

# Humanities Scientific Committee Opinion Paper



Open Access Opportunities for the Humanities  
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**SCIENCE  
EUROPE**  
Humanities Committee





# Open Access Opportunities for the Humanities

The Science Europe Scientific Committee for the Humanities affirms the principles and recommendations of the Science Europe Position Statement on ‘Principles for the Transition to Open Access to Research Publications’ (April 2013). However, the Committee recognises that Open Access is not as culturally embedded in Humanities disciplines as it is in other scientific areas.<sup>1</sup> Publishing practices and expectations about reputation, career development and achievement in Humanities research remain substantially focused on print rather than digital media. The rapid changes in Open Access policy and practice therefore present particular challenges for the Humanities.<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless, the Scientific Committee for the Humanities sees significant opportunities in these changing models for disseminating research. This paper therefore seeks to identify the areas within European Open Access policies in which there are distinct challenges for Humanities. It also posits directions of travel where an evolution of the current practices in the Humanities – relying heavily on hard copy publications, slow processes of peer review and extended embargo periods – could provide the prospect of greater impact of Humanities research, transformation in the methods of scholarly communication, and innovation in the processes of peer review.

Open Access presents positive opportunities for the archiving, access, distribution and use of Humanities research publications. Providing the transition to Open Access is made with a full understanding of the distinct practices and needs of Humanities disciplines, Open Access can provide transformational opportunities for these areas of research.

This document focusses on texts and repositories. However, in some of the Arts and Humanities disciplines, an important part of the research output is in a non-textual form, like archaeological excavations, exhibitions, artefacts and performances, or digital output. This output – and its relation to Open Access – brings in a new perspective that is beyond the scope of the present paper. The Committee does, however, support opening up the Open Access debate, and the ensuing Open Access policies, to include non-textual research production.

## Quality and Peer Review

The international reputation of some journals and publishing houses relies partially on their historic performance which is founded on robust systems of peer review. The standing of journals and publishers retains powerful currency in university promotion systems and in the assessments of panels for research grants. The ‘peer’ nature of peer review is equally highly regarded in the community, and there is concern that Open Access publications will not be subjected to sufficient quality control. However, established peer review processes and the deployment of experienced peer reviewers remain possible within an Open Access arena, while Open Access also allows for experimental methods of peer review, including post-publication peer review and open review.<sup>3</sup> Such processes themselves can contribute to richer communication and debate during the evolution of a work of scholarship.

The Scientific Committee affirms the importance of robust peer review for quality purposes, but recommends that the more flexible and experimental methods of peer review made possible by Open Access are fostered and developed.

## ► Books and Edited Volumes

One of the most striking features of Humanities scholarship is the crucial role of the book as the primary form of research output in many disciplines. The business models for Open Access publishing of monographs are evolving rapidly<sup>4</sup>, and the Committee welcomes the support that Science Europe Member Organisations are giving to initiatives that strengthen quality controlled Open Access book publishing. However, some Humanities scholars have been slower to change their habits. While the Scientific Committee recognises that the reputation of university presses and other scholarly publishing houses remains an important incentive for Humanities researchers, there are opportunities within Open Access developments for a more flexible and inventive use of the 'long form' publication than is possible within the limitations of hard copy. The Scientific Committee for the Humanities encourages Humanities researchers to take full advantage of these opportunities.

Open Access can also be considered as a means to make available numerous books whose copyrights have lapsed and/or whose publishers would not object to an open publication. This is particularly positive for Humanities research, given that older publications form a significant proportion of most research bibliographies.

## ► Repositories

The 'gold' model of Open Access, which involves the payment of Article Processing Charges (APCs), is less developed in the Humanities than in other scientific communities. However, institutional repositories provide equal opportunities for Humanities researchers to use a 'green' route for Open Access. Although Humanities disciplines have fewer subject-based repositories than other scientific disciplines, there are other forms of general repositories, such as regional ones.<sup>5</sup>

The Scientific Committee believes that repositories provide the best immediate opportunity for Humanities to disseminate their research to a wider audience during a period of transition, and would encourage an increase in the deposit of Humanities publications in well maintained and managed repositories. However, an essential pre-requisite to ensure wider uptake of Open Access options for researchers is that the quality of research must be evident to those searching the literature held in repositories. It is essential that publications placed in repositories have undergone rigorous peer review and that this is evidenced when such publications are placed in a repository. There is a need to map the criteria and categories being used by centralised repositories and university initiatives as they affect what can be found and how it can be used. Funding of research and university operations will need to recognise the magnitude of the task ahead, both in a transition to Open Access and in its final implementation. In this respect, the Committee was happy to see the recent report of the UK House of Commons Business, Innovation and Skills Committee on Open Access, recommending that the UK Government takes an active role in promoting standardisation and compliance across subject and institutional repositories.<sup>6</sup>

## ► Learned Societies and Professional Associations

In some parts of Europe (notably the UK), learned societies and professional associations depend, to a significant extent, on profits obtained from journal subscriptions to sustain their other activities – like the promotion of scholarships, prizes and other forms of scholarly endeavour – that positively contribute to the research ecosystem. This has led to some anxieties about loss of subscription income as Open Access becomes the norm but before APCs fully replace the income from subscriptions. However, other models of maintaining such activity (for example, direct subscriptions to the learned societies and professional associations rather than journal

subscriptions) are used in other parts of Europe.<sup>7</sup> The Scientific Committee would recommend that learned societies and professional associations continue to evolve their business models to ensure that they can flourish if subscriptions become a declining source of income for publishers.

