Why OA (for books), and why collective funding?

- **Traditional academic monograph sales are declining. The sector needs some kind of change in order to survive: OA is a more cost effective way to fund and produce these books for the academic market.**
- **OA is increasingly important and in some places mandated. While this has generally applied to journals, books are catching up.**
- **Book Processing Charges (BPCs) are not equitable and do not work at the scale necessary to change the broader publishing landscape.**
- **Opening the Future was developed as a collective funding model that would be able to fund OA books equitably, sustainably and affordably.**

Can the academic monograph publishing sector afford to keep working the way it always has?

Industry reports examining the state of scholarly publishing have identified that traditional sales of humanities and social science academic books are declining – and yet we are still working as a sector in much the same way we always have, largely based on a print paradigm. According to the Ithaka S+R Print Revenue and Open Access Monographs report from September 2023, written in collaboration with the Association of University Presses, there has been a ‘decline in monograph sales over the last couple of decades, [and] margins on academic books are so thin that publishers may fear that anything that threatens to cannibalize anticipated print sales of a scholarly title … is a threat to its viability’. (Interestingly, the same report goes on to conclude in its Key Insights that ‘OA titles can generate significant print revenue [and] OA titles can generate meaningful digital revenue’.)

Furthermore, as far back as 2017 a comprehensive AHRC/British Library report, ‘Academic Books and their Future’ , warned that ‘publishers are concerned that their e-book revenues do not adequately fill the gap left by declining print sales [while] libraries chafe at the costs of many of the choices they have to make.’ So the scholarly publishing world is changing. We argue therefore that the HE sector needs to adapt to this changing world and that open access is a factor in those changes. It is certainly a factor when the scholarly work has been publicly funded and the labour

involved in writing and reviewing has been given willingly by scholars.

Simply put, collective funding OA models are a more cost-effective way to publish these books.

[These two paragraphs have been cribbed from a longer article in the UKSG journal *Insights*, a link to which is below, along with links to the other two reports cited above]

- ? Grady T, Sykes E, Eve MP "How can we achieve sustainable funding for open access books?," Insights, 2025, 38: 4, 1–9; DOI: https://doi.org/10.1629/uksg.673
- ? Laura Brown et al., *Print Revenue and Open Access Monographs: A University Press Study*, (Research Report, Ithaka S+R, September 19, 2023), https://doi.org/10.18665/sr.319642 (accessed 24 October 2024).
- ? Michael Jubb, *Academic Books and their Future. A Report to the AHRC and the British Library*, (London, Research Report, 2017, p.72), https://academicbookfuture.files.wordpress.com/2017/06/academic-books-and-their-futures_jubb1.pdf (accessed 24 October 2024)

Benefits of OA for books

Since the Budapest Open Access Initiative in 2002, open access has become an increasingly major component of scholarly publishing and research dissemination. There are many reasons for this, including obvious benefits of increasing access to publications like increased usage and citations. Additionally, open access allows researchers whose institutions are unable to bear the financial burden of endless subscriptions and purchases, or who work outside of a university structure, to access resources vital to their research too. It also allows members of the general public and citizen scientists – who are often the funders of this work as taxpayers – to access them too.

Mandates and policies

The growth of OA has also been due to the proliferation of funder mandates demanding it, and providing the funds to support it. But books have lagged behind journals in this arena. For example in the UK, UKRI, the national funding agency directing research and innovation funding, brought in a requirement for OA for monographs, edited collections, and chapters from 2024 while an OA policy for research articles went live over ten years earlier in 2013.

Funders in the Netherlands, Austria, Norway, Ireland, Slovenia, and Portugal, and others have OA book policies (see Annex A in the Overview of existing OA book policies from cOAlitionS for a longer list). The Council of the EU stated in May 2023 that "immediate and unrestricted open access should be the norm in publishing research involving public funds, with transparent pricing". Further policies in the European Research Area (ERA) may begin to include them based on the work of the

PALOMERA project.

