RCUK Policy on Open Access
Frequently Asked Questions

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Questions with Answers:

1. What is covered by the policy?

1.1 If my project has funding from another funder as well as RCUK, does it also need to comply with the RCUK policy?

Yes, the RCUK policy covers all relevant publications (see guidance 3.2) which acknowledge funding from the UK's Research Councils. If more than one funder is acknowledged, and one (or more) of them is a Research Council, then the RCUK policy applies.

The Research Councils are funding a project to work with the various stakeholders, led by the Research Information Network, which will look at the practical aspects of sharing open access costs across various institutions and/or funders, and establish good practice recommendations.

1.2 My research is funded by a commercial partner as well as RCUK, does it need to comply with the policy?

Yes, the RCUK policy covers all relevant publications (see guidance 3.2) which acknowledge funding from the UK's Research Councils. If more than one funder is acknowledged, and one (or more) of them is a Research Council, then the RCUK policy applies.

As peer-reviewed publications are considered to be in the public domain, albeit often requiring a subscription to access, there is no limitation to making the text available in open access due to commercial sensitivity.

1.3 My research is in collaboration with partners overseas, do I still need to comply with the policy? What if that means that, due to different overseas expectations for publishing, I won't be named as an author?

Yes, the RCUK policy covers all relevant publications (see guidance 3.2) which acknowledge funding from the UK's Research Councils. If more than one funder is acknowledged, and one (or more) of them is a Research Council, then the RCUK policy applies.

RCUK funded researchers should ensure that collaborators are aware of all the terms and conditions of the project funding as soon as possible, and that the obligation to publish results in Open Access is included in collaboration agreements.

The Research Councils funded authors are expected to to take the lead in ensuring that the paper is made immediately available on publication or self-archived in an appropriate repository (see Guidance 3.8).

The Research Councils are also actively engaging with funders internationally; as more and more funders implement policies in support of open access publishing it is likely that this issue will only occur in exceptional circumstances.

1.4 I am a student funded by one of the Research Councils. Does the policy apply to the papers that I publish?

Yes, the RCUK Open access policy applies to student awards, and therefore relevant publications must be made available in open access.

1.5 Is it anticipated that additional types of research output might be included in this policy at a later date?

The Research Councils take very seriously their responsibilities in making the outputs from publicly funded research freely available – not just to other researchers, but also to potential users in business, charitable and public sectors, and to the general tax-paying public.

Whilst peer-reviewed research papers, reviews and conference proceedings cover a large part of publicly funded research outputs, it does not include all forms of publications. The Research Councils will therefore consider, as part of the planned policy reviews, whether it is appropriate to extend the policy to include other forms of publications. There are no plans to do so at this current time.

The Research Councils also have a common position on data sharing, summarised in the RCUK Common Principles on Data Policy (see http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/research/Pages/DataPolicy.aspx), as well as individual policies on data sharing.

1.6 The RCUK guidance says that the payment of colour charges and page charges may also be taken from the block grant at the discretion of the managing research organisation; is this the case even when an APC has been paid? *NEW*

Yes. However, it is unclear why such charges are sometimes levied in addition to the APC, especially as such costs apply mainly to printed journals. RCUK (and others) will be monitoring this practice and we will review our position as part of the 2014 review.

1.7 Does the policy apply to papers funded by RCUK that are accepted for publication after 1st April 2013 (but which were submitted before this date), or those submitted after 1st April? *NEW*

As written, the policy applies to those peer reviewed journal articles that were submitted for publication but not necessarily accepted after the 1st April. However, during the transition period, we are happy to be flexible

with this and allow the block grant to be used for papers submitted for publication before the 1st of April but only where costs for APCs were not included within the grant.

2. Going 'Gold' or 'Green'

2.1 Do researchers have the freedom to choose the green route even if the publisher offers a 'gold' route?

Yes: although the Research Councils' preference is for immediate unrestricted open access ('Gold'), they support a mixed approach to Open Access, and the decision on which route to follow remains at the discretion of the researchers and their research organisations.

It is recognised that in some circumstances, where funding for APCs may be unavailable during the transition period, self-archiving (or Green route) may be the only possible route.

