Open Access Publishing
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Introduction

The Open Access (OA) agenda, longstanding in the life, health and physical sciences, has entered the mainstream of social sciences in the last few years. This chapter explains what OA is and identifies the key factors that early-career researchers (ECRs) in particular should bear in mind.

What is Open Access?

OA refers to work that is freely and publicly accessible online, without the need to pay subscriptions or other charges to read it. Journal articles are the scholarly output most commonly made OA, though OA monographs are also emerging. There are two main routes to OA:

- ‘Gold’ OA: where the research output is made freely available in the final published form, typically in PDF format and via a publisher’s website. Most publishers charge a fee (Article Processing Charge, APC) for this service, which vary wildly but can be up to US$3,000. Some journals have arrangements to reduce or waive these fees depending on career stage, the body that funded the research, or the geographical location of the author(s).

- ‘Green’ OA: where the author can archive the peer-reviewed version of their manuscript online (usually in an ‘institutional repository’, a publicly-accessible database) once it is accepted by the journal. Usually this will be a Word document that includes revisions made by the author after peer review but excludes any proofing or typesetting done by the publisher. Public access to these files is usually subject to an ‘embargo’. Most licensing agreements in politics and international studies require embargo periods from 12 to 36 months in duration depending on the publisher, though again policies vary wildly.

Why Should You Care About OA?

First and foremost, making research freely and publicly available is an obvious social good. Non-academic users – policymakers, NGOs, journalists, the general public – and those lacking access to costly journal subscriptions – like scholars and students in developing countries – can freely access scholarly output made OA.

In general, research has shown that OA work is also read and cited more widely, increasing authors’ scholarly impact. Books published by Open Book Publishers, an OA press run by Cambridge academics, are downloaded about 500 times per month, more than the total lifetime sales of an average academic book. OA can also be easily combined with social media, increasing downloads by 100-500 per article.

Moreover, crucially, HEFCE has declared that in order ‘to be eligible for submission to the post-2014 REF, authors’ final peer-reviewed manuscripts must have been deposited in an institutional or subject repository on acceptance for publication. Deposited material should be discoverable, and free to read and download, for anyone with an internet connection. The requirement applies only to journal articles accepted for publication after 1 April 2016 (HEFCE, 2014a, p4). Since REF eligibility is a key part of the hiring and promotions process in UK universities, this has obvious implications for all researchers.

While HEFCE shows no preference for Green or Gold OA routes, in practice this policy will mean that all researchers need to archive their accepted, peer reviewed version of their articles in their institutional repository within three months of acceptance by the journal (not publication) to meet the OA eligibility requirements.

Your institution will have a process for uploading your accepted manuscript to the repository. You should familiarise yourself with this process as soon as possible. Generally speaking, you should only be responsible for uploading the accepted manuscript. The institutional repository should be responsible for checking the journal’s policies on OA archiving and ensuring that any embargo period is respected before the article becomes freely downloadable. Current
HEFCE (2014a) guidelines state that the maximum embargo period for REF eligible articles in politics and international studies is 24 months (see point 30). However, HEFCE has recognised that some journals have longer embargo periods while others prohibit the free downloading of authors’ accepted versions in perpetuity (see points 37abc). These policies do not eliminate your responsibility to upload the file to your institutional repository within three months of acceptance. In such cases, the repository will need to create a ‘closed deposit’ – one where the basic information shows up in online searches, but the full text cannot be read. You should not worry that this will make your work ineligible for REF submission: closed deposits will be eligible and HEFCE will also make exceptions where deposits were impossible, journal policies vitiate compliance, or technical issues have arisen (see points 35-39). Thus, while it would be sensible to read publishing licensing agreements carefully and flag potential non-compliance to your department to help plan for making any cases for exceptions, you should not worry that HEFCE’s policy means you cannot publish in particular journals if they are the best outlets for your work. More on HEFCE’s OA policy can be found here.

OA is also increasingly a requirement of research funding. The Wellcome Trust has long required its grant-holders to publish using OA, and has even started funding APCs for OA monographs. Research Councils UK (RCUK) now require all research they fund to be made OA. RCUK officially favours the gold route, despite the extremely high cost of most APCs. RCUK has issued block grants to some research-intensive universities to fund APCs, but these cannot even cover all publications arising from RCUK funded projects. Institutions receiving these block grants have their own procedures for rationing these funds internally. If you are publishing work arising from RCUK (e.g. ESRC and AHRC) grants, including PGR studentships, you should ask the research director of your unit how you might access APC funding.

What OA Publishing Opportunities Exist?

