



Learned Society attitudes towards Open Access

Report on survey results

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1. Executive summary

Learned societies are “a critical part of the research environment”,¹ and many rely largely on subscription income from their journals publishing programme to support the other services they offer to their members in the promotion of their academic discipline. As a result, they are facing enormous challenges as the journals publishing landscape becomes more complex and established revenues are threatened.

Following the publication of the UK Finch Group’s report² on expanding access to research publications, there is genuine concern that learned societies could potentially stand to lose out significantly if Open Access is widely adopted³. They are understandably worried about the future sustainability of their organizations and the knock-on effect on the subject research communities they support and serve.

Questions are being asked about how societies, especially those that are small with limited resources, can remain viable in an Open Access world? How should publishing partners be helping to support societies with their journal publishing programmes to allow them to continue their mission on behalf of their members?

With these issues in mind TBI Communications, on behalf of EDP Sciences, undertook a programme of research to help understand more fully the attitudes of professional and learned societies towards Open Access (OA), their evolving needs; and how a publishing partner can effectively support them in an OA environment. There were two steps to the research, 1) an online survey to professional and learned societies and to supplement these findings, 2) a focus group to a wider range of representatives from the academic publishing industry.

The key findings were as follows:

General attitudes towards Open Access

- Most societies are familiar with Open Access and its principles.
- Only around half of the societies surveyed are strongly positive about Open Access, but equally there are only a small proportion who are strongly negative.
- Societies overwhelmingly agree that Open Access will inevitably place some learned societies’ journals into financial jeopardy.
- Whilst framed around a statement from the UK Finch Report – nearly all those who strongly agreed that OA will place learned societies’ journals into financial jeopardy were outside the UK.

¹ Cary Cooper (Academy of Social Sciences)

² In July 2012, the Working Group on Expanding Access to Published Research Findings, chaired by Professor Dame Janet Finch, published their report on how the UK can move towards Open Access to published scholarly articles. To read more see the full report [click here](#).

³ Letters in the Times Higher Education from the Academy of Social Sciences and the Society for Higher Education, as well as an article in The Bookseller on “Learned Societies: OA Risks.”

Challenges relating to Open Access

- By far the most significant challenge to societies relating to Open Access is seen as the ability to maintain revenues from existing publications.
- The challenges of the evolving and changing landscape is evidenced by nearly two-thirds of societies indicating that it is complex to understand and decide appropriate responses, with positive messages being lost in the confusion.
- Competing with large Open Access specialist publishers was also considered a significant challenge for societies.
- Two-thirds of societies felt that maintaining ethical and business integrity, was the least significant challenge.
- Further concerns raised related to the reputation and role of publishers, freedom of choice, integrity, lowering of quality, funding, access and mandating.

Opportunities relating to Open Access

- The survey showed that by far the greatest opportunity recognised by societies relating to OA was enabling researchers in poor and developing countries to have broader access to information.
- Half the societies felt there was a strong opportunity for increasing inter-disciplinary access to research information and for the acceleration of research impact.
- The focus group felt that Open Access meant that Societies potentially had many opportunities open up to them relating to their role in advocacy and member communications.
- Collaboration between Societies could help in the transition to Open Access, by pooling resources and sharing complex tasks.
- There is an opportunity for Societies to be agile and start new journals in new and emerging disciplines.
- More than ever before, with so many journals being published Open Access, Societies should look to endorse themselves as the stamp of quality and authority.
- Other potential opportunities highlighted related mainly to the expansion of membership, society services and readership.

Current society activities relating to Open Access

- All the societies who have a publishing programme are offering Open Access of one flavour or another.
- Gold Open Access is the OA method that is least offered by society journals, however nearly two-thirds of societies indicated that they would *like* to be offering this option.
- The greatest majority of societies are offering OA via Green routes in repositories.
- Hybrid (by article) OA is offered by over three-quarters of societies.
- Half the societies simply use delayed Open Access whereby there is subscription access first and free access after an embargo period.

- Over half of the society do not have arrangements in place to waive or reduce OA fees for their publications, conversely over a third do support their members in this way with the remainder unsure.
- When it comes to supporting the payment of APCs, two-thirds of societies have no support in place.

Support in responding to Open Access

- The main way that societies keep up-to-date with OA Policy developments is by reading key industry information such as the Scholarly Kitchen.
- Of those who have publishing partners, i.e. not self-published, the vast majority are kept updated of OA Policy developments by their publisher.
- Further evidencing the complexity and confusion society are feeling in the OA landscape, the most valuable services relating to Open Access a publisher can provide to societies are: keeping societies updated on policies and practices, and providing technology and process support for article process charges.
- Two-thirds of all societies are also looking for support on best approach to OA, and compliance with funder mandates.

In summary, learned societies are generally positive about Open Access. They see the benefits of broadening access, which in turn may help the society profile and increase membership. However, societies generally depend on publication income streams to fund much of the work they do supporting members and their discipline. There are significant concerns about the potential negative impact of Open Access on these income streams. Despite this, societies are looking to expand their Open Access publishing activities, and a number of opportunities were highlighted especially around advocacy and membership communications. They are hampered in this by lack of access to good information to help them make appropriate decisions – the Open Access landscape is complex and constantly evolving. Keeping up to date with changing policies and emerging initiatives is a huge challenge, as is providing the necessary technology infrastructure to support new workflows, such as management of Article Processing Charges (APCs). This is why two thirds of societies completing this survey expressed the need for more support in deciding the best approach for them relating to Open Access.

EDP Sciences commissioned this research with a view to exploring how societies are responding to Open Access. As a society-owned publisher, EDP is only too aware of the critical need for support for societies in evolving their publishing programmes for the future. This is why EDP Sciences has launched EDP Open, as a service through which societies can tap into the expertise and systems of a global publisher, while at the same time making decisions for themselves that are right for their communities. We hope these survey results will be useful in stimulating further discussion on how publishers can develop their services to societies to offer them the tailored support they need to create opportunities out of this new, challenging environment.

