

NATURE | NEWS

## Europe joins UK open-access bid

**Britain plans to dip in to research funding to pay for results to be freely available.**

Richard Van Noorden

17 July 2012

Being the first to try something new is nerve-wracking — so it is always a relief to see someone else follow your lead. When the UK government announced on 16 July that it would require much of the country's taxpayer-funded research to be open-access from April 2013, it was not immediately clear whether the move would set a trend or prove to be an isolated gamble — one that would leave the United Kingdom essentially giving away its research for free while still paying to read everyone else's.

But the next day, the European Commission (EC) matched the United Kingdom's vision, launching a similar proposal to open up all the work funded by its Horizon 2020 research programme, set to run in the European Union (EU) from 2014 to 2020 and [Print](#) disburse €80 billion (US\$98.3 billion). The details will be negotiated over the next year, but EC vice-president Neelie Kroes emphasized the momentum that open access has already acquired. "We are leading by example, making EU-funded research open to all — and we are urging member states to do likewise, so that sooner, rather than later, all nationally funded research will follow." The EC says that it is aiming for 60% of all European publicly funded research articles to be open access by 2016.

The announcements weren't unexpected. Britain's policy follows last month's government-commissioned Finch report on open access (see *Nature* **486**, 302–303; 2012), itself the culmination of more than a year of debate. The EC has made no secret of its support for open access, having run a pilot trial that covers some 20% of the budget of its current research-funding scheme, the Seventh Framework programme.

But coming in such quick succession, the statements mark Britain and Europe's determined plunge into an uncertain open-access transition that will dramatically shift the incentives for scientists, journal publishers and research institutions over the next five years.

Other funding bodies such as the US National Institutes of Health (NIH) and Australia's National Health and Medical Research Council already mandate a degree of open access. These agencies compel researchers to make their work publicly available in a separate repository within 12 months of publication — a version of 'green' open access that coexists with conventional subscription-based publishing.

But the UK Finch report advocated that authors should make their work free to read immediately on publication by paying publishers up front — the 'gold' open-access model. This is controversial among some researchers who argue that it sustains publishers' already high profits by eating into funds that could be used for research, and that the Finch report has played down the value of green repositories.

**"The fear that the UK ends up isolated is not going to happen."**

Although the UK policy recommends the gold route, it includes a much larger role for green open access than the Finch report envisaged. The plan is set out by Research Councils UK (RCUK), the umbrella body for the nation's seven research councils that award government grants. To cover the up-front charges for gold papers, the RCUK will pay 1–1.5% of its £2.8-billion annual research budget in block grants to research institutions. Each will use the

money to set up a publications fund to pay for its researchers' papers, with the size of the award being proportional to each institution's research activity in recent years. Prepaid gold papers must have a liberal publishing licence, making text and data free to mine or reuse, the RCUK policy adds.

For journals that don't offer gold open access, the RCUK insists that they allow authors to deposit the final peer-reviewed version

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of a paper online within 6 months of publication (a system with which *Nature* complies). A longer embargo of 12 months is allowed for the arts, humanities and social sciences. The RCUK says that journals that don't allow either route should be shunned by researchers. The EC proposal matches this mixed green-gold model, right down to the 6- and 12-month publishing embargoes, but allows individual researchers to pay any author fees from their own grants.

To enforce its policy, the RCUK will probably tie compliance to future funding — much like the rule that the Wellcome Trust, a private UK research charity, announced in late June to beef up the 55% compliance of its own green-gold open-access mandate. The RCUK hopes after “a number of years” to approach the 75% compliance that the NIH has achieved for its green open-access policy, according to Astrid Wissenburg, chairwoman of the RCUK Impact Group, which is charged with increasing the economic and societal benefits of research-council funding.

If researchers do fall in line, the wide adoption of open access will shift everyone's publishing behaviours. Scientists may start discussing with universities where, and how much, they can afford to publish. Publishers and learned societies that rely on profits from library subscriptions will have to be more transparent about the costs of publishing. The latest open-access journals, such as *PeerJ* and *eLife*, may gain from the resulting melee (see *Nature* **486**,166; 2012).

A large-scale change will depend on other countries following the United Kingdom and the EC; as *Nature* went to press, rumours were circulating that the US National Science Foundation was set to announce a new open-access policy of its own.

UK science minister David Willetts told *Nature*: “The fear that the UK ends up isolated is not going to happen — our policy will shape the international debate.”

*Nature* **487**, 285 (19 July 2012) doi:10.1038/487285a

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Valery Brown · 2012-09-02 04:22 PM

Making authors pay to have their work published will simply limit the work done in the UK that is put out in the public domain. I publish my data if I think it will be useful for the scientific community. There is no way that I could do this if it were to cost 2k for an APC. I would love free access to scientific papers, 30 pounds per article is extortionate, but charging authors will prevent academic institutions with limited research budgets from publishing anything. This will be a nail in the coffin for UK research, not the dawn of free information for everyone.

