
JISC COLLECTIONS OPEN ACCESS FEES
PROJECT: FINAL REPORT
SUBMITTED TO OAIG SEP 2011

Commissioned by the

UK Open Access Implementation Group



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INTRODUCTION

Between 2009 and 2011, JISC Collections has undertaken three separate, yet linked, projects relating to the emergence of gold open access as an alternative business model for scholarly journals. This work, funded by JISC, has all been based on the situation in the UK and, in contrast to many of the more strategically focused studies that have taken place in this area over the last five years, has a very practical focus and approach, making recommendations designed to help all stakeholders manage their responsibilities in a more transparent and joined-up fashion. This particular project has been prepared for JISC's Open Access Implementation Group (OAIG).

The work in 2009, culminating in the internal report Scoping Study regarding the administration of open access article fees on behalf of UK Higher Education, focused very much on the situation within UK universities regarding the management and administration of publishers' article-processing charges.

It was prompted by evidence which suggested that administration and management of OA article-processing charges varied considerably amongst institutions and a hypothesis that a more centralised and streamlined approach could help contribute to a greater take-up of the gold OA model.

The study revealed that less than 15% of institutions had established a central fund to enable academics to pay OA article-processing charges. Just over a third of institutions had created a centralised administration for this activity and, where it existed, in over two thirds of cases, the university library fulfilled this role.

The study also attempted to address transparency issues based on concerns expressed by librarians that they are potentially paying twice, via subscription and OA charges, and the fact that it was not easy to locate articles published under the OA model. Out of this emerged the idea of a central database that recorded all articles funded in the UK.

As a licensing organisation, JISC Collections was already trying to address the above issue via its negotiations with publishers and clauses in its model licence, but with limited success at this time.

In 2010, a second project was initiated, designed to test the feasibility of building and populating the central database of funded articles envisaged and articulated in the work the year before. This project aimed to create a database of all OA articles (funded by UK bodies and published by NESLi2 publishers), using information supplied by publishers, funders and UK HE Institutions. 22 institutions contributed data which covered OA articles from NESLi2 publishers. 20 of the 22 simply provided the data they had captured for Wellcome-funded articles.

The project also asked NESLi2 publishers to provide their data, and 5 responded. The responses from publishers varied considerably in terms of the quality and quantity of information provided. A Microsoft Access database has been created and populated and currently contains over 600 articles. Additionally, it was envisaged that the data gathered could be used in NESLi2 negotiations to progress discussions about the transparency and level of OA article-processing fees and to help ensure that JISC Collections is monitoring and seeking to address the potential “double dipping” concerns expressed by librarians, as part of the negotiation and licensing process. The data gathered could also be used to monitor developments and to identify and share good practice among HEIs, publishers and funders.

PHASE 3

The most recent project began in March 2011. The focus of this third phase was around the so-called hybrid model of OA publishing and the extent to which this can be seen as an optional model offered by publishers or a transitional one as part of the move away from subscription-based to fully Gold OA.

It began with a series of in-depth one-to-one interviews with stakeholders within the Research Councils, other funding bodies, publishers and representatives from universities including librarians, institutional repository managers and research management. Interviewees were invited to answer a series of questions about the principles of the hybrid journal model, their attitudes towards it, the management of open-access fees at their organisation and their policy. Naturally in the course of the interviews many of the areas that the 2009 study addressed around administration and management of the OA model were re-visited.

The list of organisations interviewed is available at the end of this report. The results of the interviews were used to develop a workshop for stakeholders to ensure that presentations and discussions were focused on the key issues identified in the interviews. The workshop was held in May 2011 and was the final part of the project.

SUMMARY OF PHASE 3 FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. CURRENT CONTEXT

1.1 Compared with 2009 when the first of these three projects was initiated there is now a sense from publishers, librarians and funders that open access as a business model for scholarly publishing is here to stay. On the publisher side, this can be characterised in some areas as a sea change, with evidence of new Gold OA journals being launched and a shift in attitude from one of cynicism and hostility in some quarters to one of pushing the agenda back to funders and their financial support for OA publishing.

1.2 A recent paper by Bo-Christer Bjork, published in June 2011, reported an average annual growth rate since 2000 of 18% for the number of OA journals and 30% for the number of articles. The paper also suggests that the share of articles in OA journals, of all peer-reviewed journal articles, has reached 7.7%.

