UNDERSTANDING OPEN ACCESS POLICIES

A fundamental pillar of Open Science is Open Access, which is the practice of making research outputs freely available to the public and reusable. Open Access policies play a crucial role in making this possible by setting guidelines on how research should be published and shared.

This resource explains what Open Access policies are, their key aspects, and why they are fundamental to the research ecosystem.

WHAT IS AN OPEN ACCESS POLICY?

An Open Access policy is a formal guideline or requirement set to ensure that research outputs are openly accessible without financial or technical barriers. These policies apply to journal articles, books, research data, and other scholarly outputs, aiming to maximise the impact of publicly and privately funded research.

Open Access policies can be categorised based on who implements them and their scope:

Institutional Open Access Policies: Adopted by universities and research institutions to ensure their researchers make outputs openly available.

National/Regional Open Access Policies: Enforced by governments or regulatory agencies to promote open science at a broader level.

Funder Open Access Policies: Mandated by funding bodies requiring researchers to publish in open access.

Journal/Publisher Open Access Policies: Set by publishers, determining how and when articles can be made open access.

PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES OF OPEN ACCESS POLICIES

The primary goal of Open Access policies is to remove paywalls and restrictions on research publications, making them freely available for researchers, policymakers, industry professionals, and the general public. This enhances knowledge dissemination, fosters collaboration, and accelerates scientific progress. Some policies are mandatory (mandates), with penalties for non-compliance, while others offer guidelines or recommendations.

The main objectives of Open Access policies are:

Remove Barriers to Research

Open access policies prioritise removing financial, legal, or technical barriers to ensure that research outputs are freely available online to anyone worldwide.

Enable Reuse and Adaptation

They emphasise enabling the reuse, redistribution, and adaptation of research outputs through licensing agreements like Creative Commons.

Ensure Knowledge Equity

These policies aim to level disparities in access to research, particularly benefiting researchers in low- and middle-income countries.

Promote Transparency and Integrity

Promoting openness in research methodology, data collection, and analysis fosters trust, reproducibility, and ethical practices.

Accelerate Innovation and Collaboration

By removing barriers to information sharing, open access policies encourage interdisciplinary and international cooperation.

MAJOR ELEMENTS OF OPEN ACCESS POLICIES

Open Access policies define the principles and requirements for making research outputs freely available. These policies typically address:

- Scope and coverage
- Data sharing and reproducibility
- Licensing and copyright
- Publication guidelines
- Deposit and archiving
- Funding and support
- Compliance and monitoring

Scope and Coverage

The types of research outputs included (e.g., journal articles, books, data).

Open Access policies define which research outputs must be made openly accessible, often including journal articles, books, and datasets. Some policies apply only to publicly funded research, while others extend to all institutional outputs. Policies may also vary in their requirements for different disciplines, recognising that Open Access practices differ across fields.

Data Sharing and Reproducibility

Policies on making research data and software openly available.

Many Open Access policies now emphasise open data to enhance transparency and reproducibility. Researchers may be required to:

- Deposit underlying data in repositories (e.g., Zenodo, Dryad).
- Provide software or code associated with their research.

While openness is encouraged, exceptions exist for ethical, legal, or security reasons, particularly in sensitive fields like medical research.

Licensing and Copyright

Conditions for content reuse, including Creative Commons licenses.

Open Access policies often specify whether researchers retain copyright or must transfer it to publishers. Many policies mandate the use of Creative Commons (CC) licenses, particularly CC BY, which allows unrestricted reuse with attribution. These licenses ensure compliance with Open Access principles while enabling broader dissemination and reuse of research.

Publication Guidelines

Requirements for Open Access journal publication, hybrid models, or preprint sharing.

Researchers may be required to publish in fully Open Access journals, hybrid journals with Open Access options, or share preprints for early dissemination. Some institutions and funders negotiate transformative agreements with publishers, allowing authors to publish Open Access without direct fees. These agreements are part of the shift toward making Open Access publishing the default model.

Deposit and Archiving Requirements

Where and how research should be stored.

Many Open Access policies mandate researchers to deposit their work in designated repositories. These policies specify:

- Accepted formats: Some require the published version, while others allow the accepted manuscript.
- Embargo periods: Timeframes before research becomes openly accessible, often determined by publisher agreements.

Repositories may be institutional (e.g., university archives) or subject-based.

