Open Access Policy Dependencies – Final Project Report

Background

A wide range of non-commercial services exist to support the process of open-access (OA) publishing. In recent years, research funders and research-performing organisations have progressively developed and implemented policies to promote, or mandate, open access to academic research. As the reach of these policies grows, and as authors themselves increasingly adopt OA publishing, so the reliance on existing support services has grown. Yet the initial development of these services often happened organically, prior to the widespread adoption of OA policies, and many services lack sustainable models of funding and governance.

The role of Knowledge Exchange

Knowledge Exchange has been actively involved in promoting open access (OA) on several levels for many years, and has long recognised the risk posed by inadequate OA infrastructure and services. In 2012, we initiated a programme of work designed to improve the extent to which the infrastructure and content services required to support OA can be sustained, and that longevity managed across the community. This work was undertaken in five phases, culminating in a workshop on ‘Sustainable Business Models for Open Access Services’ in February 2014, and the release of the OA Sustainability Index.

In May 2015, we initiated a follow up programme of work intended to identify the extent to which OA policies are dependent on non-commercial, compliance-enabling services. This report summarises the outcomes of this activity.

Initial report and workshop

Our work in 2015 involved a stakeholder consultation and desk-based review of current policies and services, culminating in a workshop in November 2015, and a report, ‘Putting Down Roots: Securing the Future of Open Access Policies’, released in January 2016. This work established that:

- There is broad commonality between funders’ and institutions’ OA policies in terms of their dependencies on OA services;
- These services are critical to the delivery of OA policy goals; and
- Current arrangements for supporting and developing these services are inadequate.

In response to these findings, KE was asked by a number of stakeholders to develop a proposal for a co-ordinating body to promote the sustainability of open-access services.

Proposal for a co-ordinating body

We developed a proposal for a co-ordinating body which could fulfil the following mission:

To promote and facilitate the development of an open scholarly infrastructure, in order to enable the widest possible legal dissemination and usage of the outputs of scholarly research.

In working to fulfil this mission, the body would have regard to the ‘Principles for Open Scholarly Infrastructures’ proposed by Bilder, Lin, and Neylon (2015), and would undertake four key activities:

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1. To maintain a register of the most important international services, operated for the public good, that are either explicitly dedicated to supporting open access, or that are central to the successful implementation of open-access policies.

2. To develop, and periodically review, appropriate criteria to assess the sustainability, governance and level of usage of existing OA services, together with their degree of interoperability with other relevant services.

3. To publish on a regular basis:
   i) prioritised recommendations for the funding of existing services,
   ii) risks to the sustainability of these services; and
   iii) gaps in existing infrastructure where there is a need for new services to be developed, or for improved interoperability between existing services.

4. In time, to develop and manage a mechanism to collect and distribute funding from research funders, research-performing organisations and other interested parties to open-access service providers, on a transparent and equitable basis.

A copy of the full proposal for a co-ordinating body is available from the KE office on request.

Stakeholder consultation

Our proposal was circulated in March 2016 to a number of key bodies and stakeholders for written feedback, and to gauge their support. 17 organisations responded at this stage, with 13 of these responses (76%) characterised as supportive, 3 (18%) as neutral, and one (6%) as negative. The majority of respondents therefore welcomed the proposal for a new body, but it was clear that further work would be needed to define its scope and funding. It would also need to be ‘lightweight’, non-interventionist, and to work effectively in conjunction with existing bodies.

Open Science Presidency Conference/ Amsterdam Call for Action on Open Science

The proposal for a new co-ordinating body was discussed further by participants in a break-out session at the Open Science conference held as part of the Dutch Presidency of the EU, on 4/5 April 2016. Those present recognised the need for a register of key OA services, and for these services to be effectively monitored and supported. There was also consensus that an international, non-governmental organisation would be the most appropriate vehicle for delivering these activities. However, there was less agreement on how such an organisation might be established, or whether the funding of services should be within its remit from the outset. Participants therefore recognised and acknowledged the problem of sustaining OA services, but concluded that more detail would be needed on the scope and likely costs of any proposed solution before it could receive full support from the community.

The outcome of these discussions was reflected in a ‘concrete action’ in the Amsterdam Call for Action on Open Science, as follows:

   National authorities, research funders, Research Performing Organisations, e-infra organisations and publishers: support work in progress and further develop Principles for Open Scholarly Infrastructures to set up concerted mechanisms and fund initiatives to maintain a register of key open access services that address sustainability, governance, usage
and interoperability. Publish the recommendations on funding and risks in a workshop in order to derive a generic approach for such services in general. (p.19)

**Conclusions and Further Development Opportunities**

Knowledge Exchange commissioned this programme of work to highlight the importance of services and infrastructure to the successful delivery of open access. Over the last four years, more than 150 individuals from stakeholder organisations across Europe and beyond have been involved in KE consultations and workshops focussed on this issue. The [OA Sustainability Index](#) and the report [Putting down roots: Securing the future of open access policies](#) capture the outcomes of this work, and provide key reference points for further developments in this area.

With the publication of the Amsterdam Call for Action on Open Science, the need for better mechanisms to track and support OA services and infrastructure has been recognised at the highest level within Europe. This is now an international activity that goes beyond the five Knowledge Exchange countries, and is best taken forward by the service providers themselves, and the beneficiaries of these services.

For further progress to be made, there is a need to develop a better understanding of the likely costs of operating these services and improving their co-ordination. Building on our work, a small-scale pilot is therefore underway to place the SHERPA and DOAJ services on a more sustainable footing. The aim of this work is to develop an international funding model for the two services, that can serve as a model suitable for adoption by other OA services. For more information on this initiative, or to offer your support, please contact Neil Jacobs ([neil.jacobs@jisc.ac.uk](mailto:neil.jacobs@jisc.ac.uk)), Bill Hubbard ([Bill.Hubbard@jisc.ac.uk](mailto:Bill.Hubbard@jisc.ac.uk)) or Lars Bjørnshauge ([lars@arl.org](mailto:lars@arl.org)).