



Open-Access and long-form (book) publishing in the 2027 REF exercise:

A briefing note for UK-based historians

HEFCE has recently confirmed that all long-form research published in book form will have to be made available in Open Access (OA) formats in order to be submitted for the Research Excellence Framework exercise due in 2027. Dr Steven Hill of HEFCE has outlined their current thinking [here](#).

We are barely 1000 days away from this new regime coming into effect, and all university-based historians (as well as all researchers publishing in collaboration with them) should be alive to the (many) implications of this decision, which will affect the REF-eligibility of **all** book-length publications published after 2020.

The Royal Historical Society recognises the many merits of OA formats, and has recently launched its own OA monograph series, [New Historical Perspectives](#). However, the proposed HEFCE protocols raise numerous issues which will require quite rapid resolution if the quality and diversity of historical publications released by British historians are to be maintained after 2020. Amongst these are:

- 1) **Funding the transition to Open Access:** given the paucity of bespoke research funding in the arts and social sciences and the correspondingly high proportion of research funds subsidised by REF quality-related (QR) funds rather than external grants (at least as compared to STEM disciplines), how is a sustainable publication model to emerge for the Arts & Humanities (A&H)?
- 2) **Peer Review and Quality Assurance:** both peer review and proper curation of published research carry financial costs, as registered by author article- or book-processing charges (APCs or BPCs). What funding arrangements will guarantee that current standards of peer review and long-form text curation (including series-editing and copy-editing) are maintained? Will authors at all of the 80-plus UK universities with History provision have equal access to funds for costs such as BPCs? Will early career researchers who lack permanent university posts have equal access to these funds?
- 3) **Embargo periods:** if modes of Green Open Access are adopted, what embargo periods will be chosen and what will be the impact of these be (if any) on publishing models and the sustainability thereof?

- 4) **International Reach of UK A&H Research:** how will such a proposal impact those many British scholars who currently choose to publish with scholarly imprints or learned societies based outside the UK and not subject to UK Open Access protocols? Will UK researchers, for example, lose the ability to publish their works in prestigious North American monograph series in their sub-specialisms, and/or to publish research in languages other than English with European imprints? Will UK researchers publishing co-authored works with international collaborators be exempt from these protocols?
- 5) **Trade or Crossover titles with general appeal:** some of the most important and influential historical works are published by major general publishers like Penguin Books or by imprints (like Princeton UP or Yale UP) specialising in work that attracts both a scholarly and a more general audience. These works bring UK historical scholarship to the attention of global reading audiences. Will this publication option no longer exist for university-based UK historians?
- 6) **Small and specialist society imprints:** at the other end of the scale, much UK historical research is published by a substantial array of small local, regional or county-based historical imprints with impeccable publication standards, often subscription-based. The proposed protocols represent a substantial challenge to these bodies' publishing activities. How will their sustainability be guaranteed?
- 7) **Discoverability:** ultimately the biggest challenge for all types of scholarly research, and how will the currently (rather expensive) instruments of global discoverability be maintained under any proposed new models? It is worth stressing in this context that discoverability is *not* the same thing as access.
- 8) **The enduring traction of print:** much evidence suggests that print, and not on-line reading, remains the preferred mode for the large majority of readers of long-form research. How will this preference be accommodated, going forward?
- 9) **Freedom to choose?** The current proposals militate adversely against the freedom of individual academics to choose where to offer their own work for publication. This is becoming an increasingly thorny question, both in the UK and Europe, and in North America, and has come up frequently in discussions about the United Kingdom Scholarly Communications Licence. Strong supporters of Open Access protocols argue that the freedoms of faculty are currently much more circumscribed (by extra-publication considerations) than they think, and that an element of compliance is necessary to achieve the sort of widespread transition to Open Access that (e.g.) HEFCE and its successor UKRI are seeking. Others disagree, profoundly.

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