



Position Paper

Country: United Kingdom

Committee: UNESCO (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization)

Topic: Promoting Open Access to Scientific Information and Research

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Introduction

UNESCO promotes **Open Access (OA)**, with particular emphasis on scientific information (journal articles, conference papers and datasets of various kinds) emanating from publicly funded research. Working with partners, UNESCO works to improve awareness about the benefits of OA among policy makers, researchers and knowledge managers. Through its global network of Field Offices, Institutes and Centers, UNESCO facilitates the development and adoption of OA enabling policies. In addition, UNESCO engages in global OA debates and cooperates with local, regional and global initiatives in support of OA.

Scientific information is both a researcher's greatest output and technological innovation's most important resource. UNESCO promotes and supports OA—the online availability of scholarly information to everyone, free of most licensing and copyright barriers—for the benefit of global knowledge flow, innovation and socio-economic development.

Some researchers, funding bodies and HEIs have argued that the cost of some journal subscriptions is compromising the UK's capacity for research. They say that researchers, especially in smaller UK universities, do not have access to the publications they need. Some have also argued that the subscription model does not deliver adequate access to researchers in countries with lower income levels, or to the wider public, such as individuals with medical conditions. However, many subscription publishers argue that the subscription model is highly competitive and efficient and that UK research libraries could make efficiency savings elsewhere, to accommodate subscription costs. They also say there are already several initiatives to expand access, such as provision of free or low cost access online access to developing countries. In September 2011, the government set up an independent working group to look into how expanded access might best be achieved. This group aims to produce recommendations in spring 2012. Many researchers, funding bodies and HEIs argue that OA could offer a key way to expand access and increase the impact of research.

There is a growing trend towards OA in the UK and worldwide. Around 20% of all articles were made available through some form of OA in 2009. An increasing number of UK research funding agencies including the Wellcome Trust and Research Councils UK (RCUK) and many HEIs have now adopted OA mandates. These require researchers to make their published articles freely available online. Most subscription publishers have incorporated OA models in their business to allow authors to meet funder and HEI requirements in ways that the publishers perceive are sustainable for the journal. The main challenge of OA is seen to be how to meet the costs of publication, particularly the administration of peer review, on a sustainable basis.