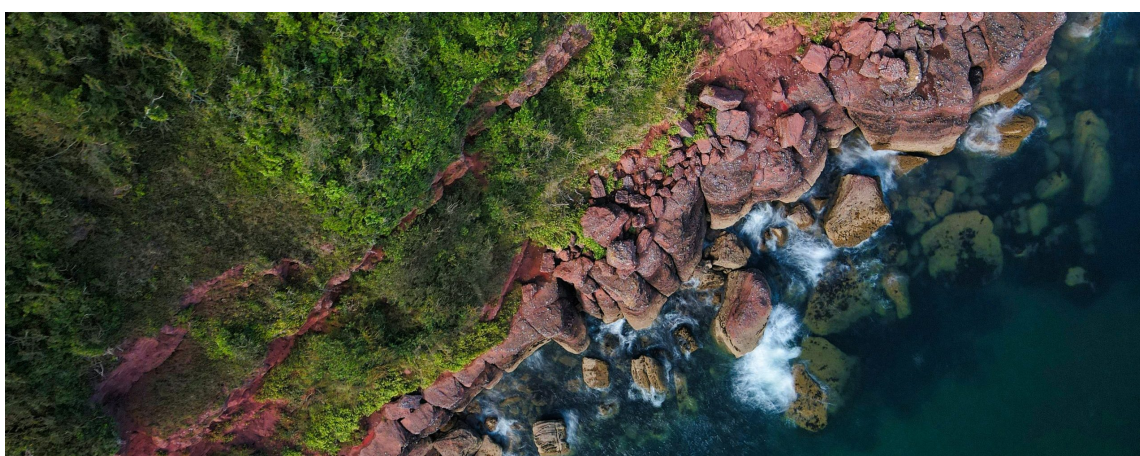


UKRI's 2021 Open Access Policy

by Caroline Winter | 29 April 2022 | English, Observations, Observations and Responses | 0 comments



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At a glance:

Title	UKRI Open Access Policy (2021)
Creator	UK Research and Innovation (UKRI)
Publication Date	August 6, 2021
Keywords	funding agencies , open access , policy

In August 2021, [UK Research and Innovation \(UKRI\)](#) published [an organizational open access policy](#) that applies to publications supported by funding from any of its [seven research councils](#), [Research England](#), and [Innovate UK](#). This new policy is the result of a consultation process that began in 2018, with a draft policy for consultation released in February 2020 (see “[UKRI Open Access Policy Review and Consultation](#)”). It builds upon nearly two decades of open access policy development in the UK, including the [2012 Finch report](#), [Research Excellence Framework 2021 OA policy and guidance](#), and [research councils’ existing OA policies](#).

Under the new OA policy, research articles submitted for publication as of April 1, 2022, must be published with immediate open access via one of two routes: gold OA or green OA. In route 1—gold OA—

the article is published in an OA journal or platform (including transformative hybrid journals) that meets a set of technical standards to align with the [FAIR principles](#) (Findability, Accessibility, Interoperability, Reusability). These standards include the use of persistent identifiers (PIDs), metadata standards, a long-term preservation program, and the inclusion of the self-archiving policy in [SHERPA/RoMEO](#) (UKRI 2021c; see “[The UK Persistent Identifier \(PID\) Consortium](#)”).

In route 2—green OA—the article is published in a paywalled journal and the author’s accepted manuscript (AAM) or the version of record is deposited in an institutional or subject repository. A [Creative Commons license](#) must also be applied, either Attribution (CC BY) or Attribution–No Derivatives (CC BY ND) 4.0 International. (UKRI 2021a). The repository must meet similar technical standards to the OA journal and must be registered in the [Directory of Open Access Repositories \(OpenDOAR\)](#). All biomedical articles must also be deposited in [Europe PubMed Central](#) (UKRI policy 2021b).

