

9th August 2021

STM response to UKRI Open Access Policy

STM welcomes the positives contained in the publication of the UKRI Open Access policy. Our members appreciate that UKRI recognises that adequate and sustainable funding for full OA (Gold) is fundamental to ensuring the long-term sustainability and integrity of high-quality research publication. The acknowledgement that longer timescales are required for the implementation on monographs is also welcomed, as is the recognition of the need for embargoes for long-form publications.

Despite these positives however, we continue to have significant concerns that the policy will ultimately stand to harm the integrity of the scholarly record and constrain researchers' freedom to choose the most appropriate outlet for the publication of their work.

We are deeply concerned that the UKRI policy gives equivalent status to the subscription-tied Accepted Manuscript (Green) and the full OA publication of the Version of Record (Gold). By doing so, and by requiring zero embargoes in the Accepted Manuscript (Green) route, UKRI is encouraging the widespread utilisation of freely available substitutes of final published articles (Versions of Record). Given the unfinished and unconnected nature of the AM, this has the potential to both confuse its users and to undermine the integrity of the scholarly record and therefore of UK research. It also jeopardises the continued progress of the Open Access publishing transition by enabling an entirely unsustainable route.

STM shares UKRI's belief that it is vital that researchers retain the freedom to publish in the publication outlet of their choice. However, UKRI's policy potentially excludes specialist publishers who do not have transformative agreement in place with Jisc and who cannot support zero embargo publication of accepted manuscripts. Similarly, it constrains the freedoms of authors who cannot readily access funds for Article Publishing Charges where their preferred publisher does not support the AM route.

The UK is at the leading-edge of the global transition to Open Access and is on track for the number of full OA articles published within the UK market to exceed 90% by the end of 2021. Publishers have worked determinedly with other key stakeholders to ensure that the open evolution of the UK scholarly communications environment has been both rapid, but also crucially, enduring. This has resulted in many journals already offering compliant routes to Open Access. Transformative agreements have been a vital method for helping to achieve this.

We urge the UKRI Board to carefully consider these issues in the implementation of its new policy so as not to threaten the momentum the UK has built up. Publishers stand ready to support that implementation and hope that it offers the beginning of an ongoing discussion on the best paths for achieving the shared goals of the research community.