

# Research and the Scholarly Communications Process: Towards Strategic Goals for Public Policy

A Statement of Principles

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## A Statement of Principles

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This statement builds on discussions which the Research Information Network initiated during 2006 with a range of stakeholders, notably from the library, publishing and research funding communities. The purpose of this dialogue was to identify the fundamental goals for public policy in relation to the scholarly communications process.

An articulation of these goals is important to enable Government and the other key players to develop a clear policy framework to support effective scholarly communications as an essential underpinning of effective high-impact research and knowledge transfer. Recognising this, the organisations below have signed up to the statement and to the principles that it enunciates.

Both research and scholarly communications are of course international in scope, and the UK is a significant player in a global endeavour. The focus of this statement is on the goals for public policy in a UK context.

**The Association of Learned and Professional Society Publishers**

**The British Library**

**The Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals**

**The Consortium of Research Libraries in the British Isles**

**The Department for Trade and Industry**

**The Higher Education Funding Council for England**

**The International Association of Scientific, Technical and Medical Publishers**

**The Joint Information Systems Committee**

**The Museums, Libraries and Archives Council**

**The Publishers Association**

**Research Councils UK**

**The Research Information Network**

**The Society of College, National and University Libraries**

**The Wellcome Trust**

## Introduction

The scholarly communications process involves a range of closely-linked activities that contribute to fulfilling seven broad purposes or objectives which flow roughly in sequence:

- 1 the pursuit of research aimed at generating new knowledge and understanding
- 2 assuring the quality of the information outputs generated by researchers
- 3 ensuring appropriate recognition and reward for all those engaged in the scholarly communications process
- 4 presenting, publishing and disseminating information outputs digitally, orally, in print and other forms
- 5 facilitating access to and use of information outputs by researchers and others who have an interest in them
- 6 assessing and evaluating the usage and impact of information outputs
- 7 preserving digital, printed and other information outputs, so that those of long-term value are accessible for the indefinite future

Both the purposes and the activities to support them overlap, and information outputs come in many different forms, disseminated through both formal publications and more informal mechanisms. Moreover, the roles and responsibilities of the actors in scholarly communications – researchers, funders, publishers, librarians and others - are changing under the stimulus of new technologies, and the growth of new mechanisms for communicating the results of research. Nevertheless, the purposes set out above provide a framework for developing a better understanding of the scholarly communications process.

## 1 The pursuit of research and generation of new knowledge and understanding

Research is funded by a wide range of public, charitable and commercial organisations. The motivations behind such investment are various, but from a UK public policy perspective there are two key aims in view:

- first, to generate new knowledge and understanding of the world in which we live and the universe beyond
- second, to solve problems, to promote and sustain innovation in the economy and the provision of public services, and to improve the quality of life in the UK and overseas

The two aims are closely related, and researchers and funders will vary in the priority they give to one or the other in different funding schemes and projects. But the key goals for public policy are clear, seeking to ensure that

- the UK sustains a world-class research base which attracts a strong supply of highly-skilled people both from the UK and overseas
- the UK research base is supported with world-class facilities and infrastructure, with growing levels of investment from both the UK and overseas, so that it sustains high productivity at the highest levels of international excellence
- there is growing engagement between the research base, business, and the providers of public services, so that UK research supports a vibrant UK economy and society
- UK research makes a significant contribution to sustainable development in other countries, and enhances the UK's standing around the world
- there is across UK society, and where possible overseas, strong confidence in and awareness of the achievements of UK researchers.

Scholarly communications is an essential part of the research process. Achieving the fundamental aims of investment in research, or the key goals for public policy outlined above, depends on an effective scholarly communications system for the UK. High-quality research demands high-quality scholarly communications.

## 2 Assuring the quality of information outputs

It has long been accepted that the information outputs communicated to other researchers and to the wider community must be subject to effective quality assurance, and that this is best achieved through rigorous scrutiny by the research community itself, called peer review.

Citation analysis and other post-publication indicators (see under 6 below) are also important, but do not negate the need for peer review. The key goals for public policy are therefore that

- published research results should be subject to quality assurance through rigorous peer review
- experimentation and innovation in peer review procedures and timing are encouraged, including open peer review and less formal web-based approaches
- where appropriate, datasets and other information outputs that are made available for re-use, but not formally published, should be subject to peer review
- it is made unambiguously clear to researchers and others who gain access to research outputs whether or not they have been subject to peer review
- participation in peer review is recognised as an essential responsibility of the research community

- where information outputs are updated, annotated or amended after initial dissemination a clear lineage should be presented to users, with clarity as to where and how they can gain access to the most up-to-date version.