This is the first UKRI OA policy that applies to monographs as well as articles (see “[Open Access Monographs](#)”). Under the policy, long-form publications—monographs, edited collections, and book chapters—must be OA within 12 months of publication, as of January 1, 2024, either through publication in an OA platform (similar to route 1 above or gold OA) or through deposit of the AAM in a repository (similar to route 2 or green OA). As with articles, a CC licence must be applied, either CC BY (preferred), CC BY ND, or Attribution–NonCommercial (CC BY NC) (UKRI 2021a). The policy acknowledges that some rare exemptions may be made when OA publication is not possible and encourages but does not require adherence with metadata standards and the use of PIDs (UKRI 2021b).

The policy notes that its licensing requirements do not apply to any third-party copyrighted material, such as images or maps, included in articles or long-form publications (UK 2021b). And, although the policy does not apply to preprints, it supports their use and circulation, particularly in emergency situations (UKRI 2021b).

To support the implementation of the new OA policy, UKRI has committed up to £47.7 million per year, with £3.5 million earmarked for OA monographs, but support funds can only be used to publish articles in hybrid journals that have a transformative agreement in place with [JISC](#) (UKRI 2021b; UKRI 2021c). It will work to ensure that any future research excellence framework (REF) OA requirements are consistent with it and will provide further details about implementation and funding, particularly related to long-form publications, later in 2022 (UKRI 2021a; UKRI 2021b). Further details about the implementation will be available on UKRI’s [Shaping Our Open Access Policy](#) site as they become available.

Reactions from the INKE Community

[Open Access Australasia](#), an INKE Partnership member through the [Canadian–Australian Partnership for Open Scholarship \(CAPOS\)](#), made a statement in support of the new policy, noting that it offers a useful example that could inform [Australia’s national OA strategy](#), currently under consultation.

The New UKRI OA Policy in the Press

The announcement of the policy was covered in the academic press, including in [Physics World](#), [Science Business](#), and [University Business](#). As evident from its press coverage, the UKRI’s OA policy has broad support in principle from the academic community, but opinions differ on how it should be implemented (McKie 2021).

In an article in [Times Higher Ed](#), Carrie Webster (at Springer Nature) argues that the UKRI’s new OA policy gets many things right, including its funding commitments and its requirement that funding is used to support transformative agreements. She expresses concerns, though, that the policy treats green OA (route 2) as “on par” with gold OA (route 1), since this has the potential to undermine the ultimate goals of the policy by entrenching rather than moving away from a subscription-based model (Webster 2021).

An [article in Nature](#) by Richard Van Noorden is less supportive of the policy, calling it “strict” and

characterizing UKRI's process for determining which hybrid journals qualify for APC support as indecision (2021). Like Webster, his critique focuses on the policy's support for green OA, but he conveys concern from the UK publishing community that the policy's support for green OA will harm publishers by enabling authors to comply without paying APCs.

Reaction from the Broader Community

The UKRI received a strong response from the broader community to its draft policy for consultation and has shared [an analysis of the 350 responses](#) it received.

[Research Libraries UK \(RLUK\)](#) shared a statement of strong support for the new policy, as did [cOAlition S](#) and [Frontiers](#), and other stakeholders have expressed support for the policy with concerns about its implementation.

Many of these concerns relate to the elimination of any embargo on articles deposited in repositories. For example, The [Publishers Association](#) states that putting green OA on equal footing with gold OA—rather than as a backup option when gold OA is not available—will undermine both the publishing industry and the OA movement (2021). Similar concerns have been voiced by the Copyright Committee of the [Association of Learned and Professional Society Publishers \(ALPSP\)](#), [STM](#) (an industry organization for academic publishers), the [Institute of Physics \(IOP\) Publishing](#), [Taylor & Francis](#), and [The Bookseller](#) (a publishing trade magazine). Oxford University released a [statement in response to the policy announcement](#) expressing concern that issues raised in response to the draft were not fully addressed. It states that the April 1 timeline for articles is too short, that the policy revisions did not consider the rapidly growing number of transformative agreements in the UK, and that necessary details about funding are not yet available. In addition, it argues that the 12-month embargo for monographs will put the future of scholarly presses in jeopardy (Oxford 2021).

