

# The publisher journey for OUP

The journey towards open access (OA) monograph publishing is incomplete. Since the publication of the Finch Report and in an environment of improving funding for OA monographs, publishers have made tentative moves into the OA monograph space, but there are a number of questions to be answered before one or more truly successful and sustainable business models can be identified. Oxford University Press (OUP) is a large monograph publisher, and has been publishing OA journals for a decade. It is only in the last year though that OUP has made significant moves towards OA monograph publishing, participating in the OAPEN-UK project and considering other options. The challenge for OUP and the publishing industry is to work with authors, funders and other interested parties to develop OA monograph publishing options which work for all involved and safeguard the future of a crucial element of the scholarly publishing landscape.

The brief for writing this article was to look at the ‘publisher’s journey’ from the perspective of Oxford University Press (OUP) towards a world of open access (OA) monographs. That journey is incomplete – to extend the analogy further one could say OUP has not yet emerged from the drive, while even the most experienced OA monograph publishers are cautiously heading down the street, struggling to find the correct formula in order to motor away gloriously into the sunset. Other publishers are as yet admiring their vehicles in the garage, but have not got as far as opening the door and braving the big wide world. Collectively, the publishing industry does not know what the end destination is for OA monograph publishing, and that makes for an exciting environment in which to work. OUP does not purport to have answers but has some experience of moving into OA monograph publishing to share.

Looking at the publishing environment as a whole, we can identify three key reasons why OA monograph publishing came to the fore much more in 2013, and consequently why publishers are now taking OA monographs very seriously. These are the publication of the ‘Finch Report’, moves towards OA generally by funders, and an industry-wide inclination to support OA specifically in humanities and social sciences (HSS).

The drive for open access globally, and especially in the UK, seems to have become all-encompassing ever since the heady summer of 2012. Ask the average person from the UK what happened in summer 2012, and they will tell you it was the Olympic Games. Ask a journal publisher and there is a good chance they will give pride of place to the Finch Report. There is no question that the publication of the Finch Report, coupled with the release of Research Councils UK (RCUK)’s policy on OA, and set against the backdrop of changing funding policies globally, galvanized conversations around OA and rapidly threw light on the disparity in interest and readiness from a demand perspective between science, technical and medical (STM) and HSS.

The ‘balanced package’ of the Finch Report offered threats and opportunities for publishers, and more than that, demanded scrutiny of its every recommendation. Behind the headline recommendations of the Finch Report, recommendation viii<sup>1</sup> about monographs was not driven forward with any massive dynamism across the industry early on (an exception being the SpringerOpen books programme, which launched in September 2012), but has been more of a slow burner, picking up pace in 2013. This is fairly logical. For publishers such as OUP it was necessary, particularly in response to the RCUK funding mandate, to focus on journal publishing, ensuring that policies were



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“... the publishing industry does not know what the end destination is ...”

22 in line with the funders' requirements before turning attention to monographs. Although slow to take off, monograph publishing has now become a more significant part of the OA conversation. The Finch Report has been perceived in some quarters as a favourable deal for publishers<sup>2</sup>. Whether that assertion is true or not is debateable, but it is fair to say that the report was accepted, and generally positively endorsed, by the bodies that represent the publishing industry<sup>3</sup>. It can be argued that the Finch Report represents a balanced consensus where all the key stakeholders were represented, and where government was interested and engaged at both a policy and a practical level. As such, it would seem to be in the best interests of publishers to follow the Report's recommendations wherever possible. Although the business models for OA monographs are not yet secure, experimentation is desirable and may provide exciting opportunities for publishers. Such experimentation also demonstrates a willingness to comply with the recommendations in the Finch Report and to contribute to an increasing evidence base for the development of the OA monograph.

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If the Finch Report was not met with universal joy by OA advocates, it could be argued that RCUK's policy for open access was met with considerable negative reaction from sections of the academy and the publishing industry, with particular concern coming from those in HSS – historians being one example. RCUK did not include an open access requirement for monographs in its policy, and the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) has suggested in its recent consultation that it will not do so either in its requirements for the post-2014 Research Excellence Framework (REF). Although vocal sections of the HSS community have voiced concerns about the RCUK open access policy for journals, there is nonetheless a need to consider the full spectrum of potentially OA scholarly outputs including monographs. If journal articles are sometimes (rather simplistically) seen to be dominated by STM subjects, then the world of the monograph is sometimes viewed as the preserve of HSS. RCUK set out a policy that seems to have assumed that in the journals world, HSS subjects could move towards OA on the same trajectory as STM<sup>4</sup>, and that broadly similar policies should be applied on issues such as embargo periods and licences. However, the publishing industry needs to consider how and where OA options might be achievable for all HSS outputs, whether they are journal articles or monographs (or something in between, as with Palgrave's 'Pivot' initiative<sup>5</sup>). Some research funders are positively supporting OA monographs, for example the Wellcome Trust in 2013 extended its open access policy to include all scholarly monographs and book chapters written by its grant holders. HEFCE is also providing funding to higher education institutions in England that wish to participate in Knowledge Unlatched (a collaborate initiative enabling OA books), and we in general see goodwill from funders towards OA monograph publishing.