### 3 Ensuring appropriate recognition and reward

Recognition and reward are fundamental to the scholarly communications process, and the purposes of the UK intellectual property framework are – or should be - consonant with the purposes for which public and commercial bodies support research: to support creativity and innovation, ensuring both the sharing of knowledge and appropriate rewards for those who generate new ideas and knowledge and invest in innovation. In the context of scholarly communications, the key goals for public policy are that

- there are reasonable levels of recognition, reward and protection for those who create new knowledge and understanding, and for those who provide financial and other forms of support for them
- there are reasonable levels of reward for publishers and others who invest in mechanisms for communicating the outputs of research
- access to research outputs, particularly those stemming from public investment, should be provided as speedily and effectively as possible, so that researchers and members of other communities can read and make use of the latest research results
- a balance is struck in the public interest between the requirements for recognition, reward and protection for rights-holders on the one hand, and for speedy and effective access by users on the other
- the IP regime should be as simple and comprehensible as possible, and that both rights-holders and users are made fully aware of their rights and responsibilities, including how and with whom to negotiate.

### 4 Presenting, publishing and disseminating research outputs

The fundamental principle here is that the information outputs of research, particularly publicly-funded research, should be made available as widely, rapidly and effectively as possible using the full range of available technologies, techniques and media. The key goals for public policy are therefore that

- the results of research are presented to high standards, for the benefit both of the research community and of others who have an interest in them
- researchers, publishers and others are innovative in exploiting new technologies, new publication and dissemination models and a variety of media to communicate the results of research as widely, rapidly and effectively as possible
- the UK's world-class infrastructure of academic publishing, information and communications services is sustained, with the necessary investment and skills base to ensure continuing innovation
- an appropriate market environment is sustained, with fair competition between the various providers of publishing, information and communications services, and effective partnership between bodies in the public, commercial and charitable sectors.

## 5 Facilitating access to and use of information outputs

Easy and effective access to and use of information outputs depends on the interlocking roles and partnerships between publishers, libraries, and intermediary service providers; data centres and repositories; search and navigation services; and network services. All depend on each other in creating an information infrastructure to ensure that researchers and others are made aware of, and can readily discover, access and use the information outputs of interest to them. The key goals for public policy are therefore that

- the UK develops and sustains a world-class information infrastructure that facilitates access to and use of research outputs in a cost-effective way
- access is provided in managed environments which emphasise ease of discovery and use, with as few restrictions as possible
- there is effective partnership between publishers, libraries and other service providers in investing in the development of the information infrastructure.

## 6 Assessing and evaluating performance, usage and impact

In order to facilitate decision-making by researchers, funders, publishers, librarians and others involved in the support of research and scholarly communications, we need systematic evidence both on the performance and achievements of the UK research base, and on the functioning of the scholarly communications system itself. The key goals for public policy are therefore that

- there are effective and systematic procedures to monitor and evaluate usage and impact both of different vehicles for publication, dissemination, and access; and of individual information outputs
- there is reliable information about, and regular independent review of, key aspects of the performance of the scholarly communications system in the UK
- evaluation, for funding and other purposes, of research performance at departmental, institutional, and national levels can be supported as appropriate by reliable bibliometric measures or other appropriate metrics.

## 7 Long-term preservation of information outputs

For all areas of research - even those where researchers make little or no use of older information outputs - an authoritative record is needed for future generations of the key information outputs of the UK research community. The challenge now is to ensure that appropriate arrangements are made for the long-term preservation of both printed and digital publications and data. The key goals for public policy are therefore that

- systematic arrangements are in place, with an appropriate statutory and institutional framework, permanently to preserve and provide access to an archive of the published outputs of the UK research base, and of leading scientists in other parts of the world, whether in printed or digital formats
- there are appropriate arrangements for managing the unpublished records and outputs of the UK research base, and for selecting and preserving those of long-term value
- the UK develops and sustains a world-class infrastructure of services and expertise in digital curation and preservation.

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