There are two basic approaches here. First, if you are RCUK funded or have access to other funds, you may be able to make your work available using the publisher’s Gold OA route. This will involve paying an APC of up to US$3000. This will make the typeset PDF of the article available online for free to all readers, irrespective of subscriptions. A small but growing number of outlets offer low-cost routes to Gold OA. Typically these are online journals who either have low/zero APCs as part of their publishing model (e.g., Stability or Research and Politics) or are able to waive APCs in a significant number of cases (e.g., Ethics & Global Politics). These journals’ APCs may change over time as low/waived APCs tend to depend on the journal’s external funding and/or are offered to attract submissions for a limited period of time. Other models also exist, such as the Society for Cultural Anthropology’s journal, Cultural Anthropology, which offers a free Gold OA route for society members (and charges non-members a low fee). OA book publishers are scarce, though more are emerging. In the Humanities and Social Sciences, Open Book Publishers and Open Humanities Press offer the full services of any scholarly press – peer review, editorial support, page-setting – and make the books freely readable online.

However, given the financial costs of Gold OA, most scholars will generally need to pursue Green OA, as described above.

It is important to emphasise that simply uploading the PDFs of your articles to a personal website or an academia.edu profile is not an alternative to the archiving of accepted work in an institutional repository. While this practice is widespread, it is noncompliant with RCUK/HEFCE guidelines, which require work to be placed in institutional repositories. It also usually violates copyright and can be considered the legal equivalent to piracy. For example, in December 2013, Elsevier issued ‘take-down notices’ to 2,800 scholars who had posted their papers on academia.edu on precisely these grounds.
Particular Considerations for Early-Career Researchers

OA is generally a good thing for junior scholars. Adapting to the new agenda is easier for ECRs, who are typically more tech-savvy, work more online, know more about OA, and are more familiar with alternative forms of publishing, including blogs.

OA also offers early adopters a chance to achieve much wider exposure for their work. Combined with good practice in writing titles and abstracts, some research suggests that OA can help achieve a wider readership and more citations. Similarly, since anyone with an internet connection can read your articles, OA provides a useful pathway for public engagement and non-academic ‘impact’. Particularly if you write in a way accessible to and meaningful to non-academics (see chapter 6 of this guide), making your work OA could help reach non-governmental organisations, think-tanks and others that you might want to influence. Of course, you will still need to do more than merely post articles online to secure ‘impact’, but it is a start.

Pragmatically, however, ECRs must balance OA opportunities against other considerations. Establishing, securing and progressing in an academic career often depends on the reputation of the journals or presses where one publishes. A recent survey confirmed that along with pricing, reputation is a major barrier to the development of Gold OA. Bluntly, a non-OA article in the American Political Science Review carries greater prestige than the same article would in a recently-started, low-APC Gold OA journal. Similarly, a non-OA book with Oxford University Press ‘counts’ for more than an OA book with Open Book Publishing. Moreover, prestigious journals and presses generally have larger established readerships, meaning work published there is more likely to be read, used and cited in comparison to other scholarly outlets, OA or otherwise.

Although OA journals and presses are trying hard to build reputations, they face a Catch 22 situation: they cannot attract authors until they achieve parity of esteem with traditional outlets, but they cannot achieve this without attracting more high-profile authors. ECRs, whose positions are relatively precarious, cannot reasonably be expected to take the lead in advancing OA journals and presses in this way. It would not be sensible for ECRs to prioritise publishing in low-APC, Gold OA journals just for its own sake. Thus, do discuss your publication plans with senior colleagues and/or research mentors.

ECRs must also be aware of the different licensing (copyright) arrangements attached to OA publications. One of the driving forces behind OA is the idea that publicly-funded research should be available for use and re-use without significant extra cost. For Green OA, authors licensing agreements usually assign copyright to the journal publisher as a condition of publication. However, for some Green and Gold OA, other copyright arrangements are possible. The most popular approach is the Creative Commons (CC) licensing system (see below). CC has designed a range of licences that, while superficially sounding very similar, actually involve very different rights for authors. The ‘CC-BY’ licence, for instance, ‘lets others distribute, remix, tweak, and build upon your work, even commercially, as long as they credit you for the original creation’. Conversely, the similar-sounding ‘CC-BY-NC-ND’ license permits redistribution only in the original format and without any reuse or derivatives. Thus, CC-BY potentially allows companies to copy and paste chunks of your work into products that they later sell, with no return to you; CC-BY-NC-ND does not. If how and for what ends your work might be used matters to you, pay careful attention to the copyright forms you sign.

