

SUMMARY OF RCUK POSITION STATEMENT ON ACCESS TO RESEARCH OUTPUTS

This document summarises the RCUK position on the dissemination of and access to research outputs in the form of journal articles or conference proceedings. A fuller statement of the position is available at <http://www.rcuk.ac.uk>. The position is founded on four fundamental principles:

- Ideas and knowledge derived from publicly-funded research must be made available and accessible for public use, interrogation, and scrutiny, as widely, rapidly and effectively as practicable.
- Effective mechanisms are in place to ensure that published research outputs must be subject to rigorous quality assurance, through peer review.
- The models and mechanisms for publication and access to research results must be both efficient and cost-effective in the use of public funds.
- The outputs from current and future research must be preserved and remain accessible not only for the next few years but for future generations.

Communication, Access, and Availability

The development of Internet technologies providing access to a range of distributed information resources has enabled new possibilities for the delivery of information as an output of research. E-print repositories and open access journals have both developed as part of this change in technology, and RCUK considers that both can help improve access to the results of publicly funded research.

RCUK believes that e-print repositories provide an opportunity to enhance access to research publications. Research Councils will work with partners to set out a strategy for developing in particular the network of institutional e-print repositories, and promoting their role.

But promotion in itself is not sufficient. Therefore, Research Councils will require for all grants awarded from 1 October 2005 that, subject to copyright and licensing arrangements, a copy of any resultant published journal articles or conference proceedings should be deposited in an appropriate e-print repository (either institutional or subject-based) wherever such a repository is available to the award-holder. Deposit should take place at the earliest opportunity, wherever possible at or around the time of publication. There will be no obligation to set up a repository where none exists at present. Although RCUK sees advantages in the deposit of material in institutional repositories, Research Councils will leave to authors the choice of which is the most appropriate repository for their publications.

Research Councils will also encourage, but not formally oblige, award-holders to deposit articles arising from grants awarded before 1 October 2005. By the end of 2008, RCUK will review the development of e-print repositories and the requirement to deposit.

Full implementation of the above requirements depends upon copyright and licensing practice, and RCUK will engage the publishing industry and other partners to develop effective policy and practice in this area.

Quality Assurance

Rigorous, high-quality peer review remains the guarantor of quality whatever the medium of publication, and must be the norm as new models develop. There is no reason in principle why emerging publication and dissemination models should adversely affect either the key processes or the quality of peer review.

E-print repositories that carry published material must make a clear distinction between articles that have been peer-reviewed and those that have not – and also between different pre-print versions. RCUK will work with the managers of e-print repositories to develop a standard for making clear to all users the distinction between pre-prints and post-prints.

Cost-effectiveness

The costs of communication and dissemination are an integral part of the costs of research itself, however they are met. Research Councils are interested in ensuring that the mechanisms of communication, and the financial models that support them, are as efficient and effective as possible.

Councils recognise that, although e-print repositories provide clear benefits, they also impose costs on institutions and on the bodies that provide the necessary co-ordination and support for networking, interoperability and preservation.

Adoption of an “author-pays” publication model is also likely to lead to some shift in costs, small initially, but probably larger in the longer-term. Councils will ensure that applicants for grants are allowed, subject to justification of cost-effectiveness, to include in the costing of their projects the predicted costs of any publication in author-pays journals. Such charges will be one of the elements of Full Economic Costs.

VAT is payable on electronic publications at the standard rate of 17.5 per cent, whereas printed publications are zero-rated. The Government’s conclusion that relief from this burden is not possible is disappointing. RCUK is concerned that VAT makes for an unfair distortion of the research publications market, and undermines the Government’s intention to ensure a level playing field in that market.

Long-term preservation

As we move to new models of publication and dissemination, a key challenge is to ensure that digital media remain as durable as printed material has been in the past, and that the costs of long-term archiving are manageable. This applies also to the preservation of the data underpinning what is published. RCUK draws a distinction between two overlapping purposes: (a) making published material quickly and easily available, free of charge to users at the point of use, and (b) long-term preservation and curation.

The British Library, and the other Legal Deposit Libraries, have a critical role to play in the preservation of digital publications. The Research Councils need to engage in a dialogue with the British Library and other stakeholders about issues of long-term preservation and access, including the potential for them to extend their roles in preserving and making accessible research publications and related data in digital formats.

Learned Societies

RCUK views the Learned Societies as key members of the research community whose work the Research Councils support. RCUK will discuss with the Learned Societies ways in which they can adapt to and exploit new models of publication.