

Open access

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Green versus Gold

Readers will I am sure be aware of the different manifestations of Open Access (OA) - Green and Gold - the future of which is now the subject of debate.

To be clear: Gold OA is delivered through journals, which may be completely OA or hybrid, where some articles are OA and others are available only to subscribers; Green OA is delivered through self-archiving - authors' deposit of manuscripts in repositories, which may be institutional or disciplinary.

The main characteristics of Green and Gold OA are as follows.

Green OA:

- Relies on a quite recent but well established infrastructure of repositories. Hence it is easy and cheap: each article only incurs a portion, very small in monetary terms, of the overhead costs of setting up and running repositories.
- Does not have the overheads of a peer-reviewed journal; however deposited articles may be, and most often have been, peer-reviewed for publication in subscription journals.

- Is compatible with subscription journal publishing; scholars are able to publish in subscription journals, for instance where these are of particularly high repute, and, through self-archiving, still make their articles OA, albeit after an embargo period.
- Depends on authors' obtaining rights from publishers to deposit and make articles available.
- Is hospitable to many other types of document, notably pre-prints (which provide the time-stamp noted at the start of this chapter), theses, and research datasets.

Gold OA:

- Offers articles, in both OA and hybrid journals, that are peer-reviewed for publication. It incurs the same costs for the editorial and peer review process as subscription journal publishing.
- Is always immediate, while Green OA is often subject to time embargoes imposed by subscription journal publishers.

- Provides access to the published version of an article, while Green OA generally provides access only to the author's final peer-reviewed manuscript, without the formatting or pagination of the published version. However by its nature it is confined to post-prints.
- Generally obtains rights and permissions direct from the rights-holder (usually the author).

In June 2012 the publication of the [Finch Report](#) (Working Group on Expanding Access to Published Research Findings) gave a great boost to Gold OA with the recommendation (p.7) that “a clear policy direction should be set towards support for publication in open access or hybrid journals, funded by APCs [article processing charges], as the main vehicle for the publication of research, especially when it is publicly funded”. This boost was given added force by the endorsement of the Government and the funding of APCs by the Research Councils in the UK.

Finch was interpreted by many as undervaluing Green OA, particularly in the recommendation (also p.7) that “the infrastructure of subject and institutional repositories should be developed so that they play a valuable role complementary to formal publishing, particularly in providing access to research data and to grey literature, and in digital preservation”.

There has been some rowing back from this position. For instance, the latest [consultation](#) by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) on the Research Excellence Framework exercise to be held in about 2020, while endorsing Finch in principle, states: “as the transition to full open access will occur over a period of time, we propose to accept material published via either gold or green routes as eligible, recognising that it is not appropriate to express any preference in the context of research assessment”.

One interpretation of Finch is that endorsing Gold over Green was the price of getting the publishers in the Working Group on board. It remains to be seen whether the pendulum will swing back towards Green OA. Certainly the economic case for Green during the period of transition to Gold has been demonstrated by Swan and Houghton (*Going for Gold? The costs and benefits of Gold Open Access for UK research institutions: Further economic modelling: Report to the UK Open Access Implementation Group*. London: UK Open Access Implementation Group, 2012. Available at: http://repository.jisc.ac.uk/610/2/Modelling_Gold_Open_Access_for_institutions_-_final_draft3.pdf).

This economic pressure on universities may be decisive.

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