

THE **PUBLISHERS** ASSOCIATION

A response from The Publishers Association (UK) to the Office of Science and Technology Policy public consultation on public access to scholarly publications

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A response from The Publishers Association (UK) to the Office of Science and Technology Policy public consultation on public access to scholarly publications

The Publishers Association is the leading UK trade body representing academic, scholarly, consumer trade and educational publishers based in the UK. Publishing is our largest media sector, and the biggest creative industry. The PA's members represent approximately £4bn (80%) of the £5bn turnover within these parts of the overall publishing sector. Collectively the creative industries – of which the copyright industries form the dominant part – contribute over 8% to the UK's GDP.

The PA welcomes this opportunity to comment on the OSTP request for public comments on **approaches that would enhance the public's access to scholarly publications** resulting from research funded by a Federal agency. We appreciate the spirit of open consultation which lies behind this request and we are happy for our comments to be shared with other stakeholders.

We have structured our comments in three sections: firstly a short summary, then a 12-point expansion on where we stand on this issue, and finally some responses to the structured questions in the RFI. We hope that our comments may be helpful in this debate.

Summary

- This is an international issue. We urge OSTP to take a broad view.
- Publishers support the aspiration that taxpayers should have access to the results of the research they have funded.
- Individual articles are not published in isolation. They part of a concept on which scholarly communication depends: journals.
- Any solution to the public access aspiration should be designed not to undermine the journal system but to complement, even support it. Journals bring benefits [point 4] to researchers that will be hard to replace.
- Taxpayers have not funded the processes that relate to archival quality publication of the outputs from the primary research they have funded.
- Appropriating the scholarly literature without compensation to populate repositories will only undermine whatever model is used to sustain these publication processes.
- Journals are sustained by learned societies, communities of scholars and publishers that manage and invest in them. Collectively these stakeholders support functions [point 8] that add value to the scholarly communications process, for which costs must be recovered.
- For investment to be sustained, societies and publishers need certain market conditions to be in place. [Point 9]
- We would argue strongly that publishers of journals do an excellent job of meeting the needs of their core audience: the global community of researchers.
- Publishers are not opposed to open access. But we are sceptical about unfunded appropriation of value-added material to populate repositories in the name of 'public access'.
- Public access is a separate issue from publication for the research community itself. It needs fresh strategies, and fresh funding.

Our position

- 1) **This is an international issue.** Although project funding might derive from US Federal agencies, the researchers themselves may well be working in international teams that include researchers from other nations and from institutions not based in the US. Both effective communication among scholarly researchers, and effective communication of the knowledge deriving from their work, should be seen as international issues, with implications beyond the remit of the Federal funding agencies. What happens in the US impacts the global system of disseminating research outputs.
- 2) **Publishers support the aspiration that taxpayers should have access to the results of the research they have funded.** There are however at least two distinct dimensions to this aspiration: the needs of the research community and the benefits to the public.
- 3) The unit of publication envisaged for public access is the peer-reviewed article (or articles) deriving from the work of federally funded researchers. **But individual articles are not published in isolation.** They are part of an aggregated concept on which the dynamics of scholarly communication depends: the scholarly journal. Journals are owned by learned societies, institutions, and publishers. Journals bring benefits to the community that created them and has sustained them for over 300 years: the global community of scholarly research.
- 4) Journals fulfil a useful, even vital and irreplaceable role. **So any solution to the public access aspiration should be designed not to undermine the journal system but to complement, even support it.** The benefits they bring to researchers are several:
 - a) Journals evolved, and are still evolving, to support specialist communities of researchers. They are signposts to quality and relevance.
 - b) Journals are the first line filter of quality assurance. Other filtering systems to identify relevance and reduce information overload tend to augment the journal, not replace it.
 - c) Journals (or their editors and publishers) organise the pre-publication process of peer-review, which is the acknowledged and irreplaceable benchmark for integrity and quality in research outputs¹.
 - d) Publication in a journal means taking an author's manuscript up to archival quality and making it available for all posterity.
 - e) A successful journal, that builds and sustains a community of interest, becomes an incentive for investment and further innovation. Positive feedback from the community generates organic improvements that do not require regulation or intervention.
 - f) Journals have acted as the principal vehicle for registration (of the work undertaken) and dissemination (to the community of mutual interest) since 1665. Despite adverse predictions,