1.3 Another significant development has been the emergence of the “mega journals”, following in the wake of PLoS One. In June 2011 the Howard Hughes Medical Institute, the Max Planck Society and the Wellcome Trust announced that they are to support a new, top-tier, open-access journal for biomedical and life-sciences research. Preparations are also underway to make SCOAP₃ a reality by transitioning a number of high-energy physics journals to Gold OA.

1.4 In the context of the three projects undertaken by JISC Collections, there is a recognition that scholarly communication and, by implication, scholarly publishing are global phenomena and that for significant change to take place the various communities will need to move forward together and in a coordinated way. As one delegate at the end-of-project workshop put it:

“The UK contributes around 8% of the scholarly output, so if UK research were to become open access, it would have to pay to publish its own research and also to licence the content under the traditional subscription model from the rest of the world.”

However, there is a recognition that the advantages to authors of having their work published under an open-access model is not dependent on this global shift and that all communities will have this hurdle to overcome and this transition to manage.

1.5 Various studies have indicated the challenges of this so-called transition phase and it is not within the remit of this study to try to provide industrial-scale, global solutions. Instead, drawing on feedback gained from interviews and discussions that took place at the workshop, it endeavours to provide some practical recommendations and proposed next steps that will enable one geographic region to play its part more effectively in the wider movement.

2. KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE PHASE 3 PROJECT

ISSUES RELATING TO FUNDERS AND FUNDING

2.1 From interviews with the principle stakeholders and from feedback at the workshop, it is clear that lack of awareness of funding for OA article-processing charges and difficulties in accessing the funding are the main barriers in the UK to authors taking up this option.

2.2 Funders, other than those already actively engaged with this process, need to become involved by making funds readily available and by creating clear, consistent, implementable and unambiguous mandates.

2.3 The process of paying OA article-processing charges as part of indirect costs is not perceived to be efficient, effective or useful. Funders need to consider alternative approaches – such as those used by The Wellcome Trust or the British Heart Foundation, where clearly defined pots of money are made available – if they are to successfully fund, track and audit how and where their investment is being spent. A “one size fits all” model is not what is being proposed here; more that administrative rigour, clear process and transparency are necessary regardless of the size and profile of the funder.

2.4 Currently, because some authors do not have funding to publish or have not been made aware of how to obtain this funding, hybrid OA will remain a minority activity until such time as this situation is rectified.

2.5 It was not just publishers who made the case for change in this area. Librarians who were interviewed for this study argued that there is no scope for moving money around to other pots. They also stressed that universities have procedures in place to manage funds made available by the Wellcome Trust, so can be expected to manage other funds in a similar way.

ISSUES RELATING TO FUNDERS AND FUNDING

2.6 Research Council representatives who were interviewed for this study and those who attended the workshop made it clear that they do not want to manage any fund provided on behalf of each institution. Equally, they need to be satisfied that the money is protected, used only for OA article-processing charges and not subject to onerous bureaucracy on their side or for the authors.

“RCUK Executive Group reaffirms its long-standing position that authors choose where to place their research for publication. It is for authors’ institutions to decide whether they are prepared to use funds for any page charges or other publishing fees. Such funds could be part of an institution’s indirect costs under the full economic costing regime. RCUK Executive Group makes no judgement as to the most appropriate publishing model.”

2.7 The Research Councils also argue that there is still little uptake of OA options, even when they provide guidance. RCUK’s statement on this matter, as contained in their updated position statement on access to research outputs (June 2006), is revealing in this context:

RECOMMENDATIONS

There needs to be a more joined-up approach between the Research Councils, other funders and individual HEIs in terms of the way funds for OA article-processing fees are communicated and made available and, based on the responses from librarians interviewed for this study, this should start by addressing practical, workflow issues and the idea of putting policy into practice. A forum for discussions on the practical implementation of OA funding should be formed.

To increase awareness of the availability of funding for OA article-processing fees and to ensure that authors understand the process for claiming these funds, funders should revise the information provided on their websites and make clearer in proposal submission guidance and grant letters what process should be followed.

Funders, HEIs and HEFCE need to consider how the author proposal submission process that incorporates TRAC could be amended to make clear that an author is requesting OA funding and to help develop an audit trail.

ISSUES RELATING TO HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

2.8 Librarians continue to be frustrated by the convoluted processes involved in managing OA article payment charges, with the level of work disproportionate to the amount of activity.

2.9 According to librarians, there is still huge investment needed in educating academics in the nuances and procedures around OA publishing.