In such cases, papers should be published in a journal with a maximum embargo of 12 months for STEM disciplines, or 24 months in the arts, humanities and social sciences. This is consistent with the Government's response to the Finch report (see Guidance 3.6)

Research papers in biomedicine should be published with an embargo of no longer than six months, as has been the MRC's mandated policy since 2006.

2.2 What happens if there is no money to pay for 'Gold' but my preferred journal does not offer a compliant 'green' option?

In circumstances where block grant money for APCs is unavailable during the transition period, papers should be published in a journal with a maximum embargo of 12 months for STEM disciplines, or 24 months in the arts, humanities and social sciences. This is consistent with the Government's response to the Finch report (see Guidance 3.6)

Research papers in biomedicine should be published with an embargo of no longer than six months, as has been the MRC's mandated policy since 2006 (see http://www.mrc.ac.uk/Ourresearch/Ethicsresearchguidance/Openaccesspublishing/index.htm) Institutions will need to manage their RCUK OA funding to be able to support this requirement.

If the preferred journal does not offer such embargo period, then either an alternative journal will need to be chosen, or authors must be aware that the research paper will not count towards their institution's compliance target for OA.

2.3 I am a biomedical researcher, and funding is not available from my research organisation to pay for the APC in my chosen journal. Can I self archive my article instead?

In order to be compliant with the RCUK Open Access policy, all research papers in biomedicine must be made available in open access with an embargo of no longer than 6 months, as has been the MRC's mandated policy since 2006. This applies in all circumstances (see Guidance 3.6.v).

If funding is not available to pay APCs, and the journal in which the researcher is planning to submit does not allow self archiving with a 6 months embargo, then another journal must be chosen, or authors must be aware that the research paper will not count towards their institution's compliance target for OA.

In addition, if the research is funded by MRC or BBSRC, in order to be compliant, the paper must be archived in Europe PubMed Central (http://eurropepmc.org). This is done automatically by the publishers for whenever an APC is paid, but can also be done by the author via Europe PMC Plus (http:// http://plus.europepmc.org)

A list of MRC funded researchers' frequently used journals, with information on how to be compliant, can be found at http://www.mrc.ac.uk/Ourresearch/Ethicsresearchguidance/Openaccesspublishing/Frequentlyusedjournals/index.htm

2.4 Could a researcher choose to not go Gold and deposit via Green with a longer embargo period? ***NEW***

The RCUK policy is that where a journal does not offer an immediate, unrestricted route to open access (ie Gold) then to be compliant with our policy journals must offer short embargo green deposit of the peer-reviewed manuscript (ie Green) – of 6 months max for STEM subjects and 12 months for research funded by ESRC or AHRC.

However, there is more flexibility over embargo periods during the transition period, as we ramp-up the funding for APCs. Where a journal offers a Gold option, but the author does not have access to APC funding, we will accept Green with longer embargo periods in line with Govt policy and as outlined in the Publishers Association 'decision tree'. This allows for up to 12 months for STEM subjects, and up to 24 months for Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (HASS). The one exception is that for biomedical research, in all cases embargo periods for Green must be no more than 6 months (as has been MRC's policy since 2006). Institutions need to take this exception into consideration when allocating APC funds, as not all biomedical journals offer 6 months max embargo for Green.

3. RCUK OA Block Grant

3.1 Will the block grant be recalculated or will all future amounts be based on the funding in the period 2009-12?

The Research Councils are committed to providing funding for APCs in the long term but recognise that the funding we are currently providing to Research Organisations to implement the policy is based on a number of estimates and assumptions.

Funding levels are only specified at present for an initial period of two years from 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2015.There will be an interim review in 2014 to consider how the system is working and to determine the level of funding to be provided in the next Spending Review period post 2014/15. For further information on the way the block grants were established, please see http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/media/news/2012news/Pages/121108.aspx

3.2 Is the block grant paid at 80% Full Economic Costs (fEC)?

No, following discussions with the community, RCUK will not be expecting research organisations to provide the additional 20%.

3.3 My grant was awarded before the 1st April 2013 and I had already included publication costs. Should I still apply for costs to be covered by my Institution's Publication fund?

