

How are universities putting policy into practice, from both library and research perspectives?

Based on a paper by Adam Tickell and Jill Russell, presented at the UKSG One-Day Conference, 'Open Access Realities', London, November 2013

This paper briefly outlines the experience of a large research-intensive university working towards wider adoption of open access. OA has featured in the University's research strategy for several years, but there was a step change in the level of activity following the Finch Report and subsequent policy announcements from RCUK and HEFCE. For individual researchers, OA presents a number of practical challenges that universities must work to overcome. Existing processes and systems have been adapted to improve support for OA, and there has been renewed interest in gold and green initiatives from academics, support staff and senior University executives. Ambitions and priorities are outlined for the coming months.

Introduction

Open access (OA) is an important feature in the higher education research landscape. Universities, their governing bodies, and funding agencies are paying increasing attention to the impact of research, therefore it is essential to improve public engagement with research findings by supporting access to publications and communicating results.

Political context

Open access is not just something that has been done to universities, publishers and scholarly societies in a political vacuum. In an information-rich age, traditional forms of publication feel outdated, a process given momentum by an apparent political consensus for 'transparency'. The Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOI)¹ codified this for the first time, and remains an important piece of active legislation. The Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) has far-reaching powers, and issues further guidance on the Act, which has been interpreted in increasingly strong terms over its lifetime. A similar approach pertains for equalities and other important legislation.

The year 2012 saw the passage of the Protection of Freedoms Act², which included a new requirement that data released on request must be machine readable. This makes a big difference to the way universities and other public bodies handle and supply data. Other recent changes towards openness include the Open Data white paper³ and the creation of the Public Sector Transparency Board and the Open Data Institute.

Transparency

The research sector has its own Transparency Board whose Chair understands the nuances and subtleties of the challenges facing universities. Its members occupy important roles in



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"... it is essential to improve public engagement with research findings ..."

26 the scientific infrastructure of the UK and its three main areas of focus are open data, open access and data security. The activity on OA mainly involves watching the implementation of the Finch recommendations and working closely to make sure the momentum continues.

Open data and data security, although not the focus of this paper, are likely to present even greater concerns and challenges than OA. For example, funders require a release schedule for all publicly funded data, and there is potentially a significant storage and compliance issue. It seems from recent news reports that almost everybody is trying to look at data held by public organizations, and there is a particular concern to prevent industrial espionage. There are issues around commercial confidentiality which don't apply to publications, but very much apply to research data.

"...without additional funding it is inevitable that the volume of research will fall."

Policy background

Nominally, open access to research publications has been part of the higher education landscape in the UK for many years. The Research Councils have, for example, had OA policies since 2005 although there has been very little implementation of what were, essentially, voluntary measures. A growing emphasis on transparency and, in particular, the personal commitment of the Minister of State for Universities and Science, David Willetts, led to the setting up of the 'Finch Group', which reported in 2012 with a series of recommendations to provide new impetus. Although the Group's members represented a very divergent set of interests, the report managed to find core points of agreement⁴.

In the short period since the report was published, the debate in the UK has increasingly focused on the form that OA ought to take. Much of this has been given a particular impetus by the main funders of research, particularly the Wellcome Trust⁵, Research Councils UK (RCUK)⁶ and Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE)⁷, all of whom require that the research that they fund be made available in OA form as a condition of grant.

Challenges of open access

Although universities in the UK are committed to the principles of the OA movement, there are a number of practical challenges to its implementation. First, it is expensive and may remain so. As the Finch Report recognized, UK-based researchers only produce 6% of the world's scholarly articles and will continue to need to purchase access to the other 94% as long as the mixed model remains. Whilst our funders legitimately see the cost of communication as a part of the cost of carrying out research, without additional funding it is inevitable that the volume of research will fall.

The second and urgent challenge concerns compliance. Persuading academics to take OA seriously is something we have not yet cracked, because it takes a little bit of effort and it is not in their mind set. We need to show that OA serves the interests of individual researchers and encourage them to comply, not least because they need all of their publications to be eligible for the next Research Excellence Framework (REF).

"Persuading academics to take OA seriously is something we have not yet cracked ..."

Gains

Despite the challenges, there are nevertheless enormous potential gains to be had and we must remember what OA is about. Our Council, funders, and collaborators are all interested in the number of people who read and cite our papers, and OA massively enhances the visibility of the research that we do. There are some studies that cast doubt on this, but there is an overwhelming amount of research which suggests that OA increases readership and some which suggests it increases citations⁸.

