

# RCUK Policy on Open Access and Supporting Guidance

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## 1. Introduction

(i) Free and open access to the outputs of publicly-funded research offers significant social and economic benefits as well as aiding the development of new research. The Government, in line with its overarching commitment to transparency and open data, is committed to ensuring that published research findings should be freely accessible. As bodies charged with investing public money in research, the Research Councils take very seriously their responsibilities in making the outputs from this research publicly available – not just to other researchers, but also to potential users in business, charitable and public sectors, and to the general tax-paying public.

(ii) The Research Councils have had policies on Open Access since 2005 and this revised policy takes account of the evolving policy landscape, both within the UK and globally.

(iii) This document comprises both the policy statement (*section 2*) and the supporting guidance (*section 3*) aimed specifically at researchers, their host institutions and the publishers of peer-reviewed research papers.

## Key Points to Note

- This policy applies only to the publication of peer-reviewed research articles (including review articles) and conference proceedings that acknowledge funding from the UK's Research Councils;
- The Research Councils UK (RCUK) policy supports both 'Gold' and 'Green' routes to Open Access, though RCUK has a preference for immediate Open Access with the maximum opportunity for re-use;
- Funding for Open Access arising from Research Council-supported research will be available through a block grant awarded directly to research organisations;
- RCUK recognises that the journey to full Open Access is a process and not a single event and therefore it expects compliance to grow over a transition period anticipated to be five years;
- RCUK will undertake a comprehensive, evidence-based review of the effectiveness and impact of its Open Access policy in 2014 and periodically thereafter;
- RCUK is mindful that the impact of its policy on different disciplinary areas is likely to be varied and has therefore made allowance for a different pace of adjustment by permitting different embargo periods across the disciplines supported by the Research Councils.

## 2. RCUK Policy on Open Access

### Aim of the Policy

The Research Councils work to ensure that the public investment in research secures the maximum economic and societal return. One of the ways of achieving this is through Open Access. The RCUK Policy on Open Access aims to achieve immediate, unrestricted, on-line access to peer-reviewed and published scholarly research papers, free of any access charge. Our vision is for all users to be able to read published research papers in an electronic format and to search for and re-use (including download) the content of published research papers, both manually and using automated tools (such as those for text and data mining), provided that any such re-use is subject to full and proper attribution.

**For definitions of Open Access see section 3.1**

### Scope

The policy applies to peer-reviewed research papers, which acknowledge Research Council funding, that are submitted for publication from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2013, and which are published in journals or conference proceedings.

**For definitions of what is and is not covered under the policy see section 3.2**

### Expectations on Researchers

Researchers, as the generators of all of the research papers and responsible for much of their peer review, are expected to publish any peer-reviewed research papers which acknowledge Research Council funding in journals that are compliant with the RCUK policy on Open Access. All papers must include details of the funding that supported the research and, if applicable, a statement on how the underlying research materials – such as data, samples or models – can be accessed.

**For further details on acknowledgment of funding sources and underlying research material see section 3.3**

### Compliance of Journals

RCUK recognises a journal as being compliant with this policy if:

The journal provides, via its own website, immediate and unrestricted access to the final published version of the paper, which should be made available using the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) licence. This may involve payment of an 'Article Processing Charge' (APC) to the publisher.

Or,

The journal consents to deposit of the final Accepted Manuscript in any repository, without restriction on non-commercial re-use and within a defined period. No APC will be payable to the publisher.

In this latter case, RCUK will accept a delay of no more than six months between on-line publication and the final Accepted Manuscript becoming Open Access. In the case of papers in the arts, humanities and social sciences (which will mainly be funded by the AHRC and the ESRC), the maximum embargo period will be twelve months. In some circumstances, where funding for APCs is unavailable during the transition period, longer embargo periods may be allowable (*see section 3.5*).

RCUK recognises that copyright in the manuscript itself normally remains with the author, as reflected in the historical right and tradition of authors to publish online manuscript versions of their papers even before submission, and this will continue.

**For further details on:**

- **APCs:**  
section 3.5
- **Embargos:**  
section 3.6
- **Licences:**  
section 3.7
- **Repositories:**  
section 3.8
- **Accepted Manuscripts:**  
section 3.9
- **Transition period:**  
section 3.10

### Article Processing Charges

From 1st April 2013 the payment of APCs and other publication charges related to Research Council-funded research are supported through RCUK OA block grants provided to eligible research organisations. APCs and other publication charges relating to peer-reviewed research papers can no longer be included within research grant applications.