2. Method and objectives

The research was undertaken in two phases:

1. During February 2014, TBI Communications conducted an **online survey** to professional and learned societies on behalf of EDP Sciences to gather their attitudes towards Open Access. The objectives of the survey were two-fold:
 - Explore the views of societies views towards Open Access.
 - Explore the needs societies have from publishing partnerships relating to Open Access.

The societies surveyed were members of SSP and/or ALPSP plus some current EDP Science society contacts.

Detailed responses were received from 33 societies.

2. To supplement these findings, a **focus group** was held at the UKSG Meeting in April 2014 where the themes raised in the survey were explored further. These discussions mostly feed into the challenges and opportunities section.

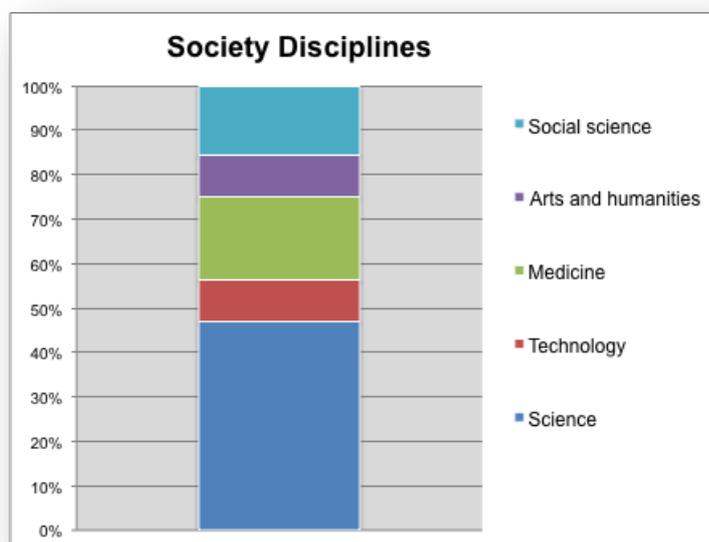
3. Profile of respondents

3.1. Profile of Survey respondents

33 responses to the online survey were received.

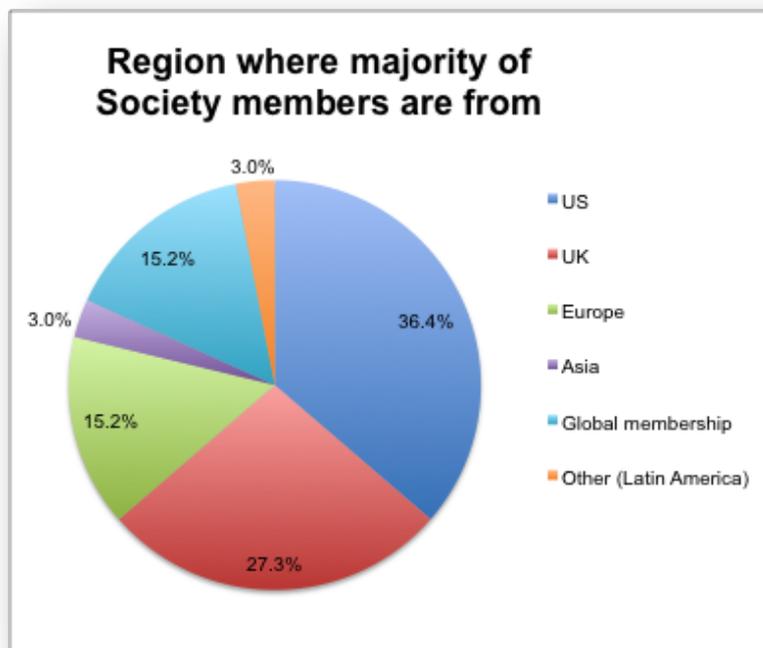
3.1.1. Academic field

75% of respondents were in the STM field, with nearly half the respondents (46.9%) in the science field. The remaining respondents were in the social sciences (16%) and arts and humanities (9%).



3.1.2. Geographical region

The largest proportion of respondents (36.4%) had the majority of their members based in North America, 27.3% were in the UK, and 15.2% in Europe. 15.2% of respondents indicated they had global membership.



3.1.3. Publishing profile

All respondents except one had a journals publishing programme, with the majority (78.8%) publishing between 1-5 journals.

Half the respondents (50%) were self-publishing, 37.5% are publishing with a publishing partner and 12.5% are doing both.

3.2. Profile of Focus Group participants

Together with representatives from EDP Sciences, six participants were recruited from the delegates of UKSG 2014, with the intention of getting as broad representation from the academic publishing industry as possible.

The following roles were represented:

- Consortia Manager
- Academic Librarian
- Librarian at a Research Institute
- Society Official
- Publisher
- Subscription Agent

