

# **Open Access: Is a National Licence the answer?**

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## **About the authors**

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# Foreword

Nick Hillman, HEPI Director

The UK is a world leader in academic research and a world leader in publishing the fruits of academic research.

In the past, the publication process assumed universities provided the main readership of peer-reviewed work. But today, there is increasing demand for much wider access – from businesses, public sector workers and independent researchers. We should not pretend that past models of academic publishing are suitable for the future, but nor should we kill the golden goose. A free-for-all that does not recognise the work of authors and publishers would ultimately leave us all worse off.

On the back of a review by Dame Janet Finch, the Coalition Government supported gold open access in which upfront Article Processing Charges cover the publishing costs. The Research Councils and HEFCE swiftly explained how they would encourage open access. Such clarity is welcome, as was the clear leadership provided by Ron Egginton, the leading civil servant on open access in the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. He was a true public servant and has been sorely missed since his early death last year.

Challenges remain. The gold open access model is working and the UK is ahead of the pack, but it is not working for all in

all circumstances. In particular, it gives people abroad better access to UK research while doing little to improve the access of those within the UK to research produced elsewhere. That is not in the national interest.

This paper is designed to contribute to the next stage in the debate by seeking to provide answers to the remaining questions. In particular, it proposes a new national licence scheme as a way of promoting greater access while serving the UK national interest.

The outstanding issues are too important to lose amidst the political noise of the 2015 general election and subsequent spending review. We encourage policymakers to evaluate the costs and benefits of a national licence. If they do not agree with the model proposed here, we urge them to propose other ways to ensure the UK continues to punch above its weight in both academic research and academic publishing.

# **Open Access: Is a National Licence the answer?**

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## **Introduction**

1. The United Kingdom is a global leader in academic research. The science and research sector that underpins the academy is a major contributor to the strength of the British economy and a source of global competitive advantage. If we are to sustain this pre-eminence, we must find ways to improve access to published research, widen the potential readership of research and reduce costs and inefficiencies. The impressive productivity of the UK's research base should be matched by greater efficiency in access to research outputs.

2. The Finch Report of June 2012 established a clear framework for the development of open access to scholarly publications within the UK that ensures sustainability and excellence.<sup>1</sup> Subsequently, open access policies have been introduced by RCUK and HEFCE. However, the benefits are largely confined to academia, where access was already excellent. Compliance with open access policies is a significant cost for universities. We remain some way from achieving the ideal desired outcome, as defined in Finch and endorsed by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), of universal gold open access – where every taxpayer-funded published research paper is publicly

available free at the point of use. Moreover, there is an unresolved conundrum: the UK is offering global access to its own research via the gold route with no reciprocal offering from most other countries, including key competitors.

### **Green versus Gold**

Under gold open access, publishers are paid by researchers (or researchers' institutions or funders) and papers are made globally and freely available online.

Under green open access, the manuscript, not usually the final published article, is placed in a repository and can be accessed by all following an embargo period. Green open access is common where there are no funds to pay the Article Processing Charge (APC) or where gold open access is not offered by the publisher.

3. A mechanism needs to be found that could run alongside the outcome of the Finch review and which fits in line with its recommendation to explore other licensing models. The goals should be:

- to extend access to the wider economy and society;
- to reduce some of the challenges, particularly the cost implications for universities; and
- to assist with the transition towards global gold open access.

4. This paper suggests that a national licence for access would achieve these aims and offer a number of additional benefits to the UK, including:

- supporting economic growth;
- making it easier for researchers to conduct their work; and

- providing broad public benefits, such as improved access to research among National Health Service (NHS) workers, small and medium-sized business (SMEs), teachers and policy officials.<sup>2</sup>

5. Importantly, a national licence could boost the transition towards gold open access while avoiding some of the disadvantages in the current position and, in particular, the potential damage to the UK's national interest.

## **Part 1: Open Access and a national licence**

### **Access to published research**

6. Research is a long-term growth sector. Global spending on all research and development (R&D) was \$1.2 trillion in 2010 and spending typically increases by 4 per cent a year. This is driven by two primary factors: economic growth leading to more commercial R&D activity; and an increase in the number of researchers in academic institutions around the world. As the global economy becomes more orientated towards technology and an emphasis on knowledge, these factors will remain prominent drivers.

