

RCUK Open Access Block Grant analysis 2013/14, 2014/2015 and 2015/2016

Background

RCUK introduced a collective policy¹ on open access in April 2013 a component of which was the introduction of the RCUK Open Access block grant funding for institutions in receipt of the vast majority of RCUK funding. Institutions were given flexibility on how this funding could be spent, though the primary purpose was for the payment of Article Processing Charges (APCs).

RCUK recognised that there would be a transition period following the introduction of the policy in 2013 and the block grant funding currently runs for five years up until March 2018. The implementation of the policy was reviewed in 2014 by an independent panel chaired by Professor Sir Robert Burgess.²

RCUK is committed to publishing as much information about the operation of the block grant and the implementation of its Open Access policy as possible and further information relating to years four and five of the block grant will be published in due course.

Introduction

This document summarises some of the information that RCUK has collected as part of the ongoing financial and compliance monitoring of its Open Access Policy.³ For the first reporting period, which covered the period April 2013- July 2014, RCUK did not collect individual article level APC data but for the second and third reporting periods (August 2014 – July 2015 and August 2015 – July 2016) this information was collected and is reported on here.

- For the 2013/14 reporting period we report here on the sub-set of the data that was collated for the analysis section of the 2014 Burgess review of the Implementation of the RCUK Policy on Open Access.² This was based on 55 institutions which accounted for 93.5% of the block grant in 2013/14.
- For the 2014/2015 reporting period RCUK received 84 returns of which 73 included an APC breakdown.
- For 2015/2016 107 returns were received with 88 including an APC breakdown.

Returns were cleansed using data from CrossRef, DOAJ as well as manual cleaning.

The analysis looked at all unique journal articles where an APC was paid. Where an article was funded through an off-setting or membership deal the reporting convention was to make these a zero cost APC (approximately 750 per year) and to report the cost of the deal separately. As a result of this, these papers are not included in the calculation of average APC costs in this document.

¹ <http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/research/openaccess/policy/>

² <http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/documents/documents/openaccessreport-pdf/>

³ <http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/documents/documents/rcukopenaccesspolicy-pdf/>

Summary of APC costs

The number of articles published under an APC model using the RCUK block grants has increased significantly since the launch of the policy in April 2013. If we look at the average number of APCs per month within a reporting period (given the different durations covered by the reporting periods) this has increased from about 400 per month in 2013/14 to almost 800 per month in 2015/16. This reflects the improved coverage and accuracy of the reporting as well as growing awareness and support for researchers in complying with the new policy.

The average APC cost has increased from £1,580 in 2013/14 to £1,811 in 2015/16 – a rise of over 14%. Hybrid Open Access articles are significantly more expensive than fully open access and make up the vast majority of articles paid for through the block grant.

	2013/14 (16 months)	2014/2015 (12 months)	2015/2016 (12 months)
Value of block grant awarded	£16.85M	£19.83M	£22.8M
Number of Articles which an APC was paid	6505	6,870	9,509
Average number of articles per month	407	573	792
Of which were fully open access	Not possible to provide as source data is not detailed enough.	1,499	2,264
Of which were hybrid open access	Not available	5,371	7,245
Average APC ⁴	1,580	1,755	1,811
Average open access APC	Not available	1,424	1,497
Average hybrid APC	Not available	1,847	1,909
Total cost of APCs *	10,277,184	12,056,549	17,224,058
Total RCUK spend on APCs	Not available	10,793,817	15,935,714

