Non-corresponding authors Task & Finish group

Summary of the first meeting [12th July 2022]

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The chair welcomed attendees and introduced the focus of the group; to explore the issue of non-corresponding authorship in light of the UKRI open access policy applying to all funded authors. It was noted that this session was not to come up with solutions but to listen to the different perspectives of attendees and to further develop the briefing paper to build a shared understanding of the issues.

Discussion

The group began by discussing the challenges faced by funders, publishers and institutions in supporting the implementation of the UKRI open access policy and the transition to open access (OA). The link between the corresponding author and eligibility and ‘funding’ was developed to enable measurement and allocation in transitional and other types of OA agreements.

There was discussion about author behaviour and motivation, noting that there is an ethical consideration as authors do not wish to overstate their role or take credit for something that they have not done. Disciplinary differences also occur with regards to how an author, or group of authors apply corresponding status.

It was noted that authors often don’t understand the significance of corresponding author (CA) in relation to eligibility for publishing in transitional agreements (TA). TA’s also assume a level of stability with regards to authors which doesn’t reflect reality as authors move institutions. Attendees raised the question of whether we are looking to trying to resolve an issue that would actually resolve itself as more TA’s are reached outside the UK – thus negating the challenge of authors assuming CA status to publish as part of a TA in the UK. Caution was suggested in putting in place a solution where the costs would fall on UK when it could be a short-term issue.

A discussion took place around systems capability to capture and match up authors, funding / funders and institutions, noting that technical solutions would need to capture the CA status earlier in the publication process. When it comes to technology and workflows, it was noted that there is significant variation in practices across publishers / systems providers and that it would be unlikely that a single solution would fit all. Standardisation would be challenging to achieve within systems as well as due to the global variation in models for TAs / OA agreements.

The group discussed author communication and education and whether this might be a more viable route to address the challenge. Perhaps at the point of grant application or receipt or via author collaboration agreements to raise awareness of UKRI obligations and ensure these are understood by all authors.
Breakout rooms

The group then divided into two groups to discuss the following: *What mechanisms we can put in place that won’t complicate the landscape?*

**Group 1 feedback**

- There is perhaps more we can learn from initiatives like OA2020 and other countries with TAs that might inform the approach here in the UK. In this immediate period, where we are trying to avoid further changes in systems that will be difficult to implement, it may be best to go down the route of encouraging authors to have a conversation at the outset about CA status and funding. However, we would need to be clear about what we are advocating for in those discussions, as the position of authors on a paper can matter significantly to them. Perhaps these need to be guided by some principles.
- We want to avoid implementing solutions that run counter to what is trying to be achieved in the transition – we want to support a level playing field and avoid inequalities. Do we need to think about the authors who are not able to benefit in the short-term, and whether this could tie in with other diversity initiatives?
- Do we know the scale of the issue? Is this actually an issue or is it something that will resolve over time and the UK need not take action that might incur unnecessary costs.

**Group 2 feedback**

- Could the use of existing funder metadata be the trigger for a conversation with the author or for a group of authors to discuss? The challenge here is the quality of funder metadata.
- Is one option to simply enable the green route for these authors or to provide an exception – might this be a reasonable solution and easier especially if the scale is low?
- The sharing of costs across organisations could take different directions, and solutions need to be kept as simple as possible. We need to be careful about assuming that funds are going to be indefinitely available, tying funds into agreements that in the future, that an organisation may not be able to afford or support.
- Could we utilise ORCID iDs to validate author-institute-funder ID associations? This would remove the need to ask CAs to provide data for all their co-authors and for publishers to validate this. This is not a quick fix but would ensure a more efficient process. Who will support the costs of implementing new technological solutions?

**Concluding remarks**

The group agreed that developing a shared set of principles, against which to view and evaluate possible solutions or approaches would be sensible.

It was noted by the HE sector that if such principles couldn’t be agreed upon, the Rights Retention Strategy could be utilised as a solution. An understanding of the global picture could help with the education of authors, and to get a sense of how technologies surrounding data and metadata are being harnessed. In terms of costs, it was noted there will be extreme challenges across the board and having principles in common would be the way to move forward.
Next steps / actions

In order to be transparent and to keep interested parties informed, the details of this group will be added to the Jisc website.

1. Circulate meeting summary to attendees (Anna Hughes)
2. Form a working group to look at this topic (Anna Hughes)
3. Write terms of reference / circulate for review (Anna Hughes)
4. Update the briefing document to capture the views and perspective from both sides of the conversation. This will be shared as a public document, intended to summarise and pull together key strands of thought to be brought back to the group (Anna Vernon, Anna Hughes, Caren Milloy)
5. Set up next meeting (Anna Hughes)