7. Science publishing is the next link in the research value chain. A nation's R&D spending is strongly correlated with the volume of its published articles.<sup>3</sup> There is a virtuous circle: access to published outputs drives research productivity. Researchers say that journal articles are the single most important type of

information influencing their productivity.<sup>4</sup> Access to and high usage of e-journals drives researcher productivity in terms of articles published, doctorates awarded and grants won.

8. The UK's high level of access is one of the reasons that it performs so well in terms of generating papers and citations relative to its R&D spend and researcher base: 16 per cent of the most cited papers in the world are generated by the UK, which has just 4 per cent of the world's researchers and 3 per cent of the world's R&D spend.<sup>5</sup> Favourable economics sit behind the high levels of access: British universities access 32 per cent more journals than in 2004 and pay 11 per cent less per journal accessed.<sup>6</sup> The price paid by UK universities per article download dropped on average by 12 per cent a year from 2004 to 2008 to 70p.<sup>7</sup>

9. At the same time as looking for ways to increase article access, we should be looking for ways to reduce friction in the system. Despite the unit price reduction, many UK higher education institutions report they are struggling to pay for access to the expanding number of published articles. The gap between the growth in library funding and the growth in publications causes problems. This is one cause of the protracted negotiations that take place between individual higher education institutions and publishers. Although Jisc Collections undertakes such negotiations on behalf of the UK higher education and further education sectors, this does not affect the time-consuming negotiations with publishers that do not participate in Jisc negotiations.



10. More could be done to raise levels of access in the UK and increase efficiency, in order to help promote further success in the UK's research, training and service areas. In particular, this paper considers what more might be done to raise access levels among SMEs, medical institutions, teachers and trainers, independent researchers outside higher education institutions, policy makers and interested members of the public. It also addresses the competitive threat from countries such as China, South Korea and Brazil.

### **National Health Service pilot**

A shift away from higher education institutions as the main places where research can be accessed is underway in the NHS. From April 2014, a pilot scheme has given eligible staff working across the NHS in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland access to journal content licensed by Jisc Collections for the academic research community. This builds on an earlier pilot from 2012 involving Academic Health Science Centres in England.

The pilot builds on the Finch Report recommendation that, during the period of transition to open access publishing worldwide, funds should be found to extend and rationalise current licences to cover all the institutions in the higher education and health sectors.

The pilot has received funding for the administrative support required to enable and maintain OpenAthens and IP address authentication for NHS users and to provide usage data at agreed points. No funding has been made available to purchase access rights to the journal content for NHS users during the pilot period. A Steering Group comprising representatives from the UK academic sector, the NHS in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, NICE and Jisc Collections has led the NHS Pilot from its inception. The pilot period ends in March 2015 and a final report will be issued in the summer.

The results will inform Jisc, publishers and the NHS about relevant business models for NHS users. It could also provide evidence that there is scope for multi-stakeholder, medium-term licensing arrangements and offer useful lessons for the transition to a national licence.

## **Developments since the Finch report**

11. The drive towards greater access to research is an established fact for academic publishing in the UK and open access publishing has been recognised in higher education policies. A model of open access that is sustainable for producers, distributors and consumers of knowledge is the right objective. The benefits include: increased research productivity; access to new research for business, with the potential of stimulating innovation; and improved NHS outcomes by facilitating the translation of research findings into clinical practice. By virtue of its strong research base and its strong publishing industry, the UK is well placed to demonstrate global leadership in the dissemination of research and in championing a knowledge-led economy.

12. The Finch report defined the three most important principles for access to academic research as accessibility, research excellence and sustainability. The report recognised the balance needed between providing access to publicly-funded research and maintaining a viable commercial basis for the publishing sector. The key recommendation was for the UK to move to gold open access, with green as a fall-back option when gold was not possible.