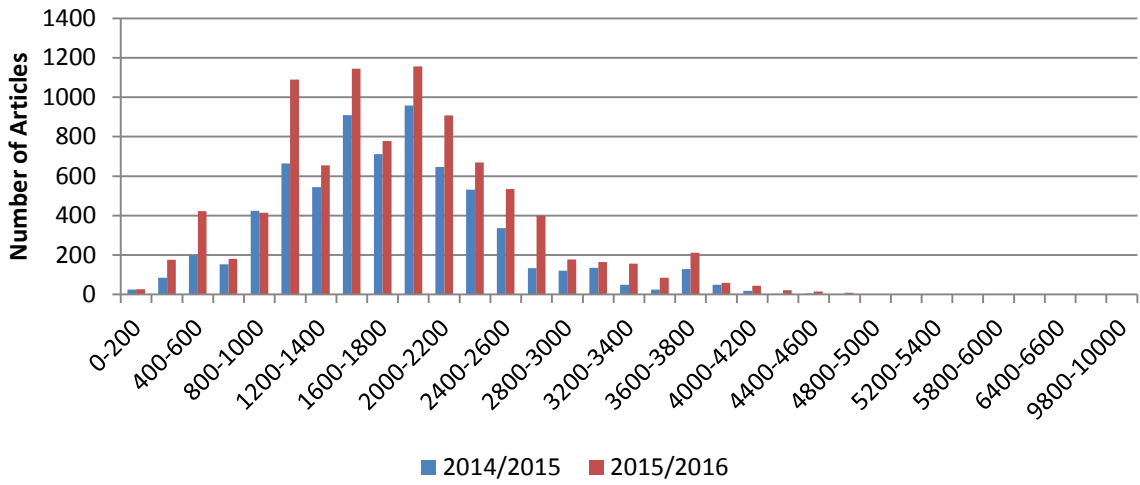
* This figure is the total cost of the APCs that the RCUK block grant either paid all of or part of. In the cases where the block grant funded only part of the APC the other funders were in most cases the Charities open Access Fund (COAF) or institutional funds. The average APC costs are based on the total cost of the APCs and not just the portion that the RCUK grant paid for.

APC Cost Distribution

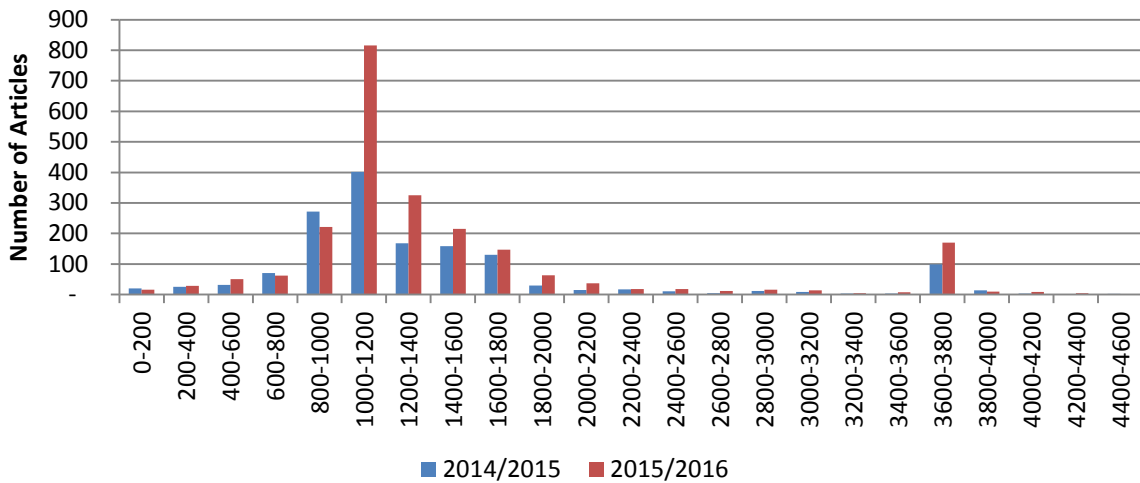
The tables below show the cost distribution of all APCs by year, followed by the breakdown of fully open access journals and hybrid journals.

⁴ This compares to an average cost of €1100 per article in 2015/16 in the particle physics field *via* the SCOAP3 consortium which STFC contributes to <https://scoap3.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Facts-Figures-30.06.2016.pdf>

