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REF 2029 Open Access Policy consultation question set

Consultation questions

Your details

1. Are you answering on behalf of your organisation, institution or as an individual?
2. What is your organisation/institution?
3. Country: England/Scotland/Northern Ireland/Wales/Other (Please state)

Section A: open access developments in the sector

It is important for the four UK higher education funding bodies to understand recent open access developments in the sector. This context will support the development of the final open access policy for REF 2029.

Question 4

What are the most important changes in the open access landscape since the development of the REF 2021 open access policy,

- 1) how do these differ across disciplinary areas
- 2) what are the implications of these changes for the REF 2029 open access policy?

Section B: journal articles and conference proceedings

Summary

Requirements

The four UK higher education funding bodies, propose the following requirements for submission of in-scope journal-based publications: journal articles (REF 2021 output type D) and conference contributions published in conference proceedings (REF 2021 output type E) for REF 2029:

1. Where not published as immediately open access, in-scope journal-based outputs should be available to read, download and search no longer than six months (Main panels A and B) or 12 months (Main panels C and D) after the date of publication.
2. Must be the version of record or the author's accepted manuscript.
3. Should be available via a journal website, repository or other appropriate publishing platform.

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4. The preferred licence is CC-BY or equivalent; CC-BY-ND or equivalent will also be accepted (Please see [Creative Commons Licenses](#) for further information).
5. The tolerance band of 5% for non-compliance at unit submission level will be retained.

Exceptions

Allowable exceptions proposed for journal articles and conference proceedings are:

1. Third-party content was included for which licenses could not be obtained.
2. Outputs were authored in whole by one or more non-volume contributing staff prior to implementation of the open access policy for REF 2029.
3. Criteria beyond the control of the HEI (such as personal circumstances of the author, industrial action, closure days and software issues).
4. Output has a demonstrable and substantive connection to the submitting institution but was published following the end of the author's period of employment, and it has not been possible to determine compliance with the criteria.
5. It would be unlawful to deposit, or request the deposit of, the output or to otherwise make this available.
6. The publication concerned requires an embargo period that exceeds the stated maxima and was the most appropriate publication for the output.

Questions

Publication as open access

As per REF 2021 policy, the four UK higher education funding bodies consider that publication in a journal, with immediate (and irrevocable) availability upon publication of the version of record and appropriate licensing remains an appropriate standard, and that publications meeting this requirement will not have any further requirements to meet.

Deposit

HEIs raised concerns about the burden imposed by needing to meet and track deposit requirements post-publication. In response, the four UK higher education funding bodies, consider that there is an opportunity for reducing burden by simplifying the requirement.

1. It is proposed that REF2029 move to a requirement that relates to publication rather than acceptance. This is to avoid operating a two-tier system, potentially requiring a higher, or conflicting, standard.
2. The approach proposed is that in-scope outputs should be made available at the point of publication or at the expiry of any applicable embargo period.

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This removes the requirement for deposit of in-scope outputs, which were not published as immediately open access, to be deposited in a suitable repository within a given period (for REF 2021 this was three months or 92 days).

This is replaced with a requirement for repository deposit or otherwise making the output available through a suitable platform on publication.

However, the four UK higher education funding bodies are mindful of mitigating for unforeseen adverse consequences that might arise from this approach, and therefore wish to invite comment from the sector.

Question 5

Should deposit requirements post acceptance be maintained where publication isn't immediately open access?

- yes/no/not sure/no comment
- if yes, why? What would be an appropriate time limit for deposit post acceptance?

Access

We will retain the requirement for items to be discoverable, fully searchable and freely available for download.

Licensing

In REF 2021 for journal articles allowed submission of CC-BY-ND-NC licensed outputs, while encouraging more fully open licensing, such as CC-BY or OGL. There have since been wider moves within the sector, and in particular within universities and funder policies towards embedding rights retention for authors, as well as UKRI policy requirements to mandate more fully open licensing (CC-BY as standard, with ND allowed by exception and where demonstrated as appropriate).

The four UK higher education funding bodies propose to more closely align licensing requirements with the UKRI policy, with publications needing to meet at minimum licensing terms equivalent to CC-BY-ND with no exclusion for commercial use permitted. The four UK higher education funding

Question 6

Do you agree with alignment to the UKRI open access policy in respect of licensing for journal publications by requiring licensing terms equivalent to CC-BY or CC-BY-ND licensing for journal publications?

