

Open Research Values & Practice: Scholarly Societies in the Humanities

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This narrative accompanies the presentation [10.5281/zenodo.4899213] which summarises the findings from the White Rose College of Arts and Humanities Researcher Employability Project with Routledge, Taylor & Francis.

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Project Objectives

The objectives of our project were two-fold:

- Firstly, to consider what challenges and opportunities are emerging from the ongoing transition to Open Research; moving the discourse on from transactional considerations of Open Access to the role of Scholarly Societies in normalizing Open Research practices in the Humanities
- And, secondly, to use this research as the basis for developing contextualized options for Publishers to use when engaging with their Scholarly partners around the transformation to Open

In considering the needs of Humanities Societies specifically, there has also been a natural focus on *values*, and how they align or misalign with *practice*. As has emerged from the research, the ethical debates around Open are where Humanities could make a **real intervention** and lead the way in a **values-first transition to Open**.

This research highlights not only how Publishers and Scholarly Societies might engage more deeply in the ongoing Open Research discourse to establish appropriate routes to open, but how a values-lead transition to Open might support that transition for a wider range of participants, including Universities and other Research Organisations in the Humanities.

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Project Outline – March to May 2021

We took a customer-first approach to understanding the needs of Scholarly Societies in relation to a transformation to open publication. From a series of baseline interviews with Scholarly Society executives, we identified common themes and synthesised insights on

attitudes toward Open in the changing research and publication landscape. We then contextualised these findings against some wider desk-based research that surveyed the state of Humanities-focused engagement in the global debates around Open.

Based on these findings, we produced options that could offer routes to Open for Societies. The two major research outputs from this project were this presentation, and a confidential report delivered to Routledge leadership.

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Scholarly Society insights – A Complex Discourse

The responses received from Society representatives helped to shape the direction of the desk research. The quotes on this slide are representative of the range of views expressed; the first quote on this slide encompasses an optimistic attitude, that recognises the inevitability of a shift to Open while also viewing it as a great opportunity for **reputational advantage** and leadership within the field.

The second is **starkly different**. It also acknowledges that this shift is inevitable, but it views it as no less than an existential threat. The respondent questions if the Society can survive a transition to Open, and sees **no potential** for positive gain. These quotes give a sense of the range of feeling across the Humanities Societies.

As we moved into the second phase of the study, we started to look more closely at the Humanities in the context of a broader Open Research discourse. The key themes that emerged from this deeper dive into the Open Research landscape reflect the complexity of the discourse around Open in the humanities. These themes also bring into sharper focus the need for more education and engagement about Open Research practices that can be applied by Scholarly Societies and extended to a wider range of participants in Societies' networks, including university stakeholders such as librarians and research managers, funded project leads and advocacy and policy-influencing organisations.

With the broader range of stakeholders in mind, we consolidate all of the research findings under four main headings, as a way to illustrate the key drivers associated with the complex discourse around the Humanities in the context of Open Research:

- **Changing Landscape** refers to the shifts that are occurring in the research publication landscape. This primarily refers to the transition to Open Research, but also considers how Societies and other institutions must adapt in the face of external frameworks (such as PlanS and the REF) and crises (for example, the pandemic or insecurity in academic work).
- **Strategic Priorities** includes the short and long terms goals of Societies and other institutions. This is a broad category, but the most common priorities expressed were broadening and diversifying membership, improving reputation, and supporting Early Career Researchers.
- **Economic Concerns** are often bound with anxieties about a shift to Open Access business model. The main fear being cost of APCs and jeopardising one of the core revenue sources for many Societies.

- Finally, **Global Inequalities** refers to the current inequities that exist in Humanities, especially between Global North and South researchers, and how they may be addressed or exacerbated by a large-scale shift to Open Research. This also considers the values of Societies, their commitments to diversity, equity, and inclusivity, and whether those values cohere with current practice in OR.

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Proactive Options for Values-Lead Open Research

Having identified the most pressing priorities and concerns, we worked to devise recommendations that address them. The hope is that these suggestions offer a starting point for conversations not only between Publishers and their Scholarly Partners about the smoothest routes to Open Research. These recommendations have also been informed by workshops and one-on-one conversations with editorial team. In talking to portfolio managers and drawing on their experience, we have gained a more accurate picture of Societies' needs.

Throughout the recommendations, there is an emphasis on a need for an *active* rather than *reactive* response. Although the anxieties around Open held by Societies are valid, prioritizing engagement and adaptation with the changing landscape and the opportunities therein will stand them in good stead for the future. Reacting slowly will likely result in greater upset and financial losses, while an active response could have numerous benefits that we will go on to discuss.

This may feel daunting for many Societies, however, they should be assured that they won't face this challenge alone. Many of these anxieties are shared across the Humanities, and so addressing them effectively is in the interest of all within the research ecosystem.

Coordinated collaboration and constructive discussions must be encouraged between all parties – from Societies, to publishers, to institutions, to researchers, and even between “competing” associations and journals. Sharing research, insights, ideas, and strategies could be crucial in finding a route to Open that does not simply work *in* the Humanities, but *for* the Humanities.

