

Irish Humanities Alliance Position Paper:

Open Access and the Humanities

April 2021



Introduction

This position paper on ‘Open Access and the Humanities’ has been prepared by a working group of the Irish Humanities Alliance (IHA) Board to represent the perspectives of the Irish humanities research community as the Irish research system [transitions to open access](#). Open access may be defined, broadly, as the process through which research outputs are distributed online, free of cost or other access barriers. Furthermore, ‘gold open access’ refers to the publication of research in an online open access journal whereas ‘green open access’ refers to the self-archiving of a publication in an open access repository. Diamond open access is a not-for-profit publishing practice that represents an upgrade from the Gold model.

As per our [February 2019 statement](#) on ‘Plan S’, which outlines the alignment of open access policies of national, supranational and charitable research funders towards a number of key principles, the IHA broadly welcomes the principles underpinning open access. Open access promotes the exchange of knowledge and the dissemination of research findings – so critical to informed citizenship and the ideal of an open, democratic society. We welcome initiatives that facilitate the dissemination of scholarship to a wider audience and acknowledge, in particular, the desirability of making the outputs of publicly funded research more freely available. We see that these developments will have a transformative impact on research and academic development more generally, and therefore wish to engage in shaping a resourced open research ecosystem which facilitates access to research on a broad scale, inclusive of research produced by individual researchers not associated with specific grants.

However, very significant differences exist between the different fields of study and the transition to open access needs to be balanced against these, and the principles of academic freedom and scholarly reputation.¹ While grants are very significant, many researchers in the humanities develop work on an individual basis, rather than working as members of funded research teams. Humanities institutes, departments and researchers in Ireland are internationally recognised as leaders across several fields. It is therefore imperative that open access strategies at national level are responsive to the needs of the humanities researcher community and promote continued research excellence. We welcome this opportunity to outline the variations in publishing practices that exist across our disciplines and we urge those developing a National Action Plan for the transition to an open research environment to ensure that it will serve the needs of all disciplines, including the arts and humanities. As this paper shows, the IHA is keen to engage in a productive dialogue and we aim to work towards an open access policy that protects the diverse expressions of humanities scholarship. Our main points to consider may be summarised as:

Summary:

1. We advocate for an open access strategy that takes account of and is responsive to the diversity of research fields, the specific publishing practices of the humanities disciplines, and publishers that advance knowledge in highly specialised disciplines;
2. That the transition to open access needs to be balanced with the principles of academic freedom and scholarly reputation;
3. That there is appropriate investment in the development of open access infrastructures to ensure a successful transition that works for authors and readers, and that also supports and is available to researchers working outside of existing grant infrastructure on individual projects;
4. That green open access, with flexibility around embargoes (18, 24 and 36 month), be available to researchers required to publish their work open access;
5. That maintaining research and scholarly excellence in the humanities must remain the core pillar of the research process through robust peer-review;
6. That there is a clear definition of ‘publicly funded research’ and criteria as to what constitutes a requirement to publish open access;

¹ Irish Humanities Alliance, *By Imagination We Live: a strategy for the humanities, 2020-2030* (Dublin, 2019), p. 14.

7. That any future consideration of monographs in open access guidance,² recognise that the monograph remains the main currency for career development within most fields in the humanities, as reiterated by Professor Geoffrey Crossick in his work on the monograph and open access publishing, and acknowledge that the monograph, which requires a significant editorial and publishing infrastructure, poses unique challenges in relation to open access.³
8. That resources are put in place to enable individual researchers and researchers working outside of grant infrastructures to make their work open access, given the increasing importance of open access to citation metrics and academic progression.

Open Access and the Humanities Overview

The humanities research community has long been dedicated to the principle of openness, and to sharing research as widely as possible, to many different groups and stakeholders.⁴ Researchers share their work through different forms of media, including radio and television broadcasting, podcasting, newspapers and blogs, exhibitions, public talks and participation across the public sphere more broadly. Humanities researchers work with many different stakeholders across civil society, including within the areas of education, public heritage and history, policy development, and local and national government, in order to ensure that research is shared, available, and accessible. These are important examples of openness, and reflect ongoing, vital connections between humanities researchers and society.

Open access publication provides opportunities for researchers to share their research widely, to expand their career trajectories, and to enhance research networks. Open access is especially advantageous to independent researchers unable to avail of institutional subscriptions to academic journals. It also provides opportunities for the investment in research by funding bodies to be of benefit more broadly to society. It will enable researchers to network more effectively with peers elsewhere, leading to international collaborations. Open access provides important opportunities for creative arts practice researchers to disseminate their work through, for example, green open access repositories, as well as national and international open access archives. However, the transition to open access does raise some questions for the humanities research community:

1. Costs of Open Access publications

Our first concern relates to the cost of open access publishing. Some gold open access models require the author to pay for the cost of open access. This will be extremely problematic for early career researchers without grant support that includes open access costs, as well as teams and individual researchers at all career stages across the humanities. While recent agreements with significant publishers regarding article open access costs are welcomed, they do not cover many of the significant humanities journals or monographs for humanities disciplines.

Existing research grants that will require open access for research outputs (including open access monograph costs) must be included as an additional element within research grants. National funding streams to support open access projects across disciplines should be also made available.