We argue therefore that it is necessary for publishers to engage earnestly with open access, both for moral and pragmatic reasons; there are enormous benefits to publishing OA to the researcher and to the publisher, and it is also increasingly required by funders and other national bodies, at least in some countries – both carrot and stick.

The difficulties of funding OA books

Funding OA books is a difficult but vital topic. This is because the funding model which has thus far dominated, the Book Processing Charge (BPC), has numerous problems. Running to several thousand pounds/dollars/euros, it is unaffordable for a large number of authors and their supporting institutions, particularly in AHSS subjects where the monograph is particularly important. It is also difficult for many libraries as it causes a highly variable and unpredictable strain on their budgets, as they cannot easily predict how many BPCs they will be asked to pay in a single financial year. And many precariously employed scholars, such as ECRs, and independent researchers have no access to institutional funding at all. It therefore renders open access outside the reach of many scholars whose work is no less deserving than those who can afford to pay.

It is for this reason, among others, that many began to consider more equitable, non-BPC business models that presses could use to support their existing OA publishing programmes, or transition to OA from entirely closed publishing. These included our own project, Copim, which ran from 2020-2026 (the project is sometimes also referred to as Copim 'Open Book Futures'). It is a reflection of the high degree of importance, but also difficulty, of equitably funding OA book publishing that not one but two of the Copim work packages are dedicated to this topic (Opening the Future and the Open Book Collective).

The genesis of the Opening the Future model

One of the project outputs was the publication of a report in 2020 entitled 'Revenue models for Open Access monographs' [Izabella Penier, Martin Paul Eve, and Tom Grady, ‘Revenue Models for Open Access Monographs 2020’, Community-Led Open Publication Infrastructures for Monographs, 2020 <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4011836>]. This described an adaptation of the journal ‘Subscribe to Open’ model whereby members ‘subscribe to a backlist, with the revenue then used

to make the frontlist openly accessible'. This model is called 'Opening the Future'. It constituted a new business model for OA monographs that had not previously been implemented at the time.

Before continuing, we would like to note that collective funding via library memberships, of the sort this model relies on, is not new, and we need to acknowledge a debt to the forerunners such as Open Book Publishers, Lever Press, and punctum books, who began their membership programmes in 2014, 2016 and 2018 respectively. Nevertheless, the last few years have seen something of a sea change, and the awareness and implementation of collective funding for books has expanded hugely.

Opening the Future was first put into practice with two publishers, the Central European University Press (CEUP), and Liverpool University Press (LUP) in 2020. This model presented a potential route for the mass and sustainable transition to OA of many small-to-mid sized publishers. Our partner publishers have spent the past few years utilising and refining it in partnership with Copim. It has been very effective, as we will outline. At around the same time that Opening the Future launched, so too did MIT's Direct to Open, another collective OA funding scheme, and Fund to Mission at the University of Michigan. Since that time, many other schemes have proliferated, including from commercial firms, such as (amongst others):

- Bloomsbury Open Collections
- T&F Pledge to Open
- De Gruyter's UPLOpen
- OUP's Commit to Open
- JSTOR Path to Open
- Purchase to Open

The size of the field now should indicate how much confidence there is among publishers and libraries around collective funding. These are all slightly different, a reflection of many factors including that they are tailored to suit the needs of their publishers. Ours, which is designed for small to medium scholarly publishers looking to transition to OA with as little financial risk as possible, is a particularly straightforward one; it is also unusual in that it is acquisition-based.

This toolkit

This toolkit provided here provides the documentation for how to implement your own version of Opening the Future in order to fund OA books on your frontlist. It builds very heavily on an earlier version of this toolkit [Eve, M. P., Pinter, F., Poznanski, E., & Grady, T. (2022). Opening the Future: How to Implement an Equitable Revenue Model for Open Access Monographs (3.0). Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7003979>] with updates to reflect real world changes and experience gained as we have gone on, for example, regarding the renewal process which was not

yet a factor at the time of the first publication.

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