

DINNER/DISCUSSION SUMMARY

Open Access – the Finch Working Group report on expanding access to published research findings

Held at The Royal Society on 6th March, 2013

The Foundation is grateful for the support for this meeting from
The Wellcome Trust, Springer and BioMed Central

Chair: **The Earl of Selborne GBE FRS**
Chairman, The Foundation for Science and Technology

Speakers: **Dame Janet Finch DBE DL AcSS**
Chair, Working Group on Expanding Access to Published Research Findings
Professor Douglas Kell
Chief Executive, Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council
Steve Hall
Managing Director, IOP Publishing

DAME JANET FINCH said that her Working Group¹, set up at the request of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, had sought to find ways of making peer-reviewed published research available free of charge, immediately to more people and for making it possible for that material to be re-used without restriction. The Group had been concerned not to make recommendations that would damage the high standards of the UK's peer review process, the high quality of UK research, the UK's successful commercial publishing industry or the UK's learned societies.

The Group recognised that the different parties affected by its work (Higher Education Institutions (HEI), researchers, funders, libraries and publishers) all had different interests which would be difficult to reconcile. It therefore developed success criteria against which to assess options with a view to finding a "best fit" which might not be perfect for every party but which every party could live with. Those criteria were quicker and better access for more people, financial sustainability for publishers and learned societies, affordability for funders, libraries and HEIs and sustaining high quality research and high quality services to researchers and authors. The Group considered both a "Gold Open Access model" (Gold - publication costs covered at the beginning of the publications process either by or on behalf of the author and with free and unrestricted access to all after publication) and a "subscription model" (publication costs covered by or on behalf of the reader through journals bought at the end of the publications process and with access after publication controlled by licence, subscription or

purchase). The Group concluded that any feasible form of subscription model would necessarily involve restrictions to access after publication of a kind incompatible with the sort of free and wide access which it believed essential and desirable. The Group decided that the long-term goal should be Gold but it recognised that time and money would be needed before that goal could be reached and that during a transition period both Gold and a form of subscription model (Green Open Access) should co-exist alongside the Gold option. Gold would require research funders to accept that Article Processing Charges (APCs) were an integral component of research costs. It would require Higher Education Institutions to put in place funds and payment arrangements to cover authors' APCs. It would require publishers to develop a greater number of open access journals and to negotiate APC with HEIs. During the transition period the licensing and embargo restrictions inherent in Green should be kept to a minimum.

PROFESSOR DOUGLAS KELL outlined the key reasons for wanting Gold – work paid for by the taxpayer should be freely available to all. Under subscription models authors provide content but then could not access it, published material could not really be described as "public" when it remained behind a paywall, Creative Commons (CC BY) licences permitting full re-use by anybody to add value would help to get the maximum national return on investment in research. Internationally the current trend was towards open access policies. It was right for the UK to be in the forefront of that trend. The UK Research Councils (RCUK) had published on the day of the meeting its policy and guidance on open access² to reflect the Government's decision to accept the main

¹ www.researchinfonet.org/publish/finch/

² www.rcuk.ac.uk/media/news/2013news/Pages/130305.aspx

recommendations of the Finch Report. That policy clearly stated that Gold was its preferred objective but accepted that, if that was not available from a publisher or if APC funds were not available from a research funder, Green would be acceptable. That modified form would require the deposit of a research paper in a publicly accessible repository within a specified period after publication (the length of that time interval would depend on the research discipline and whether the inability to go to immediate open access was due to the lack of a suitable publisher or the lack of APC funds).

RCUK aspires to reach 100 per cent open access in five years. During that period RCUK would provide research institutions with increasing levels of block grants – from within the existing research budget (£17million in Year 1 intended to achieve 45 per cent Gold) to help them set up funds to meet APCs. Where the RCUK block grant was used to pay APCs, the full research paper would have to be given full open access immediately using the Creative Commons Attribution Licence (CC BY) which allows full re-use including commercial, subject to attribution). In his opinion the policy of moving towards 100 per cent Gold should be seen as an opportunity and not as a threat.

MR STEVE HALL (Managing Director, IOP Publishing) described his firm's credentials as a supporter of open access: four out of a portfolio of 65 IOP journals were open access, CC BY was its standard licence for Gold publication. For non-Gold publication, papers had to be deposited in a repository after a (normally) 12 month embargo period. Nevertheless he cautioned against overstating the benefits of Gold. He believed that publishers were willing to work with Gold if that is what funders and researchers wanted and if they would pay publishers properly for their services. He noted that the Government, while accepting the Finch Report recommendation in favour of Gold with funders paying APC, had ruled that existing research funds would have to be used to pay for APC. He was concerned about the potentially damaging effect on libraries of the Government's decision to accept the Finch recommendations. He argued that an embargo period as short as six months (as envisaged by RCUK) would be severely damaging to publishers and thought that such a policy was incompatible with an estimate of no more than 45 per cent of full funding of APCs in Year 1. He made a number of criticisms of the latest RCUK policy document; it did not for example take proper account of the fact that the subscription model currently dominates. He did not think that Government policy and RCUK policy were fully in alignment, noting in particular the Minister of State's statement that a six-month embargo was unsustainable. He thought that

