



Response to Call for Evidence for the Independent Review of the Implementation of the RCUK policy on Open Access

September 2014

Introduction

This paper provides feedback to the call for evidence for the review into the implementation of the RCUK open access policy¹. It complements the formal report of activity in complying with the policy and the financial report of how RCUK provided funds were used. The evidence presented represents the practical view of those involved in operating the processes to support compliance with the policy and administer the RCUK funds provided.

Commentary

In regard of the key areas of the RCUK policy, the University of Hull found:

- Very limited use of journals that were non-compliant with the policy (just one case, where the title was used prior to institutional awareness of the publication). This is viewed as most mainstream publishers falling into line with the policy and ensuring they provide a way of complying with it. It is not known to what extent authors may have opted for compliant journal titles after finding their first choice was non-compliant, though.
- Use of the CC-BY licence was commonplace amongst those using Gold open access, and no examples of other licences have been found. Again, it is not known at this point to what extent authors encountered any issues around licences, however.
- Use of Green open access was limited away from the use of the local repository (which was affected by CRIS interoperability issues), but, where used, was most commonly through sites like Academia.edu. Academics have found this site useful, and have noted the downloads their papers get from it.
- That authors can be reasonable in acquiring funds for Gold open access through consultation. In one case an author noted they were part of a joint project with University of Leeds, and that the project was exploring Gold open access support at both institutions. Following consultation, it was agreed to split the costs and publish one paper through each institution. In another case, the grant holder had moved away from the University and taken the grant with them. Although initiated at the University of Hull, it was agreed that payment for publications should be through their present University.
- Payment for multi-authored papers published as Gold could not easily be traced if not paid through a central fund. Hence, it was difficult to know to what extent the impetus for using open access lay with the University of Hull researcher or one of their partners elsewhere.

¹ Independent review of the implementation of RCUK Policy on Open Access: Call for Evidence, <http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/RCUK-prod/assets/documents/documents/CallforevidenceJuly2014.pdf>

- Use of the Sherpa FACT service has been very helpful in clarifying whether to accept a request for payment against the RCUK funds. Nevertheless, the language used in the service is not always felt to be clear, and checks on the publisher website were sometimes required to validate decisions.

Dealing with authors/publishers

Most of the cases of Gold open access processed were managed without difficulty. This was particularly the case with larger publishers, such as Elsevier and PLoS, who are well set-up to receive and process such payments. However, less efficient processes were encountered at a smaller publisher, where we needed to establish them on our purchasing system. We shall learn from this.

Where there was most difficulty in processing payments was in the communication of invoices. These were sent to the individual academic, and were sometimes not passed on, resulting in chasers from the publisher and delays in publication; it was also noticed that payment terms on invoices from publishers did not always fit with the University's schedule for making payments, which could result in unnecessary defaults. This required a degree of chasing. It also suggests a different route for communication of the invoices via a central point to streamline the process.

Open access awareness

The RCUK policy has helped to raise awareness of open access amongst a significant proportion of researchers at the University. Nevertheless, there is more research currently undertaken that is not RC-funded than is. Attention given to the RCUK open access policy has, at times, inhibited attention to open access requirements from other funders, as these have not been so strong. Consistency of practice across funders will thus be helpful in continuing to roll out open access and avoid the confusion that open access can sometimes cause.

Feedback from academics suggests that many of them equate open access with Gold open access. It is unclear why this should be, though the lack of a substantive Green open access alternative during the reporting period due to technical issues will have no doubt affected this. This situation requires additional advocacy to highlight options and aid understanding of the options for compliance in the future.

Publicity for the RCUK fund produced a good number of enquiries on how it could be used, and whether there were other funds available to support Gold open access. There is, thus, clearly a demand for open access that the RCUK policy has brought more into the open.

Requesting open access funding

The restriction on applying for funds to support Gold OA through RCUK grants was communicated in advance of the introduction of the policy to alert all new grant applications. Very little feedback has been received on this. However, it is considered that enabling, or even mandating, use of grant funds for 1 or 2 publications through open access would be a valuable way to encourage wider adoption and compliance with the policy over the next few years.