

## **Submission to the Independent Review Panel call for evidence on the implementation of RCUK Open Access policy (12.09.14)**

### Declaration of interests

1. The Academy of Social Sciences is the national academy for academics, learned societies and practitioners in the social sciences. The Academy has been at the forefront of debate on Open Access policy in the social sciences; we have given evidence to HEFCE, RCUK and BIS and hosted two conferences (one in 2012, and two in partnership with Taylor and Francis this year).
2. This submission is based on a survey of 10 of our 47 member learned-societies who differ in discipline, size (300-1100 individual members per society) and number of journals owned or branded (the range being 1-12, the total 24, the mean 8, the median 3). The very short timescale has meant that not all learned societies have been able to respond. Given the early stage and the small sample size, the findings summarised here are not assumed to be representative, but indicate areas to monitor systematically throughout the review process and beyond.
3. The principal finding has been that **it is too early for there to be any meaningful empirical data from which to draw conclusions**, as the Academy warned when the review was proposed. Anxieties abound, however. Although RCUK is concerned mostly with implementation by fund-holders, the **learned societies are an integral part of the research ecosystem; negative impacts on their work will have wider ramifications. Systematic and sustained monitoring over the full five-year transition period is therefore crucial.**

### Evidence of compliance, uptake and adaptation

4. Nearly all learned societies who responded are compliant with RCUK's Gold/Green and licensing requirements for Open Access. Two said they were unsure. Most have adopted 24-month embargo periods for Green Open Access publishing during the 'transition period'. One operates 18-month embargoes; two use 12 months.
5. A number of adjustments to publishing arrangements have already been made, or are being planned, as a direct result of the policy:
  - those necessary to ensure compliance (at least five societies);
  - the establishment of a new fully Open Access journal (at least three societies);
  - measures to mitigate the effects of an anticipated loss of income (at least two societies);
  - close monitoring of the effects of Open Access publishing, to inform choices about embargo periods and licensing (reported by one society).
6. Although it is too early to infer a trend, **Gold-route publishing uptake so far has been concentrated in very few journals branded by large societies – mostly those whose disciplines intersect with the natural sciences or business.** To date approximately 130 Gold articles have been published by six of the ten societies who responded; 81 of these were in one journal. Six societies reported receiving 'very little' or 'no' interest in Gold-route publishing from authors; only two could attribute this to the small proportion of research in their discipline funded by RCUK or to the high proportion of articles written by scholars overseas.

Effectiveness of policy communication

7. **Learned societies uniformly reported confusion and poor understanding among their research communities, describing them as ‘peripherally aware’, ‘disengaged’, ‘not very familiar’ and ‘ill-informed’.** This was attributed to 1) differences in approaches taken by different publishers, 2) ‘inaccessible’ terminology and rules and 3) ‘obtuse’ guidelines. Despite attempts by societies to disseminate information, some still receive standard queries. Given the pressure to publish, we are concerned that researchers’ publishing choices may not be well-informed.
8. **Higher Education Institutions were cited as scholars’ first port of call for guidance;** hence levels of understanding apparently differ between scholars at different institutions. **The most effective channels for communication appear to have been at the departmental level and the employer-level,** via research-heads and relevant officers.

Impact

9. As noted above and by the majority of respondents to our survey, **it is too soon for there to be any meaningful data on the wider impact of the policy on learned societies and their finances, on disciplines and on the international publishing landscape.** In particular many learned-society journals are tied into five-year contracts with publishers, so any widespread fall in income will not show up for some years yet. Close and systematic monitoring is needed (see ‘Recommendations’ below). However, our survey offers the following early indications:
  - **A small rise has been noticed by at least one society in the percentage of rejections by international journals of articles by UK authors with Open Access requirements.**
  - **Several societies consider their global publishers to have been critical to their success** so far in the implementation of Open Access, keeping them abreast of international developments, advising on policy changes and making continued strategic efforts to add value to publications.
  - Societies for **smaller disciplines expressed the most anxiety about the disciplinary impacts of their potential loss of income from journal subscriptions.** A particular worry is that disciplines already experiencing disproportionately low access to internal university funds (such as Education) may likewise have difficulty accessing their share of Article Processing Charges.
10. Learned-society respondents’ concerns on which no data is yet available and which need proper evidence-gathering include:
  - the relative attractiveness of different journal policies to authors (e.g. in terms of embargo periods and fees);
  - the effects of the ‘one size fits all’ CC-BY licence on intellectual property rights;
  - changes to the volume of international research in UK journals and vice versa, in case conflicting policies and uneven access to funding worldwide discourage overseas authors from publishing in the UK or restrict UK authors’ ability to publish overseas;
  - the effect of publishing a working paper, as a result of Green-route practices, on the likelihood of publication of ‘definitive’ versions;
  - access to publication for early-career and retired academics, and for those based at institutions without significant funding, as more journals become fully Open Access and it becomes harder to publish for those without funding;
  - effects of the policy on standards and quality markers, and the potential proliferation of lower quality publishing outlets;
  - effects on learned society membership sizes and journal subscriptions;

- the treatment of sensitive or confidential data.

11. The Academy's Policy Working Group endorses these concerns and adds the following which also require close monitoring and evidence-gathering:

- access to journal publication for part-time and non-academic researchers;
- impacts on academic freedom;
- in the case of collaborative research, how ambiguity is managed over how the academic and financial responsibility for Open Access should be shared;
- how institutions deal with responsibility for Open Access in international research;
- unintended effects on publication choices (hence also research priorities) of monetising the value of research outputs;
- the claim that Open Access increases citation rates (so far unsubstantiated by evidence from supporters [e.g. the CSIR National Institute for Interdisciplinary Science and Technology<sup>1</sup>] and sceptics alike [e.g. The Scholarly Kitchen<sup>2</sup>]).

### Recommendations

12. It is crucial that such a drastic shift is informed by substantial and reliable evidence. In the absence of such evidence so far it remains to be seen if the Gold route and CC-BY licencing are worthwhile for the social sciences, or that there will not be harmful effects. Based on preliminary indications the Academy offers two recommendations:

- Between now and the next stage of the policy assessment, **RCUK should fund independent and comprehensive evidence-gathering – including in respect to the points listed in paragraphs 10 and 11 above – to judge the policy's impacts adequately and inform future directions.** Other major commissioners and funders, such as the Nuffield Foundation and the Leverhulme Trust, should be among those consulted.
- Given that the most serious effects will only be knowable after the policy has been in effect for a number of years, **RCUK should complete – and if necessary, extend – the full five-year 'transition period' without adjusting the existing transition policies,** in order to assess the impact properly before agreeing on a longer-term policy.

<sup>1</sup> Prathap, Gangan (2014). 'Open Access and impact factors revisited'. *Current Science* 107/5 (Current Science Association), p. 731. Available online [pdf]: <<http://www.currentscience.ac.in/Volumes/107/05/0733.pdf>> [Accessed 11.09.14].

<sup>2</sup> Davis, Phil (2014). 'Is Open Access a cause or an effect?' Article in *The Scholarly Kitchen*, 05.08.14. Available online [pdf]: <<http://scholarlykitchen.sspnet.org/2014/08/05/is-open-access-aca-use-or-an-effect/>> [Accessed 11.09.14].