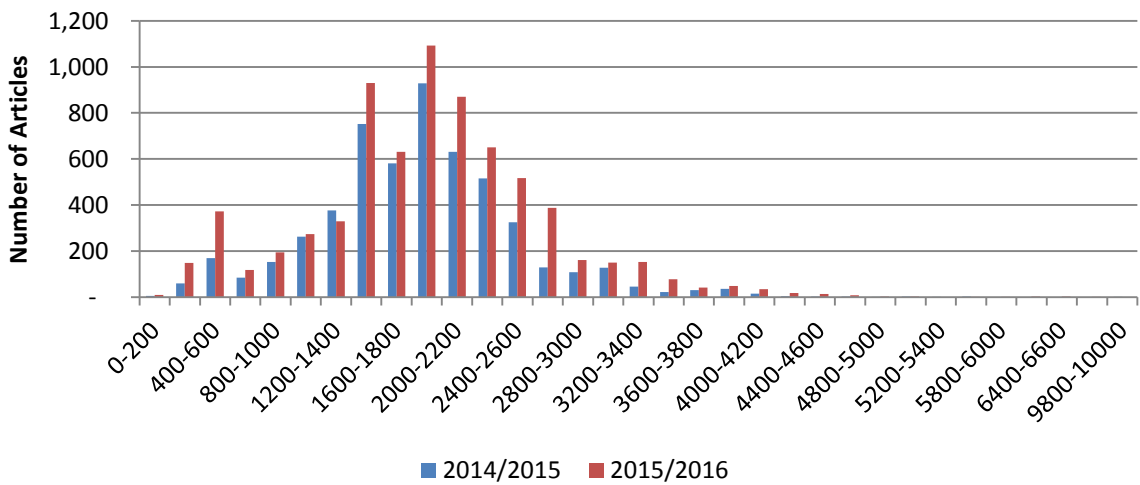
All Articles with APC Payments



Fully Open Access

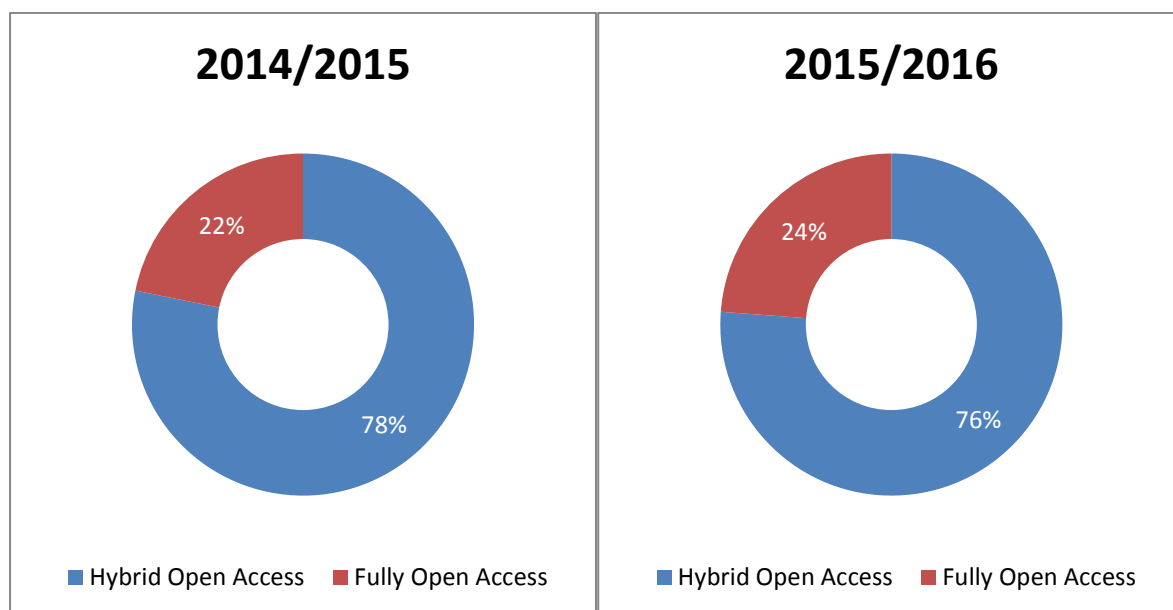


Hybrid



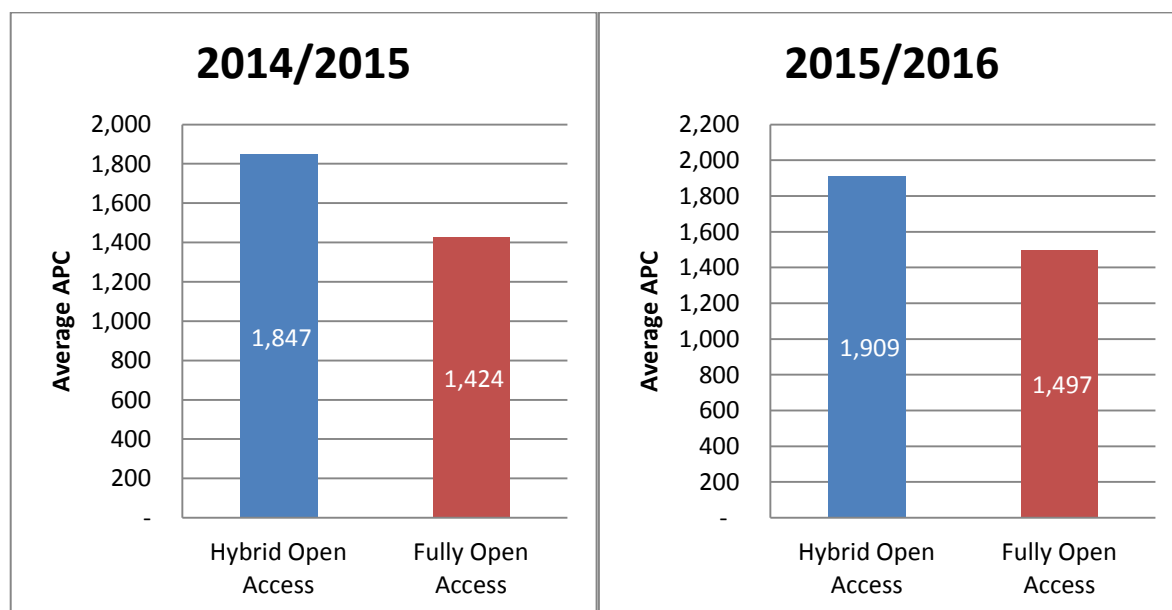
Hybrid and pure open access journals

The vast majority of APCs are paid for Hybrid Open Access publications. From 2015 to 2016 there has only been a slight increase in the percentage of articles in full OA journals. The corresponding Hybrid:Fully OA split in the COAF figures for 2015/16 were 71:29.⁵