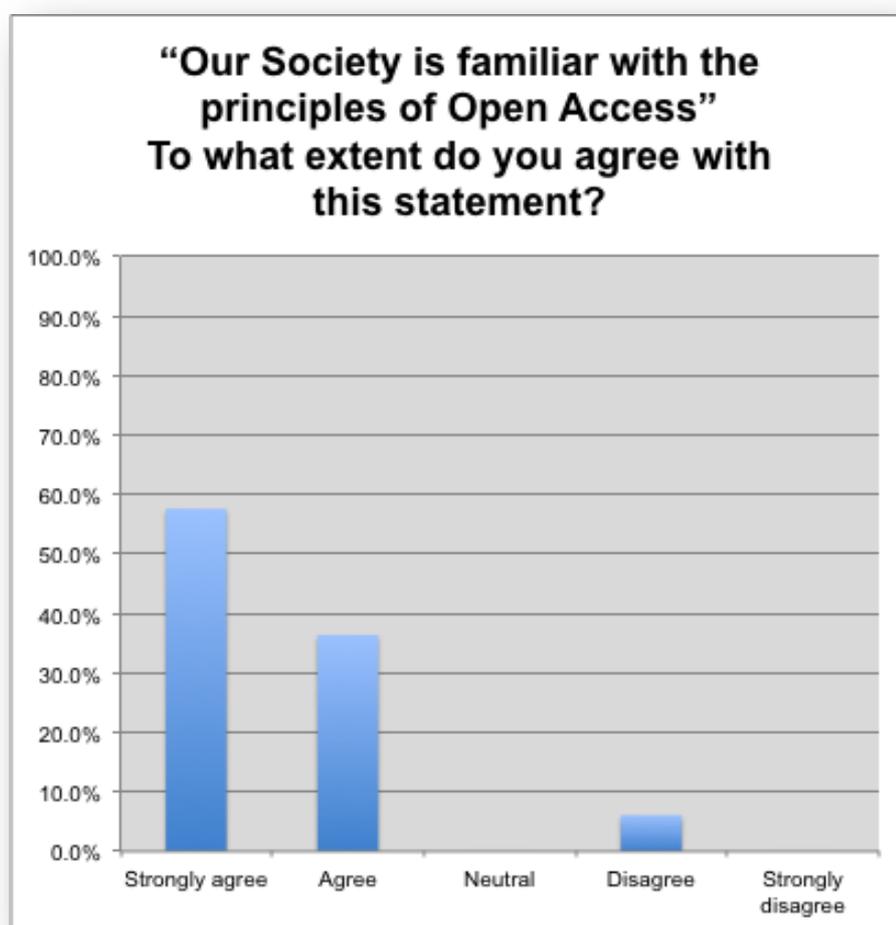
4. Familiarity with Open Access

We presented the Survey respondents with the following statement:

“Our Society is familiar with the principles of Open Access” and asked them to what extent they agreed with the statement.

We can see that the majority of societies are familiar and aware of Open Access principles, as 94% of respondents either **Strongly Agreed** or **Agreed** with this statement.

Of the 2 societies who disagreed with this statement, one was a science society and one arts and humanities.

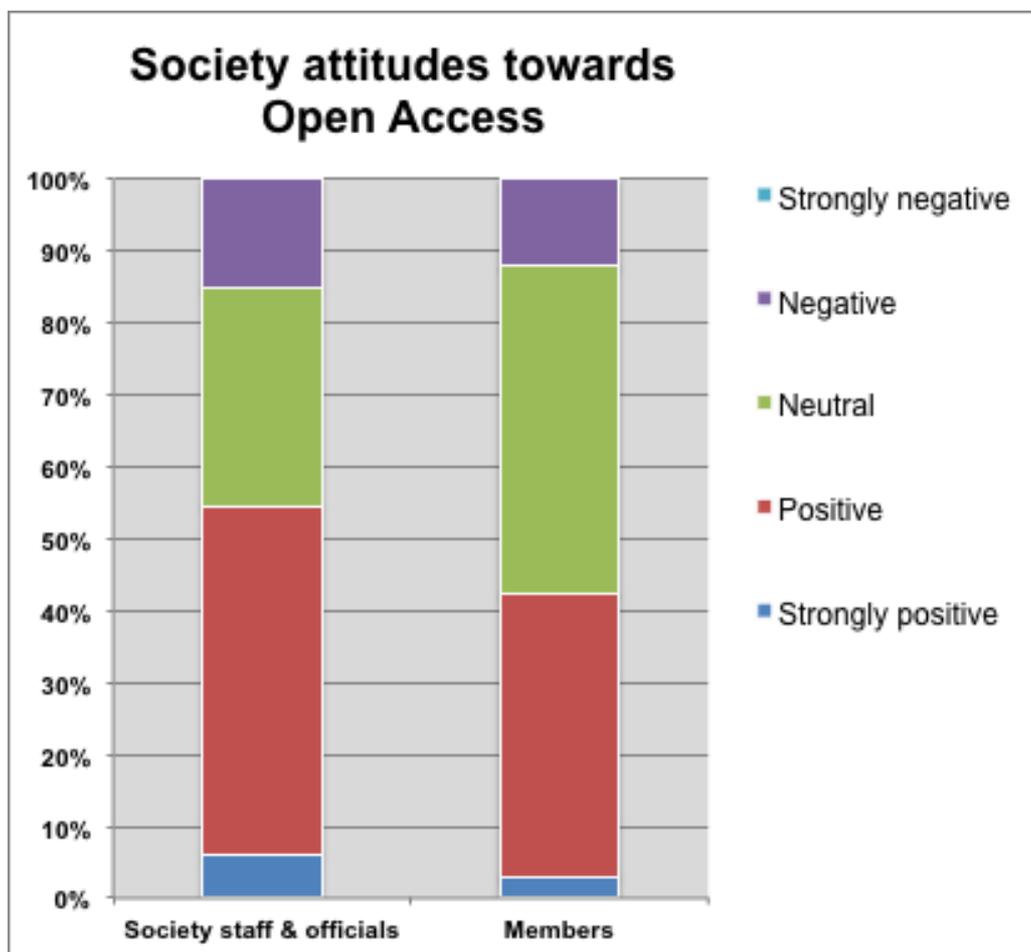


5. Attitudes to Open Access

We wanted to explore further the attitudes of learned societies towards Open Access.

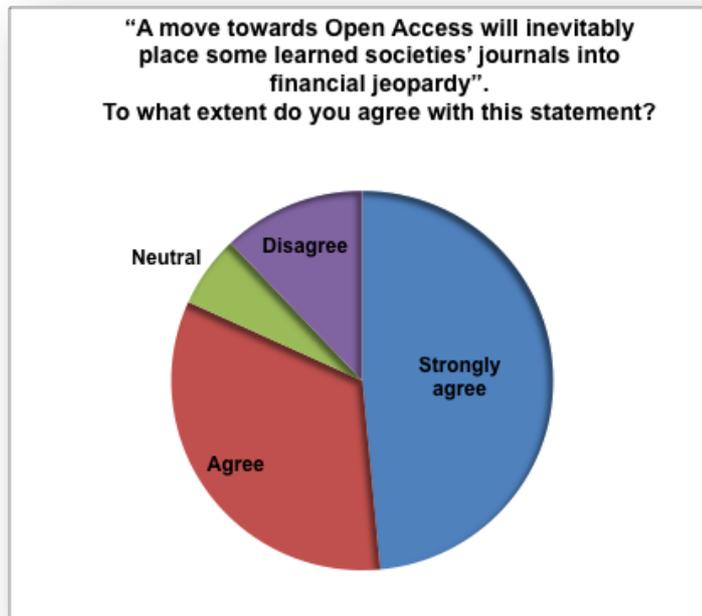
We first asked what the attitude of the society staff and officials overall was towards Open Access. Over half the respondents (55%) had either a **Strongly Positive** or **Positive** attitude, with only 15% responding that their attitude was **Negative**. The remaining 30% indicated their attitude was **Neutral**.

