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**THE ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS OF ALTERNATIVE PUBLISHING MODELS: VIEWS FROM A NON-ECONOMIST**

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In composing this short response to the paper in this issue by Houghton and Oppenheim (2010) based on their larger report to JISC (Houghton et al, 2009), I confess I am no economist, nor an expert in quantitative methods. Thus I cannot respond to their paper in either of these roles. Instead, I propose to respond both as an academic who conducts research, writes about it and tries to get it published, and as a researcher interested in scholarly communication, publishing and open access.

The Houghton and Oppenheim paper and the JISC report focus on three publishing models: subscription publishing; open access (OA) publishing (often called “gold OA”); and open access self-archiving. The authors acknowledge that this latter model, does not constitute a publishing model in and of itself, so their analysis of self-archiving focuses on two publishing models in which self-archiving is supplemented by peer review and the production mechanism of formal publishing (i) “green OA” self-archiving operating in parallel with subscription publishing; (ii) and the “overlay” or “deconstructed” journal model. Summaries of the approach, method and difficulties are provided; costs and benefits are quantified and compared; and conclusions arrived at. The analysis finds potential economic benefits for scholarly publishing in more open access, both Gold and Green.

Following this summary Houghton and Oppenheim then summarize the polarized responses to the report. Some scholarly publishers and their trade associations reacted negatively. Houghton and Oppenheim suggest that these responses be modeled and justified with data and analysis, to allow for open review and dialogue. While I would welcome reading the argument so supported, I also welcome comments and perceptions as contributions to the discussion. Like many other academics, and apparently some funders, I welcome the report ... and any other reports which canvas the alternatives in one of the myriad of possible ways. Would we ever have innovation if we did not

canvas the alternatives, examining costs and benefits as well as discussing, speculating, creating and imagining?

Before I progress further with this essay, I must declare that at present I am a strong supporter of OA, and in particular green OA (it just seems so much more possible for me personally to achieve), so I write with that perspective. I support OA not just because in the process of studying the implementation of two open access institutional repositories while writing a thesis (Kennan, 2008) I became enrolled by its vision of free and unrestricted access to research “*uniting humanity in a common intellectual conversation and quest for knowledge*”(Budapest Open Access Initiative, 2002), but for many other reasons. For example, working in a small, not-well-funded university I am constantly having to beg, borrow and occasionally steal articles and books via time-consuming interlibrary loan and document delivery services or, often more speedily, directly from my better-funded colleagues. I inwardly cheer whenever I find a paper I’m interested in has free full text, openly accessible. One of the charges made in response to the JISC report is that it under-estimates the levels of access of UK academics. Maybe so, but their report does not under-estimate my level of access.

A key question addressed by Houghton and Oppenheim in this paper is whether there are “new opportunities and new models for scholarly publishing that might better serve researchers and more effectively communicate and disseminate research findings”. How could anyone familiar with the current system, not believe that the answer to this question must be a simple “yes”. The study would not have been commissioned had not the process of scholarly publishing already faced many questions (Dodgson, 2009; Gibson, 2005; Whitworth & Friedman, 2009a, 2009b) and not already been undergoing change – had scholars around the world not been asking the question of themselves and their colleagues. As one of the academic participants my study said:

*There has been a technology shift that shows in some respects what we are doing with thousands and thousands of journals that begin here and end there and the whole system that is set up for this brick and mortar world. We wouldn't come up with anything like that if we invented academic publishing today [Professor, Business].*

Am I surprised that the JISC study concludes that OA is likely to have substantial net benefits? No!

Let’s briefly move beyond cost and benefit and examine some of the socio-technical aspects.

Developments in information and communication technologies (ICT), particularly the Internet and the World Wide Web (WWW) have created high expectations for improvements in scholarly communications (Kling, McKim, & Kin, 2003) and scholarly publication (Kling & Callahan, 2003).

These technological advances afford OA. In the words of the Budapest Open Access Initiative, OA has arisen because “An old tradition and a new technology have converged to make possible an unprecedented public good” (Budapest Open Access Initiative, 2002). OA could not do its work without its colleagues, the Internet and the WWW, search engines such as Google and Google Scholar, OAI-PMH, repositories, open source communities and others.

From the early 1990s it was envisaged that electronic publication, enabled by ICT developments, would:

- Make materials available to readers 24 hours a day,
- Ensure that costs would be lower as there would be no need to print hardcopies and it is cheaper to store electronic materials than paper,
- Assist publication to be more timely as communications were improved,
- And, enable a wide variety of document formats and other media to be included.

It was also envisaged that these potential benefits would lead to participation in scholarly publishing to be more open and democratic and the outputs to be available to a wider audience. Perhaps only the first point in that list has been achieved, for those who themselves or via their employers have subscriptions to all the titles they need.

