

Open access in the UK and the international environment: the view from Humanities and Social Science

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- Since HSS disciplines receive only a small percentage of RCUK funds, HEFCE's policy on the admissibility of work for future REFs will be the most important determining factor.
- Other countries do not have RAE/REF equivalents to drive them down the Gold route; hence they are more likely to stay with Green and with longer embargo periods.
- Some leading international journals, particularly in the Humanities, have set their face against Gold OA and the introduction of APCs.
- UK scholars in HSS thus face a dilemma. If they publish in non-compliant international journals their work risks being ineligible for future REFs; if they don't publish in these venues they risk falling off the international pace.
- A particularly intense variant of this dilemma threatens those whose professional community does not operate in English.
- Future REF criteria will need to reflect these discipline-specific circumstances.

I strongly share the desire for open access as an aspiration for the future availability of research; who wouldn't? But I am very concerned about its practicalities, and about the unintended dangers which imposing some forms of open access on the academic community will have on the research landscape as a whole. There are many concerns, all of which I cannot deal with here. In this article I will concentrate on the effect current proposals in the UK risk having on the standing of the country's research in the world, particularly in Humanities and Social Science.

The UK government and Research Councils UK (RCUK) have taken quite a gamble, in fact two: that the growing worldwide interest in open access will end up with a system of procedures which will privilege Gold open access and not Green; and that this will, in its turn, encourage (or force) journals outside the UK to become compliant with UK policies. At the time of writing (March 2013), neither of these bets seem at all likely to pay off; we will come to the latter in due course, but, as far as the former is concerned, European research funders, and not only they, are for the most

part indicating that Green open access is their major interest.¹ What follows from this? I will come back to this crucial question after I have set out some basic elements in the current picture, ones well known to those who have followed the debate, but not necessarily to all readers.

Humanities and Social Science (HSS) do not, in fact, derive most of their funding from RCUK. The total budget of the Economic and Social Research Council and Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) combined is only 10% of Research Council funding; and HSS academics are, taken together, some 50% of all academics.² The Research Councils plan to set aside enough money for Gold open access, but these figures mean that their funding for it is going to be fairly restricted for most HSS disciplines; which will almost certainly mean that Gold open access as a whole will have a relatively restricted role in this half of the sector, and that Green will be much more important. The impact of research council rules as a whole on research and publishing strategies is also relatively limited for HSS, for the same reasons; instead, the great bulk of HSS funding comes through QR, the government research budget which is distributed according to RAE³ scores, and, in future, REF⁴ scores. What the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and its sister councils in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland⁵ decide will be the rules for submission to REF2020 therefore matter much more for HSS academics than do the views of RCUK. Research Council rules, in fact, matter above all in that it is unlikely, on the present showing, that HEFCE's eventual position on requiring open access for journal articles submitted to future REFs will be very different from RCUK's. Both HEFCE and RCUK are currently consulting on this matter: HEFCE in a more open and identifiable way, with a wide-ranging proposal, interesting in that it does not appear to have all the answers already decided, out for consultation since 25 February 2013;⁶ the research councils in a rather less clear manner. HEFCE's policies are liable to change quite substantially across 2013, depending on this consultation; RCUK, for their part, have committed themselves to a wide-ranging review at the end of 2014. My reactions are therefore provisional, and are restricted to what are currently the proposals of the main public funders.

Currently, the view of the research councils is that Gold open access is definitely their preferred model, but they recognise that funding constraints make it currently impossible to pay for the article processing charges (APCs) necessary to fund full and instant open access. Green open access, by contrast, involves free access to articles published in journals after an embargo period with no need to pay APCs; how long this embargo period will be allowed to be is thus of intense interest, for HSS in particular – but, actually, for Natural Science and Medicine too. RCUK intends to make this embargo period 12 months (6 months for the STEM⁷ subjects), coming down to 6 in the end for all subjects, but, as they have now made clear, only in the future. For the moment, for a period of five years, 24 months will be acceptable (12 months for STEM – except Biomedicine, where 6 months is established now), as long as the journal in question offers Gold open access to anyone who can pay APCs for it. Some disciplines may well be able to argue for longer than 24 months, although it is not yet clear how they will argue this and to whom. HEFCE have indicated that they are minded to follow this pattern, and it is also the pattern favoured by the Minister for Universities and Science, David Willetts MP.⁸