Average APC Cost of Hybrid Open Access Vs Fully Open Access

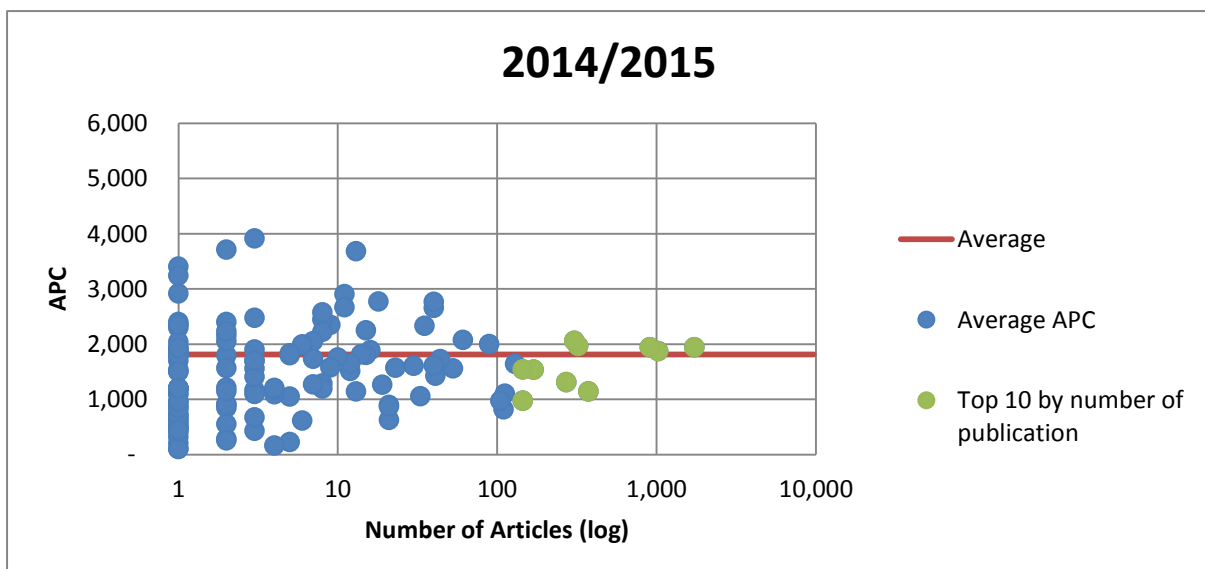
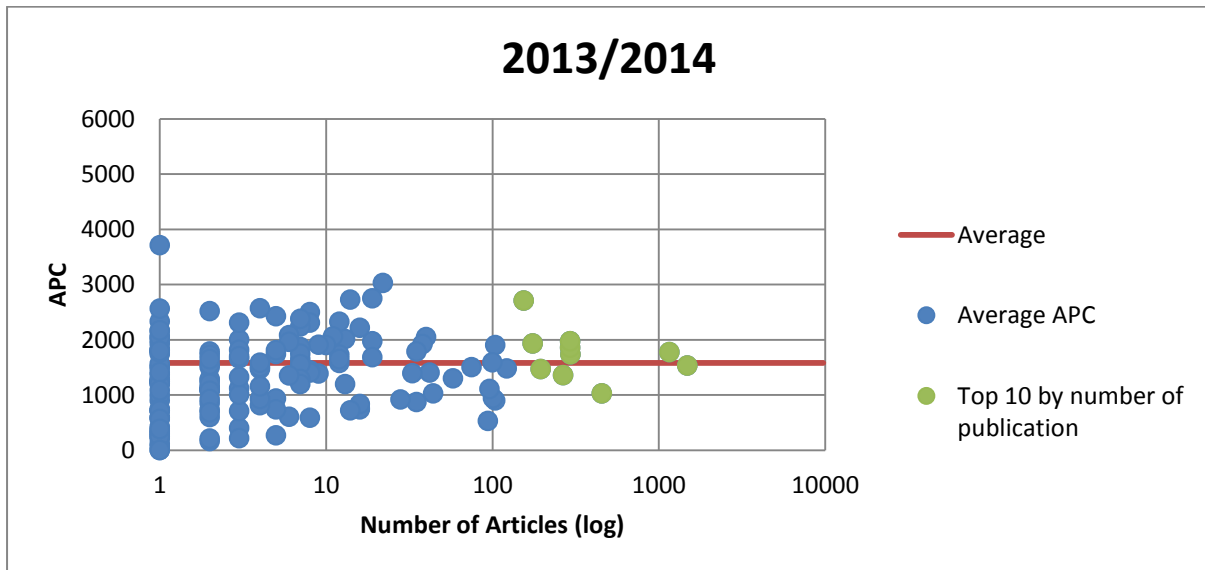
RCUK has also found that the average cost of APCs for Hybrid journals is significantly greater than for fully open access journals; however, the rate of increase of APC costs for fully OA journals was greater than for hybrids between 2014/15 and 2015/16. This is in line with the findings of COAF although we only saw a 5.3% increase in fully OA APC costs compared to the 18% increase COAF reported.⁴