**For further details on:**

- **APCs:**  
section 3.5
- **RCUK OA Block Grant:**  
section 3.4

- **Allowable costs within research applications: section 3.11**

### **Expectations on Research Organisations**

Eligible research organisations in receipt of RCUK OA block grants are expected to establish institutional publication funds, and the processes to manage and allocate the funds provided. Institutions have the flexibility to use the block grant in the manner they consider will best deliver the RCUK Policy on Open Access in a transparent way that allocates funds fairly across the disciplines. RCUK expects that the primary use of the block grant will be for payment of APCs. We expect research organisations in receipt of an RCUK OA block grant to comply with the monitoring arrangements that will be put in place by the RCUK for this policy.

**For further details of:**

- **RCUK OA Block Grant: section 3.4**
- **Institutional publication funds: section 3.12**
- **Monitoring: section 3.14**

### **Implementation and compliance**

RCUK will allow some flexibility in implementation of its policy, especially regarding the length of embargo periods, during the transition period. An evidence-based review of the implementation will take place in 2014 with subsequent, periodic reviews taking place as the transition progresses.

**For further details of:**

- **Embargo periods: section 3.6**
- **Transition phase: section 3.10**
- **2014 review: section 3.13**
- **Monitoring: section 3.14**

## 3. Guidance for the RCUK Policy on Open Access

### 3.1 Definitions of Open Access

(i) RCUK defines Open Access to mean unrestricted, on-line access to peer-reviewed and published scholarly research papers. Specifically a user must be able to do the following free of any access charge:

- Read published papers in an electronic format;
- Search for and re-use the content of published papers both manually and using automated tools (such as those for text and data mining) provided that any such re-use is subject to full and proper attribution and does not infringe any copyrights to third-party material included in the paper.

(ii) RCUK considers that the 'content' of a paper includes, but is not limited to, the text, data, images and figures within a paper.

(iii) There are various models for achieving open access, some of which allow more immediate access. RCUK has a preference for immediate, unrestricted, on-line access to peer-reviewed and published scholarly research papers, free of any access charge and with the maximum opportunities for re-use. We will be supporting this preference with block grants to eligible research organisations in order to fund the associated article processing charges (APCs). This is commonly referred to as the 'Gold' route to Open Access. Although we have this preference, a mixed approach to Open Access is consistent with our policy, and the ultimate decision on which model to follow remains at the discretion of the researcher and their institution.

(iv) However, journals which are not compliant with RCUK policy must not be used to publish research papers arising from Research Council funded work apart from in the special cases during the transition period, as noted in section 3.6 on embargos.

### 3.2 What is covered by the policy?

(i) This policy covers all peer-reviewed research and review papers normally published in academic journals or conference proceedings, and which acknowledge Research Council funding. The policy does not cover monographs, books, critical editions, volumes and catalogues, or forms of non-peer-reviewed material. However, RCUK encourages authors of such material to consider making them Open Access where possible.

(ii) While RCUK recognises that many researchers derive value from sharing early versions of papers (for example, by using the arXiv pre-print archive), RCUK will consider only versions 'as accepted for publication' when assessing compliance with its policy.

### 3.3 Acknowledgement of funding sources and underlying research material

(i) The policy requires funding information to be included within the acknowledgement section of a paper. Guidance on how to acknowledge funding information is provided by the Research Information Network<sup>1</sup>.

(ii) As part of supporting the drive for openness and transparency in research, and to ensure that the researcher thinks about data access issues, the policy requires all research papers, if applicable, to include a statement on how any underlying research materials, such as data, samples or models, can be accessed. However, the policy does not require that the data must be made open. If there are considered to be good

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.rin.ac.uk/our-work/research-funding-policy-and-guidance/acknowledgementfunders-journal-articles>

or compelling reasons to protect access to the data, for example commercial confidentiality or legitimate sensitivities around data derived from potentially identifiable human participants, these should be included in the statement.

### 3.4 RCUK OA Block Grant

(i) Research Councils have in the past provided support for APCs through both direct and indirect costs as part of grant funding. From 1 April 2013 RCUK will contribute to the payment of APCs for papers arising from grant-funded research through block grants to eligible research organisations. Research grant and fellowship applications with start dates on or after 1<sup>st</sup> April 2013 are no longer permitted to include provision for Open Access publication or other publication charges in respect of peer-reviewed journal articles and peer-reviewed conference papers.

(ii) The RCUK OA Block Grant is principally to support the payment of APCs. However, Research Organisations have the flexibility to use the block grant in the manner they consider will best deliver the RCUK Policy on Open Access, as long as the primary purpose to support the payment of APCs is fulfilled.