OA comes to scholarship as a vision that makes sense, is hard to argue against, it is congruent with the aims of science and scholarship. It is hard to argue that research, often funded out of the public purse, should not be a public good, and should not be equally accessible to rich and poor, now that it is possible to make it so. That it may also make economic sense is a bonus! In the words of some of the participants in my study:

*... OA. I think it's a thing that we should strive for* [Associate Professor Information Management]

*... I'm a strong supporter of OA publishing models ...* [Researcher Social Science of Medicine]

*... sounds like motherhood to me* [Senior Lecturer Science]

*... The reason we are in academia is to generate information to disseminate knowledge and to provide that information to as many colleagues and friends and interested people as possible. ... You want to get it out to teachers, to policy makers and practitioners. So OA provides free access to it,* [Professor Education]

*... Well I mean the profession of scientists are all for OA. The more people can read it with the least barriers the more impact we think we have so we don't want anybody to be excluded from reading our work* [Professor Economics].

Given its visionary characteristics and its congruence with the aims of scholarship, why is OA not practiced by all researchers all the time? In my research I found many programs operating against OA. For example, we researchers, as authors, editors, peer-reviewers, and readers are familiar with traditional scholarly subscription-based publishing and so we adopt and enact a particular set of values congruent with subscription-based publishing rather than scholarship. Our connections, entanglements, relationships are with subscription-based publishing and unless we make a conscious decision and effort to explore the alternatives, such as this report does, the *status quo* is preserved without question, as a matter of course.

How do we make changes such as those that Houghton and Oppenheim indicate have potential benefits for scholarship? Houghton and Oppenheim say that more OA would have substantial net benefits “in the longer term, and ... net benefits may be lower during a transitional period” ... how do we get to a space which might be the “longer term”? How do we counter the programs working against OA? Let’s talk about an elephant in the green OA room – institutional mandates. The JISC report discusses mandates, largely as a process authors have to consider when making decisions about how to communicate and disseminate their results. It does not suggest mandates as a way of overcoming the barriers (Houghton et al. 2009: 232). I suggest they are. Of the two university OA repositories I studied, one had a mandate, and one did not. The institution with a mandate had more than 75% of its research output available OA in its repository. This institution has moved through the transitional period and is entering the “longer term”. Statistics were much harder to come by at the other institution but knowledge of the number of academics and therefore the number of potential papers indicated the percentage of the university’s research output in the non-mandated repository to be quite low.

What is a mandate and why are we so against them? An institutional mandate or policy promoting OA, signals the university’s support for OA to the scholarly corpus. It flags the centrality of research and access to that research as a part of that university’s mission. In terms of the university studied, their mandate combined aspects the OA vision and the University’s vision into a single vision framed to inform a policy requiring staff to deposit their papers and other research outputs in the repository where this is legal.

The University I studied was the first institution in the world to institute an OA IR institution-wide mandate in 2003, active as of 2004. Indeed it is the first mention I can find of a mandate of any kind (Suber, 2007). Now many more OA IR institutional mandates exist (eprints.org, 2008). Where other institutions do not follow suit researchers take the issue into their own hands. This is illustrated where faculties at powerful institutions such as Harvard and Stanford have enacted their own faculty mandates rather than waiting for their institutions to act and where individuals chose to self-archive or publish Gold OA.

There is a growing network of mandates around the world. In Australia, for example, mandates and other policy actors for OA in IR are growing and predicted to grow further (Australian Department of Innovation Industry Science and Research, 2008; Carr, 2008) as they do worldwide (eprints.org, 2008). The Australian Research Council “strongly encourages” OA deposit in IRs and this encouragement works with the University mandate for some researchers who were initially resistant to their local mandate:

*I can see problems here because the ARC also now wants us to give access to papers published from grants funded by them so I guess that I will have to change my attitude!*  
[Professor Mathematics].

Any of us who work within a university will know the myriad of policies, rules and regulations under which we toil, largely without argument, maybe a few minor grumbles. And here is one that will benefit our own work in terms of making it more accessible to potential readers, reviewers, citers and will benefit our university by enabling it to manage and showcase its own research output. Why would one additional policy requiring us to make our work open access, when it is seen to work in at least one case, generate so much discussion and antipathy? I do not know the answer, perhaps it is those unexamined entanglements with subscription publishing clouding our view?

In the end, the new models of scholarly publishing we end up supporting may not be any of those studied by Houghton and Oppenheim. However, work like theirs, examining the costs and benefits, potentials and opportunities is essential, for to go on with a system, scholarly publishing or any other, without regularly investigating and analyzing the alternatives, is neither common-sense, nor scholarly.

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