

25 February 2013



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Dear Colleague

Open access and submissions to the REF post-2014

This letter notifies you of our intention to consult formally on the role of open-access publishing in the submission of outputs to the post-2014 Research Excellence Framework (REF). We would like some early input to help shape this consultation which will take place later this year. The consultation has no bearing on the 2014 REF.

The attached document sets out the developing intentions of the four UK higher education funding bodies. We invite you to comment and advise on a number of issues to inform the development of the consultation proposals.

Please send responses to openaccess@hefce.ac.uk, by **25 March 2013**. We will consider all responses received by this deadline. We welcome responses from any person or organisation with an interest in these matters. Please make it clear in your response whether you are responding as an individual or on behalf of a group or organisation.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David Sweeney', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

David Sweeney,
Director (Research, Innovation and Skills)

Open Access and Submissions to the Research Excellence Framework post-2014

Introduction

1. The four UK higher education funding bodies are committed to the principle that the wide dissemination of research is an integral part of any high quality research process¹. The prompt and widespread propagation of research findings will inform researchers of new discoveries in their field, stimulate the sharing and discussion of their findings effectively with a wide group of their peers, and accelerate the impact of their work both within and beyond the academic community. This will bring benefits to the efficiency of the research process, facilitate its application to support the economic, social and cultural development of the country and increase the public understanding of research. The established policy of the four funding bodies, therefore, is that outputs from all research supported through our funding should be as widely and freely accessible as the available channels for dissemination permit.

Definitions of and context for open access

2. New technology has opened up significant new modes of academic discourse and possibilities for sharing research findings. A situation where all outputs from publicly funded research are freely available upon first publication (called 'open access') is now within reach as well as desirable, and delayed open access (where the material is available after a short embargo period) is commonplace.

3. A radical change in the research publishing landscape may bring significant benefits that are more likely to be achieved in full if the change is managed with the active participation of all interested parties. This opportunity has been acknowledged by the recent government policy statement responding to the Finch Report and by major research funders including the European Union, the Research Councils, the Wellcome Trust and other research charities².

4. There are two primary routes to open access. The 'gold' route, often funded by a payment to the publisher (an 'article processing charge' or APC), leads to publication in a form that is immediately available to all, free of charge, in electronic form. The 'green' route is taken when the final peer-reviewed text of a published output is also deposited in an institutional or other repository where it is freely available, either immediately or after the expiry of an agreed 'embargo' period (see below). Various hybrid and other models are available.

Recognising funders' open access requirements

5. Over the last 10 years research funders around the world have introduced requirements to improve access to the outputs from the work that they fund. However, the need to build a

¹ The four UK higher education funding bodies are: the Department for Education and Learning, Northern Ireland (DEL), the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW), and the Scottish Funding Council (SFC).

² The report is available on the [Research Information Network web-site](#).

consensus on the best way forward has at times been overshadowed by concern about the possible future roles and contributions of commercial publishers, who have a fundamental interest in protecting their income streams and profit margins, and of the learned societies which currently use some of the income from their journals to support desirable academic activities.

6. Recognition of funders' open access requirements is not yet universal among academic publishers. However, established academic publishers, both commercial and not-for-profit, have increasingly participated in making this possible. A number of wholly new media and channels for publication are emerging, including online and open-access journals based on a range of new or modified business models. Some commercial publishers have been at the forefront of offering open-access routes to publication and are ready to compete with new not-for-profit open-access publishers for research outputs and readers.

7. At the same time the learned societies, as the representative voice of the academic community, are well placed to help identify sustainable models for widening access to journal content to the benefit both of their members and of the wider communities in which they work. We look forward to working with our partners – the academic community, other research funders, commercial and not-for-profit publishers, learned societies, librarians and others – in developing our policy on open access.

Policy and principles

8. To support and encourage the further implementation of open access we intend to introduce a requirement that all outputs submitted to the post-2014 Research Excellence Framework (REF) exercise are published on an open-access basis, where this is reasonably achievable and where, given the medium in which the output is presented, the concept of 'open access' applies.

9. We accept the Finch Report's arguments that in the long term, the gold rather than green route may be the most sustainable way to deliver open access. We have made it clear that institutions can use our funds provided for research towards the costs of accessible forms of publication. The full costs and savings to institutions of the move to open access are, however, still unknown; it is our intention to work with others in building our knowledge in this area. As the transition to full open access will occur over a period of time, we propose to accept material published via either gold or green routes as eligible, recognising that it is not appropriate to express any preference in the context of research assessment.

10. Our objective is to increase considerably the proportion of research outputs which are published in open-access form. We welcome advice on how this policy can best be accomplished in a simple, robust, fair and transparent way which allows for reasonable exceptions and is sympathetic to particular disciplinary issues.

Funding body expectations for open access in post-2014 REF

11. We propose to treat as ‘open access’ publications those which meet all of the following criteria:

- deposited in the author's own institutional repository (see paragraph 13) immediately upon publication, although the repository may provide access in a way that respects agreed embargos (see paragraph 15)
- made available as the final peer reviewed text, though not necessarily identical to the publisher's edited and formatted version; and
- presented in a form allowing the reader to search for and re-use content (including by download and for text-mining) both manually and using automated tools, provided such re-use is subject to proper attribution under appropriate licensing (see paragraph 16)

12. We intend that work which has been originally published in an ineligible form then retrospectively made available in time for the post-2014 REF submission date should not be eligible, as the primary objective of this proposal is to stimulate immediate open-access publication.

We welcome advice on our expectations for open-access publications, as set out at paragraph 11.