There has been quite a swirl of politics around this set of proposals in recent months, which is by now of mostly historical interest. It is, however, important to recognise that RCUK came to this position only after having forcefully advocated shorter embargo periods, which are still favoured by many people in that body; what happens after the five-year ‘journey’ remains to be seen. The problem with embargo periods shorter than 24 months for HSS is that most journals, including most journals published by learned societies, would not be able to sustain anything resembling their current business models, and would risk rapid failure.⁹ That is not the focus of this paper, so I will not develop it further; but it is important to stress that a 12-month embargo period is very widely feared by the sector, whereas a 24-month period is regarded by many (although not by any means all) HSS disciplines as acceptable on a long-term basis.¹⁰ RCUK and government, too, accept that a 12-month embargo period is very dangerous for journals, but believe that the solution is Gold open access funded by APCs, which would give back money to journals; whether or not that is true, it is beside the point for HSS journals if very few Gold articles appear in them.

One other caveat is necessary to add here: current proposals only concern journal articles. Although the prospect of open access for books and essay collections is frequently canvassed with enthusiasm, no sustainable moves in that direction are likely for the immediate future, and certainly not in the next REF cycle, up to 2020. Most Humanities disciplines publish less than 40% of their work in journal-article form; most Social Sciences publish less than 70% in journals.¹¹ The impact of this whole debate is therefore incomplete in HSS, especially in most Humanities disciplines. But this does not mean that it is unimportant, by any means. How we come to agreement about open access journal publishing is very likely to be a template for future rules around all publishing, however hard this may be in practice to achieve, as Nigel Vincent discusses in his own essay.

Many non-UK funding bodies, led by the European Commission and the US government, have recently advocated, and sometimes demanded, the restricted 12-month (for HSS) embargo period now temporarily abandoned by RCUK.¹² This is certainly very worrying in itself, for journals would not be then sustainable in most areas, a concern shared by everyone in the UK, including, as already noted, government and RCUK. Whether this short embargo period ends up set in stone remains to be seen, however; a significant straw in the wind is the unease expressed by the French Minister of Higher Education, Geneviève Fioraso, about it in February of this year.¹³ But if countries do fall into line behind the European Research Council (ERC) here, the effect on international journals will not be at all the same as the UK rules will have inside the UK.

HSS abroad is no more often dependent on research grants than it is in the UK; for example, only a little over 1% of the money from the ERC's/ European Science Foundation's current FP7 research programme has gone to HSS projects since it began.¹⁴ So the main way in which the ERC rules would affect standard HSS research practices, and standard journal publication, would be if research valuation projects equivalent to the RAE/REF became major funding drivers in other countries, *and* if these valuation projects adopted the rules for open access proposed by the ERC as a requirement for submission to them. No such trend is remotely visible. The USA has no such valuation project (indeed, it would be inconceivable

in a country dominated by private and state-funded – i.e. not federal – higher education institutions). France has recently closed its evaluation agency for a rethink, and anyway did not use it as a vehicle for funding. In Germany, the valuation project currently under way is explicitly one which does not have funding attached.¹⁵ In Italy, the valuation project under way, which does have funding implications, favours publication in high-ranking journals, which, however these are determined – the decision-making process has been controversial – will do nothing to force such journals to comply with open access procedures.¹⁶ So, overall, the major force which might move HSS journals in other countries in an open access direction is the rules of project-orientated research funders, who fund very little HSS research.