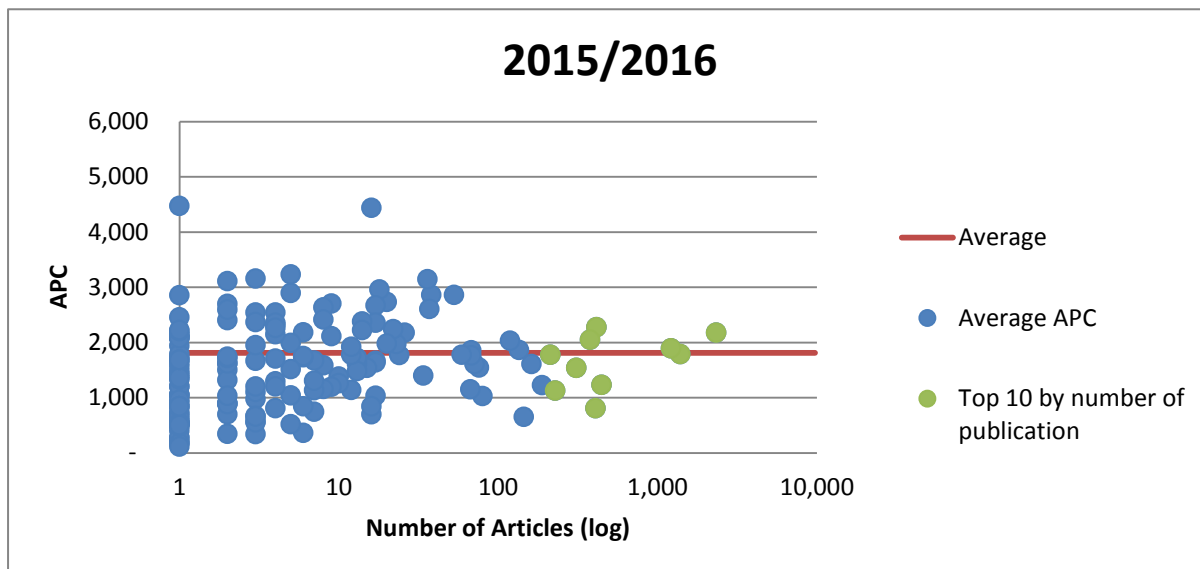


⁵ <https://wellcome.ac.uk/funding/managing-grant/wellcome-and-coaf-open-access-spend-2015-16>

Breakdown by publisher

The charts below demonstrate that the publishers that appear to have the highest APC do not have many articles. Those with average APC costs above £3,000 accounted for only 1.1% of all papers in 2014/15 and 0.7% of all papers in 2015/16. The average APC costs for the top 10 publishers by number (who accounted for 77% of all articles funded