The role of institutional repositories

13. As part of our commitment to increasing public access, we intend to require that outputs meeting the REF open access requirement (whether published by the gold or green route) shall be accessible through an institutional repository. This reflects our view of the significant role of institutional repositories in increasing sustainable and convenient public access to research. It is our intention to support the development and use of these repositories as far as possible. We envisage couching this requirement in the following terms:

‘All submitted outputs covered by our requirement for open access above, and other submitted outputs that are available electronically, shall be available through a repository of the submitting institution.’

14. This would mean in practice that each submitting institution would maintain a web facility through which all relevant outputs might be identified and accessed (including items available through a link to another website).

We welcome further advice on repository use and on techniques for institutional repositories to cross-refer to subject and other repositories.

Embargoes and licences

15. Some publishers introduce embargo periods before work can be made available in an open-access form. Where embargoes apply we propose to determine eligible periods with regard to the practice of other major research funders at the time. Outputs will be eligible if they are still under an acceptable embargo at the REF submission date. The Research Councils are still developing their guidance on embargo periods in discussion with interested parties, including ourselves. We look forward to their decisions which, along with responses to this letter, will inform our final consultation proposals.

16. We welcome the discussions which the Research Councils are having about licences with various parties. We recognise there are concerns, particularly in the arts and humanities community, about the potential dangers of licence abuse. Allowing re-use of materials is an important aspect of open-access publishing, and developing effective licences in terms that recognise the interests of all stakeholders will be an essential element in this.

While we expect that sufficient clarity and reassurance on embargoes and licences will be achieved through the Research Council discussions, we welcome responses which address these issues.

Exceptions

17. Ideally we would like to see all outputs that are submitted for research assessment published in a form which meet the criteria. However, we recognise that there may be some exceptions during this transitional period.

18. We have considered three possible ways of handling exceptions:

- a. Identifying categories of material which we think may be exempt from the open access requirement described above (paragraph 11). We would give careful consideration to reasoned suggestions for sub-categories of material that should be exempt.
- b. Allowing individual outputs to be exempt from the requirement on a case-by-case basis, based on guidelines.
- c. Specifying that a given percentage (for example, 80 per cent) of all outputs submitted by an institution meet the requirement.

19. Some have asked that particular disciplinary groups should be exempt from this requirement, but we consider that research in all subjects has equal importance and therefore equally merits receiving the benefits of open-access publication. As with other aspects of the REF we expect the details relating to exemptions to be sympathetic to particular disciplinary

issues; but in this instance we consider it will be most appropriate to identify which types of output should be exempt, looking across all disciplines, and we welcome advice on this.

20. We would expect it to be rare that all of a category of material could be exempt. Our early discussions have indicated clear evidence that a requirement of open access for outputs that contain reproductions of works of art is likely to be a significant inhibitor, and this may be a reasonable exemption. On the other hand, while some international or foreign language publications are not compliant with open access expectations of funders, it appears that there is an increasing adoption of open access mandates in other countries. Therefore, it is not clear to us that a blanket exemption for these types of outputs should be required.

21. Taking account of publication timescales and that the start of the next REF period is 1st January 2014, it may be that some notice is needed before these requirements apply. We propose to set a date which provides reasonable notice. Outputs published before that date will be automatically exempt from these requirements. We welcome advice on an appropriate notice period, taking account of the publications cycle.

We welcome advice on the best approach to exceptions and on an appropriate notice period. Any cases made for exceptions should be underpinned by clear evidence.

Monograph publications

22. The case of monograph publication and its sustainability is of particular concern to the academic community. Although the overall percentage of monographs submitted for assessment is low, there are several disciplines and types of institution for which the percentage is much higher. There are now an increasing number of routes for open-access monograph publication which would lead to immediate deposit, and we welcome and support new ways to sustain long-form publications. In many cases monographs are published on the basis that the costs of publication will be met primarily by print copies sold to libraries with the opportunity for immediate deposit of an electronic copy in an institutional repository. There is also a class of monographs which are published mainly through a direct institutional, foundation or other funder subsidy and where open-access deposit is feasible.

23. We also recognise that we are at present some way from a robust and generally applicable approach to open-access publication for monographs. The economics of conventional monograph publication are already delicately balanced, and we would not wish to upset this balance while satisfactory alternative models are not in place.

We seek comment on when it may be thought inappropriate to expect repository deposit of monograph text. Alternatively, given the percentage of submitted material which is in monograph form, we ask for advice on whether an expectation of a given percentage of compliance as described above (paragraph 18c) would eliminate the need for a special-case exception for monographs.

Open data

24. As a principle, we support the sharing of research data as an important approach to further increasing the effectiveness of the research process. However, while we expect to see considerable progress in the provision of access to data which are pertinent to those publications submitted in a future REF, we do not consider it feasible at present to make this a formal requirement.

25. With the Research Councils and the Research Transparency Sector Board, we are giving consideration to the issues involved in increasing access to research data. We are committed to working in dialogue with the sector to develop fair and balanced mechanisms to achieve this aim.

We invite comment on whether respondents feel this is the appropriate approach or whether they feel that sufficient progress has in fact been made to implement a requirement for open data as well. We will consider any representations that such a requirement may reasonably now be developed but would also need advice on how this might be achieved.

Summary of areas for advice

1. This template provides a summary of the areas on which we are seeking advice. You may use this template to respond with your advice if you would find it helpful.
2. Please send responses to openaccess@hefce.ac.uk by **25 March 2013**.

We welcome advice on our expectations for open-access publications, as set out at paragraph 11.

We welcome further advice on repository use and on techniques for institutional repositories to cross-refer to subject and other repositories.

While we expect that sufficient clarity and reassurance on embargoes and licences will be achieved through the Research Council discussions, we welcome responses which address these issues.

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