We then went on to explore their opinion on the attitudes of their members towards Open Access. Here a higher proportion and a slight majority (45.5%) indicated a **Neutral** response over a **Strongly Positive** or **Positive** response at (42%), again only a small group indicated **Negative** (12.1%) but all of these were in the STM field. The higher neutral responses here, attests to the fact we were asking them to give opinions relating to their members rather than their own beliefs.



Our final question in this section explored further whether societies felt they might face financial challenges in light of Open Access. This was framed around whether they agreed or disagreed with a statement from the Finch Report.

“A move towards Open Access will inevitably place some learned societies’ journals into financial jeopardy”.



There was overwhelming agreement with 82% of responders indicating that they **strongly agreed** or **agreed** with this statement with only 12% disagreeing that Open Access will mean financial challenges for the future.

Interestingly, although the question was framed around the context of the UK Finch Report, 93% of those who **strongly agreed** with this statement were outside the UK, with 53.3% based in the US.

Input from Focus Group

Open Access is taking off strongly in UK due to policies such as RCUK and Wellcome. This is anticipated to continue in the near future in the Western hemisphere.

One participant stated that Springer had recently reported that all research output will be OA in 10 years (it was further commented that already one in 6 of Springer’s papers is OA, so it probably won’t take as long as 10 years). The focus group indicated that if this is the direction we are headed, then we need to engage now.

However, they confirmed the survey findings that there is massive confusion and the market is not clear on what it knows, and attitudes are different by discipline e.g. biology prefer gold and physics prefer green.

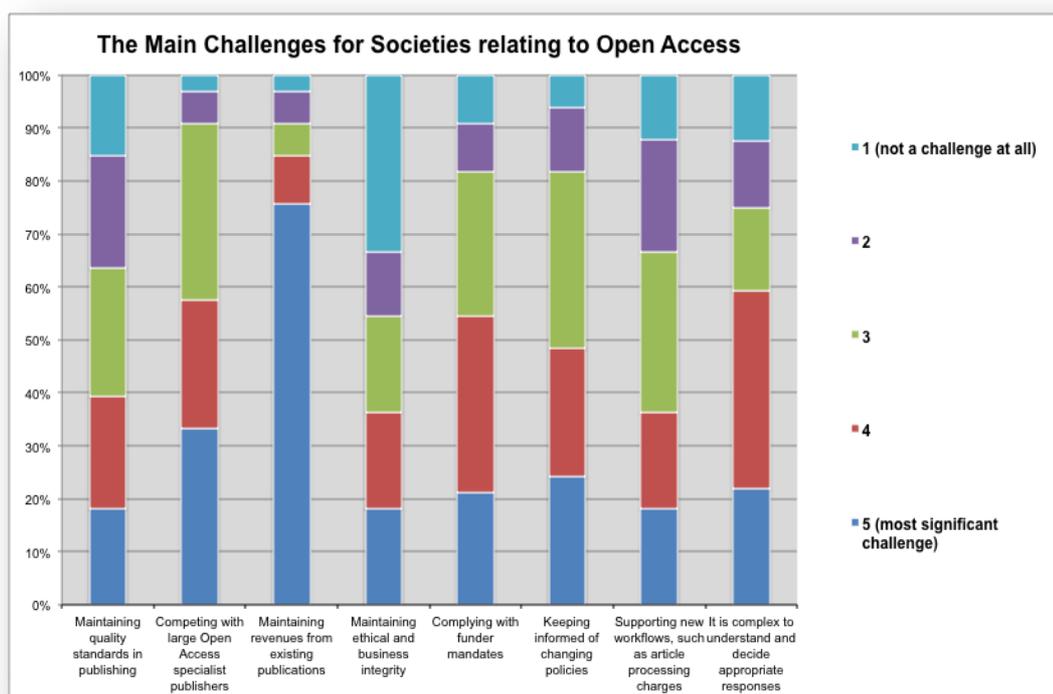
6. Challenges and Opportunities

6.3. Challenges

By far the most significant challenge relating to Open Access indicated by societies was the ability to **maintain revenues from their existing publications** with 75.8% of responders rating this as a very significant challenge.

The challenges of the evolving and changing landscape are evidenced by nearly 60% of responders indicating that: **it is complex to understand and decide appropriate responses** as a very significant or significant challenge. **Competing with large Open Access specialist publishers** was also considered a very significant or significant challenge by 57.6% of respondents.

Unsurprisingly of the challenges highlighted, 63.6% of responders felt that **Maintaining ethical and business integrity**, was the least significant challenge facing them – although 18.2% did still feel this was a significant challenge.



There was opportunity to mention additional challenges. Responses included:

Concerns relating to the reputation and role of Publishers:

- “Positioning themselves in the debate about OA as organisations that represent researchers, but also have financial interests as often publishing revenues form a significant income stream. In other words, not be thrown in with the large commercial publishers but also be seen

as organisations that significantly support the scientists in their subject areas.”

- “The "bad apples" of predatory Open Access publishers and the buzz words "vanity publishing" or "pay to publish" spoil the general perception of the thriving, positive development of Open Access among society membership.”
- “Avoiding being tarred with the 'predatory publisher brush”.

Other concerns related to authors' freedom of choice, integrity, and quality.