(iii) It is planned that the funding provided by Research Councils to support open access will be increased over the next five years until all published peer-reviewed papers, which derive from Research Council funding, are open access. This increase in funding during transition is a reflection of the time that will be needed for researchers, institutions and publishers to transition to an open access model. It will also allow publication funding already provided through direct and indirect costs on current grants to be fully utilised.

(iv) The RCUK policy also applies to research papers produced by the Research Councils' own institutes. Additional funding arrangements will be established to support papers arising from research that they undertake. The same, or more demanding, Open Access targets and compliance expectations will apply to Research Council institutes.

(v) Further detail on how the block grant is allocated and the level of funding can be found in the original announcement, from November 2012<sup>2</sup>.

### 3.5 Article Processing Charges

(i) Where the RCUK OA Block Grant is used to pay Article Processing Charges for a paper, the paper must be made Open Access immediately at the time of on-line publication, using the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) licence.

(ii) RCUK does not specify an upper or lower limit on the level of APCs paid out of the Block Grant. The RCUK block grant funding is based on estimates of the numbers of papers produced and on the average APC. Therefore, institutions and bodies such as JISC Collections, Research Libraries UK and the Society of College, National and University Libraries (SCONUL) should work together to negotiate appropriate APCs with publishers. In this context, it is important to recognise that the research councils fund only part of the total research effort in the UK, and that the RCUK block grant is not to be considered the only public funding that research organisations may use to support Open Access: it is legitimate, for example, to use funding received through Funding Council QR allocations and FEC indirect costs on research grants to pay APCs. At the same time, institutions should work with their authors to ensure that a proper market in APCs develops, with price becoming one of the factors that is taken into consideration when deciding where to publish. HEFCE's policy

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<sup>2</sup> See <http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/media/news/2012news/Pages/121108.aspx>

on the REF, which puts no weight on the impact value of journals in which papers are published, should be helpful in this respect, in that it facilitates greater choice.

(iii) We are aware that a number of research organisations that receive Research Council funding are not in receipt of an RCUK OA Block Grant. If evidence can be provided of this causing significant problems, we will consider this as part of the 2014 review.

### 3.6 Embargo periods

(i) Ideally, a research paper should become Open Access as soon as it is published on-line. However, RCUK recognises that embargo periods are currently used by some journals with business models that depend on generating revenue through journal subscriptions. Therefore, where a journal does not offer an immediate Open Access option, RCUK will accept a delay between on-line publication and a paper becoming Open Access of no more than six months.

(ii) Because six-month embargo periods can be particularly difficult in the arts, humanities and social sciences (which are mainly funded by the AHRC and the ESRC), RCUK will accept a delay of up to twelve months for such articles. However, this is only an interim arrangement, and RCUK is working towards enabling a maximum embargo period of six months for all research papers.

(iii) The choice of route to Open Access remains with the author and their research organisation, and in some circumstances, where funding for APCs is unavailable during the transition period, longer embargo periods may be allowable. Where an author's preference is 'pay-to-publish' and their first choice of journal offers this option, but there are insufficient funds to pay for the APC, in order to meet the spirit of the RCUK policy, the Councils prefer the author to seek an alternative journal with an affordable 'pay-to-publish' option or with an option with embargo periods of six or twelve months.

(iv) RCUK recognises that this may not be a feasible option in all cases, especially in non-STEM disciplines. In such a case we would expect the paper to be published in a journal with the embargo of 12 months, or 24 months in the arts, humanities and social sciences (which will mainly be funded by the AHRC and the ESRC). This is consistent with the Government's response to the Finch report<sup>3</sup>.

(v) Research papers in biomedicine should be published with an embargo of no longer than six months, as has been the MRC's mandated policy since 2006.

(vi) This flexibility for embargo periods during the transition is reflected in the following decision tree for publicly funded research<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Accessibility, sustainability, excellence: how to expand access to research publications. Report of the Working Group on Expanding Access to Published Research Findings, June 2012 (see <http://www.researchinfonet.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Finch-Group-report-FINAL-VERSION.pdf>).