OUP publishes over 300 journals, and has been an OA journal publisher since 2004. In that decade of publishing OA journals, OA monographs have not been a major topic of conversation internally until relatively recently. Perhaps that places OUP behind the curve – more likely it is an accurate assessment of the previous lack of demand. OUP does not see that its role is necessarily to push the open agenda either for journals or monographs; rather it is to support communities when they need, desire, or demand to move to OA. Now the factors described above have brought (some) demand, and as a university press, OUP is well positioned to take a positive role in the development of OA monographs. A key mission of OUP is the dissemination of high quality content, and the increased dissemination and access that might accrue from making content free at the point of consumption – whatever the business model – is an appealing possibility. It is in pursuit of this mission that the Press has continued to invest in Oxford Scholarship Online which, while not open access, does demonstrate that the scholarly monograph, far from being on the verge of extinction as some have suggested, continues to be a viable long-form format rejuvenated by digital availability<sup>6</sup>.

As a global publisher, publishing around 650–700 monographs per year across a multitude of subject areas, OUP has the scope to experiment and to contribute to the broader understanding of what sustainable options might be available for OA monographs. Such

23 a substantial change to the publishing model needs to be made in a way that allows OUP to develop its publishing and continue to fulfil its mission. The need to build a greater understanding of how publishing OA monographs might affect OUP's processes, authors, customers and outputs, is one of the main reasons why participation in OAPEN-UK<sup>7</sup> was so attractive. OUP began its active collaboration with the project in September 2013 when we contributed 18 OA monographs, each paired with a comparable title for the control group. OUP and OAPEN-UK are a good fit – the project is an opportunity to experiment with OA monographs in a controlled, independently managed way, and it provides funding which ensures that participation is a low-risk proposition. OUP's participation in OAPEN-UK provided the project with a substantial addition to the sample size, and a chance to work with the world's largest university press. OUP was a late participant in OAPEN-UK, and as such, much of OUP's set-up for the project was undertaken with some haste to provide a meaningful period for data acquisition. However, participation has already given OUP several insights into the challenges involved in OA monograph publishing, for example making the monographs available in an acceptable format, communicating the OA status of the monographs as effectively as possible, handling the different financial transactions involved when a funder and not the end user is the 'purchaser' of the publication, getting the right reporting for both OUP and OAPEN-UK, agreeing the contracts involved, and so on. It would be remiss to list problems, though, without mentioning one very notable area where there has been no difficulty – and that is in convincing authors that they might wish to participate. OUP picked the titles to go into OAPEN based on the project's criteria – but we found no complaints to speak of from the selected authors<sup>8</sup> – indeed generally, authors were happy to participate. There is a significant 'but' in that these authors were fully remunerated for making their monograph OA and did not need to do anything to secure the funding or make a payment for publication. OUP hopes that participation in OAPEN-UK will provide data on the usage and sales of those monographs that were made open, which will inform a wider assessment of how OA monographs can be incorporated into the publishing programme. Moreover, it will foster a very good understanding of the institutional changes required at OUP to deliver OA monograph publishing in a more structured manner.

OUP could have in place the best theoretical structure in the world for OA monograph publishing, but on top of that our publishing, whether journals, monographs, or reference works, needs to be sustainable. The funding model of OAPEN-UK, where publishers receive a grant for their participation in the project, is unlikely to be repeated often. Therefore, it can be argued that other means of funding for OA monographs is essential. This means in all likelihood a monograph equivalent to the journal article processing charge (APC), and the decisions on what is an affordable charge will need to be balanced with corresponding decisions on what is acceptable to all parties. This is not without its controversy, as a recently highly circulated blog post suggests<sup>9</sup>. Wellcome's extension of its OA policy is helpful for two reasons – it both creates specific funds for authors to pay publishers for making their monograph OA, and hopefully goes towards building awareness that such funds are necessary to enable OA monographs. Indeed, Wellcome has been consistently clear that it recognizes that if dissemination is a required outcome of research, it also follows that the funder should make provision for the associated costs. One of the reasons that some HSS authors and societies were so exercised by RCUK's OA policy was the perception, fair or otherwise, that there would be no funds available for HSS authors to pay for APCs. If that is the case then we need to question whether the funds are there for them to make OA monographs possible. Wellcome's policy is an important step, but that policy would need to be mirrored in many other places, and there are important questions remaining about how this can be extended into the realms of research conducted without direct project funding – yet the signs of how this might happen are not obvious.

OUP, like many others, has been pursuing OA monograph publishing much more actively over the last year. It is participating in OAPEN-UK, is happy to publish Wellcome-funded titles, and is developing other OA monograph plans both internally and with third parties.

However, there has been no need to rush any big policy out of the door because the nature of the demand is still emerging. The 18 authors or groups of co-authors now included in the OAPEN-UK project were all largely happy to participate. Would they have been so happy to participate if OUP had charged them £10,000 for publication? It would have been surprising if many of them had been financially capable of taking part. Working in OA monographs is exciting and full of possibilities and, generally, all stakeholders are open to new possibilities. The nascent landscape is generally not yet scarred by some of the battles we've seen on the journal side, and is not at present afflicted with the vitriolic, adversarial positioning which continues to affect OA publishing and policy-making with regard to journal articles in some quarters<sup>10</sup>. However, is there demand? Moreover, is there sustainable demand? Do monograph authors want to make their monographs free to access? Do they want to engage in discussions about the relative merits and demerits of the various Creative Commons licences? Are they willing to become mired in potentially drawn out discussions over permissions with rights holders for the right to make their monographs OA? Only time will tell, but it seems likely that the answers to these questions would be positive if there were more drivers for authors to publish their monographs OA – more monograph equivalents to the RCUK policy, to the US university policies, and so on. Considering the potential financial ramifications of requiring OA for monographs, however, it seems only brave and wealthy funders will be in a position to make those demands.

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#### References and notes

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