

The benefits of open access books are clear but challenges around funding remain



As part of Academic Book Week 2018, last week Springer Nature hosted an event exploring open access books featuring representatives from the researcher, funder, and publisher communities. **Mithu Lucraft** reports on the presentations and panel discussions which revealed that the benefits of publishing open access books are clear, with more downloads, citations, and online mentions, in addition to an extended international reach and improved prospects of research use and reuse. However, the obvious challenge to publishing open access books is funding, and so it is vital for publishers, funders and institutions to work together as a community to share costs and reduce them for researchers.

Do you know if your academic book is reaching the widest possible audience? Or how much usage, citations, or attention it has achieved? If you want to publish your book open access (OA) would you know where to access funds? Or what your funder requires? These were just some of the questions discussed at an event hosted by Springer Nature last week as part of Academic Book Week 2018. While open access has moved forward in journal publishing, for books it remains early days. OA books present their own opportunities and challenges compared with journals, many of which were explored in presentations and panel discussions.

The benefits of OA

From increased usage to reaching international audiences beyond academia, Ros Pyne, Head of Policy and Development (Open Research) at Springer Nature, shared lessons learned through publishing 500 OA books at Springer and Palgrave Macmillan. "[The OA effect: how does open access affect the usage of scholarly books?](#)", a Springer Nature report from 2017, found that OA books receive on average [seven times more downloads than non-OA books](#). Although the results only cover a four-year period, the data also showed that OA books receive 50% more citations compared to non-OA books; while in terms of online mentions, OA books gained ten times more mentions over a three-year period compared to non-OA books.

Reach a global audience

Author interviews conducted as part of "The OA Effect" report also revealed that reaching new, global audiences was a major motivation for publishing an OA book, a stance reiterated at last week's event by Hannah Hope, Open Research Co-ordinator at the [Wellcome Trust](#), and a panel of authors who had previously published OA books. Maureen Mackintosh, Professor of Economics at the Open University who published the Palgrave monograph [Making Medicines in Africa](#), was acutely aware of the benefits OA could offer: "We absolutely wanted it to be accessible specifically in Africa", she stressed. As a title with a number of authors from low-income countries, her co-authors were familiar with the considerable challenge of accessing information. They particularly wanted to make their content available to manufacturers. Prof Mackintosh described the impact of publishing OA as "transformational", saying "it can completely change what policymakers can do".

A similar case was presented by Dr Roseli Pellens, research engineer from Institut de Systématique, Evolution, Biodiversité and author of [Biodiversity Conservation and Phylogenetic Systematics](#). For Dr Pellens, it was critical that the research was read as widely as possible "because we were dealing with a subject that is quite pressing" with an opportunity to influence biodiversity strategies internationally. The book was downloaded more than 70,000 times in its first year since publication.

Reproducibility

For Wellcome, Hope argued that open research has the potential to bring forward outcomes for health. The aspiration and drive behind OA "is that there are transformative improvements in human health because research outputs are managed, shared, and used in ways that unleash their full potential". She added "we fund OA books because they are a primary research output and are a vital part of maximising and helping us achieve our funding goals".

Visibility

Several authors attending the event commented on the wide reach of their OA title. Professor Owen Davies and Dr Pellens both shared their experiences of using Twitter as an effective tool to promote their work. ResearchGate, YouTube, and the importance of in-person meetings with the right stakeholders were also mentioned.

Speakers also referenced the importance of discoverability across multiple platforms, with some publishers hosting OA books for free on Google and Amazon. Hope also described efforts by Wellcome to work with publishers to increase the visibility and discoverability of OA books, through [Europe PubMed Central](#), [NCBI Bookshelf](#), and [OAPEN](#).

Tracking the impact of OA books

Martijn Roelandse, Head of Publishing Innovation at Springer Nature, described the metrics Springer Nature provides to its authors through the Bookmetrix service for all books (OA and non-OA):

- Individual book and chapter data on downloads, citations, and online mentions are available on all titles.
- Statistics showing the average performance by discipline, and overall subject collection performance, are also available to enable authors to benchmark the performance of their own book.
- Each author can download their own book report covering these statistics.

Having access to this information can help authors demonstrate the impact of their work, for example in grant applications or as part of research assessments.

Roelandse and Hope also encouraged authors to sign up for an Open Researcher and Contributor ID ([ORCID](#)) as a way of keeping a digital record of all publications. ORCID provides researchers with a persistent digital identifier that distinguishes them from every other researcher and, through integration in key research workflows such as manuscript and grant submission, supports automated linkages between them and their professional activities to ensure that their work is recognised.

Funding for OA books

Another prominent theme debated at the event was access to funding. For Prof Mackintosh, the experience of finding funds for OA was “a nightmare” as she described having to repurpose grant funds for OA. Several speakers highlighted challenges for funding in developing countries, or in disciplines without ready access to funds. The announcement by HEFCE – now Research England – that future [Research Excellence Framework assessments would extend OA requirements to include long-form scholarly works and monographs](#) was viewed by Prof Davies as a key challenge for his discipline, history, particularly in identifying suitable funding.

According to Hope, Wellcome would like to see OA become more affordable for all, and to support a wider transition to OA: “we would like more funders to support their researchers with the costs of making research available. We would like more publishers and institutions to work together as a community to share costs and reduce them for researchers. There is funding within the research ecosystem but we need to repurpose budgets. We all have to change the ecosystem”. Wellcome’s [OA policy](#) – launched in 2006, since which time 85 monographs have been funded – is currently under review.

In the longer term, argued Pyne, publishers need to explore a range of OA book models that support the diversity of the monograph publishing landscape.

The basics of OA book publishing: what you need to know

- As a basic requirement, all books published via the [gold OA route](#) will be made freely available to the reader, immediately upon publication. However there may be restrictions on what version of the book can be shared. Check what your publisher allows.
- Most publishers will make the version of record available on their website, and some also provide access to the file in multiple digital formats to third parties, such as Google and Amazon. Check where your publisher makes OA books available to maximise visibility.

- A BPC (book processing charge) is generally applied to cover the costs of editorial, production, and digital publication.
- For the most part, OA books are still available in print, although this can vary by publisher.

[Explore Open Access Books](#) was a free event for authors and researchers held during Academic Book Week and hosted by Springer Nature, exploring how OA can help researchers make the most out of their research.

[Academic Book Week \(#AcBookWeek\)](#) is a week-long celebration of the diversity, innovation, and influence of academic books aiming to open up a dialogue between the makers and users of academic books.

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About the author

Mithu Lucraft is Director for Outreach and Open Research Marketing at Springer Nature. She has worked in academic publishing since 2004: a passion for storytelling combined with a lasting commitment to scholarly communications has led her through a variety of Marketing and Communications roles, including at Oxford University Press, Sage Publishing and Palgrave Macmillan. At Springer Nature she is responsible for promoting open books and research data services; institutional engagement with open research; as well as wider researcher content engagement strategy. She tweets [@mithulucraft](#).