Finally, beware of ‘predatory journals’ masquerading as legitimate OA outlets. These dodgy businesses often spam academics to solicit articles and peer reviews. They charge authors APCs to publish with them, but provide few or none of the services traditionally associated with publishing. Predatory journals exist to con and exploit desperate or naive scholars. Involvement with them can only waste your time and resources. Manchester University has provided a useful guide to avoiding them. See below for more detail on predatory journals and how to spot them.
Conclusion

OA publishing offers real social, intellectual and personal benefits, along with risks, in an extremely complex and evolving policy landscape. Particularly given HEFCE’s new rules, all academics should educate themselves about the OA agenda and its implementation. You may not be interested in OA, but OA is interested in you! Engaged with positively, OA can yield huge social benefits by opening up our research to anyone interested in it, rather than limiting it to those able to pay access charges. It can get our work more exposure, multiplying potential pathways to impact, and promote the discipline more widely. For ECRs, the bottom line is: do keep OA in mind; make your views on OA known within your institution and professional bodies; and ensure you are compliant with HEFCE rules. But do also be wary of the pitfalls, and discuss your publishing plans with your research mentors and senior colleagues.

References and additional resources

HEFCE (2014a): Policy for open access in the post-2014 Research Excellence Framework
HEFCE (2014b): Open access research
House of Lords (2013): Science and Technology Committee, Inquiry into Open Access
Creative Commons Licensing

Creative Commons is a non-profit organisation dedicated to facilitating ‘the sharing and use of creativity and knowledge through free legal tools’. They provide standardised text for copyright licenses that enable individuals to give the public permission to share, use, remix, and even resell creative work. There are various license types. Some of these are listed below with explanatory text from Creative Commons.

HEFCE notes that ‘outputs licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial Non-Derivative CC-BY-NC-ND licence would meet’ their requirements (HEFCE, 2014a, p.5).

CC-BY (Attribution): Enables others to distribute, remix, tweak, and build upon your work, even commercially, as long as they credit you for the original creation.

CC-BY-SA (Attribution-Share Alike): Enables others to remix, tweak, and build upon your work even for commercial purposes. They must credit you and license their new creations under the identical terms.

CC-BY-ND (Attribution-NoDerivs): Allows for redistribution, commercial and non-commercial, as long as it is passed along unchanged and in whole, with credit to you.

CC-BY-NC (Attribution-Non-Commercial): Enables others to remix, tweak, and build upon your work non-commercially. Although any new works must also acknowledge you and be non-commercial, they do not have to license their derivative works on the same terms.

CC-BY-NC-SA (Attribution-Non-Commercial-Share Alike): Allows others to remix, tweak, and build upon your work non-commercially, as long as they credit you and license their new creations under the identical terms.

CC-BY-NC-ND (Attribution-Non-Commercial-NoDerivs): Enables others to download your works and share them with others as long as they credit you; however, they cannot change them in any way or use them commercially.
Identifying Predatory Open Access Publishers

Predatory publishers can be defined as outlets whose academic standards lag behind their claims to promoting outstanding scholarship. They do not run rigorous peer review systems and the general scholarly quality of what they publish is low. They actively solicit authors through spam emails (often making reference to your conference papers, thesis, or previously published material), offer unrealistically swift timelines for peer review and publication (often a matter of days) and always charge an article processing fee. The names of the journals themselves are either overly broad (e.g., The Journal of Life) or combine disparate subject areas (e.g., Arts, Sciences, and Information Technology Journal). The academic quality of the work they publish is poor and the production values (e.g., proofing and presentation) are substandard. Unfortunately, with the spread of open access publishing requirements, predatory publishers have proliferated.

It can be difficult to identify predatory open access publishers. In particular, as an early career academic, it can be flattering to be approached by a publisher about your work which can lead to one letting their guard down. However, it is important to conduct due diligence. The first thing to ask yourself is if you have heard of the publisher? As a researcher, you should have a good idea of key publishers in your field. If not, check with your advisors and/or mentors. The second thing is to go through the criteria for determining predatory open access publishers compiled by Jeffrey Beall. These include verifying if the publisher’s policies meet the standards established by key organisations in the area of open access publishing, vetting the editorial set up including the qualifications and reputation of the editor and editorial board (the absence of either is a clear red flag), checking transparency in the publishing model (e.g., is there sufficient information about APCs, for how long will articles be hosted?), and the overall integrity of the journal (e.g., does it make false claims about where it is indexed or provide bogus measures of its impact?). It is also worth looking at the quality of the work published. How high is the standard of English? Do articles meet scholarly norms for attribution? Do you recognise authors or their institutional affiliations? If still in doubt, Beall has also compiled lists of standalone journals and publishers that are suspected of engaging in predatory open access publishing.