

The Model Grant Agreement (MGA): Perspectives from publishers

What is a Model Grant Agreement?

Grant funding is a mechanism which supports the conduct of high quality research. Grant agreements are utilised to award funding for the undertaking of research projects. They define the specific conditions which must be met for grants to be received.

The Model Grant Agreement (MGA) details the processes and requirements for requesting and receiving grant funding from the European Union long-term budget. It defines the rules on suitability, rights and obligations which are related to the grant, eligible and ineligible costs and expected project outcomes. The current version is operative for the Horizon 2020 programme, which runs until the end of 2020. It is [a large and complex document](#). The next European Commission funding program, Horizon Europe, will begin in 2021, and will contain a new MGA. This new MGA is currently under discussion.

New challenges

The current MGA stipulates that all publication outputs from research funded through Horizon 2020 must be either Gold (where the article publishing charge is often covered grant funding) or Green (with an embargo period of 6 to 12 months dependent on discipline) Open Access. However, compliance rates among researchers is unclear – with publishers’ data analytics suggesting less than 50% presently adhere to these rules.

With the move towards Horizon Europe, the EU Commission is considering revisions to the MGA which:

- Narrow options for the publication of research outputs by removing embargo periods
- Introduce new terms which eliminate funding options for hybrid journals¹
- Continue to deny funding for articles published after projects have ended
- Fail to provide researchers with adequate support for compliance

If adopted, these revisions would present a number of consequences which will hinder the shared aims of advancing Open Access and working collaboratively to solve society’s biggest challenges. At the same time, the ecosystem that supports researchers, including publishing and research discovery facilitators – in which European industry is a market leader - must be sustainable to safeguard the future of research.

¹ Hybrid journals are subscription journals offering their authors the choice to make their articles free to read globally through the payment of an article publication charge (APC)

The road to Open Access – removing the barriers

Research and scholarly communication are undergoing a fundamental transformation in how published information is conducted, disseminated, used and consumed, in which publishers are fully engaged. We stand ready to continue to work collaboratively to make a more open scholarly communication environment a reality. It is vital that throughout the transition, researchers maintain their freedom to publish in the publication outlet of their choice. This ensures their work reaches the widest possible audience and has the greatest impact.

FLEXIBILITY IS KEY: Research disciplines vary greatly in their practices. There are fundamental differences to readership, article types, publication fees and funding across the science, technology, medical, arts, humanities and social sciences fields. This presents divergent needs for immediate access with some disciplines requiring faster access to the growing body of knowledge, and others seeing article usage over a much longer timeframe. A ‘variable speed’ approach to open access would strike a balance which supports the validation, publication and dissemination of high quality publications whilst recognising the inherent differences across research disciplines

HYBRID PROVIDES OPTIONS: Hybrid journals enable authors whose funder requires them to publish Open Access, or who wish to for other reasons, to continue to select the journals of their choice. These journals enable researchers to have the greatest potential to advance their fields whilst continuing to advance the transition to Open Access. Articles published in hybrid journals not only benefit from the wide dissemination enabled by Open Access, they also receive high levels of citation and downloads.

FUNDING NEEDS TO BE AVAILABLE: Post-grant funding to enable researchers to cover the cost of Open Access APCs is vital, as many articles are published after a project has formally ended. Mechanisms which set aside a percentage of funding for publication would ensure that all research outcomes continue to be communicated, and that researchers obtain clear information about how to obtain adequate funding for both their work, and for OA publication, both during and after their projects’ completion.

Ensuring the researcher remains at the heart of research

Our destination is the same as yours – a fully Open Access and Open Science world. However, in order to translate this vision into a reality, researchers’ needs should be placed at the very heart of any updates to the MGA.

To ensure this, we recommend:

- Safeguarding researcher’s freedom of choice by trusting them to know the best ‘home’ for their research
- Retaining the current embargo periods which recognise the key differences across disciplines and ensure the long-term sustainability of preferred journals
- Ensuring that grant funding for publication is available after projects have ended
- Focusing on incentives and rewards for researchers rather than the increasing the administrative burden of grant applications
- Simplifying the MGA by making it: more user friendly for researchers (e.g. inclusion of checklists), machine readable and undergoing a maximum of two revisions per year