- “Making sure that members are able to publish where and when they wish to publish, maintaining a long-term diversity of journals (and avoiding concentration on a few major players).”
- “The perception that authors can buy their way into a journal thus compromising quality.”
- Convincing members, attracting good papers.

Other comments related to funding, access and mandating

- Finding the right way of supporting the Open Access fees. We feel that a system where the author pays for his publication is simply wrong.
- I don't think Open Access necessarily equates with unlimited republication rights with attribution.
- The linking of Creative Commons licenses to the Open Access mandates.
- keeping track of different approaches taken by different governments.

Input from Focus Group

The focus group backed up the concerns highlighted in the survey that losing revenue was the major challenge facing Learned Societies. It was commented that it is easier to transition journals if they're top quality with a high rejection rate and have a large subscription base.

They added that there are not just financial challenges, but also concerns about reputation and quality. One participant commented that “they felt that some ‘predatory’ journals have tarred the name of OA”, and cynics may assume that if a Society needs money to support an OA transition, there will be a need to publish more papers annually, and consequently lower the quality of journals.

The complexity of the landscape was highlighted repeatedly, the principles of OA are good, but the positive messages are lost amidst the confusion.

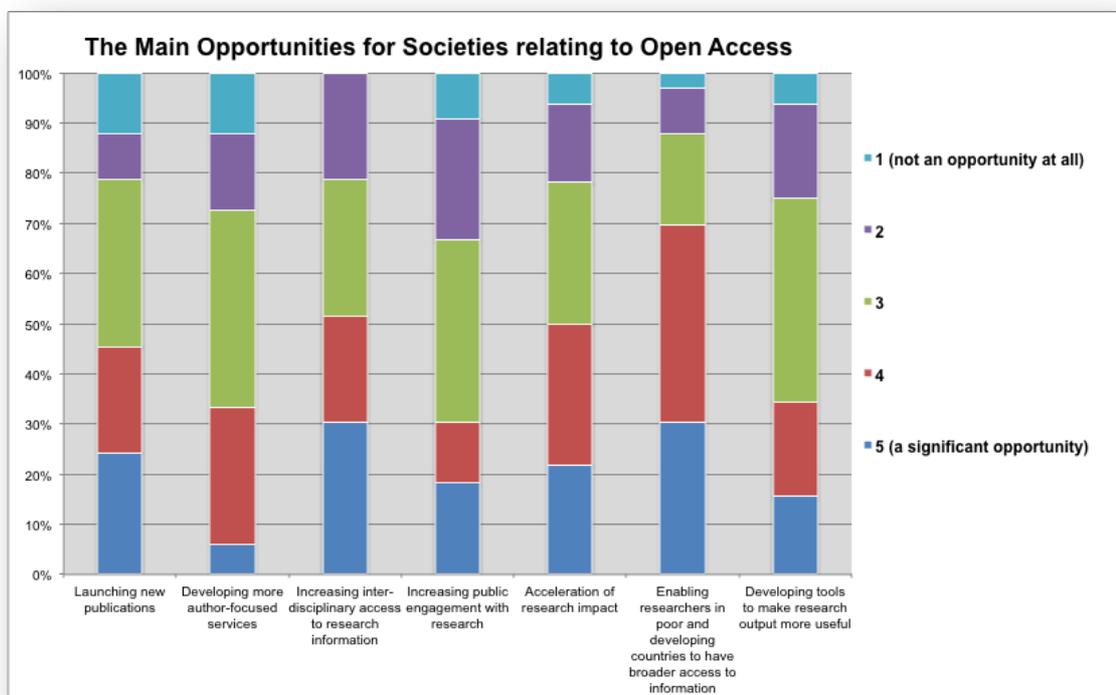
6.4. Opportunities

The main opportunity recognised by societies relating to Open Access was **enabling researchers in poor and developing countries to have broader access to information** with nearly 70% of respondents indicating this was a significant level of opportunity (rated 4 or 5 on the scale). The only other

opportunities where at least half the respondents felt there was a high level of opportunity were **increasing inter-disciplinary access to research information** and the **acceleration of research impact**. Otherwise responses to the opportunities suggested, were largely neutral with **increasing public engagement with research** thought to be the least opportunity for societies.

Responders comments to further opportunities mainly related to extending **membership, society services** and **readership**.

- Opportunity to compete with established publications.
- While the perception among members might not be too positive (see Q6), there is an opportunity to win international authors who know Open Access and will be happy to contribute.
- Opportunity to consider new areas for supporting society members and needs.



- Increasing readership from amongst members of the community who don't currently have access to our content.
- Equal opportunity to humans in the world.
- For a small society, I see none. Some authors believe it increases their impact factors but research on that seems mixed.

Feedback from Focus Group

A number of opportunities were raised during discussions in the focus group.