It is important to our mission as a university that we engage the public in the work that we do, because we are paid by the public and our legitimacy relies on our communicating the

27 results. Open access allows us to do that in a simple way. Most importantly, it enhances scientific capacity: there is nothing more soul-destroying than writing a paper which nobody reads, and the more visible the work, the better the impact for the researcher.

Legitimacy

In some areas of science, openness really matters, e.g. controlled trials in medicine, where those data must be tested again and again to ensure that the results are sound.

A group of people concerned about research misconduct is actively data mining papers in order to find evidence of it. Every research university in the country has had their attention drawn to papers where there is a prima facie case of misconduct. Although this is alarming and worrying, the mature response is to be thankful that testing the literature is now possible, and that these problems are being identified. This is a maturing of the scientific model, taking a step beyond the historical system of peer review, and is a major benefit of open access.

“... there is nothing more soul-destroying than writing a paper which nobody reads ...”

Practical implementation

All high-level policies require practical work to bring them into effect, and this is as true for open access as it for other aspects of academic life. In common with many other UK universities, support for OA at Birmingham is co-ordinated through Library Services. Libraries are accustomed to working with many of the organizations represented in UKSG, and over the years have worked with the publishing industry to help move from the 20th-century distribution chain that was trammelled by physical factors, to the 21st century where technology enables us all to make information more widely available.

Staff use the skills and the knowledge built up as the consumers of information in order to help bring about wider access to the information generated by our own researchers. For example, our experience of negotiating with agents and suppliers helps to secure good products and value for money; our knowledge of metadata helps ensure that OA publications are findable; we can draw on copyright and policy experience to advise on publishing agreements, self-archiving options and Creative Commons licences; we can explain the various flavours of OA offered by journals. We do all this by working through our existing liaison channels with academics, and with research support partners across the university.

Infrastructure

In Birmingham, Library Services has been managing the institutional repository for several years. This is a strictly full-text OA service run on the EPrints platform. Now we are also planning to market our research more widely and streamline workflows for authors, by reusing information about our publications that is held in our new Current Research Information System (CRIS) on the Pure platform. CRIS and repository technologies are converging; they utilize some of the same technical standards and hold similar metadata, and it was natural for library staff to take on responsibility for looking after the publications metadata.

“ CRIS and repository technologies are converging”

Administering article processing charges (APCs) for OA and hybrid journals, and evaluating innovative publishing models (such as PeerJ or Knowledge Unlatched) are related activities which combine naturally into a broader OA remit. Together, these systems and activities form the basis of an infrastructure to support both ‘green’ and ‘gold’⁹. We also work with other stakeholders on research data management planning, anticipating developments in that area.

Resources

Libraries are customer-focused organizations and, despite their traditional image, are often the first to challenge the status quo. To complement work already regularly undertaken with publishers and agents, we recently allocated more staff resource to work with our academics and provide the administrative support needed to increase the pace of change towards OA.

RCUK, in noting the recommendations in the Finch Report, provided some additional funding to support the transition to OA, and we used this to increase our APC budget to offer more authors the option of the gold route.

“Authors are confused by the variety of self-archiving policies adopted by publishers ...”

Engagement

Our experience has been quite typical of most UK universities and until recently, the take-up of green OA was slow. Authors are confused by the variety of self-archiving policies adopted by publishers and discouraged by the effort it takes to save a version suitable for self-archiving. We have always had much more interest and better success with theses, working papers and other types of informally published material. The likely reason is that those materials are not readily available anywhere else so that in effect, the repository becomes the primary publisher of them. As a result, we are now taking different approaches to primary material in the repository, as opposed to secondary copies of material formally published elsewhere, and we are anxious to ensure that the best-quality research in peer-reviewed journals becomes as visible as the informally published work. Gold OA has been supported consistently by the Wellcome Trust and from other small pools of research funding.

Figure 1 shows the numbers of full-text OA items released by the University each year. These numbers are small, and a few gold articles are counted again in the green category, but nevertheless activity has almost doubled in the last 18 months. The increase on the ‘gold’ side is mostly due to Finch, some of the ‘green’ activity may be in preparation for the 2014 REF, which coincided with the roll-out of the CRIS. Although statistically unreliable to project from one quarter’s worth of figures, there has been a notable increase in each recent quarter. However, only about 25% of our published articles are OA, therefore much work remains to achieve the percentages expected by RCUK and to meet our own ambitions.