Funding and Support

Financial assistance for Open Access publishing costs, such as Article Processing Charges (APCs).

Many Open Access policies outline how Article Processing Charges (APCs) and other publication costs are covered.
Support may come from:

- Institutional Open Access funds
- Research grants that allocate funds for Open Access publishing
- National or international Open Access funding initiatives

However, challenges remain, as not all institutions can afford to support widespread Open Access publishing, and researchers in low-resource settings may face barriers to publishing in high-impact Open Access journals.

Compliance and Monitoring

Responsibilities, enforcement mechanisms, and penalties for non-compliance.

To enforce adherence, institutions and funders implement various monitoring mechanisms, such as:

- Pre-publication checks: Many journals verify that submissions comply with Open Access and data-sharing policies.
- Digital compliance tracking: Tools like Unpaywall and Plan S Journal Checker help funders and publishers monitor Open Access adherence.
- Sanctions for non-compliance: Some funders, like the NIH, withhold grants or disallow costs if researchers fail to meet Open Access requirements.

Increasingly, institutions and publishers collaborate to streamline Open Access compliance, ensuring that researchers can meet requirements without administrative burdens.

WHY COMPLIANCE MATTERS

A compliant Open Access publication adheres to the guidelines established by an Open Access policy introduced by a funder, institution, or government. Adherence to Open Access policies delivers substantial benefits:

Support Reproducibility:
Open Access to data and research methods supports reproducibility and research integrity.

Citation Advantage:
Open Access research tends to attract more downloads and citations.

Continued Funding:
Non-compliance with Open Access mandates can result in the loss of funding.

Enhanced Reach:
Open Access ensures wider dissemination and discoverability of research.

VERIFYING OPEN ACCESS POLICIES

Researchers and librarians can utilise **Jisc's Open Policy Finder** (a tool that consolidates the functionalities of the former Sherpa Romeo and Sherpa Juliet services) to examine funders' Open Access requirements. This comprehensive database offers detailed information on institutional and governmental Open Access mandates, assisting researchers in ensuring compliance with policies from prominent funders such as the Wellcome Trust, the European Commission, and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.
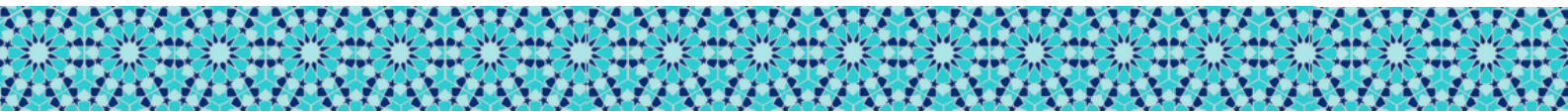
IMPACT ON LIBRARIES AND INSTITUTIONS

Open Access policies align with the mission of funders, libraries, and academic institutions to provide equitable access to information. For librarians, understanding and promoting Open Access policies is essential for supporting researchers and ensuring that research outputs are readily available and accessible.

Libraries and academic institutions act as cornerstones of Open Access initiatives. They:

- Guide researchers on policy compliance and funding opportunities.
- Host repositories for Open Access research.
- Advocate for equitable and transparent scholarly communication.

Librarians serve as critical advisors, assisting with negotiations and practical solutions to Open Access challenges. By supporting Open Access, librarians can help maximise the impact of research, and support scholarly communication globally.

CONCLUSION

Open Access policies are a foundation of Open Science, ensuring that knowledge is freely available and shared. More than regulatory frameworks, they represent a commitment to transparency and equity in science. By understanding and complying with Open Access policies, the research community can advance global knowledge, foster collaboration, and drive scientific progress.

RESOURCES

For further reading on Open Access policies and best practices, explore the following resources:

Canadian Association of Research Libraries, OA Policy Template and Toolkit

Coalition S., Part II: Guidance on the implementation of Plan S.

Elsevier, Open access essentials for librarians

F1000, Open access policies and mandates

Jisc's Open Policy Finder

Open Access Network, Open Access Policies

Plan S (cOAlition S)

Registry of Open Access Repositories Mandatory Archiving Policies (ROARMAP)

SciFormat Publishing, Open Access Policies Around the World

SPARC Open Access Program

ABOUT FORM:

The Forum for Open Research in MENA (FORM) is a non-profit membership organisation supporting the advancement of Open Science policies and practices in research communities and institutions across the Arab region.

Learn more by visiting us at **www.forumforopen.org**