



## Meeting the challenges of supporting OA monographs: our experience at the University of Essex

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There are an increasing number of ways to support open access monographs. However, increased possibilities have also brought increased challenges. What do all the different models mean? Which models should we support? We models *can* we support? These are just a few of the questions we've been asking at the University of Essex.

### Decision making

The University of Essex is a dual intensive university, focusing on excellence in both research and education. This affects the way we evaluate how and on what we spend our money. We tend to have three aspects to consider:

1. What are our academics reading for their research?
2. Where are our researchers looking to publish?
3. What are the developing areas of teaching?

Our research-led education focus means these areas tend to overlap; however, these considerations add an extra layer when deciding on content to purchase or new open access initiatives to support.

### Supporting open access publishing

Our [institutional open research position statement](#) states that Essex research should be “as open as possible, and as closed as necessary”. We therefore [support open access publishing](#) in a variety of ways.

Presently, we have [nineteen read and publish agreements](#) (or similar) available to Essex researchers, that allow journal articles to be published open access with no added costs to authors. We also have a **UKRI** block grant, so UKRI-funded authors can make use of this fund for open access publications. While we don't currently have an institutional rights retention policy, we do encourage our authors to include rights retention statements on

submissions. This is especially important when publishing with subscription journals, or hybrid journals not covered by read and publish agreements.

The most recent development in our support for open access publication is our institutional [open access fund](#). From August 2022, we were given a small pilot fund for the payment of article processing charges (APCs) in fully gold open access journals. From June 2023, this fund was extended to cover the payment of book processing charges (BPCs), and chapter processing charges (CPCs).

This extension of the fund has been well received by our researchers, with interest across various departments including Law, Language and Linguistics, Government, and Health and Social Care. With minimal promotion so far, we already have fourteen potential books and five potential chapters lined up to be published using the fund, with one book already published OA. With further promotion planned for the upcoming Autumn term, we expect interest in the fund to grow.

### **Supporting open access monographs**

Despite the positives of the open access fund, there are restrictions as to how this money can be spent. Currently, payment can only be made from the fund for BPCs and CPCs, not for community models or other diamond open access initiatives. This is due to financial decision makers at Essex requiring that there be direct ‘tangible benefits’ for our researchers. With a BPC, the money is spent on an Essex researcher’s book being published open access. With community initiatives, there is a less obvious cause-and-effect outcome for the investment.

We do support two alternative OA monograph models: ‘Opening the Future’, specifically for [CEU Press](#), and [MIT Press](#)’ ‘Direct to Open’. This has been possible due to direct ‘tangible benefits’ as our budget provides access to content, regardless of whether the OA target is reached. However, payment for these models comes from our collections development budget; for any OA publishing initiative with no content guaranteed to be purchased this wouldn’t be possible.

### **Challenges with monographs**

It therefore becomes clear that we face a challenge when it comes to supporting alternative models of publishing OA monographs. This challenge has three causes: a lack of understanding, a lack of data, and a lack of budget flexibility.

The lack of understanding amongst financial decision makers is understandable; the OA monograph publishing landscape is complicated. However, the real difficulty comes from not having a platform to explain this landscape, as well as senior leaders not having the time to invest in learning. The same is true for appreciating the unsustainability of the BPC model. For those of us working in this landscape the unsustainability of the BPC model seems obvious, but without the time to understand this it is unlikely to be questioned.

Lack of data is a potentially more difficult problem to overcome. Understandably, senior leaders want to make data-informed decisions around budgets, and yet data is lacking on where Essex’ monographs have been previously published, and more pertinently where Essex

researchers might want to publish in the future. It's also not easy to find reliable data on where our researchers are finding or reading monograph content, which further hinders decision making when taking a content-driven approach.

While we are in a strong position with our open access fund, budget flexibility is a problem. Not only is our OA fund restricted to BPCs and CPCs, but our collections development budget also lacks flexibility. The hope this year was that money left at the end of the financial year could be invested to support alternative OA monograph models, but internal changes to the set-up of our budgets meant this wasn't possible.

These three challenges are distinct, but also impact upon each other. For example, a lack of budget flexibility has meant we haven't been able to trial any new models. This has then contributed to a lack of data on both value for money and researcher opinion, and this lack of data then makes it even more difficult to increase the understanding of our senior leaders.

### **Patience and perseverance**

Yet there are ways we can move forward, and patience and perseverance will be essential.

The first action we plan to take is to increase the understanding of OA monograph publishing within the library team. This will allow the collaborative development of processes for both decision making and evaluating new models and can ensure new workflows are comparable to those we have for more traditional resourcing models.

We also plan to use the additional time we have whilst convincing senior leads to allow more flexibility with the funds to speak to our researchers. If we can better understand our researchers' thoughts and priorities, their voices can help us to make the argument for supporting more diverse OA publishing models.

The additional time we have will also enable us to learn from other institutions' experiences. Understanding where others have found value for money, where their researchers have benefitted from increased publishing options, and how they have found funds to support alternative models will help us to be confident with the approaches we are taking. While we would love to be leading the way, there are some benefits to being patient.

Additionally, we understand the importance of perseverance, and have reflected upon how UKRI have had a similar argument to make as us but on a much larger scale. It has become clear that UKRI funding will be able to be used to support alternative models of OA monograph publishing, and we hope to use this to help with our own argument at Essex.

Ultimately, confidence and timing are the most important aspects for us. Firstly, we need to be confident in our arguments, and have enough evidence to draw upon to show that the decision to diversify funds to support alternative models of publishing monographs OA is a no-brainer, and not a gamble. Secondly, we need to be sure that when we come to making the case to senior leaders that they have time to consider our arguments, and that the timing appears sensible to bring about changes based on both the situation at Essex, and in the scholarly publishing landscape more broadly.

For us then, meeting the challenges of supporting open access monographs will be exactly that – a challenge. But by persevering now in order to make a strong argument at the correct time, we're confident it will be a challenge worth working through.