<sup>4</sup> From [http://www.publishers.org.uk/index.php?option=com\\_docman&task=doc\\_download&gid=780&Itemid=](http://www.publishers.org.uk/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_download&gid=780&Itemid=)



### 3.7 Licences

(i) Where Research Council funds are used to pay the APC for an Open Access paper, we require that the publisher makes the paper freely available under a Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) licence<sup>5</sup>. This is the standard licence used by open access journals, and supports the maximum dissemination and re-use of published papers, whilst protecting the moral rights of authors. It allows others to distribute, remix, manipulate, and build upon a paper, including commercially, as long as they credit the authors for the original paper. The use of CC BY where an APC is paid is also the policy of the Wellcome Trust.

(ii) The CC BY licence opens up exciting possibilities for new areas of research by the re-use of papers, and the content of papers through text and data mining, and for new ways of disseminating research by being able to re-present papers in innovative and potentially value-adding ways. Crucially, the CC BY licence removes any doubt or ambiguity as to what may be done with papers, and allows re-use without having to go back to the publisher to check conditions or ask for specific permissions.

(iii) Concerns have been raised with RCUK of potential issues regarding use of the CC BY licence. These include:

- Loss of commercial revenue to publishers through sale of reprints – especially significant for some biomedical journals;
- Unwillingness of third-parties to allow their material to be reproduced in research papers that are licensed using CC BY;
- More easily enabling misattribution, misquoting, misrepresentation, plagiarism, or otherwise referencing material out of context, which may be damaging to the interests of authors.

(iv) CC BY is currently used by journals predominantly within the STEM sector, and along with the Creative Commons organisation, they report no significant problems with the use of the CC BY licence. RCUK will ensure that the 2014 review includes an assessment of the impact of the use of CC-BY especially within the

<sup>5</sup> See <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/>

Arts, Humanities and Social Science disciplines, and this will be monitored through active engagement with the various academic communities and their publishers.

(v) RCUK will work with JISC and the UK Open Access Implementation Group to produce guidance on the use of CC BY licences, including how to identify effectively third-party material included within a paper licensed under CC BY.

(vi) Where Open Access is achieved through deposit of the final Accepted Manuscript in a repository (the 'Green' route), the RCUK Policy requires that the manuscript is made available without restriction on non-commercial re-use; however, the policy does not request that a specific licence type is used.

(vii) This requirement can be supported by use of the Creative Commons Attribution-non-commercial licence (CC BY NC); however publisher-specific deposit licences (e.g. that for the Nature Publishing Group - <http://www.nature.com/authors/policies/license.html>) are acceptable provided they support the aims of the policy, and allow re-use including text and data mining.

(viii) In order to maximise the opportunities for access to and re-use of repository content, the Research Councils would like research papers in repositories to be made available using the most liberal and enabling licences, ideally CC BY.

### 3.8 Repositories

(i) The choice of repository in which a research paper is deposited is normally at the discretion of the author and their research organisation. However, some Research Councils, such as MRC and ESRC, have a requirement that papers must be deposited in specific repositories, such as Europe PubMed Central<sup>6</sup> and the ESRC Research Catalogue<sup>7</sup>. This is detailed in the terms and conditions of grants from individual Research Councils.

### 3.9 Accepted Manuscripts

(i) The Accepted Manuscript is the version of a journal article submitted by an author that has been accepted for publication in a journal, and that has been through a peer-review process. Peer-review is a crucial part of the quality assurance process for research, and RCUK want to ensure that all users have access to research papers that have been peer-reviewed.

(ii) While RCUK recognises that many researchers derive value from sharing early versions of papers (for example, by using the arXiv pre-print archive), RCUK will consider only versions 'as accepted for publication' when assessing compliance with its policy.

(iii) The Accepted Manuscript is also known as the *Author's Manuscript*, the *Author's Accepted Manuscript* or as the *Postprint*. It is also worth noting that it is normal for authors to retain copyright of their Accepted Manuscript.

### 3.10 The Transition Period

(i) We anticipate that the transition to full implementation of this policy may be around five years in duration but that this will depend on how the Open Access landscape evolves. During the transition we expect researchers and their institutions to follow the spirit of the policy and strive to achieve full compliance. As

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<sup>6</sup> Europe PubMed Central – see <http://europepmc.org/>

<sup>7</sup> ESRC Research Catalogue – see <http://www.esrc.ac.uk/researchcatalogue>



the available funding for Open Access increases during the transition, so will our expectations of the extent of compliance. At the end of the transition period we expect researchers and institutions to be fully compliant with the policy, and for 100% of research papers arising from the research we fund to be published in journals that are compliant with our policy on Open Access.

(ii) In year one research organisations are expected to ensure that a minimum of 45% of their research papers are published Open Access. This rises to over 50% in the second year. The choice of route to Open Access, as long as it complies with the RCUK policy, remains with the author and their research organisation.

