

# Establishing a Central Open Access Fund



The University of Nottingham is a world-class research-led institution, placed in the top 1% of higher education institutions worldwide. A major research-intensive institution, the University of Nottingham publishes about 4,000 articles a year and is committed to the pursuit of international excellence in research. This case study looks into the steps taken by the University to establish a central, institutional fund for the payment of article processing charges (APC) for open access publication and initiating a systematic process to support investigators at the University in disseminating their research to a global community.

## The driver for central funds: open access mandates

The Nottingham Central Fund was established in direct response to the open access mandates from research funders. The Wellcome Trust, The Howard Hughes Medical Institute (HHMI), five of the seven member councils of the Research Councils UK (RCUK) and other funders now require that any publications arising from the research they fund be made available through two main open access routes. Like the National Institutes of Health (NIH) in the USA, these research funders want the work they are funding to be made available either through depositing in an open access repository or publishing in an open access journal. Some of the funders like The Wellcome Trust provide money for their funded authors to cover costs relating to APCs; others allow use of indirect costs for open access publishing.

The University of Nottingham recognized that a clear, institutional approach would be required to deal effectively with research funder policies and establish the central fund.

*"...major research councils have these policies in place. It was obvious that we needed an institutional approach to dealing with these policies." Stephen Pinfield, Chief Information Officer, University of Nottingham*

The University also believed that the central fund should provide a level playing field to all authors within the institution, no matter how their research was funded and would therefore enable all authors to apply for funds to publish in open access journals.

*"Researchers should be able to claim against this fund, no matter who funds their research. If their funder doesn't have a mandate, they should still be able to apply." Stephen Pinfield, Chief Information Officer, University of Nottingham*

## Setting up the Nottingham Central Fund

### **What departments were involved?**

Information Services (IS), a combined library and IT service, were the initial drivers of the open access initiative at the University. With research funders mandating open access publication in various different ways and in varying degrees of robustness IS recognized the need for the University of Nottingham to have a centrally managed fund and to have the infrastructure and processes ready to enable authors to comply to the mandates. IS began by pitching the idea of having a central open access fund to other departments asking the following questions: *'How are we, as an institution, going to respond to those requirements? How are we going to meet the demands of funding agencies that work be published in open access?'*

*"Although Information Services instigated this initiative it was essentially to work in partnership with other stakeholders in the institution." Stephen Pinfield, Chief Information Officer, University of Nottingham*

A partnership was formed between IS and the Research Innovation Services (RIS) department, the central support office of the University. Responsible for supporting the institution's research and innovation activities and managing the bidding for research funds, RIS together with IS progressed the open access initiative and worked to maintain the ongoing development of the Nottingham Central Fund.

### **How was the central fund set up?**

Following initial discussions with RIS, IS put forward a proposal to the University Research Committee. Getting the support of the Research Committee was essential. The Research Committee recognized the importance of the issue, particularly in the light of the funder mandates outlined above. The proposal put to the committee recommended that authors should be encouraged to deposit their work in the institutional repository, that the University identify a central budget for open access publishing to which all researchers could apply. In addition, internal communications should be designed to communicate to staff the availability of the fund.

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Following the presentation and discussions around the initial proposal, IS was asked to prepare a second paper, detailing step-by-step guidelines from each funding agency about the different modes of open access policy compliance. A later meeting of the Research Committee approved the policy guidelines and these were then publicized within the University.

IS had already set up an open access repository in which papers could be deposited.

## ***Financing a central, open access fund***

The University of Nottingham publishes about 4000 articles a year; assuming an average APC of between £750 and £1500 would mean that in the future several millions of pounds would be needed to fund open access publishing at the University. The question was asked whether money for the Nottingham Central Fund should in the short term come out of the periodicals budget. The answer was 'no'. Most publishers now run a hybrid model for open access publishing, where authors may choose an open access option in otherwise subscription based journals, but are not (yet) reducing their subscription charges. It was acknowledged that during a medium term transition period, the institution might well end up paying out more money to support subscriptions as well as open access publishing. In the long term, however, funds from the periodicals budget could conceivably be transferred to support a fund like this, but it cannot be a simple and immediate one-to-one swap.

Some of the funders with open access policies, including The Wellcome Trust, provide money for open access publishing whilst authors supported by other funders can use direct or indirect costs for publishing. Since the payment of open access publication charges is directly linked to the University's research income, the cost scales with the research income. The direct costs of a project include the payment of researchers' salaries associated with the research project, travel expenses, equipment and other similar costs. Many funders allow publication charges to be funded as a direct cost of the project but only during the lifetime of the research grant. The majority of publications however, occur after the lifetime of the grant. The University hopes that the Nottingham Central Fund will prove useful when this happens, particularly for researchers who have insufficient funds.

Most funders regard the funding of publication charges as a legitimate indirect cost along with other institutional costs such as accommodation, library, IT and other infrastructural expenses. Indirect costs are usually calculated as a percentage of direct costs, with funders adding a given percentage to their grants for indirect costs. Institutions have to ensure they alter their internal formulae for allocating indirect costs to different areas of the institution to take these new costs of publication into account. Once again, it is important that a variety of stakeholders in an institution is involved in ensuring this can be achieved. At Nottingham, it was acknowledged that the open access publishing cost would have to be recalculated on a year-by-year basis, as it is likely to increase.

## ***Administering the central fund***

Nottingham is now monitoring the take-up of funds, something that is made easier by the fact that they are administered centrally. A named contact in the RIS department was made responsible for looking after the research fund applications; to monitor and track monies for the Nottingham Central Fund. Anticipating a growing demand for open access research funding, the University will put mechanisms in place to get regular reporting on how the central fund is being used. To date, only a small number of researchers have applied and have received open access funds for their work but demand is expected to grow significantly when those affected by the funder policies finish their research in the next few years. Owned and administered by the RIS, the Nottingham Central Fund provides a level playing field for everyone within the institution, which means funded researchers without a mandate are also able to apply. No matter where the research money comes from, researchers are able to claim against the central fund.

*"Having a central fund makes it easier to manage and monitor for the institution, at least for the time being."*  
*Stephen Pinfield, Chief Information Officer, University of Nottingham*

## **Planning for the future**

Most funders' policy requirements apply to grants awarded after August 2006 and therefore most people won't be publishing about those research projects until 2009. Significant demand for this funding is unlikely to kick in until two or three years down the line. For now though Stephen Pinfield, Chief Information Officer, and his colleagues are taking a step-by-step approach of getting the fund set up and then monitoring its use.

With provisions in place to see repository and funding developments through to the next decade, the University has everything ready to enable authors to comply with funders' open access mandates. The University of Nottingham is able to monitor open access costs along with other research costs. The creation of the open access fund has helped the University to put in place policies, which satisfy new funder requirements. With an open access central fund placed at the heart of the institution's research activities, the University of Nottingham is in a good position to provide appropriate support for open access publishing in the future.