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# Open access and monographs

## Where are we now?

A position paper by the British Academy

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**Recent announcements about a requirement that monographs submitted to REF2027 should be made available open access have been met with expressions of concern, including from many Fellows of the British Academy. Monographs are a crucial form of academic dissemination in the humanities and social sciences, and the preservation of a sustainable future for this medium is a matter of acute interest to the British Academy.**

**A new dialogue on the development of workable policies for extending open access to academic monographs now needs to begin, and the British Academy stands ready to contribute to those discussions. The issues which the Academy believes need to be considered – particularly those concerning money, exceptions, timing, and transparency – are laid out in the following paper.**

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## 1. *The origins of the current debate*

At a conference in February 2018, Steven Hill, the Head of Research Policy at HEFCE, announced to general surprise and no little dismay that in REF2027 the current policies on open access (OA) as applied to journal articles would be extended to encompass monographs and other 'long form outputs'.<sup>1</sup> In a follow-up blog post<sup>2</sup> and an interview in the *Bookseller* (9 March) he offered more by way of explanation, and expressed his own surprise at the reaction his remarks had caused, pointing out that HEFCE had already made its intention clear in a policy statement in December 2016. We come back to the question of the timing and manner of the announcements below, but first some background will help to set the issues in context.

OA had been under discussion for a number of years, but it only loomed large in relation to UK research and research evaluation with the publication of the Finch report in June 2012.<sup>3</sup> The model there was the practice of publication in the natural sciences. In this context monographs were already recognised as posing something of a problem, a conclusion that was reiterated in the update on Finch published in October 2013.<sup>4</sup> And indeed no mention at all of issues around monographs is made in the two UUK follow-up reports dated August 2015 and December 2017.<sup>5</sup> By contrast, some of these concerns, both for book and journal publication in the domain of the humanities and social sciences, were raised in the set of essays entitled *Debating Open Access* published by the British Academy in July 2013.<sup>6</sup>

Concurrently with the debates generated by Finch, HEFCE, who were already at work preparing for REF2014, made clear that the recommendations regarding journal publications contained in the report would be enshrined in the guidelines for REF2021. It is this same model of stating policy for the REF after next that is being followed with the present announcements concerning monographs in REF2027.

In the meantime two important further contributions have appeared, namely the report by Geoff Crossick on *Monographs and Open Access* in January 2015,<sup>7</sup> commissioned by HEFCE, and a year later the report entitled *A five-year study into open access monograph publishing in the humanities and social sciences* jointly funded by Jisc and AHRC.<sup>8</sup> Both reports, while by no means advocating the exclusion of monographs from the OA regime, do identify a number of significant challenges posed not only by current funding policies and publishing norms but also by practices intrinsic to research and writing in the humanities (see for example the OAPEN-UK report, pp.42-43). Such

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<sup>1</sup> In what follows we will adopt what has now become the common usage of the terms 'monograph' and 'book' to refer not only to single-authored works but also to collections of essays, editions, exhibition catalogues, commentaries and translations.

<sup>2</sup> Steven Hill, 'Open access monographs in the REF' <http://blog.hefce.ac.uk/2018/02/23/open-access-monographs-ref-2027/>

<sup>3</sup> *Accessibility, sustainability, excellence: how to expand access to research publications* (working party chaired by Janet Finch) <https://www.acu.ac.uk/research-information-network/finch-report-final>

<sup>4</sup> Michael Jubb, 'Finch One Year On: a Review of Progress' <https://www.uksg.org/sites/uksg.org/files/PresentationJubb.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/research-policy/open-science/Pages/uuk-open-access-coordination-group.aspx> This link also provides further information on UUK's role in relation to OA and open science more generally.

<sup>6</sup> Nigel Vincent & Chris Wickham (eds), *Debating Open Access* <https://www.britac.ac.uk/debating-open-access>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/rereports/year/2015/monographs/>

<sup>8</sup> <http://oapen-uk.jiscebooks.org/finalreport/>

issues are now being addressed by a UUK group chaired by Professor Roger Kain FBA.<sup>9</sup> It is to these and other obstacles to the implementation of OA in the domain of books that we turn our attention.