13. Following the publication of the Finch report, the Research Councils (RCUK) mandated the publication of its funded research as open access, with a preference for gold. This policy has been in place since April 2013. The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) followed suit,

announcing that for articles to be considered for the Research Excellence Framework in 2020, articles must be available on an open access basis. Full compliance with the HEFCE policy is likely to prove challenging for universities, as it requires articles to be ‘deposited in an institutional or subject repository on acceptance for publication’, which raises questions about compliance, administration and cost.<sup>8</sup>

14. The UK is ahead of the international field in having such a carefully crafted policy on open access. Outstanding issues are subject to consideration by a stakeholder group under the auspices of Universities UK, known as the UUK Open Access Coordination Group. RCUK is also currently conducting the first review of its policy.<sup>9</sup> The EU is also showing leadership: it has backed green open access in its current funding programmes and launched a gold open access pilot. Policy developments in individual EU nations, China and the United States suggest this is a global phenomenon.<sup>10</sup> The UK’s opportunity to demonstrate further global leadership may be more constrained than before.

## **The drawbacks of the UK’s open access policies**

15. Open access in the UK can be seen as a developing, but qualified, success. Yet however well it is progressing, it is limited. The UK open access settlement is restricted to papers published or disseminated in the UK, which make up only 6 per cent of the global total, or published elsewhere under the

open access model. Non-open access content from elsewhere in the world – around 90 per cent of the total<sup>11</sup> – largely continues to be available only upon subscription. This is due to the commercial realities of the publishing market, which require the costs of publishing to be met either through Article Processing Charges or subscription payments. This raises a big issue for the UK's competitiveness. By implementing gold open access, the UK is offering global access to its own research with no reciprocal offering from most other countries, including those who rival or exceed our own performance in research. This is having a negative impact on British competitiveness.

16. Additionally, despite the growth in online publishing, the principal beneficiaries remain researchers at academic institutions. The vast majority of the population and businesses still find it hard to gain access. In an age when 78 per cent of properties are able to receive superfast broadband and some 90 per cent of the population are online, such constraints seem out of date.<sup>12</sup>

17. Moreover, the cost of implementing the RCUK and HEFCE policies on open access are significant for universities. The cost of the RCUK open access policy was at least £9.2 million in 2013/14, rising to more than £20 million when expenditure on Article Processing Charges is taken into account.<sup>13</sup> The provisional estimate of meeting the requirements of the next Research Excellence Framework is £4-5 million a year, with additional implementation costs expected to be at least equal

to those for the RCUK policy.<sup>14</sup> The open access costs faced by universities therefore look to be in the region of £34 million a year, if not more. This is additional to the existing bill of around £175 million for UK university libraries' journal subscriptions.<sup>15</sup> For the future, in addition to rising journal subscriptions, the levels of funding for the payment of Article Processing Charges and the ability of institutions to support green open access with sufficiently good repositories are key concerns.

18. There is also evidence to suggest that gold open access remains costly. Extensive economic modelling – in a report funded by Jisc Collections and published by the Open Access Implementation Group – suggests green, rather than gold, open access is the cheapest option for universities. According to this report, the best current way to move from a subscription model to open access is via the green, not the gold, route.<sup>16</sup> The largest institutional repository in the UK, UCL Discovery, has successfully implemented green open access, with total lifetime downloads exceeding six million. One recently-published report shows gold open access is more than twice as time-consuming and costly for research organisations as green – even before the costs of Article Processing Charges are taken into account.<sup>17</sup> There are particular concerns for smaller institutions, which may lack the capacity to develop and maintain institutional repositories: the additional cost of implementing open access can outweigh both their spending on articles and their RCUK block grant funding.<sup>18</sup>

19. The 'Total Cost of Ownership', whereby universities are required to pay both for journal subscriptions and Article Processing Charges, is sometimes labelled 'double-dipping'. UK universities can effectively pay publishing costs twice: first through journal subscriptions and, then again, through Article Processing Charges for the publication of individual articles in the same journals. This issue is being successfully addressed by Jisc Collections through negotiations with publishers for offsets. However, not all publishers have yet engaged with this process. Moreover, the effects of the offsets still have to be felt in actual payment reductions, so it is difficult to project what their full impact will be.