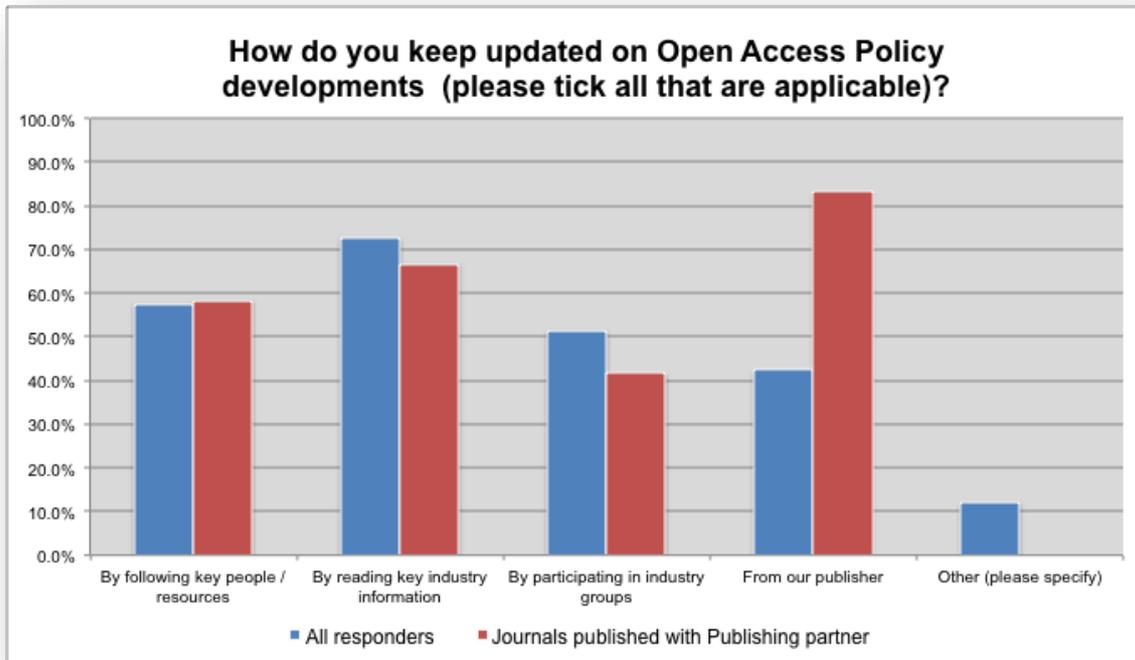
- **Advocacy/Member Communications**
 - All societies want to promote research and awareness. OA fits well with this and societies should emphasise the positives of OA and how it fits in with their mission and their aims.
 - There is an opportunity for societies to represent their members to funders and policy makers.
 - Societies have direct communications with their members that is publisher agnostic, and therefore there is a natural role that Societies could play in educating their members in Open Access issues e.g. informing members about availability of grant funds (it has been noted by librarians that there is often a disconnect between authors of an institution and the institution itself in terms of who holds grant money).
- **Collaboration** – as revenue streams shift, the transitional period from a traditional to OA publishing model is the most challenging. Most Societies don't have the resources to ride the wave during this transition. So collaboration between societies could help weather this: pooling resources and sharing complex tasks.
- **Interdisciplinary reach** – was echoed from the survey, Open Access provides real opportunities to achieve much wider readership.
- **Publishing** – in the publishing industry, decision-making can be slow. There are competitive opportunities for Societies to be more nimble and agile, and to start new OA journals in cutting-edge/new disciplines that a traditional publishing model may not risk.
- **Third Parties** – there are opportunities for third parties to set standards. OA touches on everything and lack of standards and systematic ways of doing things is adding to the confusion.
- **Badge of quality** – with a proliferation of journals (c.10k journals in DOAJ) – the imprint of Societies should be developed as a mark of quality and authority.

7. Keeping up to date

When asked how societies keep up-to-date with Open Access Policy developments, over 70% of respondents indicated that they read key industry information. More than half also followed key people and resources and participated in industry groups. Less than half (42.4%) of the full group indicated that they keep up to date from their publisher which is not surprising as the majority of the societies are self-publishing, however, when filtered by those societies who are **not** self-published, nearly 85% of societies are keeping informed from their publishing partner.

When asked about other ways of keeping up to date, these were mainly **resources** and included:

- Blogs and posts on LinkedIn or Scholarly Kitchen.



- SSP Society for Scholarly Publishing
- I read Scholarly Kitchen and Learned Publishing

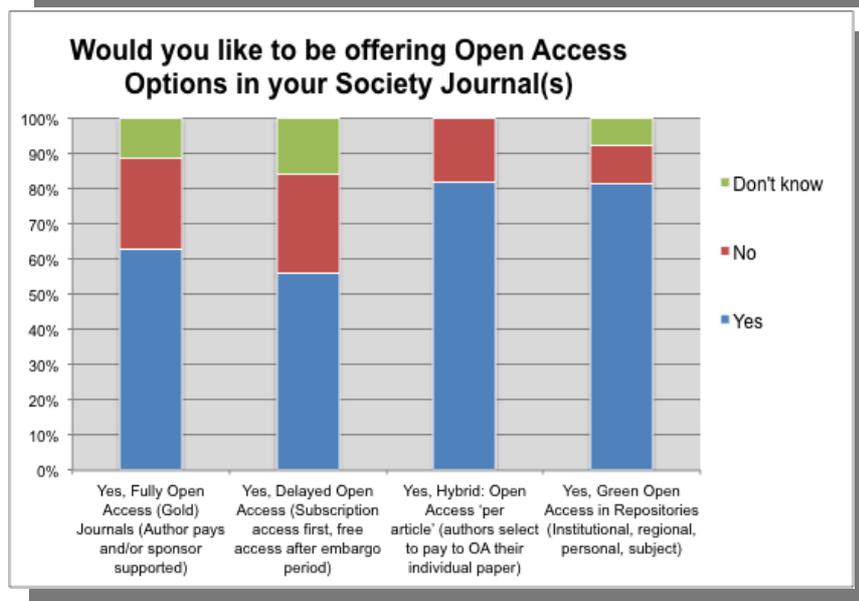
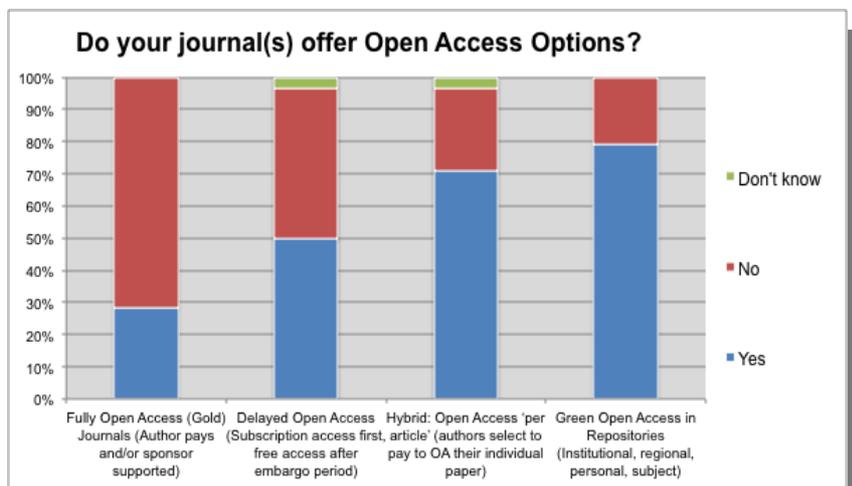
Feedback from Focus Group

The UK is leading Open Access – it is important to consider what is happening internationally.

