Strathprints Institutional Repository

Discussion Paper: Open Access (OA) Publishing – Myths, choices and costs

Discussions and enquiries concerning open access journals and the best way to support the associated costs of OA publishing have increased over the last 12-18 months. Much of this discussion has taken place with individual academics or at departmental level, rather than at an institutional level. The Information Services Directorate has participated in some of these interchanges, and is aware that the Library, in particular, is identified by many as being the most likely source of funding and/or possible coordinator of any decision to tackle this matter should a central support policy be put in place. Whilst ISD agree that its field of responsibility should include some involvement with OA publishing, not least due to the support and management of the institutional repository, it is concerned that many of the views being expressed by colleagues elsewhere are showing some evidence that the real workings of the OA enterprise in the wider arena are misunderstood, specifically on the matter of cost. This discussion paper attempts to clear-up some of the myths and provide an objective assessment of the options this institution may wish to consider.

What is Open Access?

Open Access is the sharing of research material, via the web, at no cost to the reader. Many of the research funding bodies mandate that research outputs arising from the grant must be made freely available to the community via open access. This may be done by a number of routes:

Green Open Access: The author self-archives their work at the time the article is submitted for publication i.e. it may have been peer-reviewed by this point. This is normally archived within their own institutional repository or within a subject specific repository coordinated by another academic organization or collection of subject research organizations. E.g. Strathprints, Pubmed. Green OA is acceptable to the key UK funding bodies.

Gold Open Access: The author or institution pays an organization (often a publisher) at the time of publication to make the material free to view at the point of access. E.g. Biomed Central, Hindawi, Wiley Open Access, Public Library of Science (PloS). Some funders such as the Wellcome Trust now identify an element of the grant which may be used to cover the costs of OA Gold publication.

Current Myths:

1. **Open access publishing is free**
   No. The production and storage of any article will entail a cost to cover overheads. In-house institutional repositories however, are likely to have lower overheads as maintenance of the system will form part of the overall system requirements for the organization and the staff managing the process may perform other duties. Gold OA options generally require the payment of an article processing charge (APC) which is typically in the range of £1000-3000.
2. **Open access models will release library funds to the institution by allowing large scale cancellation of journal subscriptions**
   No. Many of the OA sites continue to have subscriber only areas or offer the membership only limited discounts on APC publication rates e.g. Biomed Central maintains 6 flagship titles which require a subscription or payment per view. Most will continue to deliver a portfolio of non OA

titles in parallel, which academics continue to require access to. At the present time it is unlikely that much money could be released from subscriptions, and diverting library funds away from traditional journal subscriptions could seriously compromise the range and quality of material available to researchers.

3. **Open access models will remove control from the large publishing houses and return control to the academic community**

   No. Many of the OA gold options are owned by established publishing houses – Biomed Central is part of Springer, Hindawi is produced by a profit based publisher called Hindawi Publishing Corporation with revenues increasing by 80% between 2008 and 2010. The revenue model may have changed but the primary goal of making money has not. With OA gold options, authors are still paying a commercial concern for the service of promoting their research outputs in the form of articles and associated documentation. The difference is that the payments are now made as a steady stream of APCs across the year rather than in a single one-off annual subscription renewal. In this sense control by the academic community is probably diminished, as it may be difficult to financially plan for an unknown number of articles that will require publication during the course of the year. It is possible however, that academics may benefit by an increased choice of new journals in which they may publish - Given that OA publishers have shifted some of their revenue generation model to a dependence on the number of articles published, it is in their interest to increase the number of titles they offer to accommodate the number of articles submitted. This is why many of the OA gold publishers have dramatically increased their journal title lists year on year, and chosen to focus on particularly active fields such as biomedicine.

<u>Options:</u>

- Continue to mandate that institutional output is deposited in the Institutional Repository and focus on green OA options only. This is the current Strathclyde approach as no *centrally* organized memberships to OA Gold are in place at present

- Support OA gold options as additional route for publication by either:
  - Author covers all APC
  - Author and Institution share APC (e.g. Shared Support membership option for Biomed Central). This may be happening in practice in some areas of the institution.
  - Institution covers all APC (e.g. Prepay membership option for Biomed Central)

  Institutional support for Gold OA could be provided by:
  - Paying for institutional membership to the relevant scheme/s which may bring with it the benefit of a reduced APC, which the author continues to pay either from personal funds, research funds or a departmental budget
  - Paying for institutional membership to the relevant scheme/s to obtain discounted APC, but institution also pays the APC from a departmental or centrally created OA publication fund.
  - A centrally supported OA publication fund would benefit those researchers who have produced appropriate material as part of their general activities, rather than as work resulting from a specific grant. The result might be more material reaching full publication with the

greater enhancement to institutional reputation. The University of Nottingham is a UK example of an institution which has taken this approach.

Where could the money for a central OA publication fund come from?

- Library grant – This is not currently feasible without dramatically cutting expenditure on books serials and database acquisition. The assumed potential savings on traditional serials subscriptions have yet to materialize, subscription rates continue to rise above inflation, and a good portfolio of the traditional serials is still required to support the diverse research interests at Strathclyde. OA journals have not replaced traditional subscription based titles; they have simply added an additional business model for delivering high quality publications. Whilst some US universities do fund/partially fund OA activities from a library grant, it is known that their library grants are generally higher and many have the additional benefit of substantial endowment income to use.
- An element of each research grant award could be allocated to a central pool. As mentioned previously some funders already identify an element for publishing, but not all. Some funders allow publication to be charged as a direct cost of the project, but only during the lifetime of the research grant. Having a central fund to call on would help those researchers who publish the resulting research after the grant has ended.
- It may be possible to include publication charges as legitimate indirect costs for a project such as accommodation and other infrastructure expenses. If this is the case then some adjustment for calculating this internally would need to be considered. There is a danger that this could unfavourably increase the level of the bid made to the funding bodies thus jeopordising the success of the bid.

Costs:

Some OA gold options will base the calculation for the membership fee on the number of researchers and postgraduates in the relevant field. E.g. Biomed Central Supporter Membership option has a fee range of £1360 - £6792, yet only brings a benefit of a 15% discount on the APC (Biomed Central APC are in the range of £360 - £1575, with the average being £1035). Most Hindawi APC are in the range $300 -$1200, but most are at the upper end of that range. Nottingham University publishes 4000 articles in a typical year, and therefore estimated that £7 million would be needed to fund open access publishing. Such a large sum is clearly unsustainable in the current economic climate, and any decision to create a central fund is unlikely therefore to cover all publishing costs. It is worth noting that St. Andrews University library conducted a pilot by setting aside approximately £60,000 for OA, but the fund was exhausted by the end of the first term.

The US universities are ahead of the UK in organizing central funds on a trial basis. Many are continuing to evaluate their schemes. An informative summary document giving the start date of the fund, sponsor of the fund, value of fund, category of staff/student to be supported, and reimbursement limitations is available at: http://www.arl.org/sparc/bm~doc/fundsinaction.pdf . The funds range from $20,000 - $60,000 for a 12 month period.