¹ See for example: Mark Ware, [Peer Review: benefits perceptions, and alternatives](#), Publishing Research Consortium, 2008

the concept has survived and prospered in the Internet age. This must be because the concept is of value to those that support it – the research community itself.

- g) As the source for citation of the version of record, journals provide the basis for metrics to assess funding criteria and for mutual recognition and advancement in the scientific community by those who publish in them.
- 5) Taxpayers have certainly funded a report (from the researchers to the funders) on the research enabled by the research grant, **but they have not funded the processes that relate to archival quality publication of the outputs from that research.** This report is generally not what gets published in the peer-reviewed scholarly literature, if it gets published at all or just remains in the files of the funding agency. There are other processes, separately funded², that result in the archive-quality, peer-reviewed contribution to the sum of knowledge that might derive from this research if it is successful. The costs involved in these processes need to be recovered, with a margin on top to sustain investment in system development and innovation.
- 6) **So, appropriating the scholarly literature without compensation to populate repositories will only undermine whatever model is used to sustain these publication processes** (currently generally a subscription model funded by library budgets). The US Federal agencies fund very large volumes of research. If all the published outputs from this research are appropriated for repositories, the established global system of scholarly publication in journals could be fatally undermined, with unknown and unforeseen consequences.
- 7) Journals are sustained by the learned societies, by the community of scholars (editors, advisers, research authors and reviewers) and by the publishers that manage and invest in them. **Collectively these stakeholders add value, through the following functions:**
 - a) Investment in the submissions systems, peer review management systems, and production systems that make up the technology scaffolding of the journal.
 - b) Organisation of and support for the network of peer-reviewers associated with the journal.
 - c) In-house work on editing the text to publication quality (often from manuscripts produced by non-native speakers) and formatting the final version for functionality and interoperability in a world of rapidly evolving technology.
 - d) Disseminating and marketing the journal to a global audience.
 - e) Archiving the output of the journal, and linking to databases for search and discovery.
 - f) Building a respected brand that commands loyalty and continuity from a global community of scholars. This requires strategic journal development and editorial relationship management.

² Unless the agency has agreed in its research grant that research authors may use project funds towards the cost of publication charges levied by 'Gold' open access journals, that cover the costs of publication from funding on the supply side/ author pays, as opposed to the demand side/ reader pays.

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- g) Experimenting with new journals, nurturing them beyond the loss-making early years, supporting new disciplines and sub-disciplines, and adapting to the publication needs of evolving research communities.
- 8) For these benefits to the research community to be sustained, and for investment in the journal system to continue, **societies and publishers need certain market conditions to be in place**, or at least to be respected and taken into account by policy makers and fund holders:
- a) A marketplace with sustainable and accessible funding for which to publish.
 - b) A marketplace that is not undermined by unfair competition, or where value-added material is appropriated without compensation to populate repositories.
 - c) An evolving marketplace, with incentives for innovation and investment.
 - d) The prospect of a reasonable return on investment over the medium term, in return for taking on the risk of publication.
 - e) An exclusive licence or copyright assignment to publish the IPR in which they choose to invest, in order to have the means to protect their investment and pursue infringement.
 - f) A willing culture of peer-review in the research community, to establish the authority of their journals.
 - g) Recognition of the importance and value of their role, in enabling a secure and stable system of archive-quality research outputs.
- 9) Societies and publishers have supported and developed the journals system in order to meet the needs of their core audience: the global community of researchers. **We would argue strongly that publishers do an excellent job here.** Access by researchers to journal articles has increased dramatically over the last ten years: through investment in Internet technology, and through developments in licensing, especially the 'big deal' for library consortia. Surveys continue to show high levels of satisfaction with journal access among researchers, especially in universities and research institutes.
- 10) **Publishers are not opposed to open access.** Variants of the author/ funder pays 'Gold' OA model are well established and growing. But we are sceptical about the unknown consequences of variants to the unfunded 'Green' OA model, designed to populate institutional and subject repositories with value-added material appropriated from societies and publishers in the name of 'public access'.
- 11) **Public access is a separate issue from publication for the research community itself.** It needs to be addressed as such. Fresh strategies, and fresh funding, are needed to achieve these aspirations.