20. The question we now face is how government, publishers and authors can ensure the UK can achieve even better access to published research, while still respecting the need for sustainability and excellence as outlined by the Finch Report. We propose that a national licence is a potential answer.

### **A national licensing agreement**

21. A national licence provides a centralised framework within which publishers can collectively agree a contract with a government-approved body that would make all or any of their specified journals freely available to any person within the UK. Academic researchers would benefit from improved access to research outputs but, more importantly, vast new

audiences would open up: corporations; small businesses; patient groups; teachers; A Level students; and even casual web surfers.

22. The potential benefits include:

- Providing extended access to articles published anywhere in the world, as opposed to just the 6 per cent of UK-authored articles under current gold open access initiatives.
- Positioning the UK as a leader in expanding access, to the benefit of UK researchers, who could read research from across the world from the day of publication free at the point of use.
- Reducing costs through better knowledge-sharing, joint development of systems, automation and data-sharing, improving the deposit process and greater clarity in publishers' policies.<sup>19</sup>
- Delivering broader public benefits through expanding access to published research to key sectors, such as schools, the NHS and medical institutions, businesses and citizens. One study shows access to journal articles is the most important or second most important factor for success among SMEs, large businesses, hospitals and public health workers and government and independent research institutions.<sup>20</sup>
- Increasing research productivity of the beneficiaries of increased access, not only in terms of access to the peer-reviewed and published content but also to the advanced technologies and tools developed by publishers to help improve access to that content.<sup>21</sup>

- Eliminating inefficiencies and tensions inherent in the current purchasing process.
- Supporting the provision of new institutional productivity tools.

23. We argue that a national licence offers the best option for the UK to extend access and move towards the ultimate goal of full open access, in a way that can address some of the current difficulties. A national approach to licensing offers cost savings to the public purse and greater efficiency in negotiations with publishers, while also providing the benefits of increased access to and dissemination of UK research and enabling users to gain access to a wealth of knowledge.

## **Part 2: Getting from Here to There**

24. The national licence would cover access by any Internet Protocol address connected with a UK internet service provider – so, by extension, any person online in the UK. The key elements of the proposal are:

- **The centralised framework:** A national body, such as (for the sake of illustration) Jisc Collections, representing the UK government and other stakeholders, would be empowered to create and negotiate medium to long-term contracts with individual publishing companies. This national body would represent UK higher education institutions, SMEs, UK medical institutions and NHS staff, charitable funders of research, public libraries and representatives of independent researchers.



- **The contract:** This would set out a formula for predicting and determining the annual contract licence price. It would scale with growth of units published but with a mechanism for accounting increasing efficiencies of unit production and delivery costs.
- **The funding:** This could come from a combination of existing sources of central government higher education funding (via Research Councils and the higher education Funding Councils), some allocation of funds currently dedicated to facilitate closer co-operation between industry and academia, the National Institute of Health Research (NIHR) or NHS funding and contributions from business and Innovate UK.

25. Publishers would be compensated for the provision of access to their journals at a level to be determined through further individual negotiation. It is important that the national licence provides a feasible and sustainable model, including for publishers, but price negotiations should also take account of: the greater efficiencies for publishers of having one overarching framework; the greater stability offered by a long-term contract; and current funding constraints and budgetary pressures in universities and elsewhere.

26. The content covered by the contract would be determined by universities, researchers and other stakeholders in discussion with participating publishers. The overall value of the approach and the specific financial value of the contract would be enhanced as the number of journals included increased. This would have to be fully declared at the beginning of the

negotiation process. This proposal envisages that this would cover content generated anywhere in the world.

## **Access to Research**

The logic of the national licence concept can be seen at work in the Access to Research initiative, which was launched in January 2014 and which permits patrons of public libraries in the UK to read UK research articles on-site, for free. Access to Research is born out of the recommendation of the Finch report that a proposal for walk-in access to the majority of journals to be provided in public libraries across the UK should be pursued with vigour.