### ▶ **Embargo Period**

It is well recognised that Humanities citation habits are distinct in that citations do not normally follow as rapidly from first publication as in other scientific disciplines. There are anxieties that allowing green Open Access too soon after first publication will lead to declining subscriptions for humanities journals, as libraries will be willing to wait for the Open Access version rather than subscribing to the original journal.

The Science Europe Position Statement on Open Access stresses that research papers should be made available in Open Access within six months following first publication but makes an exception for Social Sciences and Humanities, where a delay of a maximum of 12 months is proposed. The Scientific Committee recognises that there are differences between disciplines that may require variant embargo periods, but recommends that as Open Access becomes the norm, the embargo period for Humanities is gradually reduced.

### ▶ **(Re)-Use**

One of the key principles of Open Access is the immediate access to, and re-use of, original works of all types. For example, under the CC-BY license – one of the most popular public copyright licenses – authors agree to make articles legally available for re-use, without permission or fees, for virtually any purpose, as long as the author and original source are properly cited. The concept of ‘re-use’ operates differently in Humanities, where there is less of a reliance on large data sets but more of a concern about plagiarism (facilitated by digital print). There is also a culture that values an individual author’s unique form of expression and scholarly style.

However, new opportunities in the digital world enable re-use to take on new meaning. Re-use (strictly speaking ‘use’) is fundamental to the way Humanities research operates, as researchers build on the ideas and publications of their colleagues and predecessors. The Scientific Committee sees that (re)-use for Humanities could, for example, lead to more rapid citation and dissemination of research discoveries than are currently the norm. Therefore, provided that (re)-use is protected by license, and that copyright laws are respected, the Scientific Committee takes a positive attitude towards the re-use of work.

### ▶ **Languages other than English**

As language-based research is fundamental to much Humanities scholarly work, publication in languages other than English is also common. It is well recognised that Open Access compliance is at different stages of evolution in different parts of the world, and is better developed in many English-speaking countries. The Scientific Committee acknowledges that non-English language journals may well be the most appropriate venue for particular kinds of scholarly publication, and recognises that scholars who publish in these journals may have less opportunity in the short to medium-term to ensure that their publications are available through an Open Access route.

The Committee urges all bodies involved in research assessment and research funding to recognise this to ensure that researchers who rely on publications in such journals are not disadvantaged.

## Visual Images

Although publications in all disciplines may be accompanied by illustrations, one of the specific issues that many Humanities researchers must face as part of the publication process is the need to clear copyright on reproductions of visual images (works of art, artefacts and other objects in museums and private collections) that may involve a contractual agreement and/or a fee payment to the owner of the artefact, the museum or gallery and/or the photographer who took a picture of the image. Since these costs are often calibrated on the basis of the potential audience for the publication, an Open Access publication – with a potentially infinite audience – could incur prohibitive costs.

The Committee recommends that all bodies involved in research assessment and research funding recognise these constraints and costs when they require researchers to publish in Open Access journals.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

In view of the above, the Scientific Committee for the Humanities:

- Affirms the importance of robust peer review for quality purposes, but recommends that alternative methods of peer review made possible by Open Access are fostered and developed.
- Encourages Humanities researchers to take full advantage of new Open Access opportunities in book publishing.
- Believes that repositories provide the best immediate opportunity for Humanities to disseminate their research during a period of transition and encourages an increase in the deposit of Humanities publications in well maintained and managed repositories.
- Recommends that learned societies and professional associations continue to evolve their business models to ensure that they can flourish if subscriptions become a declining source of income for publishers.
- Recognises that there are differences between disciplines that may require variant embargo periods, but recommends that as Open Access becomes the norm, the embargo period for Humanities is gradually reduced.
- Takes a positive attitude towards the re-use of work, provided copyright laws are respected and (re)-use is protected by license.
- Acknowledges that non-English language journals may well be the most appropriate venue for particular kinds of scholarly publication, and urges all bodies involved in research assessment and research funding to recognise this to ensure that researchers who rely on publications in such journals are not disadvantaged.
- Recommends that all bodies involved in research assessment and research funding recognise the constraints and costs imposed by the use of visual images when they require researchers to publish in Open Access journals.