- yes/no/not sure/no comment
- what, if any, negative or positive impacts might there be from this change?

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bodies strongly encourage the use of more open licensing where there is no clear rationale for applying more restrictive measures.

Pre-prints and alternative publication platforms

Pre-prints are not in scope of the UKRI policy and as noted the four UK higher education funding bodies have agreed to consider alignment where possible with this policy. However, as with other measures relating to open access, the four UK higher education funding bodies also must consider the implications for a wider pool of outputs and output types.

We note with interest the development of alternative publication platforms. Some examples are referenced in the [Knowledge Exchange report on alternative publication platforms](#). We also note the extent to which publication through these platforms can meet the broader requirements of open access policy for REF 2029 in terms of access, licensing, and embargo periods.

The four UK higher education funding bodies consider that there is a strong case to continue to recognise dissemination through pre-print or other open platforms as meeting either initial publication or repository requirements for post-embargo dissemination. However, this requires that the published output should align to the general requirements for meeting open access policy by being the version of record or author accepted manuscript, rather than a preliminary or transitional 'near final' version as allowed for in REF 2021.

The sector is invited to comment on whether, and how, there may be further scope for first publication through alternative publication platforms to be recognised as meeting in full all open access requirements in their own right, and therefore within the scope of policy for REF 2029.

Question 7

Do you agree with recognition of alternative platforms as meeting open access requirements as primary platform for publication?

- yes/no/not sure/no comment
- please provide any further comment

Embargo periods

REF 2021 allowed for up to 12 months for main panels A and B, or 24 months for main panels C and D. This allowed for authors to adhere to the different practices and expectations of publishers in respect of these different disciplinary areas.

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In light of progress towards open access for journal publications, including positively increasing movement towards embedding rights retention in practice, the four UK higher education funding bodies propose that while a disciplinary differential is recognised, the allowable maximum embargo periods for REF submission, should be reduced to six months for main panels A and B, and 12 months for outputs for main panels C and D.

Question 8

Do you agree with the proposed changes to embargo periods for journal publications for main panels A and B (12 months reduced to six months) and main panels C and D (24 months reduced to 12 months) in light of changing standards and practice?

- yes/no/not sure/no comment
- what, if any, negative or positive impacts might there be from this change?

Tolerance limits for journal articles and conference procedures

Following the relative success of REF 2021 with only 25% of in-scope outputs overall not meeting open access compliance, of which the majority were subject to policy exceptions, the four UK higher education funding bodies consider that it is appropriate to review the level of tolerance allowed for these publications. Noting however, the potential impact of submitted outputs produced by non-volume contributing staff, and differential rates of non-compliant, or unflagged submissions across the main panels in REF 2021 the four UK higher education funding bodies propose to retain the allowed tolerance level for open access non-compliance of articles and conference proceedings at 5% of any unit submission.

Implementation date for revised requirements for journal-based publications

The four UK higher education funding bodies propose that these revised requirements will be applicable to journal articles and conference proceedings published from 1 January 2025.

Question 9

Do you consider that tolerance limit for articles and conference proceedings should be retained at 5% of any submission?

- yes/no/not sure/no comment
- please provide any further comment

Question 10

Do you agree that changes to the open access policy for journal-based publications should be implemented from 1 January 2025?

- yes/no/not sure/no comment
- please provide any further comment

Exceptions

There have been several changes to the underpinning basis for submissions in REF 2029 as compared to earlier exercises. These include:

- Removing the need for attribution of outputs to a named author.
- Allowing submission of outputs produced by a wider pool of authors with a demonstrable link to the submitting institution.
- Submission of outputs by staff who do not have significant responsibility for research, for instance, research enabling staff.

The four UK higher education funding bodies propose an exemption to cover these circumstances which will therefore allow flexibility for institutions in selecting outputs for submission from this wider pool. However, the four UK higher education funding bodies are clear that to the greatest extent, institutions should seek to make submitted outputs open-access compliant. The four UK higher education funding bodies consider that the following exceptions should be applicable:

1. Third-party content was included for which licenses could not be obtained.
2. Outputs were authored in whole by one or more non-volume contributing staff prior to implementation of the open access policy for REF 2029.
3. Criteria beyond the control of the HEI (such as personal circumstances of the author, industrial action, closure days and software issues).
4. Output has a demonstrable and substantive connection to the submitting institution but was published following the end of the author's period of employment, and it has not been possible to determine compliance with the criteria.
5. It would be unlawful to deposit, or request the deposit of, the output or to otherwise make this available.

