



## Towards collaborative funding models for Open Access books

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I spoke recently at an Open Access Books Network webinar co-organised by **Jisc**, and the following are thoughts on the issues and challenges surrounding our current approach at Imperial College London towards collaborative funding models for open access books. Firstly some background to our institution: it is research-intensive, in receipt of significant **UKRI** research funding awards, as well as a range of other medical and industry funding reflecting the very strong focus on **STEMMB** (science, technology, engineering, mathematics, medicine and business) research and teaching.

That disciplinary concentration heavily impacts on the content of our collections, their development and the corresponding resources we provide to our students and staff via the Library Services. Our book (or monograph, depending on what terminology you want to use) collections are carefully maintained to ensure the most current editions are available to support taught courses, led by both reading lists and staff and student suggestions. The primary aim of the collections is the support of learning and teaching, while also ensuring we hold the essential research monographs relevant to each subject. However we know the most current research reading material is the journal article, and therefore the bulk of our content budget supports access to journal literature.

For over ten years, we have been in the fortunate position to be able to support our authors publishing their work in full open access journal titles, and more recently through transformative agreements, through a combination of open access funds and our subscriptions budget. This has been through a combination of an institutional open access fund, and block grants from UK research funders. For many of those years we have not paid open access costs for publishing in hybrid titles, although with the current swathe of transformative agreements, that has slightly shifted for some funder grant expenditure.

Like many others in the sector, we are keen to find more achievable sustainable models for journal publishing, and to ensure that the lessons learnt from the past twenty years are applied to how we approach open access book publishing. An interesting question that came up at the webinar was whether having a university press would be a good thing or not at Imperial – we don't have a press, and there are currently no plans to set one up. My feeling is that if there was a press, it would have been instituted on traditional publishing practice and turning it around to open access would be a potential challenge. If a press were to be set up, I would be

arguing that it focus on non-traditional research outputs, or indeed open textbooks, rather than replicating what already exist elsewhere. But without one, this further heightens the emphasis on how we fund other presses and publishing initiatives to expand open access to book titles.

During the past few years rather than paying for only our authors to publish open access books and book chapters we have aimed to financially support open access book publishing models where we can, but more recently this has becoming more challenging. This is partly related to the available open access monograph catalogues having little or no coverage across the related disciplines taught at Imperial. This is wholly understandable as the monograph is the more significant research output in non-STEMM disciplines, and textbooks, of which we purchase many titles, are not yet moving to the open access space. We would very much love to see the latter do so, though!

Additionally as more publishing catalogues have been opened up, that means we have had to balance the ideal of ensuring we give our support to open access publishing against how we spend our available budget on content that will also be of value to our own user communities. Where there are publishers whose catalogues could be of value, they are often smaller (and potentially new) suppliers. Depending on the timing of decisions as to when we can commit budget, tight timeframes can make it harder to set suppliers up in time. We've also found some technical limitations related to metadata quality and needing to re-prioritise how results are presented in our search interface so that OA collections are featured appropriately but not at the expense of other relevant texts.

Up to now, that means that we've not had a specific strategy directing which initiatives or models we choose to contribute to. But we are aware that we have to move from a general 'let's show support as a sector leader regardless of the disciplinary focus' to a more targeted 'let's support open access book publishing in the fields relevant to our user communities'. The more general support, which we want to maintain, could be better demonstrated through contributing towards infrastructure. That would be less discipline-specific, although there is sometimes a grey line between open access book infrastructure and content, which is also an issue we will need to grapple with to ensure fair allocation of budget. That includes a discussion of whether we need to begin ring-fencing areas of budget for open access infrastructure *and* content.

There are other factors that we will need to take into consideration in building our future strategy. We do need to maintain a curatorial role in ensuring the open access content we make discoverable through our LMS is complementary to our collection overall. And there has not been any active conversations with academic and teaching staff about introducing open access content to their reading lists. I know that there can be hesitation in getting involved with discussions about reading lists – something that is an equally sensitive topic in work colleagues have been doing for some years to highlight potential geographic bias in reading lists – and so we have to get round the concerns of engaging academics in conversations about their content choices. The sector voice continues to be invaluable in supporting both the e-textbook campaign and being brave in highlighting how content choices will continue to embed bias unless challenged.

Lastly, but very importantly I do not want us to perpetuate a book processing charge model, and this is one of the crucial factors in how we will continue to evaluate and select open access book models in the future. We definitely want to continue to support models that

enable authors (of any institutional affiliation) to publish book and book chapters on open access; to better direct available budget to do this; and to establish how we can support the infrastructure that will enable sustainable provision of metadata and content.