



MEMORANDUM

To: Research Councils UK

Subject: Independent review of the implementation of RCUK Policy on Open Access – Call for Evidence

Date: 12 September 2014

Dear Professor Sir Bob Burgess,

Please find attached the BSA/HaPS response to the call for evidence on Open Access. It is not entirely straightforward for Learned Societies to respond as the focus is geared more to issues arising in HEIs, albeit that there was special guidance for Learned Societies and Academic Publishers. Given our dispersed membership we have found it especially difficult to gather information in what was a rather short timescale during the 'holiday' period. We would stress that it is too early for us to have sufficient meaningful data on the effects of Open Access on our Journals. We are concerned about our members seeming lack of detailed awareness about the implications of Open Access for them, and the BSA and HaPS are engaged in attempting to rectify this. A significant proportion of the BSA's income is derived from journal subscriptions and we are, of course, concerned to bring to the attention of RCUK and HEFCE the need to consider the future health of the UK's Learned Societies. While we support the principles of Open Access we have a number of concerns about the communication of policy and practice, about the pace of change, about the relationships between academics and publishers and especially about the implications for the international status of UK research. In addition are considering the effects of a move to 'Gold' on the hitherto collegial basis on which our journals are edited and reviewed as we think that this may become unsustainable. We set these and other issues out more fully in the attached document. We would very much welcome further input into the review process either directly or via the Academy of Social Sciences.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Sue Scott (BSA Trustee and Chair of the External Affairs Group)
On behalf of the British Sociological Association

Professor Lynn Jamieson (Chair)
On behalf of the Heads and Professors of Sociology



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Background

1. The British Sociological Association had a membership of 2700 as of the end of August 2014. The Association has sought to inform its members about the Open Access debates and also sought feedback from them on a number of occasions since OA was initiated.

2. The BSA owns two journals: *Sociology* and *Work, Employment Society* and is a partner in relation to two others: *Cultural Sociology* and *Sociological Research Online*. *Sociology*, *WES* and *Cultural Sociology* are published in association with Sage. The BSA has adopted a hybrid approach publishing some articles as 'Gold' alongside others as 'Green' after an embargo period. All four journals are compliant with the RCUK policies regarding open access in the transition period and all offer Gold Open Access with the CC BY license for authors who request it for an article processing charge of £800. All four journals allow the deposit of post-peer review versions of articles after a 12-month embargo period (Green Open Access). In the case of *Sociological Research Online* all articles have a route to free access for individuals outside of a University domain.

Evidence of Compliance, Uptake and adaptation

3. The uptake of Gold has been very low and has been concentrated largely in one journal. Another of our journals has had no requests or inquiries about Gold Open Access at all.

4. We are considering launching a rigorous peer-review Open Access journal. We are continually assessing and monitoring Open Access and its effects to inform our embargo periods, licencing options, etc. We are anticipating a reduction in publishing income in the relatively near future and are looking for additional funding streams as a result.

5. We do not as yet have any evidence of any specific effects on Sociology as a discipline, but we do have concerns about the longer term effect of APC as a much sociological research is funded from sources other than RCUK.

6. Our members seem to be only peripherally aware of the issue. Some universities seem to have effectively communicated their policies, though what methods have worked best is unclear at this stage. Anecdotally, we sense that information distributed at the departmental level seems to be most effective.



Concerns about the implications of Open Access

7. We have a number of concerns. As the publishing landscape is still so uncertain, we recognise that some of these problems may not arise but we do foresee significant risk to key elements of academic research and its dissemination:

- We are extremely concerned about the lack of clear communication about policy changes and their implications for researchers. This makes it very difficult for our members to make informed choices about where to place their research outputs.
- We consider that there will be a threat to the sustainability of Learned Societies' high-quality journals due to reduced income. This is especially problematic in the context of rapid change
- We are concerned about unequal access to high quality journals because of unequal access to funding for all researchers. This is likely to be a particular issue for early career and retired academics, as well as those based at institutions without significant funding. This latter is a particular issue for a discipline such as sociology where the development of theoretical work is important, but very hard to gain funding for. Also Sociology is a discipline which is not well represented in all highly ranked HEIs in the UK, but is widespread in newer Universities and this is seems likely to have greater implications in the medium and longer term – especially for early career academics

The standards and quality markers for published research may be at risk in the context of the proliferation of lower quality OA publishing outlets, with lower APC charges and lower levels of peer review and quality control, alongside the lack of page restrictions for online publications which means that much more *can* be published

- We feel that researchers and the public who are accessing research need to have clearer and more effective guides to assessing the quality of published research
- Publishing choices for researchers and editors may be limited where questions about where to submit and what to publish are influenced by financial concerns rather than by quality and reach
- Much sociological research is conducted in cross-institutional and sometimes cross-disciplinary teams and we are concerned about the different policies and practices being implemented across HEIs



- We have concerns about the effect on researchers' intellectual property rights and about the treatment of sensitive/confidential data with the 'one-size-fits-all' CC BY license
- We are concerned about the 'international' status of our member's research and of our journals should the volume of international research published in UK journals and UK research published in international journals decline. Conflicting and unclear policies and uneven access to funding worldwide may restrict authors' abilities to publish in international journals, potentially making UK journals more parochial. There is some evidence (but insufficient to claim significance) that more articles from UK authors (with OA requirements) are being rejected by international journals
- Changes to the structures and financial models in this area raise further concerns about sustainability of Learned Societies and their scholarly journals. We would wish to be involved in discussion and decisions about the full economic costing and recompense for all the labour that goes towards the publication of scholarly articles. The current model of journal peer review and publication is supported by a significant amount of voluntary labour (editorial work, peer review work, etc.). With changes to the model of journal publishing, as well as changes in academic life and workloads, Open Access publishing developments may need to recognize and reward this work

Further Comments

8. We are called upon to give evidence of the policy implementation and its effects. Very little data exists. We have surveyed those authors who have chosen the Gold Open Access publishing model, examined the level of article deposit (Green Open Access) and invited our membership on several occasions to tell us about their experiences of Open Access. Our small evidence base suggests that there is still very low engagement with the Open Access policies and a significant level of confusion and misinformation. Universities and departments are taking different approaches and setting differing internal policies, which adds to the confusion. With the professional importance of publishing and the significant pressures on researchers' time, some researchers are focused on compliance so that they can get published and progress professionally. Without more efficient communication about these policies there is the risk that decisions will be made without a comprehensive understanding of the implications.

9. More systematic data collection is needed regarding the Open Access policy in order to adequately judge the outcomes and set future directions. The collection of this evidence requires significant resources and investment. Learned Societies (as well as other bodies) are not in a position to make this level of investment. While we can consult with our communities and monitor our own journals but it would not be appropriate for individual Learned Societies to seek



information from universities or commercial publishers, nor do we have the resources. The volume of data and evidence required to appropriately inform future policy needs to include information from all these sources and also to take account of the international research landscape. We cannot presume that the authors who have chosen Gold Open Access in our journals are representative of our community as a whole; we need more data. **We would welcome a decision by the RCUK to fund dedicated and independent research on Open Access and the recent policies, to ensure that the evidence collected between now and the next assessment of the policy can be constructive and illuminating.**

10. We would also like to reiterate the points we said were in need of consideration in the 2014 review of OA in the response we made to the request for feedback on the Revised Open Access Guidance in March 2013:

- The adequacy of the proposed 5-year transition
- Identification and correction of any inequalities created or enhanced by the RCUK OA policy
- Identification and correction of any inequalities created or enhanced by harmonization of RCUK and HEFCE policies
- Exploration of the impact on peer-review;