Over 10 million academic articles are available, free of charge, in participating public libraries across the UK. Students, independent researchers, small businesses and members of the public can now access many of the world's best academic papers, covering a wide range of disciplines (including health and biological sciences, technology, history, medicine and social sciences) through their local libraries. In total, 23 publishers, including all the leading academic publishers in the UK, are signed up to the two-year pilot.

So far, over 14,500 individual users have used the service and 163 (80 per cent) of UK local authorities that operate public library services are signed up. More local authorities are expected to join. Local authorities are now taking the lead in promoting the service via their libraries, so usage is expected to increase during the pilot. The implementation group, led by the Publishers Licensing Society, is gathering quantitative and qualitative data which will be used to assess the effectiveness of the service and to inform future delivery.

Access to Research has been able to provide expanded access to content outside academic institutions in a relatively short space of time because of three key factors:

- (i) the close relationships between publishers and libraries and the recognition of trust in the security systems;
- (ii) the relatively closed environment of the library network and – given the stipulation of licensed material being read only on dedicated terminals – a limited marketplace; and
- (iii) the desire on all sides to develop the technology behind the system, to ascertain the level of demand and to identify any delivery problems.

## Further reflections

### *A multiple pricing approach*

27. The most feasible way for a national licence contract to be negotiated would be through a multiple pricing approach. This would see a single body (such as Jisc Collections) representing all potential user groups negotiating a single licensing framework within which different pricing points would be available, giving rise to multiple contracts within the agreement. These deals could have variable time limits, according to the needs of different publishers and institutions.

28. One advantage of this approach is that it is more likely to secure the support of publishers as well as other stakeholders: publishers would be able to maintain the current levels of commercial control and flexibility with no risk of competition law concerns. This flexibility could be more suitable to institutions as well, as they would be able to arrive at the negotiated price best suited to their circumstances. This approach would also make it easier for individual publishers or institutions to develop further additional licensing terms or deals and could foster innovation.

29. One drawback to this approach is that it would sustain current concerns over the pricing and cost models deployed by different publishers. This multilateral approach has the further potential complication of variations other than on price. The framework licence could insist on a *ceteris paribus* condition for everything except price, but that may not be sustainable. Publishers might wish to introduce varying price points

according to certain licence conditions. Institutions too could wish to alter their costs according to certain usage levels. Such complexity could undermine the logic of a single licence system, with the weight of different approaches unravelling the unity.

### *A single pricing approach*

30. Alternatively, not only the licence framework but the licence price itself could be determined in one big negotiation. Publishers and the representative body would negotiate a price to be paid by all, with one single time-limited deal being negotiated between all publishers and all institutions represented in the framework body. However, there are serious and probably insurmountable difficulties with this approach. The price of simplification is rigidity. A negotiation to arrive at a single price would in many cases mean a distortion of the market-clearing licence price that could be achieved through the usual negotiations. It is impossible to predict in whose favour this would operate and, indeed, it is unlikely it would all be on one side or the other. While in the aggregate (to a watching economist) the efficiency gain might be satisfying, to the involved firm or institution the forgone revenue or cost would be less welcome. Furthermore, a single protracted negotiation might be no less onerous than a high number of bilateral discussions.

31. There could even be further legal costs incurred through a single licence negotiation due to the extra scrutiny that

would have to be paid to the competition law considerations. At all stages of the process to arrive at a single price, great care would need to be taken to ensure that publishers were not unfairly acting in concert and that, where a requirement for publishers to act together existed, they were doing so in an appropriate way, limited only to the terms required for the negotiation. These considerations could make this particular approach a non-starter for some stakeholders.

## **Potential challenges and how to deal with them**

### *Cost to Government*

32. The introduction of a national licence is likely to deliver some efficiency and cost savings. We would not, however, wish to pretend that a national licence offers a simple solution to reduce the public funding commitment significantly from current levels or that cost savings are the main reason to consider its introduction. Ensuring the sustainability of the publishing industry, as recognised by the Finch report, will remain an important consideration, particularly in the context of expanded access to global research outputs and the consequent implications for publishers.

