

## **Independent Review of the Implementation of RCUK Policy on Open Access**

### **Response of the Political Studies Association of the United Kingdom**

1. The Political Studies Association of the United Kingdom was founded in 1950. The objectives of the Association are 'to promote the development of political studies and to encourage education and the advancement of learning in the art and science of government and in other branches of the political sciences.'
2. The Association currently publishes four academic, peer-reviewed journals with its publishing partner Wiley-Blackwell. These are *Political Studies*, the *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, *Politics* and *Political Studies Review*. All four journals are included in the Thomson Reuters' Web of Science and Journal Citation Report and collectively achieved around 650k full-text article downloads in 2013 across all platforms, from over 200 different countries.
3. Our journals account for over 60% of our income and support a wide range of other activities, including schools outreach, public engagement and supporting the development of the professional skills of graduate students.

### **The effectiveness and impact of the RCUK policy on the transition of RCUK funded outputs to Open Access**

4. All four PSA journals comply with RCUK Open Access policy by offering a Gold route to publication and meeting RCUK embargo periods. APCs are set at \$3,000 or £1,864 at today's exchange rate<sup>1</sup>. If all the articles published in the PSA journals (based on 2013 volumes) were published using the Gold model and we were to cease charging subscriptions, the total income generated by our four journals would fall by approximately 60%. This would barely cover expenditure and publication would not be viable.
5. Take up of the Gold route to publication has been extremely low. Since it was first offered in June 2012, just eleven articles have been published in this way. Of those articles for which an APC has been paid, eight papers, or 73% of the total, have been written by one or more UK-based authors and six of these, some 54% of the total, have received RCUK funding for their research (five from the ESRC and one from the AHRC).
6. The PSA journals are not unusual in seeing such a low take up of the Gold option. We have consulted with Heads of Politics Departments across the UK and they report very low levels of Gold publication by their colleagues. This is both a function of very limited funds being available at departmental level to fund APCs and limited interest amongst academics working in the discipline.

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<sup>1</sup> \$1.6095 = £1 on 9<sup>th</sup> September 2014

7. In a number of universities the RCUK block grant is held centrally but where the grant has been allocated to individual departments the amount allocated funds just one, at most two, APCs in a reputable journal.
8. Funding from sources other than RCUK to pay APCs is extremely rare. A handful of universities have mentioned the availability of additional funding from central university resources. Certainly within the field of political studies research grants tend to be so modest that they cannot stretch to funding APCs.
9. Across the board demand for funding for APCs within the discipline has been very low. Even in those departments with the funds to pay at least one APC, either from the RCUK block grant or from other sources, there has often been no call on the money. This may be because there are no academics in receipt of RCUK funding that have been ready to publish their research findings. However, it could also be because academics are unwilling to sign CC-BY licences, which are required under the Gold option. Research conducted by Taylor and Francis earlier this year<sup>2</sup> showed that CC-BY was the least favoured of all licence options by the academics surveyed internationally. Just 4% chose it as their most preferred licence choice with a further 7% selecting it as their second most preferred choice. The most popular form of licence was CC-BY-NC-ND with 33% choosing it as their most preferred option and a further 20% as the second most preferred option.
10. One unforeseen consequence of RCUK's preference for Gold and the desire of publishers to avoid accusations of "double dipping" is that journals publishing significant numbers of Gold articles risk seeing a decline in their Web of Science JCR impact factor, which continues to be a critical measure of quality and thus a major factor influencing academics' choice of journal for publication of their articles. The reason for this is that many publishers are pushing editors to match the number of Gold articles in any published volume with *additional* regular articles so that the absolute number of non-Gold articles is maintained. Yet any increase in the number of articles published in a journal can serve to reduce the journal's Impact Factor because the denominator used in the calculation is the total number of articles published. This is a problem for all publishers, who believe that they are open to criticisms of "double dipping" when more than 5% of articles in a published volume are Gold. Publishers have two ways in which they seek to avoid this problem: either they increase the number of articles published overall, so that the 5% threshold is not reached, or they allow the threshold to be reached and amend the subscription price for the following year, meaning there is a much delayed response.