## 2. *How will OA be paid for?*

The first challenge concerns the costs. This is at once both the easiest and the hardest problem involved in the transition to OA for books. A recent study suggests that to fund OA for three-quarters of the monographs likely to be submitted to the next REF would cost in the region of £20m per annum.<sup>10</sup> The easy part is that this could be addressed at once if Research England (together with the Higher Education Council for Wales, the Northern Ireland DfE and the Scottish Funding Council) or UKRI were prepared to meet these charges up front through additional research funding and – crucially – to commit to continuing to do so. Indeed, in his February conference talk HEFCE’s Head of Research Policy described this figure as ‘achievable’, as seems eminently reasonable in the context of UKRI’s annual national research budget in excess of £6bn.

Among UK charities that fund research, the Wellcome Trust since 2013 has both required that any books deriving from research it supports be available on OA, and provided the necessary funds to bring this about.<sup>11</sup> Solutions of this kind mimic the journal world, but with book processing charges (BPCs) replacing the by now familiar article processing charges (APCs). The level of such charges varies considerably. The above-mentioned UUK group found figures ranging from £5k to £13k amongst a selection of UK-based publishers, while a recent international study cited sums starting as low as €500 and rising to €18,500.<sup>12</sup> As we write, exactly how much books cost to produce, and how much a fair average BPC could possibly be, are matters of active enquiry; they will become clearer in the coming months.

A fixed rate for BPC funding would in any case be an inappropriate way of proceeding. There are irreducible minima of costs when each separate book is produced; and – quite apart from the varying costs of editing, depending on the commitment of the publisher – books vary in length, and very often the best books are the longest ones, with correspondingly higher production costs. Any acceptable system of BPCs must not discriminate against such books.

A further risk that needs to be taken into account is the equivalent in the domain of book publishing of the proliferation of new online journals with lower standards of peer review and editing that attended the move to OA for articles. It would be unfortunate if OA for books came to be associated even to a small degree with a new form of vanity publishing.

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<sup>9</sup> Roger Kain, who is Vice-President for Research and HE Policy at the British Academy, chairs this UUK group in a personal capacity, having taken over from the original chair, Professor Shearer West, in November 2017. The British Academy is represented on the group by Professor Nigel Vincent FBA.

<sup>10</sup> Martin Paul Eve *et al.* ‘Cost estimates of an open access mandate for monographs in the UK’s third Research Excellence Framework’ <https://insights.uksg.org/articles/10.1629/uksg.392/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://wellcome.ac.uk/funding/managing-grant/how-get-open-access-funding>

<sup>12</sup> The international range of charges and the question of what one gets for the money are helpfully discussed in this study by Frances Pinter, founder of Knowledge Unlatched: <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/j/jep/3336451.0021.101/--why-book-processing-charges-bpcs-vary-so-much?rgn=main;view=fulltext> This link also gives access to a much larger investigation by Knowledge Exchange entitled ‘A Landscape Study on Open Access and Monographs: Policy, Funding and Publishing in Eight European Countries’. Note that we do not here discuss the possibility of making unedited typescripts of whole books available OA after an embargo period, which would match with the ‘Green’ option that is available for articles, but which does not seem so plausible for monographs.

The hard part of the money question is that, independently of whether a funder will support publication costs, most monographs do not derive from externally funded projects but are the fruit of the research time of regularly employed academic staff. Since the latter is at least in part covered by the QR component of a higher education institution's income (the allocation of which is determined by the outcomes of the REF), any new funding stream to cover the costs of OA books must be in addition to, and not drawn from, existing support. Otherwise, HEIs would be being penalised financially for submitting books to the REF.

Academics would need reassurance that internal mechanisms for distributing any such funds did not constrain them in their choice of topic and outlet, thereby inhibiting their freedom to exercise their own judgements in respect of the fields in which they are, precisely by virtue of their research experience, in any case the best judges. It would also be reasonable to expect that HEIs should not advantage particular categories of research staff when allocating the money. It would be unfortunate too if smaller HEIs or those with lower REF profiles opted not to encourage staff in the appropriate disciplines to publish books.

At the same time, it is reasonable to seek to reduce those publication costs and this is where alternative funding models come into play. As both the Crossick and OAPEN reports make clear, there is no single business model which is likely to satisfy all needs.<sup>13</sup> In this respect the world of OA book publishing is very different from the journal world where the market has carried on pretty much as before, but with authors now paying up front for access at the point of publication or else making unedited manuscripts available after an embargo period. We do not go into detail here on the different models. The crucial point is that a policy regarding acceptable models and their implementation needs to be in place before a blanket REF policy is articulated and not left to be worked out while the REF clock is ticking.