33. However, the potential benefits to the UK of supporting greater access to knowledge are immense and include: driving innovation and the knowledge economy; and removing what is effectively a subsidy for other countries to access UK research output.

### *Modelling of costs*

34. More work is needed. It is important to develop a robust cost-benefit analysis that explores and models the expected cost savings alongside the anticipated benefits. While this is essential to underpin further discussions on a national licence, it will be a complicated piece of work.

### *Funding model*

35. One of the most tricky issues involved in introducing a national licence is determining how much each partner (for example, universities, businesses, the NHS and public libraries) should pay. There are a number of questions: for example, whether there should be an equal contribution from all partners; whether contributions should be based on current levels of payment for those organisations with existing research journal subscriptions; or whether contributions should be made in accordance with anticipated levels of use and/or available budget.

36. There are also issues to be resolved on the extent to which funding will be provided from existing budgets versus an additional (dedicated) government funding stream. These questions are beyond the scope of this paper and will need considerable stakeholder engagement.

### *Engaging stakeholders*

37. While a national licensing agreement is likely to be of most direct and immediate benefit to higher education institutions and publishers, it is important that the preparatory work recognises all potential beneficiaries are fully engaged and that the proposal is seen as jointly owned. Furthermore, the experience of implementing open access policies thus far suggests that the costs and effort of advocacy will be considerable, and need further thought. A truly national licence needs the devolved areas of the UK to support the project, which recent political developments may make more difficult.

### *Engaging publishers*

38. Not all publishers may wish to engage in a national licence and no one can force engagement on the reluctant. If a big number of smaller players or a small number of bigger players wants to continue with the current bilateral relationships, this might prevent a national licence from getting off the ground.

### *Security*

39. Without a guarantee that only UK Internet Protocol (IP) addresses may be used, it would be very difficult to persuade publishers to work towards the new system. Furthermore, even with such an agreement in place, it would take only one leak – either accidental or deliberate – for the system to be

called into question. Achieving a foolproof, fail-safe security protocol around the national licence requires a technical method of ensuring the authenticity of every UK-based IP address. Through work in tackling online copyright infringement, we know that such assurances can be difficult to come by, especially with the use of proxy servers. But it is not impossible. A key workstream in developing the national licence concept will be around this question of security and resilience.

### *Competition*

40. From the outset, care would have to be taken on competition law. Publishers need to be individually and collectively certain that they are not standing in legal danger by merely developing the concept, let alone delivering it. Furthermore, the government and whoever else sits on the other side of the negotiating table need absolute comfort that they are taking part in a fair and transparent discussion. The goal is to make the market work better rather than to stymie it.

### *Impact on the development of open access*

41. The arrival at something close to a settled will on the development of open access in the UK, following the Finch Report, could be undermined by this proposed dramatic change in licensing arrangements. Some people might ask



about the impact on the development of gold open access. We suggest that a national licence, through extending access to research outputs in the UK, is actually part of the transition towards gold open access. Researchers can continue to exercise choice in their journal of publication and Article Processing Charges can be offset against the national licence in the way they are now beginning to be offset against subscriptions. The prices charged for subscription to non-gold open access content would reflect the extent to which journals contain gold open access articles. If anything, the national licence takes forward the spirit of the Finch proposals by emphasising the accessibility of research while maintaining the bedrocks of sustainability and excellence.

## **Building a coalition**

42. The biggest point of difference between current arrangements and the national licence concept is that the latter brings a number of new entities into the room for the negotiations between publishers and institutions.

43. Establishing a national licence agreement will require the support of:

- senior university leaders (particularly among research-intensive universities);
- sector bodies and mission groups (such as Universities UK);
- representatives from the NHS and other UK medical institutions;

- research funders (including RCUK, the Funding Councils and charitable funders);
- Jisc Collections;
- university libraries;
- publishers;
- public libraries (perhaps through the British Library);
- independent researchers;
- business representatives;
- government departments and agencies; and
- interested citizens' groups.

