Recent Open-Access Mandates in Europe

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One of the more complicated developments in the evolution of open access (OA) in recent years came in the second half of 2012 with the announcement that Research Councils UK (RCUK) would be introducing a new policy early in 2013. With many publishers struggling to address that and other new challenges, this session provided some background and context for understanding developments.

Martin Frank began the session with a history of OA, starting with the origins of the movement in 1999; since then, the Public Library of Science was founded, and the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Public Access Policy was introduced, requiring that all NIH-funded research be made freely available within a year of publication. Many of the early milestones were concerned mostly with how an article was accessed; publishers could often retain their subscription or copyright models as long as articles were made freely available at some point after publication.

However, 3 years ago, attention began to shift to how articles are licensed and how they can be reused. The 2012 Finch Group report laid out recommendations for the future of OA publishing in the UK and led to the adoption of the RCUK OA policy. The report differentiates between levels of OA publishing: “gold” OA provides access to the full text of an article immediately upon publication on a publisher’s own platform, and “green” OA provides free access to an article either in a repository or on the publisher’s platform after an embargo period of several months. Publishers’ statuses can be found at the SHERPA/RoMEO database (www.sherpa.ac.uk/romeo/). As of 1 April 2013, articles receiving RCUK funding must be published in green or gold OA journals and licensed under a Creative Commons by attribution (CC BY) license.

Katherine McCarter detailed the six available Creative Commons licenses, about which more information can be found at creativecommons.org/licenses. The licenses cover a variety of access and reuse options, and each requires attribution of the author of the original work. CC BY allows anyone to “distribute, remix, tweak, and build upon your work, even commercially, as long as they credit you for the original creation.”

The two panelists used the remainder of the session to discuss how their societies are responding to the new mandates. McCarter, with the Ecological Society of America (ESA), has not felt the effects quite as strongly as other publishers, because ESA does not deal with the biomedical sciences. However, it has recently launched one OA gold online-only journal with CC BY licensing as an experiment in a different publishing model. Although it has been popular and has garnered small profits for ESA, the society continues to deal with the challenges of the changing environment and the effects that mandates could have on subscription-based journals.

Frank, with the American Physiological Society (APS), has previously opposed the OA mandates as an intrusion into publishing business models. Nonetheless, APS has also created an OA journal, with cascading peer review from sister journals and flat publication charges; in addition, all OA articles in any APS journal are now published under a CC BY license although non-OA articles are still published in a traditional copyright-transfer model.

During the question-and-answer session, attendees asked whether the panelists felt that OA journals had reduced submissions to non-OA journals; the consensus was that as submissions rise, OA journals could help both to keep submissions manageable at traditional journals and to retain lost revenue from rejected papers. Other attendees were concerned that the RCUK mandate and others like it were not well defined and that there was not much guidance from funders on new mandates. Another attendee asked when and how a society should begin to consider adopting OA policies or launching a gold OA journal. Answers were that publishers need to let the OA business model develop and see whether funding mandates continue to emerge. If possible, societies should experiment with OA journals and different publishing strategies.

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