

Open Access and Research Assessment: Dealing with UK Open Access Requirements in Practice

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Abstract. This paper describes research-funder and research assessment policies in the UK and assesses the impact that these policies are having in the transition towards research outputs being made available on an open access basis.

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1. Introduction

Over recent years there has been a significant increase in the number of institutional and research-funder policies [1] mandating open access (OA) to research results; taking advantage of both green and gold routes. In the United Kingdom, academic institutions and research centres mostly mandate green OA, which is achieved by self-archiving into a repository. Funders have recognised that it is their responsibility not only to fund the original research, but also to ensure the widest possible dissemination of its results. For that reason, some funders do not limit their policies to green OA, but also extend them to gold OA, and take responsibility for covering gold article-processing charges (APCs) when they arise.

In this context, institutional and funding policies can contradict one another and create a level of frustration not only to researchers who need to comply both with their institutions' and funders' policies, but also to the people who advise them on how to comply, such as repository managers and librarians.

2. Background to Open Access at the University of Edinburgh (and in the UK)

The University of Edinburgh has had a long-standing commitment to open access. The University adopted its initial Institutional Repository in 2003, and now has over 34,000 full-text open access research outputs in its systems. This work is facilitated by the library's Scholarly Communications Team and is supported by the University's Research Publications Policy, which strongly endorses OA, with a stated preference for green. Since 2008, the library has managed a fund to pay gold APCs to Wellcome

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Trust-funded authors and managed a number of publisher accounts to make best use of these funds.

In the early years, although there were many pockets of enthusiasm, OA did not become part of the fabric of academic life across all disciplines in the way many had hoped.

More recently, additional funder OA policies and initiatives such as those of the Wellcome Trust [2], FP7 [3] and Horizon 2020 [4] have helped to raise awareness of OA issues. However, despite fairly wide publicity since the introduction of the repository, habitual uptake of open access options by University of Edinburgh authors has only really become part of everyday academic practice in some scientific and medical disciplines – a fairly typical scenario in most UK universities.

3. RCUK Open Access Policy

In 2012, Research Councils UK (RCUK) [5] strengthened its existing open access policy [6], effectively requiring that journal articles and conference proceedings arising from research funded by the seven RCUK members are made open access within a maximum 6-24 months from the date of publication. This policy allows both green and gold OA, though rapid access is preferred, and RCUK has provided block grants to 30 research-led universities for gold OA where publisher embargo periods are too long to meet the RCUK requirements.

The University of Edinburgh responded to this policy by beginning an Open Access Implementation Project [7], which paid for some staff time to source and upload repository-appropriate copies of journal articles and conference proceedings to its institutional repository. This approach was successful, and the University achieved OA rates of 64% [8] for RCUK-funded journal articles and conference proceedings in the first year of the policy – a compliance rate fairly typical of research-led Universities in the UK.

4. Research Excellence Framework (REF) Open Access Requirements

The Research Excellence Framework [9] is the current system for assessing the quantity and quality of research undertaken in UK higher education institutions. Following wide consultation, the four UK higher education funding bodies have introduced an open access requirement [10] in the next assessment, (referred to as the post-2014 Research Excellence Framework, likely to take place in 2020). This new requirement comes into effect from 1 April 2016.

The guiding principle of this requirement is that journal articles and conference proceedings must be available in an open access form in order to be eligible for submission to the post-2014 REF. In practice, this means that these outputs must be uploaded to an institutional or subject repository at the point of acceptance for publication. This is a green open access requirement, and even if the author takes a gold route, deposit into a repository must still be made.

The REF assesses the full range of research undertaken at UK universities and research centres and is funder-agnostic. Indeed, in many fields, much of the research assessed is un-funded. The implication of this policy for research-led institutions such as the University of Edinburgh is that all journal articles and conference proceedings

will need to be made OA. The deposit requirements are stringent and auditable (full-text documents must be added to a repository immediately on acceptance by the publisher and made open as soon as the publisher allows). Failure to comply presents significant reputational and financial risks, both for researchers and universities. Accordingly, OA is now considered an institutional priority by university management.

