



SFC Announcement

Open access in the Research Excellence Framework: Extension of flexibility

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Summary: The four UK higher education funding bodies have decided to extend the initial flexibility in the Open Access (OA) policy for a further year, recognising the timetable for the next REF with results in 2021.

FAO: Principals and directors of Scotland's universities

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Open access in the Research Excellence Framework: Extension of flexibility

1. I am writing to let you know that the four UK higher education funding bodies have decided to extend the initial flexibility in our Open Access (OA) policy for a further year, recognising the timetable for the next REF with results in 2021. The requirement that outputs be deposited on acceptance will commence after Sunday 1 April 2018, subject to a review of the readiness of systems within the sector in autumn 2017.

Background

2. In 2014 SFC and the other three UK higher education funding bodies announced a policy for OA (www.hefce.ac.uk/rsrch/oa/Policy/), applying to research publications submitted to a future Research Excellence Framework (REF). A key component of the policy is that, to be eligible for submission, certain outputs (namely journal articles and conference proceedings) will need to be deposited in a repository allowing public discovery, accessibility and reuse of research material. Our policy builds on the Government's position that expanding access to research outputs stimulates higher education efficiency, increases scholarly impact and underpins significant gains in the economic and social benefits from research.

Further developments

3. Following clear advice and evidence received during consultation, the REF OA policy requires early deposit of outputs in repositories. By requiring deposit upon acceptance of the paper, we best fulfil our objective of increasing author engagement with OA and delivering higher uptake, significantly increasing the amount of UK research that is publicly available. The time-stamped date of acceptance provides a clear, unambiguous point for tracking policy compliance, and has significant advantages over the date of publication, which is often much later, ambiguous and out of the author's sight or control.
4. We are pleased with the progress so far, but we recognise the challenges involved in driving the policy centrally. As previously announced, for the first year of the policy (from 1 April 2016 to 1 April 2017), we are providing a degree of flexibility to allow time for higher education institutions (HEIs), Jisc and others to develop tools to allow information about publications to flow better between researchers and administrators. During that period of flexibility, HEIs may deposit outputs in their repositories within three months of publication, rather than of acceptance, which provides a longer window for securing author engagement. Many HEIs have nonetheless continued to implement our 'deposit on acceptance' policy and are seeing academic engagement increase significantly, and excellent progress has been made to build new relationships

between HEIs and publishers in pursuit of the UK's OA goals.

5. In *Open access in the next Research Excellence Framework: policy adjustments and qualifications* (HEFCE Circular letter 20/2015, www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/Year/2015/CL,202015/), institutions were advised that the funding bodies would work with them in autumn 2016 to review the developing arrangements, and to determine whether remaining technical gaps had been sufficiently addressed to end the flexibility in April 2017. In the intervening period, the Minister for Universities and Science asked Lord Stern to review the REF, and to allow time for this, the timetable has been realigned so that results of the next REF would be announced in December 2021. The four higher education funding bodies will now work together to develop proposals on how to implement Lord Stern's recommendations in the next REF. We expect to launch a consultation with the sector on these proposals in November 2016 and we are conscious that our original plan to review progress on OA in autumn 2016 may collide unhelpfully with the consultation on the REF. We therefore want to allow HEIs longer to improve systems and fine-tune approaches. The REF 2021 timeframe will provide HEIs with a further year to embed open access activities and to work with us to develop the shape of the next REF.

Next steps

6. In light of the above, we are therefore making the following adjustments to our OA policy:
 - The policy continues to require that, to be eligible for submission to the REF, outputs must be deposited within three months of acceptance for publication, but we now plan that this requirement will apply to outputs accepted after Sunday 1 April 2018. We will review the readiness of systems with the sector in autumn 2017.
 - Outputs accepted between 1 April 2016 and 1 April 2018 must be deposited within three months of publication.
7. The policy documentation (www.hefce.ac.uk/rsrch/oa/Policy) has been updated to reflect this change.

Further information

8. If you have any questions about this letter, contact openaccess@hefce.ac.uk.

Yours sincerely



Stuart Fancey
Director of Research & Innovation