Research Councils recognise that a significant amount of funding has already been awarded as part of existing grant to cover publication costs.

Any funds specified for APCs within already awarded grants should be used before using the RCUK OA Block Grant.

3.4 Why doesn't the algorithm to calculate each Research Organisation's block grant use actual research effort (hours) rather than the cost of that effort?

The cost of the effort is easily available to the research councils and was felt to be a reasonable proxy for the effort involved. The suggested change might result in minor adjustments to the allocations to individual Research Organisations, but it is not clear that it would have any appreciable impact on overall implementation of the policy and will therefore not be considered at this stage. If the relative allocations are found to have been inappropriate, it will be possible to address this following the 2014 implementation review.

3.5 Will RCUK make a grant to cover APCs to Research Organisations below the cut-off?

No; RCUK has considered this at some length and concluded that it will not be cost effective to administer grants at this level. Any serious impact arising from this decision can be addressed as part of the 2014 review.

3. 6 When will the block grant be paid to my institution? *NEW*

The block grants will be paid by EPSRC on behalf of the Research Councils in one single payment for 2013/14. We expect the payments to be made to eligible institutions during June 2013.

4. Compliance rates

4.1 What levels of Open Access does RCUK expect over the next two years?

In 2013/14 institutions will be expected to make a minimum of 45% of their papers available via Open Access (Gold or Green). This increases to 53% in 2014/15.

RCUK has a preference for immediate, unrestricted OA (Gold) and has an expectation that the majority of the OA block grant funding it provides will be used to support the payment of APCs for Gold.

4.2 In the first year could the 45% open access publishing required by RCUK be via the green route only?

Yes, to reflect desire for greater Open Access and to reflect the early stage of the transition, for the first year the expected 45% compliance can be made up from either route, 'green' or 'gold'.

5. Embargo periods

5.1 If an article is based on work funded by MRC, AHRC and ESRC, what embargo period applies?

In circumstances where research is funded by more than one funder, including multiple Research Councils, the shortest embargo period will apply, as otherwise Terms and Conditions attached to part of the funding would be breached.

RCUK funded researchers should ensure that collaborators are aware of all the terms and conditions of their funders as early as possible, and that relevant wording stating the obligation to publish results in Open Access is included in collaboration agreements (see 3.2)

As part of future review of the policy, the Research Councils will consider how maximum embargo periods can be further harmonised.

6. Licences

6.1 My preferred journal's publisher refuses to allow me to use a CC-BY licence, what should I do?

If your preferred journal refuses to allow a CC-BY licence then you should not opt to pay an APC as the journal does not comply with the RCUK policy through that route. The journal may however still comply if it allows deposit and full non-commercial re-use of the article after not more than 6 months (12 months in the case of Arts and Humanities research papers).

7. Accepted Manuscripts

7.2 Which version of an article is acceptable for deposit?

Peer-review is a crucial part of the quality assurance process for research, and RCUK wants to ensure that all users have access to research papers that have been peer-reviewed.

RCUK will consider only versions 'as accepted for publication' when assessing compliance with its policy.

The Accepted Manuscript is the version of a journal article submitted by an author that has been accepted for publication in a journal, and that has been through a peer-review process.

The Accepted Manuscript is also known as the Author's Manuscript or Postprint.

7.3 Who is responsible for deposit when an article has authors from different research organisations?

Each researcher is responsible to ensure that s/he is complying with the requirement of her/his funder and/or institutions in regards to Open Access and should ensure that all relevant acknowledgements are included (see Guidance 3.3).

When there is a requirement for the paper to be archived in a specific repository, such as Europe PubMed Central, usually the corresponding author will do so on behalf of all the authors.

The Research Councils are funding a project to work with the various stakeholders, led by the Research Information Network, which will look at the practical aspects of submitting papers to repository when multi authors are involved, and establish good practice recommendations.

8. Reviews of the policy and implementation

8.2 How will the Research Councils carry out the review of the policy implementation in 2014?

The Research Councils have highlighted in the Guidance issued with the policy the type of issue that will be included in the review (see Guidance 3.13). Whilst there is no final plan yet of how the review will be organised, the Research Councils see value in the review being independent and will consider how best to approach this nearer the time.