2.10 Lack of transparency from publishers is a major complaint from librarians. This relates in particular to the issue of locating OA articles easily on publisher web sites and in the area levels of fees applied.

2.11 There is specific frustration concerning the time delay between payment of an invoice and the relevant article being made available

2.12 Records relating to Wellcome-funded grants are generally well maintained, but there is very little knowledge or record-keeping relating to article-processing charges funded by other bodies and very little understanding of the level of this activity. This may be because the level of activity is still very small, but is more likely to be because the processes and resources are not in place to capture this activity.

2.13 OA policies from smaller publishers are still not as clear as they could be, which causes confusion and additional work.

2.14 In terms of the situation in HEIs, in most areas, little has changed since the first phase of this work in 2009.

RECOMMENDATION

Publishers and HEIs need to work more collaboratively to help educate and inform authors and an appropriate forum to enable this to happen needs to be devised.

3. PUBLISHERS AND TRANSPARENCY

3.1 Librarians who were interviewed and other stakeholders who attended the workshop are adamant that until there is financial transparency in the area of subscription and OA charges, the “double dipping” tag will not go away. It is important that this is removed from the debate and ceases to be a distraction, diverting everyone from more fundamental matters.

3.2 There is an acceptance that there may not be a simple, single formula to address this issue, but the onus is on publishers to provide the evidence; it is no longer acceptable simply to state that the levels of OA article publishing are so low that it is not worth doing.

3.3 Publishers claim that there are regulatory issues relating to transparency and that while they wish to be transparent with their customers, they do not want to be transparent to their competitors.

3.4 One librarian at the workshop sought transparency and more standardised pricing, seeking to understand how there can be so much variance in article-processing charges (a range from £800 to £6,000 was quoted). This has been a consistent theme dating back to the Phase 1 report in 2009, although it is now recognised that the solution isn't necessarily a simple and uniform one, involving potentially different business models, a variety of policies and practices adopted by publishers and the need for them to be transparently presented and packaged to funders and academics.

3.5 Appropriate metrics to help provide transparency were discussed at the workshop. Some publishers expressed the view that clauses in model licences relating to numbers of OA articles published are too simplistic and that they need to be set alongside other metrics such as the overall growth in published research and submissions in a given year.

3.6 It is not just financial transparency that is being sought by librarians. End users often find it difficult to locate articles available under OA. This difficulty is compounded by the hybrid model, which means that the same users may become confused when they discover that other articles within the same journal are subject to access-control methods linked to the subscription model.

PUBLISHERS AND TRANSPARENCY

RECOMMENDATIONS

Under the auspices of STM or ALPSP, publishers should collaborate with each other (and other stakeholders, including NISO, OAIG, funders and librarians) to agree on a more transparent and consistent way of revealing OA content on their websites and journal interfaces and to consider a standard symbol or mark to identify such content.

Just as standards have been developed for the reporting and presentation of usage statistics, the feasibility should be investigated of a body such as COUNTER establishing metrics for the reporting of articles published under different business models (fully OA, hybrid OA, subscription).

The work undertaken in Phase 2 should be built on by looking at ways in which the investment in time and money on the OA articles database can be continued, so that an accurate, up-to-date and comprehensive source, showing the extent of Gold OA publishing activity, can be made available to UK HEIs.

4. MANAGING THE TRANSITION

4.1 Publishers interviewed and attending the workshop argue that the debate about transition should not all be about them signalling that a journal is in “transition mode”, but also about funders providing a clear signal that the funding is present to support the move to Gold OA, putting in place robust management and administration, and communicating all of this to the appropriate stakeholders.

4.2 There is a general recognition that publishers and funders are going to work at a different pace in the transition to OA and, on the publishing side, that some journals will be able to flip over to the new model more easily than others.

4.3 Both publishers and funders are perceived to be poor communicators when it comes to spelling out their policies regarding a transition to OA. This leaves the other principal stakeholders – librarians and authors – confused and uncertain and contributes to poorly administered and inefficient systems.

4.4 SCOAP³ has illustrated the complexity and the issues involved in making a transition to Gold OA and the need for funders, librarians and publishers to work collaboratively if a sustainable transition is to be made. Innovation and initiative should not be stifled in this environment, but sustainability is likely to be more successful if a joined-up approach is used.