### 3. *Creative Commons licences*

Other problems are well known and have been articulated since the beginning of this debate. We mention them only briefly, but once again all the reports referenced here discuss them in more detail. The first concerns the nature of the Creative Commons (CC) licence. In many areas of science what matters is the ability to extract data, results, equations and the like, and the form of words used to express these, while obviously important, is secondary. In such a context, the use of text and data mining techniques allows large numbers of papers to be trawled and the results compiled without the intervention of a human reader.<sup>14</sup> To this end, an NC (non commercial) licence may be an appropriate restriction, but the further ND (no derivatives) licence favoured by many in the humanities is not. By contrast, in disciplines in which the content of an argument or analysis depends exclusively or mainly on the words used and the way the sentences are constructed, it is important that authors should have the protection from misuse, misquotation or mistranslation that an ND licence provides.

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<sup>13</sup> There are some, particularly for example the OpenBeta model discussed in Steven Hill's February 2018 presentation on 'Decoupling the academic book?', that proliferate versions of a given work and create a verbal equivalent of what in the computer world is known as 'version promiscuity'. These would seem to satisfy none of the needs either of the author and readers or of an eventual REF panel.

<sup>14</sup> The discipline-particular nature of text and data mining and the associated licence is evident in the letter dated 9 April 2018 referred to here: <http://www.eua.be/activities-services/news/newsitem/2018/04/12/open-science-eua-signs-joint-letter-on-future-proofing-rules-for-text-and-data-mining>

#### 4. *The need for exceptions*

A different problem, and one that a licensing restriction cannot solve, concerns third-party rights. These are particularly but not exclusively a concern in writing about literature, the arts and music where literary texts, pictures, images and scores are essential ingredients and are often under expensive copyright restrictions. Opening up access to texts containing such material is likely to increase rather than reduce these costs since the number of users of a digital edition is potentially much higher.

A further problem is, of course, that academics do not only publish in the UK. Some non-UK presses are happy to envisage BPCs; some explicitly are not; many have no idea that such a choice is on the cards. The situation here is similar to that for articles in 2013, when compulsory OA for (most) articles first came onto the REF landscape; but our sense of the book-publishing environment is that we are, as of now, at least five years further behind the situation for articles in 2013. It needs to be remembered that in 2013 most articles submitted for the REF already had online versions of some kind, so OA rules had something to work with. This is not at all the case for books.

One area where the humanities, and to a lesser extent the social sciences, differ from science concerns the boundaries between academic publication and general or 'trade' lists. A Stephen Hawking or a Roger Penrose may well write a book for a popular readership but such items would not be likely to figure as part of a REF return. By contrast, in areas such as history and literary criticism and biography, volumes which teem with original research and insight are to be found in paperback editions on the shelves of high street booksellers. It would not be difficult to compile a list of books which have both sold in the tens of thousands and been submitted as research outputs to an RAE or REF panel. And many such works have gone on to win prestigious international prizes. Moreover, not only do some types of publication sit astride this boundary but others may migrate from the academic to the general – what Sir Jonathan Bate FBA called 'crossover' books, akin to 'sleepers' in the recording industry.<sup>15</sup> These difficulties are further exacerbated once one moves into the domains of translation and creative writing.

Any policy concerning OA books will need to consider what happens when the publisher of a highly saleable volume expects to make for itself and its author(s) quite a lot more money than could be received in the form of a BPC, even a relatively high one. We do not think that it is the aim of Research England to undermine the ability of one of the UK's main creative industries to prosper. Indeed, to do so would appear to run entirely counter to the funding bodies' introduction of 'Impact' into the REF exercise in 2014, and to the increased percentage allocated to Impact in REF2021.

In many areas too, particularly those where the domain under investigation is comparatively new, individual volumes may well be hybrid, serving both to report original research and to act as textbooks for advanced courses. At a time when the the relation between research and teaching is subject to so much public debate, it is imperative that concern over OA does not impede the integration of these key strands of academic activity.