Non-UK HSS journals, therefore, not surprisingly, have been slow to adopt open access guidelines; and, when they do, they have certainly been slow to adopt the open access guidelines of a different country from their own. The research to determine exactly which HSS journals have adopted (or plan to adopt) which guidelines, across all disciplines, has not been done yet – it is vitally necessary, but will be arduous – but the information on the SHERPA/RoMEO website (www.sherpa.ac.uk/romeo), which collects this data, although in a different format and often in out-of-date forms, shows very little take-up of short embargo periods (and virtually no take-up of Gold open access) in France or Italy. Germany shows more interest in open access, but there, too, not across the board.¹⁷ Some major journals – I here choose as examples History journals, which I know best – most publicly the *American Historical Review*, have formally set their face against Gold APCs. Among others, *Annales: Histoire, Sciences Sociales* has no Gold, and a long Green embargo period (four years in this case) which is far from any research funder's demands, and does not intend to get anywhere near 24 months. For *Historische Zeitschrift* the embargo period is actually eleven years, and, although that is longer than for many German History journals, for almost none is it less than three.¹⁸ Gold open access indeed has little resonance in most countries (although some German publishers do offer it¹⁹), and it is, indeed, not easy to see why it would have if the only research funder which favoured it and was prepared to put substantial money behind it was in one country, the UK – which, although punching well

above its weight, which is 4% of the world research population, still only publishes some 6% of journal articles, leaving 94% to follow whichever rules they (or their host countries) choose. UK journals are likely all to offer Gold as an option, which will allow them to have 24-month (or sometimes perhaps longer) embargo periods for Green open access, but non-UK journals which do not offer Gold may turn out not to be 'compliant' if they do not have a 12-month embargo, which not many do. This will change; publishers may well extend to HSS the journal strategies which they will develop for STEM journals, where ERC rules matter more – where they can, at least; learned societies will resist this abroad as much as they do at home. But, to repeat, there is no reason to think it will change quickly, and still less completely. And, it is necessary to add, if journals do move, they are by no means necessarily going to offer other more detailed elements of the new UK rules, such as the need to house articles in institutional repositories (rather than the author's personal website), and generous CC-BY licences for reproducing and refashioning the work of others.

A problem thus appears. UK academics will be faced with a situation in which UK journals are 'compliant' with RCUK (and, probably, HEFCE) rules, but very many non-UK journals will not be. What happens then? The Research Councils and HEFCE have so far been resistant to the argument that there should just be a blanket exemption for non-UK publishing; they argue that no one would then publish in UK journals at all. (If this is their real belief, it does at least show a recognition of the unpopularity of these proposals.) But the alternative is far worse: it is that no UK scholar would be able to publish outside the UK, except, as it currently seems, in a restricted percentage of journals. *This is the crux*. There are plenty of countries in which scholars do not publish outside their borders; but they are not, any of them, major international players. (There are, however, very few countries where they are actually *prevented* from so doing; in fact, I have not found any.) The UK is a major international player; but if it cannot publish in the major international journals, it will soon cease to be. The country will have shot itself in the foot.

I am of course aware of the argument (expressed, among many other places, elsewhere in this collection) that open access is of such obvious

benefit that, if journals do not adopt it, so much the worse for them. No one needs to publish in a prestigious journal (or in any peer-reviewed form at all), as long as they publish; also, if their article is fully available now, it will even increase their visibility, for the alternative would be to sit behind a paywall for 24 months. That last point does not actually fit my experience of googling; one has full visibility of the existence of the article, even if one cannot, at the moment, read it gratis outside a large academic institution. But the argument also does not take into account standard elements of academic sociology. For a start, there are many disciplines which rely on citation indices and impact factors; if one is publishing in a UK journal with a relatively low impact factor, one will simply be less visible. There are also disciplines with a very evident international pecking order. Political Science, for example, has a clear international hierarchy of journals, which hardly changes from country to country, at least in the English-speaking world.²⁰ All but four of the top fifteen are US journals (the exceptions are three UK and one Europe-wide journal); their open access policies are various, but only six accept Gold open access at present.²¹ If one were to maintain a strict view of RCUK policies, most of these journals would be simply ‘non-compliant’, and one would have to look elsewhere; but to abandon these signs of international excellence, whether or not they are good ones (I am not at all sold on them myself, speaking personally), requires either a lordly insouciance, typical of people who are at the top of their field and do not need them any more, or a hostility to hierarchies which one tends to find in far-left political groups; it is strange to find the Coalition government in either company.