8. Society Open Access Activity

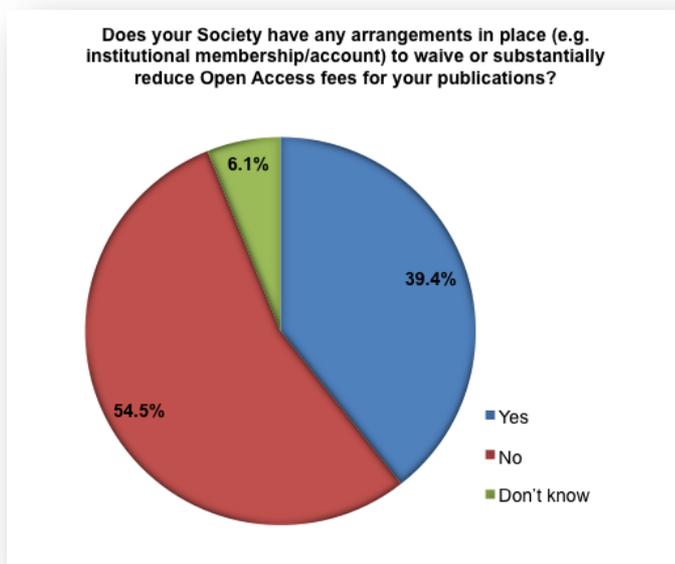
Of the 97% of societies who have a journals publishing programme, only 28.6% offer Fully Open Access (Gold) options. The greatest majority (79.3%) offer Green Open Access via repositories closely followed by 71% publishing via hybrid means offering OA on a per article basis. Half the respondents simply use delayed Open Access whereby there is subscription access first and free access after an embargo period.

When we asked what OA options they would *like* to be offering in their society Journal(s) all respondents want to be offering OA in one form or another. 63% would like to be offering Gold OA, and over 80% of respondents would like to offer OA via the Hybrid or Green routes. On the other hand, 26% do not want to offer Gold OA.



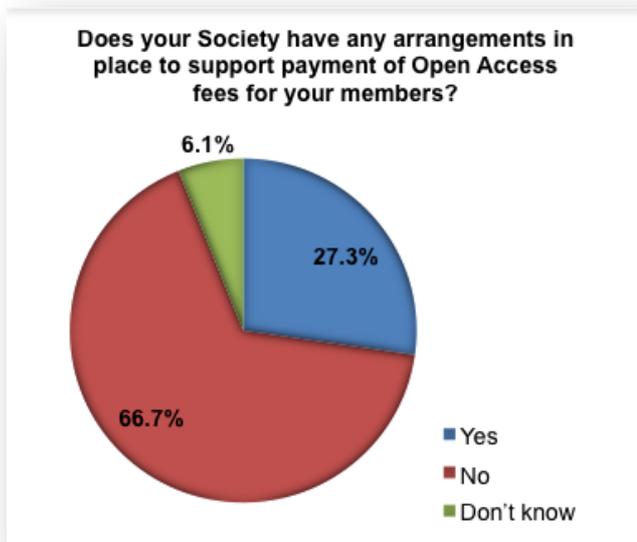
9. Society Support to Members

We explored what support societies were offering to their members with regards to Open Access.

