailbox managed within

Request Tracker (RT)¹² which provides a reference number and other processing functionality. Researchers can see information about the status of their funding applications, including any updates or additional documentation required via a ‘user dashboard’.

Requests Dashboard						
Request ID	Request Type	Title	Date submitted	Submitted by	Status ⓘ	Action
OAP_00000025	BPC	A test BPC for demonstration purposes	15-12-2023 09:45 AM	jason.partridge@bodleian.ox.ac.uk	New	Save PDF
OAP_00000024	APC	A test item for demonstration purposes	15-12-2023 09:43 AM	jason.partridge@bodleian.ox.ac.uk	New	Save PDF

A dashboard showing the number of and progress of applications

This streamlined communication process not only saves time but also reduces the potential for miscommunication or misunderstandings. Further aspects of the user dashboard are being considered regarding the UKRI two stage process for open monograph processes.

Administration dashboard

An administration dashboard has been implemented to replace the spreadsheets previously used by the OA Payments team. This dashboard streamlines workflows and improves the efficiency of processing and recording applications.

The dashboard provides the OA Payments team with an overview of applications and their status. Applications can be limited in the dashboard to show by ‘type’ (APC / BPC) and ‘status’, e.g. “New”, “Working”, “Approved”, “Complete”.

Dashboard

APC

All

New

Working

Completed

BPC

All

Export

All

Requests Dashboard

Status

Search for requests

Search

Request ID	Request Type	Title	Date submitted	Submitted by	Status	Action
OAP_00000029	BPC	Book Chapter test for demonstration 2	15-12-2023 10:45 AM	luke.taylor@bodleian.ox.ac.uk	New	Save PDF Edit
OAP_00000028	APC	CRUK test object for demonstration	15-12-2023 09:57 AM	luke.taylor@bodleian.ox.ac.uk	New	Save PDF Edit
OAP_00000027	BPC	article	15-12-2023 09:56 AM	luke.taylor@bodleian.ox.ac.uk	Working	Save PDF Edit
OAP_00000026	APC	Test for demonstration purposes - WT	15-12-2023 09:53 AM	jason.partridge@bodleian.ox.ac.uk	Approved	Save PDF Edit
OAP_00000025	BPC	A test BPC for demonstration purposes	15-12-2023 09:45 AM	jason.partridge@bodleian.ox.ac.uk	New	Save PDF Edit
OAP_00000024	APC	A test item for demonstration purposes	15-12-2023 09:43 AM	jason.partridge@bodleian.ox.ac.uk	New	Save PDF Edit

Dashboard overview of applications for funding

Each application can then be selected for editing and processing. After selecting an application, this presents the administrator with eight tabs covering the key aspects of an

¹² [Request Tracker... So much more than a help desk — Best Practical Solutions](#)

application and the processing workflow: ‘Grant’ information, ‘Work’ details, ‘Eligibility’ for funding, ‘Payments’ (invoice information), ‘Attachments’ to the application, ‘Applicant’ details.

The screenshot shows a web application interface for processing an application. At the top, there's a header bar with the text "Request: OAP_00000024" on the left and two buttons, "Edit" and "Dashboard", on the right. Below the header is a navigation bar with tabs: "Grants", "Work", "Eligibility", "Payments", "Attachments", "Applicant", "User", and "Activity Log". The "Grants" tab is currently selected. The main content area is divided into two sections. The first section is titled "Grant: 1" and contains a table with the following data:

Funder:	UK Research and Innovation (UKRI)
Funder Identifier:	http://data.crossref.org/fundingdata/funder/10.13039/100014013
Grant Number:	123456
End date of UKRI funding:	
Grant Name:	
Grant Identifier:	

The second section is titled "Notes:" and contains a table with the following data:

Checkback Date:	
Grant Information Completed?:	No
APC Completed?:	No

Administration view for processing an application

As each application is worked on the administrator can complete any additional information required for reporting or processing the application, and update the status of the application, add notes, and indicate if the application requires a ‘checkback’, such as to check for updates to a licence or publication details (e.g. a Digital Object Identifier (DOI)). Updates to the status of the application are reflected in the applicant’s dashboard view.

The screenshot shows a web application interface for updating an application. It features a "Status" dropdown menu with "New" selected. Below this is a "Notes:" section with a text input field. There are two checkboxes: "Grant Information Completed?" and "APC Completed?". Below these is a "Checkback Date:" section with a date input field showing "dd/mm/yyyy" and a calendar icon. At the bottom, there is a "Save Request" button.

Administrators can update status and add notes

The dashboard also allows for an export function. This provides the administration team with a CSV file of all the applications made, fields and status. This function is available to allow for manipulation of data for reports whilst further work is completed in this area – it is the intent that set reports will be defined in the system for generation to specific requests, such as yearly reporting on funder block grant spend.

OA Payment processes – future

The OA Payments application is currently in use for APC requests, and as of 1st January 2024 available for BPC stage 1 requests to UKRI funding. For APCs this has significantly reduced the amount of spreadsheet work required for the administration of these charges. However, some further functionality is set for release soon, or is in development, such as the addition of UKRI open monograph stage 2 management processes.

