The challenge of open access compliance

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Researchers at UK Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are now subject to HEFCE's open access policy if they want to submit their work to the Research Excellence Framework (REF) in 2021. The policy applies to journal articles and conference proceedings accepted for publication after 1 April 2016. These research outputs must be deposited in an institutional or subject repository as soon as possible after the point of acceptance. For the first two years of the policy there is flexibility to deposit up to three months after the date of early online publication. After April 2018, it is anticipated that the policy terms will become stricter and deposit must occur within three months of acceptance.

Since the announcement of the policy in March 2014, open access teams have been created rapidly in universities across the UK, either by recruitment of new staff or assignment of responsibility for open access to existing staff. These staff are faced with the formidable task of supporting researchers at their institution to ensure compliance with the policy. The repercussions of not being able to submit high quality papers to the REF would be felt acutely both by the institution and the individual researcher.

HEFCE'S open access policy presents immense challenges for institutions and supporting the policy is the biggest challenge facing me in my current post. These challenges are both financial and cultural. The financial costs associated with supporting compliance with the policy are high. Many HEIs initially relied heavily on their Research Councils UK funding to meet staffing costs. Over time, institutions have taken on staff costs to ensure the longevity of their open access teams, and some have even been in a position to create institutional funds for gold open access. At a time when increasing subscription costs are regularly imposed by publishers it can be difficult for institutions to find the means to support open access, despite its obvious importance.

The cultural challenges associated with the HEFCE policy can prove to be even more difficult to overcome. If funds can be sourced by an institution then financial worries are solved, but how do we change the attitudes towards scholarly communication that have been ingrained for many years? Researchers everywhere are time poor. Whilst they may agree with the ethos of open access, it is a new concept for many of them and uploading their accepted manuscript into the institutional repository within a designated time frame is often perceived purely as an administrative burden. Acceptance for publication by a journal often signals the end of a long research road. Making that publication open access through the repository is unfortunately all too often tagged on to the end of that process as something of an afterthought.

Behavioural change is difficult to achieve but I'm happy to say that support for open access from the research community has undoubtedly strengthened at my institution since the early days of

advocating. After three years of promotion and engagement with researchers through school board meetings, research support meetings, training sessions and online support materials, attitudes have gradually shifted towards support for open access. Following a review of 2016, we discovered that 93% of the papers in our repository that are subject to HEFCE's policy are REF eligible. This positive trend has continued into 2017 with many more papers being deposited on a daily basis.

Wielding the HEFCE policy 'stick' certainly gives clout to our message and I doubt that we would have made the progress towards open access that we have without a funder mandate. The risks associated with non-compliance are high but it has always been very important for us as an institution to balance the potential consequence of REF ineligibility with the various benefits that open access can bring to the researcher and wider society. This balanced advocacy approach has been adopted by many other HEIs and has contributed to the growing success of open access in the UK.

Another factor that can contribute to the success of open access is the delivery of joined up research support services. At this year's UKSG conference, Trudy Turner (University of Kent) and Angela Davies (University of Sheffield) delivered a breakout session on their approaches to research support through library and research services partnerships. At Kent a one-stop support service, the Office for Scholarly Communication, was developed, whilst at Sheffield there is a focus on strengthening a collaborative network of research support professionals across the university. Both approaches have yielded positive results and these models have been adopted by other HEIs in recent times with open access teams developing into scholarly communications teams with wider remits for research support.

At my institution we strive to work with the research and enterprise team to support open access and we both make use of the research information system but being situated in two different buildings across the campus, under two different university directorates can make this challenging. The research and enterprise team may engage with a researcher when they are applying for funding and my team will encounter the same researcher when they have been accepted for publication and we are encouraging them to make their work open access. Working in partnership with the research and enterprise team at an earlier stage to deliver joint support would mean that open access conversations can occur much sooner in the research process. Open access can become an integral part of the research lifecycle. Partnered working would also mean that support materials such as webpages could be merged to provide researchers with more seamless research support.

Compliance with HEFCE's open access policy is clearly a priority for UK HEIs. A funder mandate with obvious repercussions for non-compliance can certainly ensure that researchers make their work open access. To ensure that the future of open access is about more than just obligation, advocacy and the delivery of seamless support are very important to help researchers understand and believe in the benefits that open access can bring.