The need to publish abroad is also not just because an academic wants to focus on the top US journal at all costs. Many disciplines in Humanities have large sectors which have to publish abroad – and often in foreign languages – to get any international attention at all. French literature can stand for all of the modern languages here; obviously, experts in it will do much of their publishing in French, in journals of record such as *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France*, whose open access policy is a five-year embargo period.²² History, too, where some 37% of journal articles were published abroad in the current REF cycle²³ (above all in the USA and,

not far behind, the EU), is very internationally divided.²⁴ A historian of the USA is inevitably going to need to publish much of their work there; no one can risk one's work not being found by other scholars in the same field because one is not publishing in the right country; that, however, is even truer of historians of Russia or Spain, whose colleagues in those countries also may not read English at all well, and so will not seek out the excellent articles (as they would need to be, to be accepted) in *English Historical Review*. Archaeology is equally divided; to use an example close to my own work, *Archeologia medievale* is the undisputed journal of record for medieval Italian archaeology; one could not be a player of any kind in the field if one could not publish there, and that would be the case whether or not one's excavation was funded by the AHRC. *Archeologia medievale's* current and planned access policy is entirely non-open access; its online copy, for all its back numbers, is only available for payment.²⁵

On good days, I cannot envision this blocking of an international presence actually happening. But it is there in current policies, and all players, academics and funders, need to be aware of the dangers, as they do not always seem to be. The issue has not, for example, been a prominent part of the arguments submitted to the House of Lords Science and Technology subcommittee or the House of Commons BIS Select Committee.²⁶ It would be easily possible to think of ways around it. One could indeed have a blanket exclusion for non-UK journals from UK rules, which would certainly, at least, act as a recognition that in moving towards open access – as is widely recognised for other international issues such as climate change – one has to move internationally, or nothing happens at all. If, for example, most US academics continue to publish behind paywalls, the cause of open access will not be advanced, whether or not the UK has been an early adopter, a first mover. It would also be possible for the rules for deciding which journal to publish in to contain explicit statements that publishing abroad in a 'non-compliant' journal will often be appropriate to the discipline concerned, and that, if it is, then the rules will not have to be the same. REF2020 sub-panels (or their REF2014 forerunners) might, for example, be asked to make discipline-based decisions here. I commend these variants to government and the funding bodies. And, if they do not like them, I urge them to think of better ones. For something will have to

be done here: if the international standing of UK scholarship is not to be damaged, deeply and perhaps irreparably.

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Notes

- 1 sparceurope.org/analysis-of-funder-open-access-policies-around-the-world (accessed 19 February 2013). See below, pp. 121 for definitions of Gold and Green open access.
- 2 Following HEFCE figures for submission intentions for REF2014, Main Panels C and D (Social Science and Arts/Humanities) as a percentage of the total, www.hefce.ac.uk/news/newsarchive/2013/name,76316,en.html (published 15 January 2013, accessed 18 March 2013): the exact figure is 49.6%.
- 3 Research Assessment Exercise – see www.rae.ac.uk
- 4 Research Excellence Framework – see www.ref.ac.uk
- 5 Higher Education Funding Council for Wales, Scottish Funding Council and Department for Employment and Learning in Northern Ireland.
- 6 www.hefce.ac.uk/news/newsarchive/2013/name,78750,en.html (accessed 18 March 2013).
- 7 Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics.
- 8 The most recently revised RCUK statement is at www.rcuk.ac.uk/documents/documents/RCUKOpenAccessPolicyandRevisedguidance.pdf (accessed 6 May 2013). The five-year transitional provision is at 3.6.iii of the text). For David Willetts' view, see among other statements his submission to the House of Lords Science and Technology Subcommittee at www.parliament.uk/documents/lords-committees/science-technology/Openaccess/OpenAccessEvidence.pdf, p. 97 (accessed 21 March 2013). For the history of all of this, and for the impact of it on learned societies, see Rita Gardner's essay in this collection.