(iii) Our aim is for 75 per cent of Open Access papers from the research we fund to be delivered through immediate, unrestricted, on-line access with maximum opportunities for re-use.

### **3.11 Allowable costs within Research Applications**

(i) From now on research grant and fellowship applications, with start dates on or after 1<sup>st</sup> April 2013 are no longer permitted to include provision for Open Access publication or other publication charges in respect of peer-reviewed research papers. This does not affect grants already awarded. Any funds specified for APCs within already awarded grants should be used before using the RCUK OA Block Grant.

(ii) It remains permissible for grant proposals to request publication costs associated with the production of other types of research outputs that are not covered currently by the RCUK OA policy. Publication costs for outputs such as monographs, books, critical editions, volumes and catalogues may be requested but, as with any cost, they will still need to be fully justified within the application.

(iii) Where an existing grant has been awarded with provision for APCs as part of the direct costs, research organisations should manage and report against these charges using the same mechanisms used to report on the use of the OA Block Grant (see section 3.14).

### **3.12 Institutional Publication Funds**

(i) As recognised by the Finch report, research organisations should establish Institutional Publication Funds to meet the costs of APCs for Open Access publishing, and the processes and procedures to allocate the funding they contain. The RCUK OA Block Grant should be managed within the context of the institutional fund, as should funding received from other sources to support payment of APCs.

### **3.13 Reviews of the policy and implementation**

(i) RCUK recognises that implementation of its policy on Open Access will require a major change in the way researchers, institutions and publishers manage the process of publishing and otherwise disseminating the results of the research that we fund. RCUK is also asking that this cultural shift takes place over a relatively short period of around five years. For these reasons, RCUK sees the transition to Open Access as a journey and not as a single event.

(ii) The amount of funding provided by the RCUK to support Open Access in years 1 and 2 is still only an estimate of the likely cost. RCUK will be monitoring how institutions use this money, and we would like institutions to work with us to provide the evidence necessary to inform the review which will take place in 2014. Only with evidence can RCUK properly understand how its Open Access policy is working, and, for example, set the block grants at a level appropriate for the achievement of the compliance we require.

(iii) Our review will be thorough. Issues that we intend to examine include:

- The international Open Access landscape;
- The impact of the policy and its implementation on different disciplines;
- Consideration of the best mechanisms for monitoring and ensuring compliance with the policy;
- The level of RCUK OA Block Grant awarded to eligible research organisations;
- The impact of licences, specifically CC BY, on different disciplines;
- The duration of embargos for different disciplines and the extent of transition period dispensations;
- The overall cost-burden of the publication of research keeping in mind that publishers' subscription charges will continue to be paid in many cases;
- The costs to institutions of managing the RC OA Block Grant system;
- The balance of routes to Open Access preferred by researchers and their research organisation;
- Any adverse consequences (for example on the sustainability of Learned Societies).

(iv) The review will be evidence-based and we are keen to ensure that there is continued engagement with researchers, research organisations, learned societies and publishers both during the implementation period and beyond.

### 3.14 Monitoring

(i) As part of the 2014 review, RCUK will be seeking to re-test the planning assumptions used to set the initial volume of funding allocated to support Open Access, and the distribution of OA block grants to research organisations. To do this RCUK wants to understand how the OA block grants are being used, specifically the numbers of research papers which are being made open access through payment of an APC and the actual APCs being paid. RCUK will also be looking for evidence that APC funding is being used equitably across disciplines. Building an understanding of how many papers are being made available Open Access through deposit in repositories, without payment of APCs, will also be useful to build a bigger picture of the Open Access landscape.

(ii) To allow RCUK to do this, we will need information about research papers that have been made Open Access and how the RCUK OA Block Grants have been spent. RCUK will make the data it collects publicly available, in order to ensure maximum transparency on implementation of its policy, and on the payments made to publishers for APCs and other publication costs.

(iii) RCUK recognises that any reporting requirement must not impose an undue administrative burden on research organisations, and should therefore be restricted to the minimum information required. In the longer-term, we envisage ROS and ResearchFish will provide the most appropriate means to gather this information. But, before making modifications to these systems, and to support the 2014 review, we will work with research organisations and publishers to ensure we are collecting readily accessible data.

(iv) RCUK will work with Research Organisations to refine and agree the minimum achievable level of reporting, and the mechanisms to gather the necessary data. This will form part of the 'HEI Best Practice Project' that RCUK is supporting the Research Information Network to undertake.

Research Councils UK.  
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