Until April 1, when the new UKRI OA policy took effect, *Nature* and other journals published by Springer Nature were not included in [Jisc's list of approved transformative journals](#). This raised concerns that UKRI funding could not be used to pay APCs for those journals, effectively preventing researchers from publishing in those high-profile venues. A temporary, last-minute agreement between Jisc and Springer Nature announced on April 1, effective to the end of 2022, resolved those concerns temporarily, and Springer Nature is expected to have a transformative agreement in place for 2023 and beyond. This agreement remains controversial, however, due to the high APCs charged by Nature of £8290 or €9500 (Grove 2022).

Other stakeholders expressed concern about the policy's treatment of monographs. [COPIM \(Community-led Publication Infrastructures for Monographs\)](#) released a response in support of the policy, particularly its requirements for long-form scholarly publications. Noting that they are other organizations are already developing infrastructures necessary for OA monograph publishing, COPIM voices opposition to the policy's "'suitable publisher' exemption" and the possibilities of embargoes included in the upcoming REF (2021). The UK's [Royal Historical Society](#) is generally supportive of the policy and its treatment of long-form publications but expresses similar concerns to COPIM, that important details about funding and implementation remain undefined, and how this policy will affect the next REF is as yet unknown (Finn et al. 2021; COPIM 2021).

Echoing concerns about the effects of supporting hybrid, APC-based OA, COPIM's response cautions that establishing a similar system of funding for book publishing charges (BPCs) may only entrench hybrid publishing further and worsen existing inequalities (COPIM 2021). [Samuel Moore](#) expresses similar concerns, arguing that the policy could "cement the BPC as the primary business model for open access books" rather than supporting more innovative, community-led publishing models (Moore 2021). On a similar note, [Lucy Barnes of Open Book Publishers](#) argues in response to the new policy that collective funding models are the best way to fund long-form OA publishing without relying on BPCs (2021).

Debates about the potential effects of the policy on the publishing industry and on the UK's economy as a whole highlights open scholarship's role in the global economy. The new UKRI OA policy is part of the UK's overall **Build Back Better** strategy, a response to the COVID-19 pandemic that includes significant investment in research and development to support economic growth (Ficarra and Johnson 2021; see **"Open Scholarship and COVID-19"**).

However, a **report on the potential economic effects of the new OA policy** from FTI Consulting, commissioned by the Publishers Association, concludes that the policy will negatively affect the UK economy (2021). Specifically, it finds that removing the embargo period for articles published via green OA will harm publishers' ability to recover their investments in research publications, with repercussions for the UK's economy overall (9–10, 40). In a response to this report, **PLOS** argues that, in limiting its analysis to the economic effects of OA on the publishing industry—and on traditional publishing models—the report fails to account for the widespread benefits of OA in open scholarship and beyond (2021).

UKRI is a founding member of cOAlition S, and the policy's call for no-embargo, immediate open access aligns with Plan S and other international funding policies (see **"Plan S and cOAlition S"** and **"Plan S Update: The Expanding Membership of cOAlition S"**) (O'Grady 2021; UKRI 2021a). Requiring Creative Commons licensing also puts the UKRI's policy in line with Plan S's Rights Retention Strategy, which has raised concerns about impacts to open scholarship as a whole, including the possibility for widespread desk rejections of manuscripts where the journal policy requires the transfer of copyright and the collapse of hybrid journals that choose not to transition to OA, but Stephen Eglen argues that many of these concerns are overstated (see **"Plan S Update: Rights Retention Strategy"**; Eglen 2021).

Jisc's statement in response to the policy emphasizes its importance within the scholarly communications ecosystem and the wider community, stating that the policy will "help the sector maintain momentum in pursuit of a sustainable transition to full and immediate open access for all research" (Bal 2021). Since the UK is a global leader in OA publishing, the new UKRI OA policy is a significant contribution to advancing open scholarship worldwide.

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