Our response to the RFI

With these principles in mind, we would respond as follows to the structured questions in the RFI:

Question 1. *How do authors, primary and secondary publishers, libraries, universities, and the federal government contribute to the development and dissemination of peer-reviewed papers arising from federal funds now, and how might this change under a public access policy?*

Please refer to points 4 & 7 above. Publishers of journals (both commercial and not-for-profit) bring a neutral and independent means of enabling scholarly communication and the publication of research outputs. Peer-reviewed journals are generally independent of the sources of research funding that sustain the authors that publish in them. This has benefits for research integrity. If peer-reviewed journals cannot derive funding to recover the value that they add, then the filtering, quality assurance, and archival system that they represent will decay (unless rapidly replaced by a fresh paradigm), thus undermining the source of peer-reviewed papers thought desirable to populate public access repositories.

Question 2. *What characteristics of a public access policy would best accommodate the needs and interests of authors, primary and secondary publishers, libraries, universities, the federal government, users of scientific literature, and the public?*

Please see point 8 above. A public access policy should not undermine the system that created the literature to which public access is thought desirable. Some form of Gold OA model could work if the funding to pay for publishing services is made available (e.g. as a specific allocation in the research grant or as part of an institutional budget) and the payment process is made simpler. Any system of embargos should not undermine the library subscriptions that benefit the core research community, and should take into account different usage patterns for different disciplines.

Question 3. *Who are the users of peer reviewed publications arising from federal research? How do they access and use these papers now, and how might they if these papers were more accessible? Would others use these papers if they were more accessible, and for what purpose?*

Core users are the community of researchers that support the journal in question, please see point 4 above. The overwhelming majority (95%+) of peer-reviewed research articles are published in journals funded by a subscription model. This proportion is shifting as funding (in the main deriving from funding agencies) is made available to support Gold OA, but shifting slowly. The great majority (95%+) of journal articles are available and are accessed in electronic form, through the open Internet (OA) or through library systems. It is arguably more readily achievable to address enhancing access via library systems (for say commercial researchers) than to attempt to engineer a wholesale shift in the means of funding research outputs in order to make them sustainably available on the open Internet.

Question 4. *How best could federal agencies enhance public access to the peer reviewed papers that arise from their research funds? What measures could agencies use to gauge whether there is increased return on federal investment gained by expanded access?*

We have no metric to offer for access by the public, but the metric widely used to gauge impact on the research community is onward citation of published articles. It would appear that to date no clear

citation advantage for articles published on open access can be identified³. This may relate to the satisfaction levels referred to above [point 9] for the research community itself. Research has shown however that there is clear advantage in publishers enabling access by scholarly search engines to aid discovery.

Question 5. *What features does a public access policy need to have to ensure compliance?*

Experience so far (by NIH with PubMed Central and the Wellcome Trust with UKPMC) is that deposit rates by authors alone have to date been extremely low (~5%) and that publisher collaboration and cooperation is needed to build up the deposit rate. This will be enhanced of course by the Gold OA model. The PEER project in Europe⁴ will (among other objectives) investigate this effect by way of a controlled observatory involving 300 journals.