Enabling green open access, inclusive of monographs within institutional-level publisher agreements, and creating dedicated funding streams to support open access will mitigate against these risks. A

² See: <https://www.coalition-s.org/faq-theme/oa-monographs/> and, NORF, *National Framework on the Transition to an Open Research Environment* (July 2019), available here: <https://repository.dri.ie/catalog/0287dj04d>

³ Geoffrey Crossick, 'Monographs and Open Access', available here: <https://insights.uksg.org/articles/10.1629/uksg.280/>

⁴ See, for example, the IHA's statement on Plan S, available here: <https://www.irishhumanities.com/assets/Uploads/Plan-S-IHA-Statement.pdf> and the EASSH roundtable on Plan S, available here: https://eassh.eu/EASSH%20Documents/EASSH_OPERAS_shortreport_FNL.pdf

flexible approach to embargoes is required in order to ensure that humanities researchers can continue to publish in leading journals – we suggest options of 18 month/ 24 month and 36 month for required embargo period, reflecting specific publisher practices at present.

Without appropriate action, a blanket requirement for gold open access with no green open access options would likely lead to humanities researchers losing their competitive position in relation to national and international research funding, as well as their capacity to engage with leading, highly-ranked modes of publication and research dissemination.

2. Role of scholarly societies and associations

Scholarly societies and associations play a central role within the humanities research ecosystem, both at national and international scales. These associations are often independent, and employ a small staff in order to provide essential research infrastructure such as conferences, research grants, and publications (i.e. journals that are prestigious in the humanities disciplines, edited book collections or editions of texts - which make a valued scholarly contribution in their field). Subscription fees normally include access to research journals, and these fees are essential in order to fund the running of the associations. These form an integral part of humanities research infrastructure.

Mandating open access publications may undermine the existence of these associations. However, green open access agreements could be put in place in order to meet the requirements of open access and maintain their position within their respective fields. Ongoing engagement with these associations in order to promote and support open research approaches where possible is also recommended.

3. Multiplicity of research outputs

Humanities research involves multiple forms of research output, including but not limited to monographs, edited books, journal articles, book chapters, textual editions, exhibitions, exhibition catalogues, digital collections, maps, as well as creative research outputs which may include performances, art works, compositions and works of choreography. Humanities research can also include collaborative and community-based research outputs, as well as reports and policy documents. This multiplicity must be reflected within the broader open access infrastructure, and its associated frameworks and requirements, being developed. This is particularly the case for creative arts practitioners working in our humanities departments, whose works are protected by copyright law, and whose commercial publishers (often small, specialised entities) retain copyright as essential to their business model of producing professional-standard documentation of culturally important, but often specialist, work. Limiting practitioner's ability to disseminate their work through appropriate specialist channels risks undermining fields of creative practice-based research and enquiry.

While open access can provide opportunities for creative arts practice researchers, it can also present distinctive challenges, particularly in the area of copyright and CC licenses. University based arts practice initiatives such as [Visioning the Future](#) are committed to open access sharing of resources, as is [IMBAS](#), the national forum for arts practice researchers and artists in Ireland. IMBAS engages in strategic and collaborative policy development within Irish Higher Education and seeks to influence the development of wider sectoral and national policy regarding performing arts research in Ireland. IMBAS is currently involved in a nationwide survey of policy around arts practice outputs, and open access policies and procedures form an important aspect of this work.

In some cases, copyright issues may need to be taken into consideration (particularly through the use of licensed illustrations). There are opportunities to engage with European level projects such as

Europeana in order to enhance and strengthen the nature of open access at a national level, and further promote the reach and scope of Irish humanities research. However, these different types of research output need to be considered within the framing of national policy and strategy, with discipline-specific expertise and best practice internationally taken into account.

4. Minority language publisher business models

Irish-language researchers, and those who disseminate their research through the Irish language, rely on Irish-language publications such as journals, edited volumes and monographs as the primary vehicles for research output. These works are for the most part published by a handful of specialised Irish-language publishers. Such publications are highly prestigious within the field, and are an integral part of the research ecosystem. Many operate as small businesses, and their business models cannot accommodate open access at present. Other Irish-language publications, such as those produced by scholarly societies, survive on a subscription-only model as do the majority of the journals.

5. Consideration of the national academic publishing landscape

Academic publishers on the island of Ireland are an important part of the humanities research ecosystem. They must be considered as key stakeholders within the transition to an open research landscape, and integrated into discussions and consultations around open access and open research.

Our recommendations are summarised as follows:

Recommendations

- a. Where gold open access is not feasible, green open access within national and institutional level repositories should be acceptable where open access is a requirement for research outputs. It is worth noting that there are likely to be embargo periods on even the accepted versions and most publishers do not allow replication of print versions (this includes inserting print pagination references). However, green open access within institutional or national repositories provides a valuable opportunity to humanities researchers to ensure that research is made available, as well as ensuring that links to the published format with a citation are provided;
- b. In the future development of open access, explore and consider best practice in relation to the role of the monograph and open access publishing, and look at funding models/ institution-level agreements with publishers in relation to open access for monographs and edited collections as well as articles;
- c. Explore and consider best practice in relation to integrating principles of open access with minority language publications and national publishers in order to maintain a supported and robust research ecosystem in this area;
- d. Explore the integration of Licensing: Creative Commons Non-Commercial No Derivatives (CC BY-NC-ND) within open access policy and strategy at a national level. Opting for this license is likely to be most suitable, as it permits sharing without alteration. Creative practitioners might choose to permit re-use in relation to their research outputs. However, artists' rights over their creative works are protected by copyright law (e.g. <https://visualartists.ie/copyright/>) and it may not be feasible for such works to be released as open access;
- e. Take into account the opportunities and challenges posed by the multiplicity of research outputs across humanities research fields; and the need for humanities researchers within an international field to continue to publish or otherwise disseminate their work in appropriate specialist forms.

- f. Continue engagement between the Irish Humanities Alliance and the National Open Research Forum (NORF) in order to ensure that norms and practices for AHSS disciplines are taken into account in the design of national policy and strategy.

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Further information

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