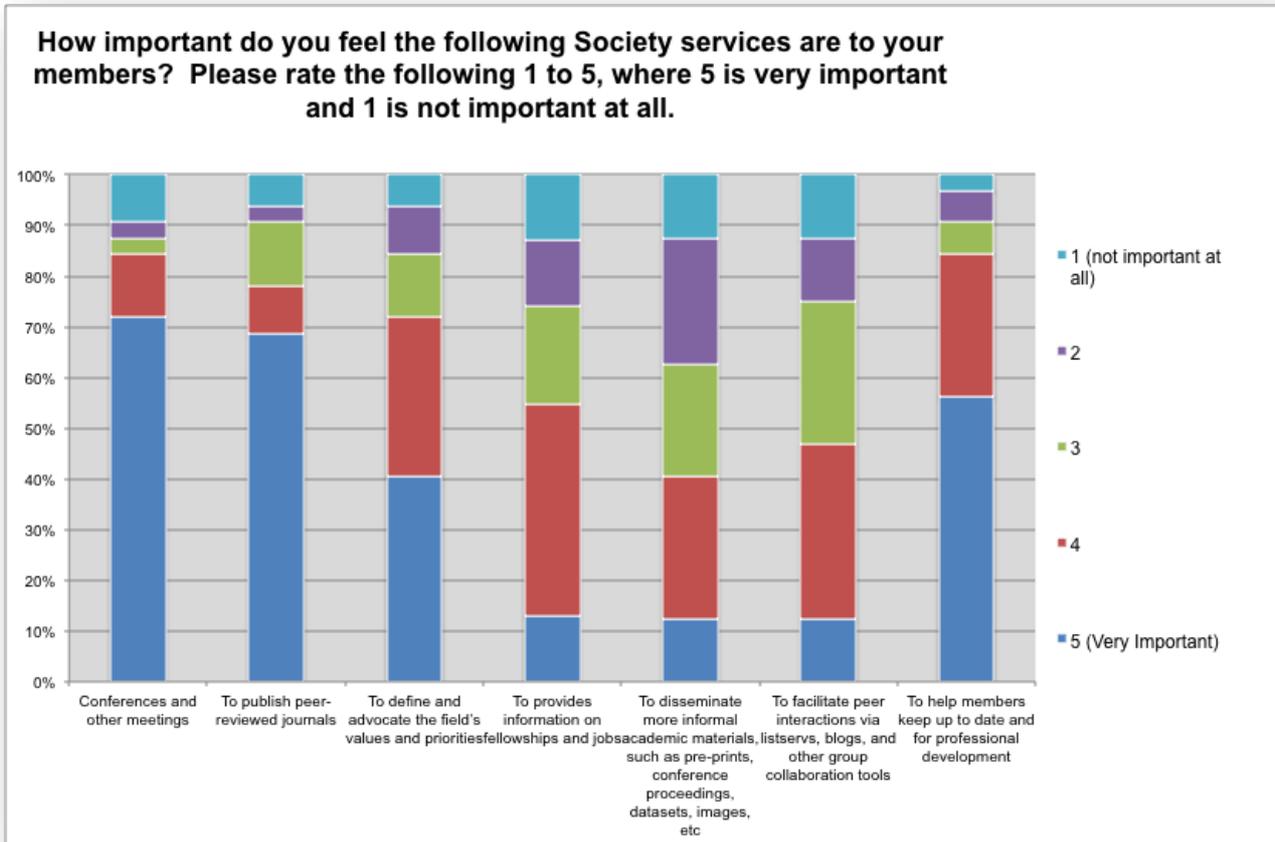


54.5% of societies do not have any arrangements in place (e.g. institutional memberships or accounts) to waive or substantially reduce Open Access fees for their publications. However nearly 40% do support their members in this way with the remainder unsure.

There was a similar response regarding supporting the payment of APCs, with a slightly higher (66.7%) having no support in place and 27.8% saying they do offer payment support to their members.



When asked a broader question about services they feel are important to offer to their members, **running conferences and other meetings** and **publishing peer-reviewed journals** were both considered very important, closely followed by **helping members to keep up to date and for professional development**.



10. Society requirements from a publishing partner

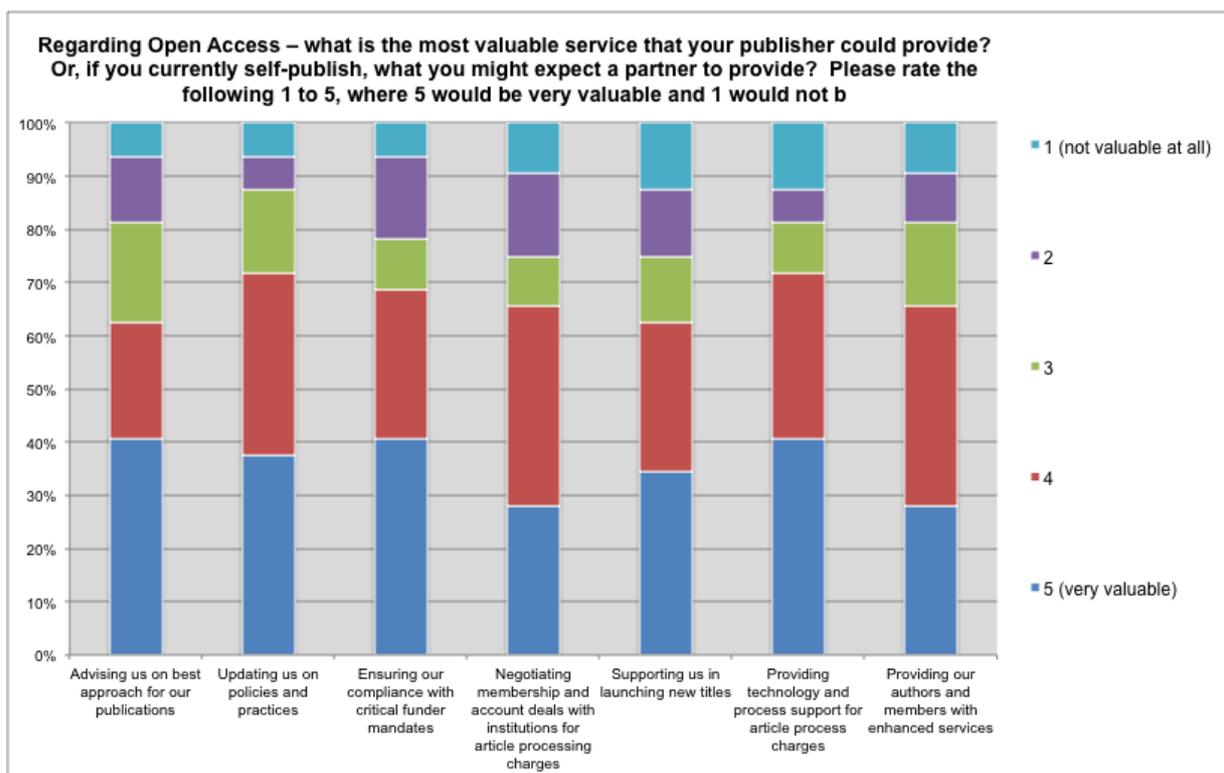
When asked what the most valuable service in relation to Open Access a publisher could provide to a learned society, the following services were rated equally important with over 40% of respondents rating the following as **Very Valuable**:

- Advising us on best approach for our publications.
- Ensuring our compliance with critical funder mandates.
- Providing technology and process support for article process charges.

Overall, the two highest valued services rated 4 or 5 on the scale were:

- Keeping societies updated on policies and practices.
- Providing technology and process support for article process charge.

These indicate the complexity and confusion societies are feeling in the OA landscape, and their need for support to manage the publishing process.



Other services that would be considered useful were:

- Advising on business models and emerging industry standards.
- Representing societies interests to government and industry.
- Checking authors who violate Green OA policies.

Feedback from Focus Group

Suggested services were discussed under Opportunities:

- **Advocacy/Member Communications**

- *All societies want to promote research and awareness. OA fits well with this and societies should emphasise the positives of OA and how it fits in with their mission and their aims.*
- *There is an opportunity for societies to represent their members to funders and policy makers.*
- *Societies have direct communications with their members that is publisher agnostic, and therefore there is a natural role that Societies could play in educating their members in Open Access issues e.g. informing members about availability of grant funds (it has been noted by librarians that there is often a disconnect between authors of an institution and the institution itself in terms of who holds grant money).*