

A BRIEFING NOTE FOR BRANCHES AND MEMBERS

Open Access

OCTOBER 2013

OPEN ACCESS: WHAT'S THE BACKGROUND?

The four higher education funding bodies (HEFCE, HEFCW, the Scottish Funding Council and the heads of universities in Northern Ireland, are at the second stage of consulting over proposals to move toward open access for all research that is submitted to the Research Excellence Framework.

The councils appears to have taken on board the many criticisms from levelled at the initial proposal to move toward 'gold access' from within the sector, including by UCU.

'Gold access' would have meant that in return for granting full open access to articles, academic publishers would have levied 'article processing charges' (APCs) on academic researchers. It would also have placed all research under a very permissive re-use licence which would have enabled anyone to remix and re-use any research outputs or data for any purpose, including commercial, providing it was attributed.

As UCU and many other bodies and individuals argued, any decisive move toward making REF submission dependent on implementing 'gold access' without proper resources to cover the costs of these fees, risked creating serious inequities and hierarchies of access to research, as well as infringing academic freedom.

The proposals, which were published on the HEFCE website in July this year are a step forward from this.

THE FUNDING COUNCILS' PROPOSALS

The funding councils are now consulting on more detailed proposals, published in July 2013. These mark a shift toward 'green access', although 'gold' is also encouraged.

'Green access' means that research can be considered open access if it is available in a repository in a 'near-final' format, generally following an embargo period to protect publishers' interests.

Specifically HEFCE is proposing:

- 1 That research submitted for the REF 2020 must be publicly available from institutional repositories either at the point of acceptance or of publication and in 'final post-peer reviewed' format.** It does not have to be the version of record of the publisher. So, research can be considered open access, and therefore be submittable to the REF 2020 if it is available in your university repository in its post-peer reviewed format from the point when it was either accepted or published. Since 'gold' is no longer being insisted on, there will be no compulsion to pay article processing charges.
- 2 That they will allow the same embargo times on public viewing of deposited materials as are currently operated by research funded by Research Councils UK (RCUK).** These embargo times (12 months in sciences and 24 months

in arts, humanities and social sciences) mean that research will be considered compliant with open access if it has been registered in an institutional repository at the point of acceptance or publication but is not truly publicly available until the embargo time runs out. Research will have to be registered at the point of acceptance or publication however and cannot be made retrospectively 'open'.

- 3 That at this time, it will not specify the form of licence to be used by publishers.** Instead, authors and publishers will be allowed to continue working within existing licences without penalty.
- 4 That it is currently unfeasible to move to open access in the cases either of monographs or of data sets.**

UCU'S POLICY

UCU's policy, established by our Congress earlier this year, is critical of the proposals to move toward 'gold' open access and supportive of the alternative 'green' route.

www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=6613#HE20

As such, we are broadly supportive of the moves toward accepting 'green' open access for publicly funded research.

However, many issues still remain around the moves to implement HEFCE's proposals.

For example, while many universities have developed policies and repositories that embed green open access already, many have not and will be under pressure to do so quickly now.

Some universities benefited from grants of public funding from RCUK to support the movement toward open access, including the payment of APCs where they are being charged. The union is

concerned that these funds should be more widely available and must be used in ways that are fair to all researchers as far as possible. There are many ways in which they could be used and distributed unfairly.

Different journals will react differently to the new publishing environment. Some may insist on charging APCs or maintaining long embargo times as a condition of publication. Different disciplines will also be affected in different ways by the proposals.

WHAT HAPPENS NOW?

The funding councils are now consulting on these proposals and this consultation closes on 30 October.

UCU will be responding to the consultation. We need your input to make sure that our consultation reflects the views of the membership.

We will also be developing guidance for our branches in ensuring that institutions support the move toward open access in the fairest possible ways.

Please help us by responding to the short survey: www.surveymonkey.com/s/openaccess-survey

FURTHER READING

Read HEFCE's proposals in full and the consultation document:

www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2013/201316

Stevan Harnad's response to the funding councils' proposals:

<http://eprints.soton.ac.uk/355015>

Meera Sabaratnam's response to the funding councils' proposals:

<http://thedisorderofthings.com/2013/07/26/getting-somewhere-hefce-proposals-on-open-access-for-a-post-2014-research-excellence-framework/>