Question 6. *What version of the paper should be made public under a public access policy (e.g., the author's peer reviewed manuscript or the final published version)? What are the relative advantages and disadvantages to different versions of a scientific paper?*

Version control is an extremely important issue. Without discipline, a proliferation of different versions (preprint, submitted manuscript, peer-reviewed manuscript, version of record, to name but four)⁵ will appear in repositories, spreading confusion and potentially hazardous misunderstanding. But there is a dilemma here. Clearly if the published version is used, especially close to publication, for an article published in a journal funded by the subscription model, then the sustainability of that journal will be undermined. Librarians cannot easily justify subscribing (public) funds to material available for free elsewhere. So publishers would argue strongly that the public access version should not involve appropriation of the value added version, or not until the access model for the core community has been fully satisfied. On the other hand, those expecting access without charge will naturally want the best version available, which would be the published version. But in the absence of universal Gold OA, such a policy would undoubtedly impact on the model designed to benefit the core community.

Question 7. *At what point in time should peer reviewed papers be made public via a public access policy relative to the date a publisher releases the final version? Are there empirical data to support an optimal length of time? Should the delay period be the same or vary for levels of access (e.g., final peer reviewed manuscript or final published article, access under fair use versus alternative license), for federal agencies and scientific disciplines?*

Research evidence to inform the embargo debate is still sparse. This survey⁶ summarises the position. The PEER project⁷ is designed to research into these effects. We do know however that the effect of embargos has distinct variations between disciplines.

³ See for example: Craig, Plume, McVeigh, Pringle and Amin, *Do open access articles have greater citation impact?: A critical review of the literature*, Journal of Informetrics, [Volume 1, Issue 3](#), July 2007, Pages 239-248

⁴ <http://www.peerproject.eu/>

⁵ There is a NISO Recommended Practice for Journal Article Versions, see: <http://www.niso.org/publications/rp/RP-8-2008.pdf>

⁶ Beckett and Inger, [Self-archiving and journal subscriptions: co-existence or competition?](#), Publishing Research Consortium, 2007

Question 8. *How should peer reviewed papers arising from federal investment be made publicly available? In what format should the data be submitted in order to make it easy to search, find, and retrieve and to make it easy for others to link to it? Are there existing digital standards for archiving and interoperability to maximize public benefit? How are these anticipated to change?*

The formats used by publishers to create the Version of Record are designed to achieve just these ends! They involve adding metadata, meeting platform interoperability requirements, using standard identifiers, constructing workflow specifications that can meet evolving format flexibility requirements, etc. But there are costs associated with these processes that need to be recovered from the marketplace.

Question 9. *Access demands not only availability, but also meaningful usability. How can the federal government make its collections of peer reviewed papers more useful to the American public? By what metrics (e.g., number of articles or visitors) should the Federal government measure success of its public access collections? What are the best examples of usability in the private sector (both domestic and international)? And, what makes them exceptional? Should those who access papers be given the opportunity to comment or provide feedback?*

Research articles are, in the main, written for the attention of fellow researchers skilled and experienced in the discipline in question. They are iterative, developmental, evolutionary: written for the attention of a community. They are not written for a general audience, nor an isolated reader, and so do not cover, say, the background needed to understand the conclusions or the implications. So arguably a different kind of literature entirely is needed to inform the American (and world) public. This will involve more editorial added value being applied to the primary research articles. Such publications exist, e.g. review journals, scientific magazines aimed at the general public, health information websites. Merely working on the supply side, making vast amounts for arcane primary research outputs available on open access, does not necessarily solve the purpose for which the mission of ‘public access’ began. Publication is about crafting material for an audience, making it fit for purpose, attending to the needs of the demand side of the equation. Successful publishing needs professional methods. We remain open and willing to engage in a dialogue with the public sector institutions to fulfil our mutual purpose – to serve the audiences that will benefit from our publications.

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⁷ <http://www.peerproject.eu/>