## Notes and References

1. *Proportion of Open Access Peer-Reviewed Papers at the European and World Levels – 2004-2011*, produced for European Commission DG Research and Innovation, RTD-B6-PP-2011-2, by Science Metrix, August 2013
2. British Academy, *Debating Open Access*, July 2013, [www.britac.ac.uk/openaccess/](http://www.britac.ac.uk/openaccess/)
3. See Peter Suber, *Open Access Overview*, <http://legacy.earlham.edu/~peters/fos/overview.htm>; and Kathleen Fitzpatrick, *Planned Obsolescence: Publishing, Technology and the Future of the Academy*, NYU Press, 2011.
4. For example, OAPEN, <http://oapen.org>; Open Library of Humanities, [www.openlibhums.org](http://www.openlibhums.org); Open Book Publishers, <http://openbookpublishers.com>; Knowledge Unlatched, [www.knowledgeunlatched.org](http://www.knowledgeunlatched.org); and Fonds zur Förderung der wissenschaftlichen Forschung (FWF) Open Access policy, <http://legacy.earlham.edu/~peters/fos/overview.htm>. For discussion of these and other recent developments, see 'Open Access Monographs in the Humanities and Social Sciences', conference 1-2 July 2013, London, [www.jisc-collections.ac.uk/JISC-Collections-events/oabooksconf/](http://www.jisc-collections.ac.uk/JISC-Collections-events/oabooksconf/)
5. See, for example, <http://hprints.org/>; Digital Research Infrastructure for the Arts and Humanities (DARIAH), [www.dariah.eu](http://www.dariah.eu); and Common Language Resources and Technology Infrastructure (CLARIN), [www.clarin.eu](http://www.clarin.eu). See also *OA Subject Repositories – an Overview*, by Bo-Christer Björk, to appear in the *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, [www.openaccesspublishing.org/repositories/Subject\\_Repositories.pdf](http://www.openaccesspublishing.org/repositories/Subject_Repositories.pdf).
6. House of Commons Business, Innovation and Skills Committee, *Open Access*, Fifth Report of Session 2013–14, September 2013.
7. *Why Open Access is Better for Scholarly Societies*, [blogs.law.harvard.edu/pamphlet/2013/01/29/why-open-access-is-better-for-scholarly-societies/](http://blogs.law.harvard.edu/pamphlet/2013/01/29/why-open-access-is-better-for-scholarly-societies/).

## This Opinion Paper has been produced by the Science Europe Scientific Committee for the Humanities

### ► About the Scientific Committee for the Humanities

Science Europe is informed and supported in its activities by six Scientific Committees composed of highly-authoritative academics from all over Europe, representing the broadest range of scientific communities and disciplines. The Committees act as the voice of researchers to Science Europe and are essential for the provision of scientific evidence to support science policy and strategy developments at pan-European and global level. The Scientific Committee for the Humanities uses an inclusive understanding of the humanities in which non-traditional humanities disciplines, such as digital humanities, education or performing arts and design, are also fully embedded.

Further information: [www.scienceeurope.org/humanities](http://www.scienceeurope.org/humanities)

For information please contact:

**Dr Eva Hoogland**, Senior Scientific Officer, Humanities  
[eva.hoogland@scienceeurope.org](mailto:eva.hoogland@scienceeurope.org)

### Members of the Science Europe Scientific Committee for the Humanities:

- **Professor Kirsten Drotner** (Chair), Chair of Media Studies at the Institute for the Study of Culture - Media Studies at the University of Southern Denmark
- **Professor Marianne Bakró-Nagy**, Head of the Department for Finno-Ugric and Historical Linguistics at the Research Institute for Linguistics, Hungarian Academy of Sciences
- **Professor Bruce Brown**, Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research and Professor of Design, University of Brighton, United Kingdom
- **Professor François de Callataÿ**, Professor at the Université Libre de Bruxelles and the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes, Paris/Sorbonne, France
- **Professor Thomas Kaiserfeld**, Professor of History of Ideas and Sciences at the Department of Arts and Cultural Sciences, Lund University, Sweden
- **Professor Margaret Kelleher**, Chair of Anglo-Irish Literature and Drama, University College Dublin, Ireland
- **Professor Kerstin Lidén**, Head of the Department of Archaeology and Classical Studies at Stockholm University, Sweden
- **Professor Allyson Macdonald**, School of Education, University of Iceland
- **Professor Lorenza Mondada**, Chair of General Linguistics and French Linguistics at the Department for Linguistics and Literature, University of Basel, Switzerland
- **Professor Cristina de la Puente**, Scientific Co-ordinator of the CSIC Humanities and Social Sciences Centres, Madrid, Spain
- **Professor Jean-Marie Schaeffer**, Research Director at the CNRS and Director of Studies at the EHESS, Paris, France
- **Professor Matti Sintonen**, Professor of Philosophy, University of Helsinki and Associate of the Finnish Centre of Excellence for the Social Sciences, Finland
- **Professor Jo Tollebeek**, Professor of Cultural History, University of Leuven, Belgium
- **Professor Anthonya Visser**, Institute for Cultural Disciplines, Leiden University, The Netherlands
- **Professor Shearer West**, Professor of Art History and Head (Dean) of the Humanities Division, University of Oxford, United Kingdom

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