

Genuine open access to academic books requires collective solutions

*UKRI, the UK's national research funding agency, and cOAlition S, an international consortium of research funders, recently reaffirmed their commitments to delivering open access to academic books. However, whilst an open trajectory has been clearly set, how this is to be achieved remains unclear. In this post **Lucy Barnes** argues that for academic books to be genuinely open, an emphasis should be placed on collective funding models that limit the prospect of new barriers to access being erected through the imposition of expensive book processing charges (BPCs).*

The [new UKRI open access \(OA\) policy](#) was released in August; it included stipulations for long-form publications based on research funded by UKRI. Monographs, chapters and edited collections published after 1 January 2024 must be made available via open access within twelve months of publication, either by the publisher or via the author's accepted manuscript being placed in a repository. There are a number of exceptions, including trade books, textbooks and books for which the 'only suitable publisher' does not offer an open access route to publication.

Likewise, in September [cOAlition S released a set of recommendations to their funders](#) including: books based on funded research should be published open access under a Creative Commons licence; authors or institutions should retain reuse rights; embargoes are discouraged and should be no longer than 12 months; and funders should financially support OA publication.

These are welcome developments that have been long in the making. The UK government [adopted the position](#) that publicly funded research should be made OA (with a preference for immediate OA) after the [Finch Report](#) was published in 2012, almost a decade ago and twelve years before the proposed implementation date of the new UKRI policy for books.

progress in establishing open access for books lags behind journals

It is nonetheless true that progress in establishing open access for books lags behind journals. Many larger presses have thus far relied solely on Book Processing Charges (BPCs) to fund the OA books they publish, an approach that places costs of anything between £5,000 to £12,500 onto the author or their funder and therefore excludes anyone without these resources. We have also seen an early example of a [Transformative Agreement \(TA\) for books this year, between Springer Nature and the University of California, Berkeley](#), an arrangement that benefits a single press and a single university's authors but does little for the OA books ecosystem as a whole. Meanwhile, some smaller presses have made scant progress in developing any kind of open access route.

However, in recent years [the rise of new presses](#), often academic-led and not-for-profit, have pioneered innovative approaches to open access book publishing. Examples include the presses belonging to the [ScholarLed consortium](#), together with New University Presses (NUPs), such as [UCL Press](#) and [White Rose University Press](#). These publishers have achieved three things beyond making high-quality, long-form research openly available: 1) they have demonstrated that it is entirely possible for smaller presses to publish open access books; 2) the models some of them have pioneered distribute the cost, and the ability to publish OA, much more broadly than a BPC or a TA can do; 3) the networks and infrastructure they have developed in the course of their work offer practical support to other presses who are establishing how to publish long-form academic research via an equitable open access route.



One example is the press at which I work, [Open Book Publishers \(OBP\)](#): an award-winning, independent OA book press that has been publishing open access books without charging BPCs since 2008. They have achieved this via [a mixed business model](#) that includes a Library Membership Programme, by which individual libraries pay a modest sum (£300 per year) to support OBP's work. This collective approach is built on the principle that no one person or organisation should have to bear too heavy a financial load, nor be barred from publishing open access simply because they cannot pay. The secure income provided by the Programme, in addition to income from sales of paperback and hardback editions and some author-secured grant funding, enables OBP to publish between 30-40 books a year.

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This collective funding approach is being adopted more widely. A US-based, scholar-led and not-for-profit press, [punctum books](#), has developed its own Library Membership Programme to support its publishing catalogue of over 50 new OA books per year, while the [Opening the Future model](#), developed by [the COPIM \(Community-led Open Publication Infrastructures for Monographs\) project](#), allows non-OA presses to 'flip' to OA through library subscription to their closed-access backlist, the proceeds from which fund their open access frontlist. [MIT Press](#) have recently announced their own collective library funding programme, [Direct2Open](#), which likewise offers paid access to non-OA backlist titles to fund new OA books, while [Michigan University Press](#) have also launched a model of collective library support, [Fund to Mission](#), and [Lever Press](#) marshals a different kind of consortial institutional support to publish OA books without charging BPCs.

These models are all based on a community approach to publishing OA: instead of an author paying for their own book, or a university paying for its own authors, the contribution from each institution collectively funds the publishing work of the press as a whole and no author is barred from publishing open access because they cannot pay a fee.

This collaborative approach is being harnessed to still greater effect by [the COPIM project](#), an international £3.6 million partnership between universities, libraries, open access publishers (including OBP) and infrastructure providers, funded by Research England and Arcadia Fund. The members of COPIM are working collaboratively to develop open, community-governed infrastructures that provide material and systemic support for open access book publishing. This is designed to overcome the technological, structural, and organisational hurdles that can hinder presses from publishing open access books, including establishing equitable funding routes, enabling discovery via effective and efficient use of metadata, and properly archiving complex, long-form digital publications so that they are of maximum use far into the future.

These infrastructures are already supporting embargo- and BPC-free open access for books, and they are being [designed to support many more presses](#). They include an Open Dissemination System, called 'Thoth', enhancing the discovery of open access books using open metadata, which is already in use by a number of presses (including OBP, punctum and [mediastudies.press](#)) and is being readied for adoption by more. The Opening the Future model mentioned above has already been adopted by two presses ([Central European University Press](#) and [Liverpool University Press](#)) and has funded its first open access books. A sustainable, non-profit, community-governed hub for open book publishing, the Open Book Collective, is in development and will help to foster relationships between libraries and presses, allowing libraries to support presses financially while better integrating OA books with library systems. COPIM is also developing processes to support archiving, experimental publishing and collective governance of the infrastructure as a whole.

Arts, Humanities and Social Science subjects need high-quality, equitably-funded routes to open access publishing. The alternative is a future in which the research produced by these disciplines is expensive and inaccessible. The work done by pioneering smaller presses, and collective approaches such as that embodied by COPIM, are creating the conditions for book publishers of all stripes to develop their own open access model without BPCs or Transformative Agreements. Almost twelve years after the Finch Report, it is time for all involved to embrace the transformative challenge of open access in a way that benefits the whole research community, rather than doubling down on an existing system accessible only to those with deep pockets.

Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of the LSE Impact Blog, nor of the London School of Economics. Please review our [comments policy](#) if you have any concerns on posting a comment below

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