It should also be clear that publishers like Routledge recognise their responsibility to work with Societies. With **purposeful guidance** from academic publishers and other stakeholders that remains **compassionate** to the very real concerns of their Scholarly Partners, Societies and more have the potential to **flourish** in a reimagined research publication landscape.

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Engaging external frameworks, reputation and recognition

Encouraging the view that a shift to Open is less a threat, than an opportunity, offers a chance for Scholarly Societies in particular to carve out a place for themselves at the heart of a reimagined research ecosystem. Scholarly Societies should be made aware of the benefit to reputation that will come if their transition to Open is done in an effective, sustainable, and ethical way. The landscape in flux offers a unique opportunity to lead the discussion and influence the Open debate. The shift will happen with or without the input of

Scholarly Societies, and the best way to ensure their interests do not fall by the wayside is make interventions wherever possible. At this stage, the direction in which Open Research develops is **not set in stone**, and Societies are strategically placed to offer valued insights in setting the agenda for the future of research publication.

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Connecting strategic priorities & Open values

The role of Societies in the Humanities has always been to guide the discipline, and at a time of identity crisis, they can use this opportunity to reassert this position. Placing more focus on Open Research issues at conferences would be an effective way of centralising the topic, building awareness, and creating a shared understanding. The activities of Societies, however, must extend beyond education into actively promoting Open Research. They must work to inform their membership of the benefits for academics, while working to dispel misconceptions and address concerns. The values of Open strongly align with the principles of many Humanities researchers – especially Early Career Researchers – and as such they will be willing to embrace a values-led, working Open model that does not place significant financial burdens on authors or their institutions.

This would also show a willingness to act upon and promote their values as Humanities Societies. The reputations of these Societies are bound up with their ethics, as expressed in their mission statements and commitments to democratisation, decolonisation, and so on. A fundamental shift in the landscape presents an opportunity to address these long-standing inequities and rebuild Humanities research publication. With Scholarly Societies choosing to take action and steering the future of Humanities in a **more equitable direction**, they can realise their **ethical values with practice**.

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Economic model & publication modalities

Following a large-scale shift, the main substitute for traditional revenue sources will be Open income. However, existing OA revenue generation models are not producing large sums and as such are not adequate to fully replace this income or sustain the current activities of Scholarly Societies. There is a need for this Open income to be bolstered by additional revenue streams and more support from funders for the Humanities. Publishers and other stakeholders should aid Societies in identifying opportunities for these streams wherever possible.

Another is to focus on providing paid training and development sessions for researchers. These sessions could be open to all, charging a fee for attendees and offering discounts to paid-up members and ECRs. This would not only provide opportunities for income, but it would also position the Scholarly Society as instrumental in nurturing the future of the discipline. It would also make Societies more attractive to the younger demographic, which could be critical in revitalising associations that have a committed but aging membership. These would cover a range of skills, such as professionalisation and peer review training, but could find a niche in focusing on Open Research practices more specifically. This would

encourage good, transparent academic practice, and make a long-term impact by instilling Open habits into the next generation of academics.

Additional sources of income can be found in incorporating digital and alternative modalities into Humanities, which has generally underutilised these tools. Scholarly Societies should encourage their researchers – where appropriate and useful – to consider using digital research tools and publication methods. There may be more appetite for these tools in the Arts, where 3D modelling, digital illustration tools, and multimedia elements can realise research that may have been impossible within the limitations of print. Once again, skills sessions could be offered to train academics in how to best exploit digital tools to strengthen their research. Societies could profit from providing academics with the tools and platforms that they need to produce and distribute innovative research. New publication modalities would not replace traditional outputs, but would coexist alongside and support print research. This would also address the issue of Digital Humanities being peripheral and excluded from Humanities proper. Centring innovation and interdisciplinarity, DH is an area capable of attracting funding that would not otherwise be awarded to the Humanities. If Scholarly Societies can promote finding alternative modalities, it will incorporate DH back into Humanities and unify the discipline, opening new opportunities for interactive research and funding.

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Further research - Addressing limitations in scope

We have reflected on the potential limitations of the project and made suggestions for further research that may fill some of these gaps. Many of these limitations are related to scope. There are practical explanations for this, primarily that arranging these meetings has likely been made harder by the additional pressures placed on these Partners by the pandemic. It may also speak to a general reluctance to engage in conversations about Open Research. Given the necessity that these conversations take place, further research should be done with a wider range of participants from across the Humanities, exploring how the Scholarly Societies' values-lead open transition perspective fits with a diverse range of needs being expressed by other actors in the Scholarly ecosystem e.g. librarians, research managers, funders.

Active discussions and workshops with Society Partners should also seek to find out if the recommendations made in this report address their primary concerns, and if they feel attractive and actionable.

While the project narrowed in on HSS, Humanities is a broad field with needs that are at once acute and diverse. An even more focused study into niche areas of the discipline would produce more nuanced findings. These findings could be utilised to develop a range of solutions that are conscious of and tailored to the variation within the field. There are varied levels of readiness across HSS, and as such there will not be a one-size-fits-all approach.

Additionally, in its interest in Scholarly Societies and their publication activities, the project has naturally focused on academic journals. A clearer picture of the transition to Open would be gained from an investigation that centred on books. Such a study would engage

with Publishers' books programme and would take into consideration the books-focused Open initiatives that are emerging.