through the RCUK block grant in 2015/16) were £1,849 in comparison. The average APC cost for the remaining 23% of publications is 1,684 for 2015/2016. The average APC cost for the remaining 23% of publishers is increasing at a faster rate than the top 10. The top 10 publishers have a very similar proportion of hybrid articles compared with the other publishers with less than 1% difference.





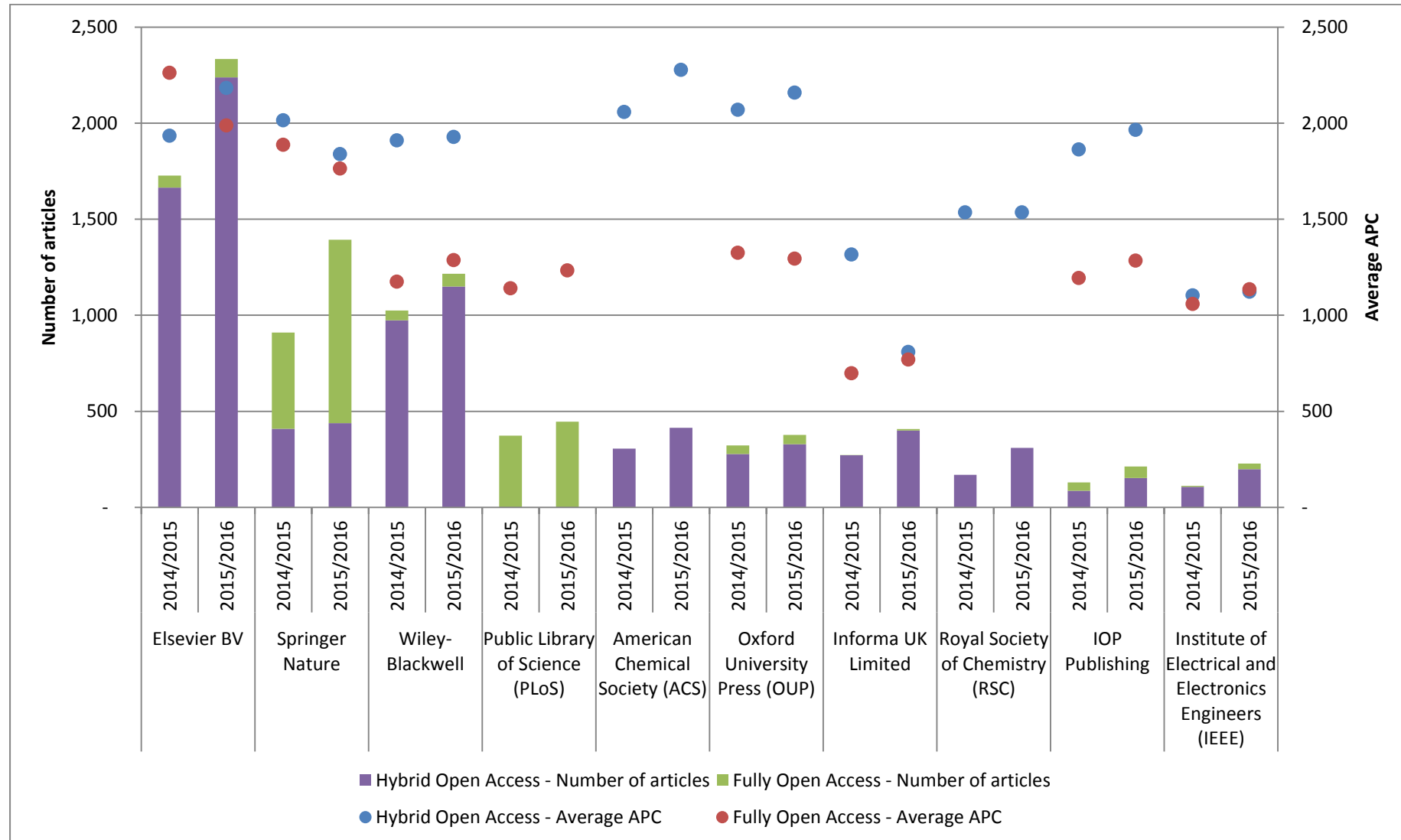
Publishers with largest number of articles Vs. Average APC

