Open Access

Summary: This document summarises recent developments in the UK in terms of Open Access and identifies how UCL has/is responding to them

Action proposed to the Committee: For discussion

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Background

2013 looks like being a decisive year for Open Access in the UK, and particularly for UCL. This may well be the year when the UK has embraced Open Access as a matter of policy.

What has happened so far

The recent Finch Report advocated a Gold route for research articles. This means that, for the payment of an Author Publication Fee (APC), the resulting article would be freely available to anyone, anywhere in the world, with an Internet connection. This report was accepted by the Government Department BIS (Business, Innovation and Skills). UCL was less enthusiastic, partly because a JISC report had identified that the most cost-effective route to Open Access is via repositories (the Green route), rather than the Gold route – as long as there are countries in the world which do not embrace Open Access requirements. Research Councils UK have published their own policy and guidance, which again has been strongly attacked by Russell Group universities. The initial RCUK policy advocated the Gold route, following the Finch Report, and Russell Group universities pointed out that the cost of meeting APCs would be an increased burden on university budgets. The final version of the policy and guidance allow both Green and Gold as acceptable routes, but the financial burden on universities will still remain. UCL Library Services is responsible for implementing the RCUK policy in UCL, and the new Publications Guide was launched at the Provost’s Heads of Department meeting on 14 March.

Both the House of Commons and House of Lords are reviewing the UK’s position on Open Access. The House of Lords has already reported and strongly criticised RCUK’s lack of communication with academic stakeholders. And HEFCE (Higher Education Funding Council for England) is also consulting on Open Access in the context of the REF (Research Excellence Framework) post-2014. This consultation is particularly important and UCL is making a strong response.

HEFCE’s position is different to that of both Finch and RCUK. HEFCE is showing much more support for the Green route to Open Access, although of course permitting Gold. And it is possible that for the REF post-2014, all research outputs which are submitted for evaluation must be available in Open Access. If this policy position is maintained, it will have a major effect on the population of institutional repositories, such as UCL’s UCL Discovery, which the Library runs for the University. UCL Discovery already enjoys 1 million downloads a year; there have been 2.9 million downloads since the repository was started in 2008.

Next Steps

If all this activity were not enough, the European Commission is consulting on the requirements for the publication of research outputs to be funded under the new Horizon 2020 programme. Horizon 2020 is likely to support Green Open Access publication, although
of course Gold will still be possible. And the European Research Council is mandating Green Open Access for its funded research outputs.

LERU (League of European Research Universities) has established a Working Group to produce a Roadmap for Research Data, with a default position that such research data should be Open. Data-driven research represents a revolution in the way research is pursued. I have been honoured to chair this Working Group and the resulting report will complement the LERU Roadmap Towards Open Access which was completed in 2011.¹

All this activity has put UCL Library Services right at the forefront in terms of developments on a national and international stage. UCL is seen as a pioneer in promoting Open Access and building Open Access infrastructures. The Library is absolutely at the centre of these developments and is pioneering a new model of research support as a consequence in British universities.

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