successful implementation of the new Government policy on open access required very close co-operation between stakeholders but was concerned that this had not occurred. He commented that the draft policy prepared by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) could not really be described as a way of implementing Gold since no additional funding was envisaged to achieve it. Where would HEIs find the funds to pay for APC? In his judgement very few of the moves by overseas countries towards open access could be described as conforming to Gold; they did not seem to envisage publishing costs being paid as an integral component of research costs. He concluded by expressing the readiness of publishers to co-operate with the Government implementation of the new policy provided that RCUK policy was made fully consistent with that policy and by urging a major effort to enlighten the research community to the meaning and implications of the new policy.

In the two discussion periods (before and after dinner) there was fairly widespread acceptance that changes in technology (digitalisation and the internet), changes in social attitudes and the Government's transparency agenda all made the present system for publishing and funding the publication of research papers unsustainable. Moreover the nature of the system with its restrictions on access and usage were denying to the economy, to researchers and to society more widely the opportunity to derive the maximum benefits from the extensive high quality research carried out in the UK. However, concerns were expressed by many speakers about detailed aspects of the proposed policy changes, about the evidence underpinning the decision to adopt 100 per cent Gold as the ultimate goal for the UK and about the unintended consequences along the journey to that goal as different stakeholders sought to safeguard their own positions in adjusting to the new policy environment and found that they were either asked to pay APCs (which for bodies such as small medical charities might be more onerous than the present system) or had to rely on funding which might prove to be inadequate. A number of speakers also felt that it was unlikely to be in the national interest for the UK to be moving faster than its main international competitors towards full open access. In quantity (but not in quality) UK published research papers were relatively small (6 per cent of the global total); therefore UK researchers would not be gaining benefits of access to international research material commensurate to the benefits being unilaterally accorded to their foreign competitors at the expense of the UK research effort (no new money was being provided to research funders who would be required to support the new arrangements out of existing resources).

Two particular areas which were thought to be especially disadvantaged by the new system were

learned societies and disciplines such as humanities and social sciences. The three speakers were sympathetic to those concerns and accepted that the close monitoring and review processes intended to underpin the implementation of the new policy would need to be alert to any problems emerging in those areas. The RCUK guidance had also sought to recognise the special needs of researchers in humanities and social research.

The element of the new policy which attracted the most vociferous challenge was the notion that an embargo as short as six months in Green - especially if everybody used that strand of the mixed economy rather than Gold - was not compatible with a sustainable publications industry. It was said that funders did not realise the dangers implicit in such a short embargo period.

The three speakers concluded the discussion by urging that the implementation phase should be marked by the same flexible and co-operative spirit among stakeholders as had so beneficially characterised the deliberations of the Finch Working Group.

Sir John Caines KCB

Useful web links are:

The Association of Learned and Professional Society Publishers (APLSP)
www.alpsp.org

Arts and Humanities Research Council
www.ahrc.ac.uk

Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council
www.bbsrc.ac.uk

Department for Business, Innovation and Skills
www.bis.gov.uk

Economic and Social Research Council
www.esrc.ac.uk

Elsevier
www.elsevier.com

Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council
www.epsrc.ac.uk

The Foundation for Science and Technology
www.foundation.org.uk

Accessibility, sustainability, excellence: how to expand access to research publications - Dame Janet Finch Working Group Report
www.researchinfonet.org/publish/finch/

Government Office for Science
www.bis.gov.uk/go-science

Higher Education Funding Council for England Open Access Letter
<http://www.hefce.ac.uk/whatwedo/rsrch/rinfrastruct/openaccess/>

House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology on Open Access Report
www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/lords-select/science-and-technology-committee/news/open-access-report-published/

International Association of STM Publishers
www.stm-assoc.org

IOP Publishing
www.ioppublishing.org

Maney Publishing
www.maneypublishing.com

Medical Research Council
www.mrc.ac.uk

Natural Environment Research Council
www.nerc.ac.uk

Nature Publishing Group
www.nature.com

PLOS
www.plos.org

The Publishers Association (PA)
www.publishers.org.uk

Publishers Licensing Society
www.pls.org.uk

Research Councils UK (RCUK)
www.rcuk.ac.uk

Royal Academy of Engineering
www.raeng.org.uk

RSC Publishing
www.rsc.org/publishing/

The Royal Society
www.royalsociety.org

Science and Technology Facilities Council
www.stfc.ac.uk

Springer and BioMed Central
www.springer.com

Taylor and Francis
www.taylorandfrancisgroup.com/

Technology Strategy Board
www.innovateuk.org

The Wellcome Trust
www.wellcome.ac.uk

UK Open Access Implementation Group
<http://open-access.org.uk>

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