

The European Commission's Open Access Pilot for Research Articles: Frequently Asked Questions

What is open access?

Under open access policies, authors published in research publications grant free Internet access to their scientific contributions, as well as the possibility to use them, subject to proper attribution of authorship¹. Under open access, a complete version of the work and supplemental materials should be deposited in at least one online repository.

In the pilot launched today, open access means free of charge access for anyone over the internet to research articles resulting from EU funded research.

Open access is a natural policy approach where research is publicly funded: the results of research funded with taxpayers' money should afterwards be disseminated as broadly as possible and for free to other interested researchers and the public at large. The Commission's pilot therefore focuses on research articles resulting from research funded under the EU's 7th Framework programme for research and development ([FP7](#)).

What are the potential benefits of an open access policy for Europe?

As all research and innovation builds on earlier achievements, an efficient system for broad dissemination of and access to research publications and raw data can accelerate scientific progress. This in turn is essential for Europe's ability to innovate, to enhance its economic performance and improve its capacity to compete through knowledge on a global scale.

Open access can boost the visibility of European research, give researchers access to a wider body of research literature that can be built upon for future developments, and offer small and medium sized enterprises access to the latest quality research for exploitation which will speed up commercialisation and innovation. Developing nations and institutions who cannot afford costly journal subscriptions can use open access to provide equal learning opportunities to their researchers, thereby increasing the possibility for new scientific discoveries.

By helping researchers to disseminate their research results to the broadest possible audience, open access generates a broader scientific debate and can trigger the interest of the wider public and of industry. This can in turn open new avenues to the commercialisation of research results, especially for taking them beyond national borders.

¹ See also the 2003 Berlin Declaration on Open Access to Knowledge in the Sciences and Humanities, <http://oa.mpg.de/openaccess-berlin/berlindeclaration.html>.

Why an open access pilot?

Through FP7, the Commission is investing, between 2007 and 2013, over € 50 billion in research and expects to get the best possible return on this investment.

The open access pilot launched today by the Commission will test, until the end of FP7, giving open access to research publications resulting from EU-funded research as a possible model for broader application under the next research programme, and also in the Member States.

The Commission will assess and discuss experiences with the pilot and its overall impact on maximising the benefits of EU-funded research with the European Parliament, Member States and stakeholders.

Open access to what?

The Commission's open access pilot targets peer reviewed scientific journal articles that result from EU funded research.

However, the concept of open access can also apply to research data, images, etc.

How will open access reward the various players involved in scientific publication?

First of all, the Commission intends to test open access policies for publicly funded research. Open access is in this context a fair return to the **public** on research funded with taxpayers' money.

Secondly, for **researchers**, open access can help them to disseminate their research results to the broadest possible audience, thereby not only generating a broader scientific debate, but also potentially triggering broad public and also commercial interest into these research results. This can in turn open new ways to the commercialisation of research results, especially beyond national borders.

Thirdly, open access to journal articles can be achieved in different ways, reflecting different business models of **scientific publishing** and different ways to get a return on investments in the dissemination system of scientific articles². Two basic models are currently under experimentation:

- *Open access publishing*, where the costs of publishing are covered by authors (in practice usually by the funding bodies supporting them) or other sources (often university libraries) instead of readers paying via subscriptions. This type of publishing is offered by open access journals and by "hybrid" journals (subscription-based journals offering authors the option to pay for their article to be available open access). It ensures that research articles are immediately available in open access mode as soon as they are published. Open access publishing is also referred to as "gold" open access. A listing of open access journals can be found in the Directory of Open Access Journals. (<http://www.doaj.org>)

² Scientific journal publishing is a profitable and sustainable business, which traditionally operates on a subscription-based model. Around 800 publishing houses based in Europe are responsible for publishing 49% of the world's research articles; 36 000 full-time staff plus 10 000 freelancers, editors and staff working for suppliers are employed in this industry in Europe. European researchers publish 43% of the world's research papers, and it is estimated that Europe accounts for 24-32% of world expenditure on journals.

- *Self-archiving*, where authors deposit the peer-reviewed manuscripts of their articles in repositories (also called open archives), to be available in open access mode, sometimes after an embargo period in order to allow publishers to recoup their investment. Self-archiving is also referred to as "green" open access. The Directory of Open Access Repositories (*OpenDOAR*) offers a comprehensive listing of repositories worldwide (<http://www.opendoar.org>).

The embargo periods foreseen in the context of the Commission's open access pilot (6 to 12 months after initial publication) provide a safeguard for the investment made by scientific publishers.