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6. The publication concerned requires an embargo period that exceeds the stated maxima and was the most appropriate publication for the output.

Question 11

Do you agree with the proposed exceptions for journal publications?

- yes/no/not sure/no comment
- should any of the above be removed?
- What, if any, additional exceptions might be required?

Section C: longform outputs (monographs, book chapters and edited collections)

Summary

Requirements

The four UK higher education funding bodies signalled to the sector in the 2016 REF consultation policy statement that while monographs and other longform publications would not be in scope for REF 2021, it was their intention to include a requirement for open access to also apply to longform outputs, as a feature of the following REF.

For submission of in-scope longform publications for REF 2029, which include published books (REF 2021 output type A), book chapters (REF 2021 output type B), edited books (REF 2021 output type C) and scholarly editions (REF 2021 output type R), the four UK higher education funding bodies propose the following requirements:

1. If not published as immediately open access, in-scope longform publications must be made available to read, download and search no longer than 24 months after the date of publication.
2. Should be the version of record or the author's accepted manuscript.
3. Available on a publisher website, repository or other appropriate platform.
4. Preferable licenced CC-BY or equivalent, but will accept licensing equivalent to CC-BY-ND, CC-BY-NC and CC-BY-NC-ND.
5. There will be a tolerance band of 10% at unit submission level.
6. Can exclude third party materials, if licensing can't be obtained.

Exceptions

Proposed exceptions are:

1. Where the only appropriate publisher, after liaison and consideration, is unable to offer an open access option that complies with the REF policy.
2. Reuse permissions for third-party materials cannot be obtained and there is no suitable alternative option available to enable open access publication.

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3. Outputs published before 1 January 2026.
4. Outputs for which publication agreements were put in place before 1 January 2026.
5. Outputs with demonstrable and substantive connection to the submitting institution, but published following the end of the author's period of employment, and it has not been possible to determine compliance with the criteria.
6. Where it would be unlawful to deposit, or request the deposit of, the output or to otherwise make this available.
7. The publication concerned requires an embargo period that exceeds the stated maxima and was the most appropriate publication venue for the output.

Trade books

There are considerations of author's interests and income associated with publication of books drawing together the content of research and scholarship, but which are more accessible to a general readership ('trade books').

The UKRI open access policy defines a trade book as "an academic monograph or edited collection rooted in original scholarship that has a broad public audience". Some considerations in identifying trade books may be:

- the intended audience for the publication is the broader public and not primarily an academic audience.
- marketing activities that seek to reach a broad public readership.
- sales and pricing models which may include large discounts to retailers.
- breadth of distribution channels and networks to reach a broad public audience and not primarily via scholarly channels.
- inclusion (or not) of additional scholarly materials such as appendices, citations, and footnotes.
- inclusion of materials for marketability.

Trade books are generally excluded from open access requirements. These represented circa 9% of longform outputs submitted to main panels C and D in REF 2014, for details see [Open Access Monographs in the UK: A data analysis](#).

This exemption will also be applied for any requirement for REF 2029, as will be the case for creative works.

Questions

Publication

As with journal publications, longform outputs will meet open access requirements for REF 2029 in full when meeting the following conditions:

- First publication (either in place of or in addition to a commercial print or e-book publication) of an output in its final publication version.

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- Shared in electronic form.
- Immediately irrevocably available for free access and distribution
- Which meets licensing requirements.
- Shared via an appropriate publication platform, which may be a publisher website, repository, or other appropriate publication platform.

As with journal publications it is recognised that disciplinary publication norms and other factors may often dictate or limit the options for selection of the most appropriate publisher for a longform output, and there is an international dimension to publications which requires some degree of recognition. 78% of REF 2014 longform publications were published within the UK. See [Open Access Monographs in the UK: A data analysis](#).

This may mean that, in some cases, the most appropriate publisher may not offer options which will allow full compliance with open access requirements, and the four UK higher education funding bodies have designated an exemption to cover this eventuality.