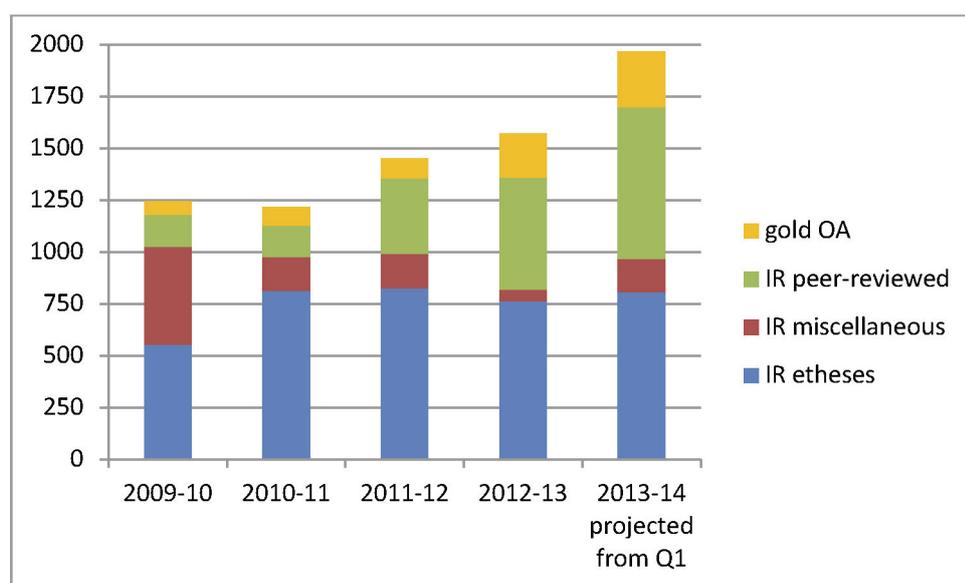


Figure 1. New open access items released per annum

Routes to open access

In order to streamline internal processes and to integrate our activities around OA with the wider record of our University's research activity, we decided to use the CRIS as the starting point of the author workflow for self-archiving. The system holds information about all research-related activity, including grants, projects, outputs, data, impact and metrics. Its main use so far has been to prepare for the REF, but next we hope to develop a good joined-up research record that is useful for the academics themselves, and a service that encourages self-archiving as a natural step.

A public portal is under development to make all of our publications (not just the open ones) more visible on the University website. All 'official' sources of the text will be recorded in the CRIS, including links to OA full text held in e.g. ArXiv or PubMed Central, and self-archived documents in our repository. There are also links (e.g. via the DOI) to the formally published version, which may be 'gold' OA or may be behind a paywall. Figure 2 illustrates a typical 'green' record. We hope that repurposing the publications metadata held in the CRIS will remove one of the hurdles to self-archiving, and encourage more authors to upload their papers.

The screenshot shows the University of Birmingham website interface. At the top right, there are social media icons for Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and YouTube. Below these is a search bar with the text "Search..." and a green "Go" button. A navigation menu includes links for "University", "Alumni", "Giving", "Working here", "News", "Events", and "Visit". Below the navigation menu are tabs for "Undergraduate", "Postgraduate", "Research", "International", and "Business".

The main content area is titled "Research publication:" and features the following information:

- Title:** Framing quality improvement tools and techniques in healthcare: The case of Improvement Leaders' Guides
- Authors:** Millar, Ross
- Publication overview:**
 - Purpose:** The purpose of this paper is to present a study of how quality improvement tools and techniques are framed within healthcare settings.
 - Design/methodology/approach:** The paper employs an interpretive approach to understand how quality improvement tools and techniques are mobilised and legitimated. It does so using a case study of the NHS Modernisation Agency Improvement Leaders' Guides in England.
 - Findings:** Improvement Leaders' Guides were framed within a service improvement approach encouraging the use of quality improvement tools and techniques within healthcare settings. Their use formed part of enacting tools and techniques across different contexts. Whilst this enactment was believed to support the mobilisation

On the left side of the page, there is a "Downloads" section with the text: "You can access and download the full publication via the links below." It includes a link to "Framing_quality_improvement_tools.pdf" with the application/pdf extension and file number 613241. Below this is a "Link to Full Text" with the DOI: 10.1108/14777261311321789. At the bottom left, there is a "Search Research Publications" button with a magnifying glass icon.