The problems we have surveyed here are not new; in fact, they were for the most part raised in the immediate aftermath of Finch. There has been much discussion in the intervening period, but it is fair to say that none of them have been solved. Until they have been – and here it is reasonable to look for help from Research England and UKRI – the only options are two: either to

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<sup>15</sup> Jonathan Bate, 'Open and closed' <https://www.the-tls.co.uk/articles/public/open-and-closed/>

postpone these rules (or make them non-compulsory), until the shape of the publishing landscape becomes clearer, or else to treat a high percentage of books as ‘exceptions’ or ‘exemptions’, as indeed HEFCE’s Head of Research Policy envisaged. At best, however, the availability of numerous exceptions will complicate the criteria for REF2027. We are now moving into the criteria-setting stage for REF2021 and those who have been involved in similar phases of previous exercises will know that such discussions are never easy. For the REF2027 equivalents of Main Panels C and in particular D, they promise to be forbiddingly difficult. More generally, the existence of a lengthy list of exceptions makes one wonder if the rule itself is not wrong.

##### *5. The key role of the monograph as a vehicle for scholarship*

These issues might be of less concern if books did not figure to such a large extent among the outputs of individuals in the fields in question. A recent study by Simon Tanner (2016) shows that books and book chapters make up at least 30% of the REF2014 submissions in all the sub-panels of Main Panel D and that in some disciplines this rose to over half: History 53%, English Language and Literature 59%, Theology 60%. Indeed, in Classics two-thirds of all submitted work was in book form.<sup>16</sup> In this connection, the words of the report from the History sub-panel of REF2014 are worth noting: ‘websites/databases, scholarly editions and monographs were the three types of output which tended, overall, to produce the highest percentage of the highest grade’.<sup>17</sup> Additional problems are posed by edited volumes, which typically include work by scholars from many parts of the world. Either UK-based scholars will have to refrain from participating in these ventures, however prestigious and reputation enhancing both for them and their institutions such collaboration might be, or a system of chapter-publishing charges (CPCs?) will have to be devised.

Even with a set of rules and exceptions in place, there is a danger that the proposed REF policy will undermine the UK’s place in the global research community. All academic research, whatever the discipline, takes place in an international context; not for nothing has international excellence been the defining factor in RAE and REF scoring since the outset. Yet to require OA for books threatens to reduce the reputation of UK scholarship as a whole and to promote – and reward – a culture of intellectual insularity. The risk of inhibiting academic mobility cuts both ways. On the one hand, a committee may be reluctant to hire a candidate from outside the UK with excellent book publications if these are with publishers in regions where the OA mandate does not run. Conversely, leading UK scholars might have been forced by these requirements to go with a publisher who would not otherwise have been their natural choice and this in turn might reduce their chances on the global job market, and hence the presence of UK-trained researchers beyond their native shores. It would also hamper the increasingly important possibility of movement between academic institutions and cultural bodies such as museums and galleries whose research active staff have no access to funds to support the OA publication of their research.

Particularly at risk in this connection are those at an early stage in their career, often these days with fixed-term, part-time or teaching-only contracts. In fields like history or literary studies they will know that the most secure route to a full research-active position is likely to involve the

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<sup>16</sup> Data from Appendix A of ‘An analysis of the Arts and Humanities submitted research outputs to the REF2014 with a focus on academic books’, report for ‘An Academic Book of the Future’.

<https://doi.org/10.18742/RDM01-76>

<sup>17</sup><https://www.ref.ac.uk/2014/media/ref/content/expanel/member/Main%20Panel%20D%20overview%20report.pdf> (p.52, para 10).

publication of a monograph. They are thus on the horns of a dilemma. To accept a non-OA contract, however prestigious the publisher who offers it, risks making them REF-ineligible and therefore not an attractive prospect to an employer. Yet, without access to any source of funding, the OA route remains closed to them – as it will to PhD students hoping to turn their thesis into the published volume that will launch them on their chosen career path.

## 6. Framing a new dialogue

To sum up, more even than with journals, when it comes to books the OA debate sits at the point where the right to read meets the right to write. In all its pronouncements to date the British Academy has made it clear that it is on the side of those who wish to extend the access of both specialists and the general public to the fruits of academic research. That much is not in doubt. The issues, as we have shown, lie in how that goal is reconciled with the freedom of academics to choose how, where and when they write. And what has been disappointing about the recent HEFCE announcements is that they have (re-)stated the position without addressing these issues – while suggesting that open access might be a requirement for monographs published from as early as January 2021. However, until these issues have been addressed and workable solutions found, it is neither just nor reasonable to mandate a REF requirement for monograph publication.