44. Whilst the initial challenges are considerable, a national licence offers a chance for the UK to demonstrate international leadership. Indeed, if successful, it could provide a model for export to other countries, thereby recouping at least some of the costs of establishing it. But finding a fruitful way for publishers to interact with other stakeholders is vital.

### **Potential next steps**

45. We have outlined here some initial thoughts as to how a national licence might come about and a number of ways in which it could operate. We propose the following next steps.

- i. The UK Government should convene a high-level expert working group with representatives of all the key stakeholders to explore in further detail the merits, potential costs and operation of a national licence, including a detailed economic impact assessment.

- ii. Soundings should be taken from all the potential beneficiaries. Discussions should also be extended to those from outside these groups who may be able to provide additional insight and assistance – most importantly, IT security specialists and competition lawyers.
- iii. Particular stakeholder groups should be encouraged to convene in-depth discussions on the proposals – for example, publishers may do this through bodies such as the Publishers Association and the Association of Learned and Professional Society Publishers.

46. The expert working group would need to give explicit consideration to how the barriers discussed above and others may be resolved. For example, it could encourage:

- Jisc Collections to begin to explore the national licence and the negotiating arrangements on behalf of the sector;
- publishers to engage with universities and Jisc Collections to discuss putting a national licence into practice;
- higher education institutions to develop support and consider funding options for a national licence;
- the Government to develop the open access policy agenda and provide the necessary funding for a national licence as a transitional route towards full open access;
- funders to amend their current policies and engage in the debate; and
- libraries to take a leadership role in negotiations and security considerations.

## Conclusion

47. This paper is intended to initiate a discussion on the desirability and feasibility of a national licence in the UK. There will be different views among stakeholders. A 'coalition of the willing' may wish to take the idea further, with others either waiting in the wings or deciding from the outset not to be involved. On close reflection, some of the issues raised could prove to be so complex that it is not seen as a proposal to take forward. At this point, we should not see any outcome as more desirable but we should be open to further exploration and discussion, with the ultimate aim of strengthening the UK's research position and economic competitiveness in the national interest. If the national licence scheme were, in time, deemed to be unworkable, we would still need to ask the question: where next for open access?

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- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>16</sup> A. Swan and J. Houghton, *Going for Gold?: The costs and benefits of Gold Open Access for UK research institutions: further economic modelling*, Report to the UK Open Access Implementation Group, June 2012.

<sup>17</sup> Research Consulting, *Counting the Costs of Open Access: The estimated cost to UK research organisations of achieving compliance with open access mandates in 2013/14*, November 2014 – the report states gold open access takes two hours per article at a cost of £81, compared to green open access which takes just over 45 minutes per article, at a cost of £33.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* Costs for gold open access are estimated on the basis of 38,853 papers at £1,727 each, totalling £67 million, and the costs for national licensing are estimated at approximately £81 million, on the basis of higher education contributing £6-12 million, the NHS contributing £1-2 million and other parties contributing less. Estimate from a large publisher.

<sup>20</sup> Publishing Research Consortium, *Access to professional and academic information in the UK: A survey of SMEs, large companies, universities & colleges, hospitals & medical schools, governmental & research institutes (Companion report)*, Mark Ware Consulting, August 2009.

<sup>21</sup> Publishing Research Consortium, *Access by UK small and medium-sized enterprises to professional and academic information*, Mark Ware Consulting, August 2009; A. Swan, *Study on the Availability on UK Academic 'Grey Literature' to UK SMEs*, Report to the JISC Scholarly Communications Group, December 2008; British Library / JISC, *Researchers of Tomorrow: the research behaviour of Generation Y doctoral students*, June 2012.

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Academic research is, rightly, becoming easier to access. The potential benefits from giving companies, NHS staff and independent researchers access to the latest research are enormous. But the change brings big challenges too, especially for the UK's world-leading publishing industry.

At the moment, the UK's support for 'gold open access' risks giving the rest of the world our research without matching reciprocal benefits. This paper argues for a national licence scheme, which would provide online access to academic research from across the world free at the point of use to everyone in the UK. That could be the best way to deliver a sustainable approach to extending access that is in the UK's national interest.



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