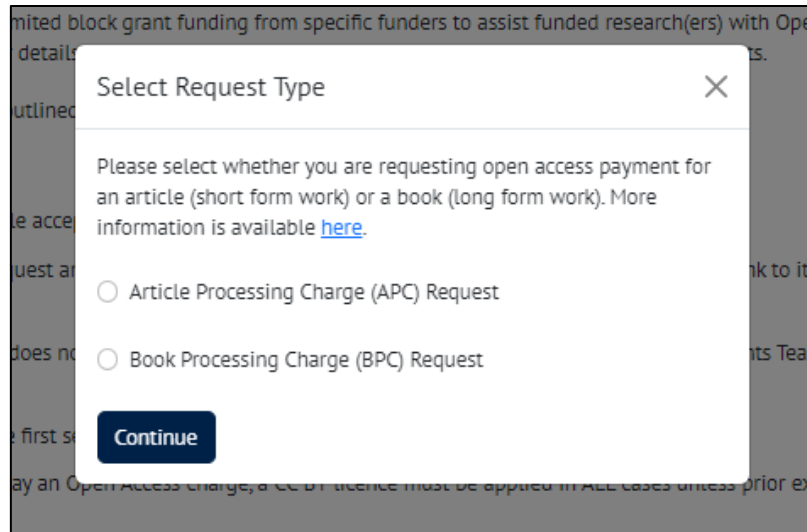
Responsiveness to growth - BPCs

The system has been designed with scalability in mind. It can accommodate the increasing volume of funding applications and adapt to evolving funding policies and requirements. This scalability ensures that the solution remains effective and efficient, even as the demand for Open Access funding changes.

The application has been enhanced to include information about BPCs (or long form publication charges). This expansion was implemented in direct response to the policy set by UKRI regarding the inclusion and recognition of monographs and book chapters in open access funding requirements.

In its initial launch the BPC form covers the ‘First stage’ applications made to the UKRI funding. The format of the application follows the UKRI fields and guidance released as part of the policy requirements.

Applicants coming to the OA Payments application are prompted at the point of a new request to select what they are applying for funding to cover, before being taken to the appropriate form.



A pop-up menu appears to users to select what they are applying to funding for

By incorporating BPCs into the system, the University of Oxford ensures that researchers and administrators can easily manage and track both APCs and BPCs in a unified and efficient manner. This aligns with UKRI's goals of fostering greater openness and accessibility in scholarly publishing across various formats.

The inclusion of BPCs in the online database also reflects the University of Oxford's commitment to staying up to date with changing policies and providing researchers with a comprehensive tool to manage their publishing costs effectively. It demonstrates the adaptability and responsiveness of the university in meeting the evolving needs of the scholarly community.

Reporting

In addition to the development of the user interface and administration dashboard, several other features are required to enhance the management of Open Access funding at the University of Oxford. One important component is the integration of a comprehensive reporting system. The new solution in development aims to allow for easy tracking and reporting of OA payment charges and other funding allocations.

Currently the application allows for a CSV to be exported of all application data. The CSV can then be filtered and manipulated manually for reporting purposes by the administration team. An enhanced reporting mechanism within the application will allow administrators to select a specific report to be generated with some of the manual manipulation already completed by the system, or to export a pre-formatted summary report with tables and graphs.

This will enable the administration team to generate accurate and up-to-date reports on fund usage, expenditure, and compliance with funding mandates with ease, and assist with a more robust reporting system, providing valuable insights into the distribution and utilisation of funds across different University of Oxford departments, research disciplines, and funding bodies.

To ensure transparency and accountability, the system will also include robust audit trails. This means that every action and decision related to funding applications and allocations is recorded and can be easily traced back within the history of a request. This feature will help provide a clear overview of the entire funding process – per application - ensuring a thorough and accountable management system.

Further reporting

It is the desire to further be able to expose the report information via API (Application Programming Interface) to internal targets, such as the Symplectic Elements (SE) Reporting Database. This would allow the OA Payments information to supplement OA reporting within and generated by SE, and assist compliance with funding bodies policy or assessment activities, such as the REF (Research Excellence Framework).

Conclusion

By leveraging technology and automation with the implementation of an online OA Payments application, the administration team can focus on supporting researchers and advancing the goals of Open Access, while maintaining accurate records and ensuring compliance with funding regulations – without the burden of heavily manual reliant processes.

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ABSTRACT

The University of Oxford supports Open Access, and the Bodleian Libraries play a significant role in managing block grant funding for various funding bodies, including UKRI, Wellcome Trust, CRUK, and BHF. However, the administration of these funds, as well as the reporting and tracking of article processing charges (APCs), has been handled using unreliable spreadsheets. Alternative solutions like Jisc Monitor have not met Oxford's complex requirements - Jisc Monitor is also set to cease as a service.

To address the challenges of managing open access payments, the Bodleian Libraries have developed an in-house solution to streamline the application and administration process for OA funds. A new interface has been created at <https://apc.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/> that allows Oxford researchers to quickly and easily apply for funding. The new system has also been enhanced to include book processing charges (BPCs) in response to new funding requirements set by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI).

This paper details some of the challenges faced and the developing solution.