Valery from IslandLoans



Stevan Harnad · 2012-07-27 03:39 AM

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### RCUK OPEN ACCESS POLICY URGENTLY NEEDS REVISION

See: <http://bit.ly/RCUKrevise>

Suppose you're a subscription journal. Hybrid Gold Open Access (OA) means you just keep selling subscriptions and &#8212; on top of that &#8212; you can charge (whatever you like) as an extra fee for selling single-article hybrid gold.

How much do you charge? Well, if you publish 100 articles per year and your total annual revenue is  $\text{\pounds}XXX$ , you charge 1% of  $\text{\pounds}XXX$  for hybrid Gold OA per article.

Once you've got that (plus your unaltered subscription revenue of  $\text{\pounds}XXX$ ) you've earned  $\text{\pounds}XXX + 1\%$  for that year.

Good business.

And if the UK publishes 6% of the world's articles yearly, then on average 6% of the articles in any journal will be fee-based hybrid Gold OA, thanks to Finch and RCUK . That means worldwide publisher revenue &#8212; let's say it's  $\text{\pounds}XXX$  per year &#8212; will increase from  $\text{\pounds}XXX$  per year to:  $\text{\pounds}XXX + 6\%$  per year

Not bad.

Publishers are not too dense to do the above arithmetic. They've already done it. That is what hybrid Gold is predicated upon. And that is why publishers are so pleased with Finch/RCUK: "The world purports to want OA. Fine. We're ready to sell it to them -- on top of what we're selling them already."

In the UK, Finch and RCUK have obligingly eliminated hybrid Gold OA's only real competition (Green OA) -- Finch by ignoring it completely, and RCUK by forcing fundees to pay for Gold rather than provide Green whenever the publisher has the sense to offer Gold.

Of course publishers will say (and sometimes even mean it) that they are not really trying to inflate their income even further. As the uptake of hybrid Gold increases, they will proportionately lower the cost of subscriptions &#8212; until subscriptions are gone and all that's left, like the Cheshire Cat's grin, is Gold OA revenue (now no longer hybrid but

"pure") -- and at the same bloated levels as today's subscriptions.

So what? The goal was always OA, not Green OA or Gold OA. Who cares if all that money is being wasted?

I don't.

I care about all the time (and with it all that OA usage and impact and research progress) that has been wasted, and that will continue to be wasted, as the joint thrall of Gold Fever and Rights Rapture keep the research community from mandating the cost-free Green OA that would bring them 100% OA globally in next to no time, and leave them instead chasing along the CC-BYways after gold dust year upon year, at unaffordable, unnecessary and unscalable extra cost.

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Let's hope that RCUK will have the sense and integrity to recognize its mistake, once the unintended negative consequences are pointed out, and will promptly correct it. The policy can still be corrected completely with two simple patches.

RCUK should:

(1) Drop the implication that if a journal offers Green and Gold, RCUK fundees must pick Gold

and

(2) Downgrade to a request the requirement that the Green option must be within the allowable embargo interval.

(The deposit of the refereed final draft would still have to be done immediately upon publication, but the repositoryâ&#x80&#x99s â&#x80&#x9cemail-eprint-requestâ&#x80&#x9d Button could be used to tide over user needs by providing â&#x80&#x9cAlmost-OAâ&#x80&#x9d during the embargo.)

There is no way to resurrect the current RCUK policy in such a way as to rule out hybrid Gold: to do that, the policy would have to be re-conceived and re-written completely. If that were done, all of the fatal bugs of the present draft would be gone:

â&#x80&#x9cYou must provide at least gratis OA within the allowable embargo. This can be done either by paying for pure Gold OA (not hybrid) â&#x80&#x94 but then the OA must be libre and unembargoed (and the paper should be deposited in the fundee's repository anyway). Or you can provide Gratis Green OA to the refereed final draft within the allowable embargo (but the deposit itself must be done immediately upon acceptance for publication).â&#x80&#x9d

That would be a fine policy, especially if beefed up with a link to submission to HEFCE [Higher Education Funding Council for England] for REF.



Stevan Harnad • 2012-07-17 06:29 PM

And the US should (and will) reject the Finch/Willetts recommendations too...



Stevan Harnad • 2012-07-17 06:18 PM

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RCUK & EC DID NOT FOLLOW FINCH/WILLETS, THEY REJECTED IT!

Irony of ironies, that it should now appear as if the the RCUK & EC were following the recommendations of Finch/Willets when in point of fact they are pointedly rejecting them!

RCUK and EC already were already leading the world in providing and mandating Green OA.

Finch/Willets, under the influence of the publisher lobby, recommended abandoning cost-free Green OA and instead spending scarce research money on paying publishers extra for Gold OA.

RCUK & EC both immediately announced that, no, they would stay the course in which they were already leading &#8212; mandatory Green OA.

What Finch/Willets have mandated is that Â£50,000,000.00 of the UK's scarce research budget is taken away annually from UK research and redirected instead to paying publishers for Gold OA.

The UK is free to squander its public funds as it sees fit.

But as long as cost-free Green OA mandates remain in effect, that's just a waste of money, not of progress in the global growth in OA.



Karel Rei • 2012-07-17 04:16 PM

And now the United States??



Karel Rei • 2012-07-17 04:13 PM

And now the United States???

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