
RLUK/SCONUL response to BIS statement on access to publicly funded research

RLUK and SCONUL very much welcome the commitment of the UK government to ensure that publicly funded scientific research is made available for anyone to read for free. We agree with Science Minister David Willetts that "Removing paywalls that surround taxpayer funded research will have real economic and social benefits."

The transition from older models of publishing to open access (OA) will take some time. Currently access to most published research papers requires the reader or his/her institution to have paid a subscription to the journal. It is acknowledged that there will be costs associated with this shift from readers-pays (via libraries) to Open access where often authors are required to pay a fee. This is especially true as not all countries worldwide will move with the same speed to OA. The UK contributes a small percentage of the world's research output (6%), so for a period we will be paying to make UK research OA while continuing to purchase subscriptions to access research from the rest of the world. We are disappointed, therefore, that the Government has not announced any new funding to facilitate the transition, but has assumed that any additional transition costs will be met out of existing budgets. This can only act to slow the rate of transition and to reduce the budget available for new research.

As we move through a transition period we will see a mixed economy where individual publishers, and indeed individual journals, will have both subscription-only content and a growing proportion of open access content. It is vital that monitoring mechanisms are put in place to ensure both that where authors have paid to publish articles are truly 'open access' and that subscription prices are adjusted downwards to reflect the level of this content. We must ensure that we do not pay twice - once through article processing fees and again through subscriptions. We are disappointed that the Government has not indicated its intention

to address this issue and we urge Mr Willetts to explore a mechanism to ensure that public funds are spent effectively.

We have already signalled our concern at the length of embargo periods for green open access suggested in the Finch Report. We believe that neither the Finch report nor the Government response gives sufficient weight to the role of the well-established network of repositories in the UK. Continued deposit of authors' papers with minimal embargo periods has a vital part to play in the transition period by ensuring access to research that is not published in gold OA (either where such options do not exist, where the fees are excessive, or where funding is not available). We therefore strongly support the revised open access policies announced by RCUK which fully recognise the importance of Green OA.

In any transition period there will be a degree of uncertainty. We would like to see more modelling of the potential transition scenarios - in particular focussing on the interplay between and interdependence of green and gold OA, and the possible role of national licensing. RLUK and SCONUL calls upon the Government to undertake this modelling as a next step following the Finch report.

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http://www.sconul.ac.uk/news/rluk_sconul_response