This chart shows the number and type of articles published by the top 10 publishers (by number of articles published) in 2014/15 and 2015/16 as well as the average APC cost by article type for each publisher. The largest growth amongst this group of publishers in this period has been that of Springer’s open access articles – this partly coincided with the launch of the Springer Compact⁶ in January 2016 and the flipping of some big hybrid journals to fully open access (such as Nature Communications) at this time.

In 2014/15 the average cost of Elsevier’s fully open access articles was significantly higher than their hybrid ones which ran counter to every other publisher in the top ten, although this was reversed in 2015/16. There does not appear to be a single reason for this although the numbers of fully OA Elsevier articles was relatively low as a percentage of all Elsevier articles we would need to look more closely at the spread of journals contributing to Elsevier’s fully OA articles between the two years to see if there has been a move towards cheaper options in 2015/16 or if the average APC for fully OA really did reduce in this period.

⁶ Further analysis of the Springer Compact has been carried out recently by JISC: <https://scholarlycommunications.jiscinvolve.org/wp/2017/03/06/compact-agreement-first-year-evaluation/>

Publishers with largest number of articles Vs. Average APC



Top Ten Publishers (by APC spend)

The table below shows the top ten publishers by APC spend in 2014/15 and 2015/16. These ten accounted for:

- 78% of articles and 81% of APC spend in 2014/15
- 77% of articles and 79% of APC spend in 2015/16

Publisher	2014/2015			2015/2016		
	Number of Articles	Average of APC paid	Total Spend	Number of Articles	Average of APC paid	Total Spend
Elsevier BV	1,727	1,946	3,360,565	2,334	2,174	5,074,619
Hybrid Open Access	1,664	1,934	3,218,109	2,238	2,182	4,883,796
Fully Open Access	63	2,261	142,456	96	1,988	190,823
Wiley-Blackwell	1,025	1,874	1,920,474	1,216	1,893	2,302,159
Hybrid Open Access	974	1,910	1,860,546	1,150	1,928	2,217,210
Fully Open Access	51	1,175	59,928	66	1,287	84,949
Springer Nature	910	1,944	1,769,270	1,393	1,787	2,489,029
Hybrid Open Access	409	2,015	824,074	439	1,838	807,057
Fully Open Access	501	1,887	945,196	954	1,763	1,681,971
Public Library of Science (PLoS)	374	1,141	426,600	446	1,233	550,004
Fully Open Access	374	1,141	426,600	446	1,233	550,004
Oxford University Press (OUP)	322	1,967	633,426	378	2,047	773,688
Hybrid Open Access	278	2,069	575,128	329	2,159	710,273
Fully Open Access	44	1,325	58,298	49	1,294	63,415
American Chemical Society (ACS)	306	2,057	629,517	415	2,276	944,711
Hybrid Open Access	306	2,057	629,517	415	2,276	944,711
Informal UK Limited	272	1,313	357,252	408	808	329,648
Hybrid Open Access	271	1,316	356,554	400	809	323,495
Fully Open Access	1	698	698	8	769	6,153
Royal Society of Chemistry (RSC)	170	1,536	261,072	310	1,536	476,053
Hybrid Open Access	170	1,536	261,072	310	1,536	476,053
The Royal Society	145	1,542	223,553	162	1,609	260,647
Hybrid Open Access	141	1,555	219,233	145	1,662	240,991
Fully Open Access	4	1,080	4,320	17	1,156	19,656
IOP Publishing	130	1,642	213,428	213	1,773	377,715
Hybrid Open Access	87	1,863	162,100	153	1,965	300,631
Fully Open Access	43	1,194	51,328	60	1,285	77,084
Grand Total	5,381	1,820	9,795,156	7,275	1,866	13,578,273