5. How Has REF Changed Open Access in the UK?

The association of OA with research assessment has changed the landscape in the UK in a number of ways:

5.1. Open Access Now Affects Everybody

Until now, there was only really a mandate for those authors in receipt of grant funder for a research project. Large, research-led universities such as Edinburgh aspire to be able to return any member of a staff on a research contract in a REF exercise. In turn, it is important that any member of staff is in a position to be able to select any of his or her publications for such an exercise. In an institution such as the University of Edinburgh, this effectively means that every journal article and conference paper needs to be made OA.

5.2. OA Is No Longer Optional, Even for Un-funded Research

Some researchers who are not in receipt of grant funding for research have argued that they do not need to make papers deriving from their research OA as there is no funder mandate. Linking OA to research assessment has started to break down this argument, with some universities responding that any research conducted during working time or using university facilities is in some way “funded” research, even in absence of a project grant. The argument for tax-payer access to tax-payer funded research still applies.

5.3. OA is Being Discussed

The OA agenda now has the full attention of research directors, administrative support staff and university senior management nationwide. It is on the agenda at many departmental meetings and the issues are being discussed amongst researchers in a way we have not previously seen in the UK.

5.4. OA Can No Longer Be Put Off, or Ignored

Authors must take action immediately on having an article accepted for publication. The OA requirements for REF have been designed in such a way as to prompt the researcher to deposit the author’s final peer-reviewed manuscript (postprint, AAM) at the point at which they are most likely to still have that version available. Because it is a requirement to deposit this (even closed-access) immediately on acceptance, authors cannot postpone this task until a later date, or they may risk the paper being ineligible for inclusion in the next REF. Because there is no scope for retro-compliance with the

requirements, appropriate administrative support must be in place to guide authors who are unsure of what actions they must take.

5.5. *We Are Starting to See Real Growth in UK Repositories*

The relative ease and low cost of making large numbers of research articles available on repositories is highlighting the relative high cost of gold OA, especially with hybrid journals.

6. Preparing for the New Way of Doing Things

The OA requirements for the next REF exercise mean that, in some small way, researchers will have to change what they *do* at the point their papers are accepted by a publisher. What is being asked is small – researchers must simply add a document to a repository (or ask someone to do this for them), but they need to do this within a certain timeframe and they need to get it right. The implementation of the requirements means that awareness must be raised amongst all university research staff in the UK – and adequate support needs to be in place to help answer questions and provide support.

When a new policy such as this is announced, institutions may not be prepared for proactive advocacy and timely compliance for many reasons; they may lack staff, knowledge, or the financial resources. Given the wide scope and broad impact of research funders' OA policies, as well as the differing workflows and approaches of universities across the sector, examples are needed of effective practice that are collaboratively developed but reflect institutional difference within a 'real-world' environment.

Jisc [11] has commissioned a portfolio of Open Access Pathfinder Projects [12] aimed at helping reduce the fragmentation of practice and put in place mechanisms to capture and share lessons quickly and iteratively around the dynamic OA environment.

The University of Edinburgh leads the LOCH Project (Lessons in Open Access Compliance for Higher Education) [13], which is already providing guidance to other institutions on the implementation of both green and gold OA. The project has shared a wide variety of guidance materials to help staff in different universities plan for the implementation of the OA requirements for REF and to provide support and guidance to a range of stakeholders. Project outputs include implementation plans, checklists, text for web pages and a wealth of documentation to help practitioners in the UK with the considerable task ahead.

7. Conclusions

- The UK has been engaged with the OA agenda for over a decade, but progress has undoubtedly been slow.
- The revision of the RCUK policy undoubtedly helped to create an increase in awareness of OA, as well as increased deposits in institutional repositories and demand for gold OA funding.
- Linking OA with research assessment has done more than anything else to get authors interested in and talking about OA.

- It is imperative that we continue to convey a really positive message about the benefits of OA to authors during this time of transition. There is real a danger that authors lose sight of the good things that OA can do for them, and a risk that it becomes perceived as an extra administrative task with a sanction for non-compliance.
- Universities in the UK are working hard to prepare for the REF requirements to ‘go live’ on April 1st 2016. There is much work to do, and many conversations to be had – but success with this new policy could prove to be a real milestone in the transition towards open access.

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