Figure 2. Repository view of a publication, with links to closed and open versions of the full text

In parallel, we have been evaluating the range of (paid) OA services provided by publishers. We recognize that a lot of work goes into producing, peer reviewing and publishing an article, hosting it and maintaining the platform, and are happy to pay a fair price for these services. There is still much disagreement within the community about how costs and payments should be calculated, so we continue to work with partners such as Jisc Collections and others involved in negotiating national licence agreements in order to obtain the best value for money across the board for both access and distribution.

Some research funders have provided grants to support the transition to OA and to encourage new publishing models. Drawing on a historical record of the University's publishing activity, we reviewed where our authors have chosen to publish, and took out some pre-paid deals for APCs with the publishers that we know are used regularly. These APCs have generally been simpler to manage than those paid individually to less-used publishers. Nevertheless, we have a host of different factors to take into consideration when it comes to supporting the gold route. Nearly every paper generates a dialogue with the author, to discuss a variety of eligibility criteria, publisher options, payment currencies and methods, author rights, licences and funder requirements.

30 While funds remain available, we operate a simple eligibility check on both the author and the paper, and a 'first come, first served' policy, but that will not be sustainable in the longer term. We provide reports to our Directors of Research on which papers have been published so that they can see who is publishing via gold, where they are publishing, and monitor whether those are suitably high-quality journals and if the APCs represent value for money. Library staff will continue to work with research committees to establish policy on the use of APC budgets.

We are agnostic about green and gold, and simply want to find the method that works best for all stakeholders. The green route is presented as a cheap way of enabling OA, but it does not actually address the fundamental problem of sustaining an affordable, rapid, high-quality publication service. The earlier our articles are open, the sooner they make an impact and the sooner we will realize the benefits. Delays, whether through practical difficulties of paying APCs or from embargoes on green access, do not serve the interests of research in any way.

"We are agnostic about green and gold ..."

Surprises

We were surprised that there is less OA activity by our authors than we anticipated, and we still don't really understand how researchers share their work. We have little evidence that they are using social media, or putting papers up on personal websites, and those we have consulted all have different but still rather closed approaches to collaboration. Because libraries, aggregators and publishers have worked hard together to provide seamless access to publications, few authors realize how many resources are restricted to subscribers, therefore don't recognize that there is an access problem for others.

Researchers seem to be more motivated by sticks than carrots, which is especially disappointing, and we need to find new ways of publicizing the benefits of OA. Authors don't tend to keep copies of their work that they can use for self-archiving, largely because of genuine confusion about copyright and distribution. Advocacy is made more difficult by the misinformation that surrounds aspects of the OA debate, and the rise of so-called 'predatory publishers' also gives concern.

On a practical note, we are very pleased that many publishers have reacted by offering more OA options, but then we have been disappointed that some have also responded by extending embargo periods on self-archiving and playing semantic games over whether OA is mandated or not.

Hopes and fears

We aim to have all research publications recorded in our CRIS, more of our authors recognizing the benefits of OA, to exceed the compliance targets set by our funders, and to look after our University's research for the future. Our immediate focus is on simple gratis access but, ideally, we want to encourage libre OA⁹. We will continue to develop the platforms we provide, and to adopt emerging standards that enable interoperability between systems.

There are many serials management tasks that libraries would be relieved of if all publications were openly accessible. But, we also have some fears for the OA future. If there is no longer a contract between the reader and the supplier of the information, what will happen if a publisher's shareholders decide that it is uneconomic to maintain a platform? Will it be downgraded or even disappear altogether? Libraries have been the traditional guardians of the printed word and we anticipate the repository becoming an essential resource for the future. We will continue to work with publishers and services like LOCKSS and Portico, who provide valuable preservation support services.

It is clear that OA is here to stay, is politically important for the sector, and there is broad agreement about where we need to head. We are uncertain about how to get there, and how to sustain an effective scholarly communications industry, but with more innovation,

31 co-operation and above all a continuing emphasis on quality, we can all work towards a more open future. As a University, we recognize the importance of providing management leadership and practical support for open access.

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