In all this, one thing that could have been more open is the way these policy developments and decisions on the part of HEFCE have been communicated. As we noted, the blog piece and the *Bookseller* interview asserted that the academic community had already been informed of this intention in December 2016. In fact, this intention was only expressed in Annex C of a consultation document about REF2021, and was framed in terms of ‘setting a direction of travel’.<sup>18</sup> This opaque approach to communication explains why so many have felt startled by the recent HEFCE announcements – and it is not easily squared with the transparency criterion contained in the initial decisions for REF2021, which refers to a ‘clear and open process through which decisions are made and information about the assessment process is shared’.<sup>19</sup>

Concerns about the content and the manner of its communication aside, perhaps the most troubling aspect of the new policy is the way it reneges on the view that has been part of UK research assessment throughout the first quarter century of its existence, according to which research evaluation should assess but not alter research practices. For example, the criteria of the panel for Modern Languages and Linguistics in RAE2008 stated: ‘In all cases the sub-panel criteria seek to reflect rather than shape the research activity of the discipline in question’. And the general guidelines for all panels in REF2014 state ‘The REF aims to assess all types of research without distorting the activity that it measures’.<sup>20</sup> It is hard to see how the proposed policy on OA and books is consistent with that goal and commitment.

By contrast, the general statement (posted in April) of UKRI policy on OA, although in its detail targeted at article publishing, expresses a set of ‘high level’ principles much nearer to those argued for in the present document and more in line with earlier practice in respect of research

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<sup>18</sup> The consultation document and the report on responses are available here:

<http://www.hefce.ac.uk/rsrch/ref2021/refconsultation/> In the follow-up report on responses to the consultation, published in September 2017, mention of OA and monographs is restricted to the paragraph (§133) on responses to the proposed additional credit for going beyond the minimum OA requirements in the 2021 submissions. There is no explicit mention of the policy for later REF exercises nor any reference to the earlier annex.

<sup>19</sup> *Initial Decisions on the Research Excellence Framework 2021*, §10.

<sup>20</sup> *Assessment Framework and Guidance on Submissions*, REF 2014 02.2011, p.4.

assessment.<sup>21</sup> It is hard not to agree, for example, with the statement that ‘stakeholders in the scholarly communications system should work together to provide a sustainable means to disseminate and validate the full range of research outputs’. At the same time we must recognise, as they say, that ‘policy requirements are sensitive to ... the sustainability of the publication system.’ The British Academy is also at one with them when they assert that ‘UKRI supports author freedom, as researchers may decide the publication venue’.

Two of the UKRI principles go to the heart of the matter. They state: ‘In the long term, we will seek to encourage open access to as many types of research outputs as possible’; and ‘The costs of scholarly communication should be a legitimate and embedded part of research funding as a whole’. In other words, due time to work out a proper set of solutions, and sufficient money to support those solutions, are of the essence.

There now needs to start a constructive dialogue about how open access monograph publication might be achievable in the future. There needs to be transparency about where and how policy decisions will be taken. The ‘internal’ review of open access that UKRI has announced needs to be generous in reaching out to those ‘stakeholders in the scholarly communications system’ in order to inform – and instil confidence in – its findings. And beyond that there needs to be full consultation on any concrete proposals for extending open access to monographs, without which it would be neither fair nor wise to impose new rules.

#### *7. Open access and the British Academy*

Monographs are a crucial form of academic dissemination in the humanities and social sciences – the disciplines that the British Academy represents – so the preservation of a sustainable future for this medium is a matter of acute interest to us. The Academy is committed to helping to find ways to broaden the scope of OA to include monographs and other book-length publications. Indeed, the Academy is exploring how the possibilities of successful OA might work in respect of areas for which it has direct responsibility – including some of its research funding schemes and its own academic publishing programme – and will be considering practical options during the next few months. We will also seek to engage international colleagues and institutions in this discussion as the best means of ensuring both that leading researchers from overseas will not feel inhibited from joining our academic communities and that UK-trained scholars will not be disadvantaged in the international job market.

But even more importantly, the British Academy has a duty to act as a conduit for the views of its humanities and social sciences constituency, and it has received many expressions of concern on this matter in the last few weeks. The purpose of this position paper is to give voice to those concerns. But it is also to help clarify the issues and frame the debate, and to start a new dialogue – a dialogue in which the British Academy must play a central role.

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<sup>21</sup> The full statement of these principles can be downloaded here:  
<https://www.ukri.org/funding/information-for-award-holders/open-access/>