Summary of non-APC costs

Institutions were given flexibility on how this funding could be spent and below we report on the most significant non-APC costs reported to RCUK. The major non-APC costs reported to RCUK are staff costs, offsetting/discount/membership schemes and page and colour charges.

The amount reported on staff costs has increased from 6.8% of awarded funds in 2014/15 to 10.1% of awarded funds in 2015/16. At over £2.3M in 2015/16 staff costs are the largest non-APC related cost reported to RCUK and will be monitored closely by RCUK in the next round of reporting.

The growing importance of discount/membership/offsetting deals is highlighted by the near £2M that was reported to RCUK as being spent on them in 2015/16. As these deals become more common it is important that we understand their impact on OA costs. This is something that RCUK will work on with other funders, JISC and the RCUK Open Access Practitioners' Group⁷ to improve our reporting and understanding of these deals.

Page and colour charges are an eligible cost on the RCUK block grant and we have seen an increase from 1.8% of awarded funds in 2014/15 to 3.1% of awarded funds in 2015/16. This could be in part to greater awareness of these costs being allowed but we also have to be mindful of reductions in APC charges being off-set by increases in other publication costs.

Reporting Period	Amount reported to RCUK as spent on APCs	Amount reported to RCUK as spent on discount or membership schemes ⁸	Amount reported to RCUK as spent on page and colour charges	Amount reported to RCUK as spent on staff costs	Amount reported to RCUK as spent on Other costs
1 (April 2013/July 14) 16 months	£10.3M	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
2 (August 2014/July 15) 12 months	£10.9M	£1.56M	£0.35M	£1.35M	£0.4M
3 (August 2015/July 16) 12 months	£15.9M	£1.9M	£0.7M	£2.3M	£0.76M

Next Steps

RCUK are committed to publishing the APC data from the fourth reporting period which covers the period from August 2016 – March 2017 (8 months) as soon as possible. This change in the reporting period is one of a number of measures we have taken to simplify the reporting requirements for Research Organisations (ROs). There are a number of other activities either underway, or about to start, which will give RCUK a better understanding of its open access data and compliance with its policy.

⁷ <http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/research/openaccess/rcuk-open-access-practitioners-group/>

⁸ Due to the way in which many of these discount deals work it is not possible to simply add the costs of APCs and the costs of memberships together – in some cases the deals are a pre-payment that result in a lower APC from that publisher and to combine them would lead to double counting. In year 4 reporting we are trying to get a better understanding of the number of publications that are part of “deals” of some sort or another.

The APC reporting has given us a good understanding of the articles published *via* the gold open access route; however, in order to understand overall compliance with the RCUK policy we need to develop a greater understanding of the papers published *via* the green open access route and the total number of papers arising from RCUK funding. We will do this by working with the RCUK Open Access Practitioners' Group, Research Fish and others to develop a robust process for identifying total article populations as well as green articles.

Across the sector we need a better understanding of the potential for publisher-institution offsetting deals to reduce OA costs. We are seeing an increasing number of articles attributed to deals and the RCUK block grant paid almost £2M towards these deals in 2015/16. As part of the 2016/17 reporting process we have asked for information on the deals that ROs have in place and the contribution the block grant has made to them as a starting point. We will work with members of COAF, JISC and institutions to improve our overall understanding of this part of the OA landscape.