- 9 So would current journals, perhaps faster, if they adopted all-Gold business models, but these are very unlikely to affect more than a tiny minority of HSS journals.
- 10 History, in particular, have argued strongly for 36 months, and a large and solid set of the UK's main History journals have committed themselves to this, www.history.ac.uk/news/2012-12-10/statement-position-relation-open-access (accessed 24 March 2013).
- 11 Figures from Russell Group submissions to RAE2008, thanks to Nigel Vincent for this information. See further N. Vincent, 'The monograph challenge', in this publication. Social Anthropology has publishing figures analogous to Humanities; Philosophy to Social Science. Only Economics, of the disciplines surveyed, publishes around 90% in journals, which is closer to the STEM norm.
- 12 European Commission, europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-12-790_en.htm (accessed 21 March 2018). US government, www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/microsites/ostp/ostp_public_access_memo_2013.pdf (accessed 18 March 2013). Note that this latter, so far provisional, policy allows for possible variation according to the 'challenges and public interests that are unique to each field and mission combination'.
- 13 www.openaccess-shs.info/communique (accessed 21 March 2013).
- 14 ec.europa.eu/research/fp7/index_en.cfm?pg=budget (accessed 21 March 2013).
- 15 Germany: www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/news/germanys-research-rating-will-make-quality-its-own-reward/2001451.article (accessed 21 March 2013). France: www.lemonde.fr/sciences/article/2013/01/03/fin-de-vie-pour-l-aeres_1812620_1650684.html (accessed 21 March 2013).
- 16 www.anvur.org/sites/anvur-miur/files/gev/documento_accompagnamento_criteri.pdf (accessed 21 March 2013).
- 17 www.sherpa.ac.uk/romeo/journalbrowse.php (accessed 21 March 2013). For more up-to-date information on a substantial minority of journals in France see: www.openedition.org/168 (accessed 18 March 2013). A joint British Academy-HEFCE research project, partly focused on this issue, has now been agreed, which will by the end of 2013 make the data here much more firm.
- 18 For *American Historical Review* (or, to be exact, its parent learned society, the American Historical Association), see blog.historians.org/news/1734/aha-statement-on-scholarly-journal-publishing (accessed 21 March 2013); for *Annales*, information kindly supplied by Étienne Anheim; for *Historische Zeitschrift*, information kindly supplied by Andreas Fahrmeir, supplemented by www.digizeitschriften.de/searchcol/?tx_goobit3_search%5Bextquery%5D=DOCSTRCT%3Aperiodical&DC=900.history (accessed 24 March 2013). Thanks to Lyndal Roper and Sandro Carocci for their help.

- 19 E.g. De Gruyter's 'open library' policy: www.degruyter.com/dg/page/560/de-gruyter-open-library;jsessionid=412DF4E460950406FE0EA4D5CB042E46 (accessed 21 March 2013).
- 20 See J. C. Garand et al., 'Political science journals in comparative perspective', *Political science and politics*, 42 (October 2009), 695-717. Note that the ranking varies slightly according to the questions asked. I have taken table 2, 'political scientists' subjective evaluations', and have included the top ten journals in each of the UK, USA and Canada, which amounts to 15 journals altogether. But the very top journals are fairly similar in each table all the same. Thanks to Iain McLean for his help.
- 21 Information from SHERPA-RoMEO, as at n. 17.
- 22 www.puf.com/Revue_d'histoire_litt%C3%A9raire_de_la_France (accessed 21 March 2013). Thanks to Richard Cooper for his help.
- 23 1 January 2008 to 31 December 2013.
- 24 A. Dilley and K. McClay, *History UK (HE): Open Access Publishing survey results*, March 2013, available at: tinyurl.com/c5tt28z (accessed 21 March 2013).
- 25 Information from Sauro Gelichi, the responsible editor, and the publisher, All'Insegna del Giglio, Florence, 4 March 2013. All'Insegna del Giglio, it is worth adding, is a very small publisher indeed, whose revenue stream is largely dependent on this one journal – a scenario which is still common outside the UK, and which will further delay open access moves.
- 26 See above, n. 4 for the Lords and www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201213/cmselect/cmbis/writev/openaccess/contents.htm (accessed 15 April 2015), for the Commons; the 419 pages of oral and written evidence for the Lords and the 546 pages of written evidence for the Commons do, of course, contain discussions of this, but they tend to be relatively brief.