The Commission has carefully analysed the effects of open access policies on the scientific publishing market, both by means of a study and of a public consultation in 2006. These are available at:

http://ec.europa.eu/research/science-society/page_en.cfm?id=3185

Which parts of FP7 will be covered by the open access pilot?

The pilot covers approximately 20% of the FP7 budget and will apply to specific areas of research under the 7th Research Framework Programme (FP7):

- Health
- Energy
- Environment
- Information and Communication Technologies (Cognitive Systems, Interaction, Robotics)
- Research Infrastructures (e-Infrastructures);
- Socio-economic Sciences and Humanities;
- Science in Society

These research areas have a potentially high societal impact and political relevance: they can help Europe face global challenges like climate change and the management of natural resources. They also make it possible to test open access for a variety of different disciplines, including a range of natural sciences, social sciences and humanities, as well as both basic and applied research.

How will the open access pilot be implemented?

New grant agreements in the areas covered by the pilot will contain a clause requiring grant recipients to deposit peer reviewed research articles or final manuscripts resulting from their FP7 projects into their institutional or if unavailable a subject-based repository. They will have to make their best efforts to ensure open access to these articles within six or twelve months after publication, depending on the research area. This embargo period will allow scientific publishers to get a return on their investment.

Why are embargo periods running from 6 to 12 months instead of a single embargo period?

Scientific publishers draw attention to the fact that when considering open access policies, funding bodies should be aware that "one size does not fit all". The length of time during which research results are novel and useful varies according to discipline. The results of research in rapidly changing disciplines in fields like energy, environment, health and ICT tend to become obsolete relatively quickly. The results of research in social science and the humanities, on the other hand, usually remain relevant for longer.

Other funding bodies have introduced embargo periods within this range. For example, the Wellcome Trust (UK) has set an embargo period of 6 months, the National Institutes of Health (USA) 12 months at the latest and the Canadian Institutes of Health Research 6 months.

As this is a pilot initiative, the different embargo periods allow the Commission to experiment and assess the impact of such embargo periods.

What is peer review and why is it important for the quality of scientific publications?

Peer review is the process by which independent experts in a scientific discipline (the peers) critically assess a scientific paper reporting on research. They check whether the methodologies used, as well as the reasoning and evidence presented in the paper meet the interest and quality standards of the subject. Their feedback often leads to changes in the article.

The peer review system is critical for the scientific community as it is an important quality control mechanism and can influence scientific careers. Rejection rates by journals vary widely and may reach 90% for the most popular journals.

The Commission's open access pilot deliberately covers peer reviewed scientific journal articles resulting from EU funded research to seek the highest possible quality of available online publications.

Are there similar projects on open access initiated by the Commission?

The Commission's pilot is one of several EU initiatives currently underway to experiment with open access and new business models to guarantee access to and dissemination of publicly funded research results.

- the Commission has taken the initiative to use FP7 grant agreements to encourage grantees to take advantage of reimbursement for the full cost of open access publishing so that their research articles can be made available in open access mode as soon as they are published
- the collaborative PEER project (Pilot Programme Investigating the Effect of the Deposit of Author) between researchers and scientific publishers focuses on the impact depositing peer-reviewed manuscripts in repositories can have on policy-making.

Does open access to journal articles interfere with patenting or other potential forms of commercial exploitation of research results?

No. Open access to journals articles comes into play only if and when a decision to publish (which implies disclosing the results) has been taken. Decisions regarding whether to patent and commercially exploit research results are typically taken before publication.

What is the situation on open access in different Member States and internationally?

The development of access policies and measures for scientific publications varies widely among the Member States. Funding bodies such as the Wellcome Trust and the many of the Research Councils in the **UK**, the Research Council for Science, Engineering and Technology in **Ireland**, the Superior Institute of Health in **Italy**, INSERM in **France**, the German Research Foundation in **Germany**, Research Foundation Flanders in **Belgium**, and the Austrian Science Fund in **Austria** have implemented open access policies to the research that they fund.

A complete list of funding bodies' policies can be found at <http://www.sherpa.ac.uk/juliet/>.

In the **Netherlands**, a national initiative called the DAREnet programme links academic and research institutions and provides open access to their findings via the Internet.

Further afield, the National Institutes of Health in the **USA** now have a public access policy that legally requires scientists to submit final peer-reviewed journal manuscripts that arise from its funding to the digital archive PubMed Central and make them open access in no more than 12 months.

See also [IP/08/1262](#)

More details about the European Research Council guidelines on open access can be also found:

http://erc.europa.eu/pdf/ScC_Guidelines_Open_Access_revised_Dec07_FINAL.pdf