Deposit and embargo

The four UK higher education funding bodies recognise that there are special considerations in respect of longform publications and embargo periods with author and publisher interests, in terms of their ability to realise their commercial interests. There is a need to balance this with the imperative to ensure that open access obligations are met within a reasonable period. Noting that most sales occur within the first two years post-publication, the four UK higher education funding bodies propose that a maximum embargo period of 24 months should be applicable where this is a contractual requirement of the publisher.

In seeking to align requirements for longform publication with those for journal-based publication as far as possible, where an output is not made immediately open access while subject to an agreed embargo period, there will be no deposit requirement. However, following the implementation of this policy, in-scope longform outputs should be made immediately open-access on publication or no later than 24 months post-publication where subject to an embargo period.

Question 12

Do you agree that there should be no deposit requirement for longform publications, but that they should be made immediately available as open access upon publication (or no later than 24 months following publication if subject to an embargo)?

- yes/no/not sure/no comment
- please provide any further comment

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Question 13

Do you agree with the proposal of a maximum embargo period of 24 months for longform publications?

- yes/no/not sure/no comment
- please provide any further comment

Access

In keeping with other aspects of open access policy, electronically hosted or published outputs should be fully discoverable and searchable by anyone with a suitable internet connection and (non-specialist) equipment.

Licensing

The licensing standards for the UKRI open access policy, while encouraging the maximum use of fully open or licensing by attribution, recognise that the interests of authors of longform publication may reasonably extend to proprietary ideas and concepts, and to elements of the work such as images on which they should reasonably continue to exercise control. This therefore allows for licensing up to and including CC-BY-NC-ND or equivalent. The commitment of the four UK higher education funding bodies has not been to exceed or require any more stringent standard than this policy.

Third-party licensing

The four UK higher education funding bodies consider that licensing for third party materials not being granted, is a reasonable ground for exemption from open access requirements. This recognises the issue of reliance on third-party licensed materials, underpinning the research being published. This would limit meaningful assessment of those materials and in effect, excluding such publications from submission to the REF.

Question 14

Is licensing for third party materials not being granted a reasonable ground for exemption from open access requirements?

- yes/no/not sure/no comment
- please provide any further comment

Question 15

Is sharing of a version of an output without third-party materials if licensing can't be obtained, mirroring the UKRI open access policy for longform outputs, appropriate to meet the open access requirements for REF 2029 policy?

- yes/no/not sure/no comment
- what issues does this present for output submission and assessment?

Tolerance level for longform outputs submitted as non-open access

The four UK higher education funding bodies propose that a tolerance level of 10% at unit submission level is appropriate. This recognises that the ongoing transition to open access for longform publications is not as advanced as for journal-based publications, and the relative challenge that this transition represents.

Question 16

Do you agree with the principle of a tolerance level for non-compliant longform outputs?

- yes/no/not sure/no comment
- please provide any further comment

Question 17

Do you agree with the proposed tolerance level of 10% for longform outputs?

- yes/no/not sure/no comment
- please provide any further comment

Implementation of open access requirements for longform publications

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The four UK higher education funding bodies propose that these requirements should apply to all submitted outputs where contracts for publication are signed after 1 January 2026.

Question 18

Do you agree with the proposed date for implementation of an open access policy for longform outputs in REF 2029 being for all longform publications for which contracts are agreed from 1 January 2026?

- yes/no/not sure/no comment
- please provide any further comment

Exceptions

The four UK higher education funding bodies propose the following exceptions for longform outputs:

1. Where the only appropriate publisher, after liaison and consideration, is unable to offer an open access option that complies with the REF policy.
2. Reuse permissions for third-party materials cannot be obtained and there is no suitable alternative option available to enable open access publication.
3. Outputs published before 1 January 2026.
4. Outputs for which publication agreements were put in place before 1 January 2026.
5. Output has a demonstrable and substantive connection to the submitting institution but was published following the end of the author's period of employment, and it has not been possible to determine compliance with the criteria.
6. It would be unlawful to deposit, or request the deposit of, the output or to otherwise make this available.
7. The publication concerned requires an embargo period that exceeds the stated maxima and was the most appropriate publication venue for the output

Question 19

Do you agree with the proposed exceptions for longform publications?

- yes/no/not sure/no comment
- should any of the above be removed?
- are there other exceptions you think are necessary for longform outputs? Please provide evidence in support.