4.5 The coming together of HEFCE and Research Councils UK to help progress the transition is a sign of a more joined-up approach and greater commitment; they recognise that only by bringing all the stakeholders along together will a sustainable move be achieved. In the words of their joint statement:

“Research Councils UK and HEFCE have a shared commitment to maintaining and improving the capacity of the UK research base to undertake research activity of world-leading quality, and to ensuring that significant outputs from this activity are made available as widely as possible both within and beyond the research community. Open access to published research supports this commitment and, if widely implemented, can benefit the research base, higher education, and the UK economy and society more broadly. To achieve this, open access needs to be implemented with clear licensing agreements, sustainable business models, and working with the grain of established research cultures and practices.”

4.6 There is a feeling from the academic community that publishers introduced hybrid models and then hid them away, and that there is a need for publishers to take the lead in addressing this problem. On the other hand, publishers argue that they cannot commit to a transition until they know that funding bodies are in a position to pay the article-processing charges. As one publisher at the workshop commented:

“You can make yourself open and encourage it, but it has to be driven by demand”.

RECOMMENDATIONS

JISC, via OAIG, and other stakeholders, need to continue to take the lead in pushing the OA agenda in a constructive, evidence-based and consultative way both in the UK and internationally.

5. STANDARDS AND METADATA

5.1 A key area for improvement in the management and administration of Gold OA is consistent and comprehensive metadata to facilitate tracking. Not only will this help improve efficiency and compliance, but it will also contribute to the production of appropriate metrics as described in section 3.5 above.

5.2 Typically, data captured and for which standards could be agreed include:

- Institutional identifiers
- Research grant numbers
- Author identifiers
- DOIs
- ISSNs
- Invoice identifiers

5.3 There is scope to explore collaboration with other initiatives or service providers operating in this area, including CrossRef (CrossCheck), ORCID and Ringgold. Additionally, technologies such as Eval and TRAC that support article submissions need to be developed to incorporate details of OA article-processing fees.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Establish a small task force comprising relevant stakeholders to map the workflows, documentation and organisations involved in handling OA article-processing charges and the associated administration. Identify an appropriate body (e.g. ONIX, Ringgold) that can codify the various documents involved for ease of identification and processing across various funders.

6. INTERMEDIARIES AND SERVICE PROVIDERS

6.1 Feedback from libraries suggests that many publishers are not set up internally to manage the process. They can experience long delays in receiving invoices and regularly have to chase to resolve administrative failures. Whilst publishers are now working on back office systems and learning how other, truly Gold OA publishers are managing this, it has been suggested that there is a role for intermediaries, like the traditional subscription agents, to provide support here.

6.2 At the workshop, one new organisation in this field made itself known to participants: Open Access Key (<http://www.openaccesskey.com/>) is a new venture and claims to have spoken to all the major stakeholders when designing their system and business model.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Potential service providers in this area should be identified and discussions held as to their interest and preparedness for providing a service to funders, institutions and publisher. As a minimum, the two leading subscription agents in the UK, EBSCO and Swets, should be contacted along with a genuine new player, such as Open Access Key. JISC Collections itself could also be considered as a potential candidate, given its existing role as a helpdesk and subscription service provider for UK HE.

Some specification work in this area might be appropriate in terms of identifying the market(s) to be served, the business models and extent of any collaboration, as well as the extent to which this service would be temporary, to be provided while the various players develop their in-house systems, or whether it might be required on a more permanent basis.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS:

There needs to be a more joined-up approach between the Research Councils, other funders and individual HEIs in terms of the way funds for OA article-processing fees are communicated and made available. Based on the responses from librarians interviewed for this study, this should start by addressing practical, workflow issues and the idea of putting policy into practice. A forum for discussions on the practical implementation of OA funding should be formed.

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JISC, via OAIG and other stakeholders, needs to continue to take the lead in pushing the OA agenda in a constructive, evidence-based and consultative way both in the UK and internationally.

A small task force comprising relevant stakeholders needs to be established to map the workflows, documentation and organisations involved in handling OA article-processing charges and the associated administration. An appropriate body (e.g. ONIX or Ringgold) needs to be identified to codify the various documents involved for ease of identification and processing across various funders.

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ORGANISATIONS INTERVIEWED

FUNDERS

Arts and Humanities Research Council
Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council
British Heart Foundation
Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council
Economic and Social Research Council
Medical Research Council
Natural Environment Research Council
Science and Technology Facilities Council
The Leverhulme Trust
The National Institute for Health Research
The Wellcome Trust

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