#### **Compliance with the "green" Open Access embargo periods mandated by the policy**

11. As noted above, all the PSA journals comply with RCUK mandated embargo periods.

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<sup>2</sup> Taylor and Francis Open Access Survey, June 2014

12. Across the discipline feedback from departments suggests that the Green model is favoured over Gold and university libraries are increasingly being organised to respond to the HEFCE requirement that any articles eligible as post-2014 REF outputs must be deposited in an institutional or subject repository on acceptance for publication.
13. Given that Gold OA does not appear to be making any significant inroads in academic publishing in political studies, the need to sustain the viability of subscription journals becomes critical to the sustainability of quality journal publishing within our discipline. In this context it is important to understand that social science and humanities journals are more expensive to produce than those in most STEM disciplines because they have higher rejection rates, longer articles and more editorial processing. Many of these differences are documented in a study by Mary Waltham, funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, entitled *The Future of Scholarly Journals Publishing Among Social Science and Humanities Associations*, published in 2009.
14. Evidence produced by Chris Wickham, Rebecca Darley and David Reynolds in their report for the British Academy entitled *Open Access Journals in Humanities and Social Science*, showed download half-lives of journal articles in political studies to be 46 months. If embargo periods are considerably lower than a journal half life, there are real risks of librarians cancelling journal subscriptions. We would urge RCUK to reconsider the embargo periods that it has set for social science and humanities articles published under the Green model and abandon plans to reduce allowable embargo periods at the end of the five-year transition period.

#### **The impact on Political Studies of the RCUK requirement for Creative Commons licensing, in particular CC-BY licences for “Gold” Open Access**

15. As mentioned above, there is little enthusiasm for CC-BY amongst academics. This is particularly true of academics working in the field of political studies. To date, as so few academics opt for the Gold route, CC-BY does not appear to have had an impact on the discipline. However, it is clear that there is serious concern about the potential for work published under a CC-BY licence to be distorted and used inappropriately.

#### **How effectively the policy has been communicated, including evidence or views to suggest any further engagement needed**

16. It is clear that there is widespread confusion amongst academics about Open Access, particularly since the HEFCE and RCUK policies differ in quite a significant way. Even Heads of Department appear to be confused about the issue. One response received from a Head of Department to a PSA request for information about the number of Gold articles they have funded to date, included the comment “As far as I am aware we did not fund any APCs in 2013-14 from our allocation, *although I expect the situation to change in 2014-2015 as relevant journals begin to demand APCs*”. Only fully Gold journals can “demand” APCs but, as yet, there are no firmly established Gold journals in political studies and this clearly will continue to be the case throughout 2014-2015.

17. Nottingham's SHERPA/RoMEO system is confusing the picture because it categorises publishers as being Green only if they allow the archiving of pre-prints *and* post-prints or the publisher's version/PDF. Many academics believe that only publishers that have been graded as Green by SHERPA/RoMEO comply with RCUK rules, when this is clearly not the case. SHERPA Romeo itself recognises that there is confusion about terminology. On the *Definitions and Terms* page of its website ([www.sherpa.ac.uk](http://www.sherpa.ac.uk)), in the section entitled *RoMEO Colours*, it writes "The terms pre-print and post-print are used to mean different things by different people. This can cause some confusion and ambiguity. One usage of the term pre-print is to describe the first draft of the article - before peer-review, even before any contact with a publisher. This use is common amongst academics for whom the key modification of an article is the peer-review process. Another use of the term pre-print is for the finished article, reviewed and amended, ready and accepted for publication - but separate from the version that is type-set or formatted by the publisher. This use is more common amongst publishers, for whom the final and significant stage of modification to an article is the arrangement of the material for putting to print. Such diverse meanings can be confusing and can change the understanding of a copyright transfer agreement".
18. Furthermore, university librarians are often so risk averse that they try to avoid even the smallest room for doubt as to whether an academic is complying with RCUK rules (particularly regarding the decision tree and scenarios in which it is legitimate to take the Green route) and consequently many provide distorted advice to academics looking to publish their work.
19. There is also evidence that interpretation of the RCUK policy is being distorted by the high levels of risk aversion evident among PhD students and junior academics concerned about career advancement. A response from one major institution drew attention to the fact that amongst PhD students there was a concern "that going Green does not potentially signal to future employers that their piece is compliant, while if they can apply for and get the funding for [going Gold], it's a much safer way of doing it".

## **Recommendations**

20. The PSA urges RCUK to amend its policy to bring it into alignment with that of HEFCE such that it adopts a neutral position with regard to Gold and Green and reduces pressure on academics to accept the CC-BY licences that are a requirement of the Gold model. This would eliminate much confusion and would help mitigate many, though not all, of the concerns that exist about the introduction of Open Access mandates in the UK, particularly around licences and embargo periods.
21. The PSA encourages RCUK to introduce a more nuanced policy with regard to embargo periods permissible under the Green model. The characteristics of journal publishing vary greatly across disciplines and this has implications for the embargo periods required to support and sustain quality peer-reviewed journals.