

The EC FP7 Post-Grant Open Access Pilot funding initiative for Open Access publishing fees: a dissemination challenge

Saskia de Vries¹ and Pablo de Castro²

¹*Radboud University Nijmegen, Nijmegen, The Netherlands*

²*LIBER, The Hague, The Netherlands*

Corresponding author: Saskia de Vries, s.devries@ubn.ru.nl

Abstract (Times New Roman 12, Bold)

A new funding initiative was launched by the European Commission in May 2015 to cover the Open Access (OA) publishing costs of publications arising from over 8,000 finished (i.e. post-grant) FP7 projects. At the time of writing, almost a year into the implementation of this FP7 Post-Grant OA Pilot, the initiative is consistently taking up and has already granted nearly 400 funding requests from eligible researchers and projects all across Europe. Funding requests submitted from researchers in Spain and the UK are currently topping the classification of approved funding requests by country, and the biomedical sciences are by far the most frequent research field that funding is being applied for.

This contribution provides an up-to-date insight on the progress of this FP7 Post-Grant OA funding initiative, which is being implemented in the framework of the OpenAIRE2020 European project in order to further support the European Commission's OA policies. Up-to-date figures are shown for the first year of the initiative showing its uptake by countries, institutions, publishers and disciplines, making emphasis on the results for the biomedical sciences. The evolution of the average Article Processing Charge (APC) paid will be discussed, together with the impact of the no-hybrid policy on the project results. This policy for not supporting the costs of publishing OA articles in hybrid journals, which is aligned with the Gold OA policies of other research funders across the Continent, offers interesting opportunities for technical coordination and data sharing across funding initiatives and also with the publishers.

Key words: Gold Open Access; Open Access publishing; Article Processing Charges (APCs); OpenAIRE; Dissemination; Research libraries

1. Introduction

A Gold OA route, meaning publishing in OA journals, was included as a suitable option in all the early Open Access declarations (Budapest [1], Bethesda, Berlin), and even before these were issued, this route had systematically been followed by researchers as a means to increase the visibility for their publications. This Gold OA route *does not mean however that OA publishing fees must be paid by authors* in order to publish their work, and it is in fact a well-known fact that most OA journals included in the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) charge no APCs to their authors [2].

Institutions have had OA funds to cover APC payments for quite a long time in order to provide the research support requested by researchers, but it was the Finch report what started to drive funders to do likewise on a comparable scale. Starting with the Wellcome Trust and RCUK in the United Kingdom, the number of funders whose policies include instruments for explicitly covering the OA publishing costs has sharply increased in the last few years and nowadays include the likes of the

FWF in Austria, the DFG in Germany, the NWO in the Netherlands, the Norwegian Research Council or the FCT in Portugal among others. The OA policy of the European Commission for the Horizon 2020 research framework programme, which already included support for the OA publishing costs incurred within the project implementation, has now been enriched with a new funding initiative aiming to cover the OA publishing fees for post-grant publications for the previous programme, i.e. the Seventh Framework Programme or FP7 [3]. These post-grant publications are journal articles, book chapters, monographs or edited volumes that get published after the project has finished, and are thus not able to rely on the funding provided by the project grant. It's very frequent for projects to produce this kind of post-grant publications, whose OA publishing fees researchers will normally cover with funding from other running projects they're involved in, but one of the goals of this pioneering EC funding initiative is precisely to test how useful it may be to provide specific post-grant funding. An additional aim is to implement the workflows that will make it possible to disseminate the funding opportunity and allocate the available €m funding in a reasonably balanced way across projects, countries, disciplines, publication types and publishing business models.

The growing number of Gold OA funds provided by institutions and funders is gradually resulting in an emerging infrastructure around the monitoring of the policies and the funding. It is critical to monitor and share information on the individual APC payments made and to make sure that the fees are not artificially raised to match the funding caps that are often defined for these funding initiatives. Standards are gradually arising for collecting APC payment information that will allow this important source of OA expenditure to be monitored and exchanged across institutions and countries [4]. Transparency has systematically been mentioned as a goal too when designing this funding initiatives, and beyond that, it's actually very important for institutions to be able to collect information on the APC payments made within their walls, something that has been nearly completely overlooked thus far but that is now starting to be possible [5].

Being managed by an international team of institutions and partners – which include the Jisc and the University College London in the UK, SURF in the Netherlands, the University of Göttingen in Germany and the Athena Research Centre and University of Athens in Greece – this FP7 Post-Grant OA Pilot finds itself in a privileged position to assist these coordination efforts. At the same time, being implemented under the strongly pro-Green OA OpenAIRE project, this post-grant pilot has been careful to design and implement an alternative funding mechanism aimed to fund APC-free OA journals and platforms [6].

2. Results

The results collected so far for the FP7 Post-Grant OA Pilot mainly refer to its core activity, namely the funding of OA publishing fees for journal articles, books and book chapters stemming from finished FP7 projects. As for the alternative funding mechanism for APC-free OA journals, it was launched early May 2016 as planned and will remain open for funding bids until June 30th, 2016, so it's very early yet to present any results on this other main workline.

A reporting module [7] has been included in the design of the OpenAIRE system for collecting and processing funding requests for this EC FP7 Post-Grant Open Access Pilot where live information is provided on the number of approved funding requests and its distribution by countries, institutions and publishers. Data is also provided on the funds awarded on each of these three categories, together with up-to-date figures on the average fees paid for journal articles, book chapters and books. A year into the initiative, these average values are remaining rather stable and well below the funding caps that have been established as part of the policy guidelines (€2,000 for articles and book chapters, €6,000 for books).

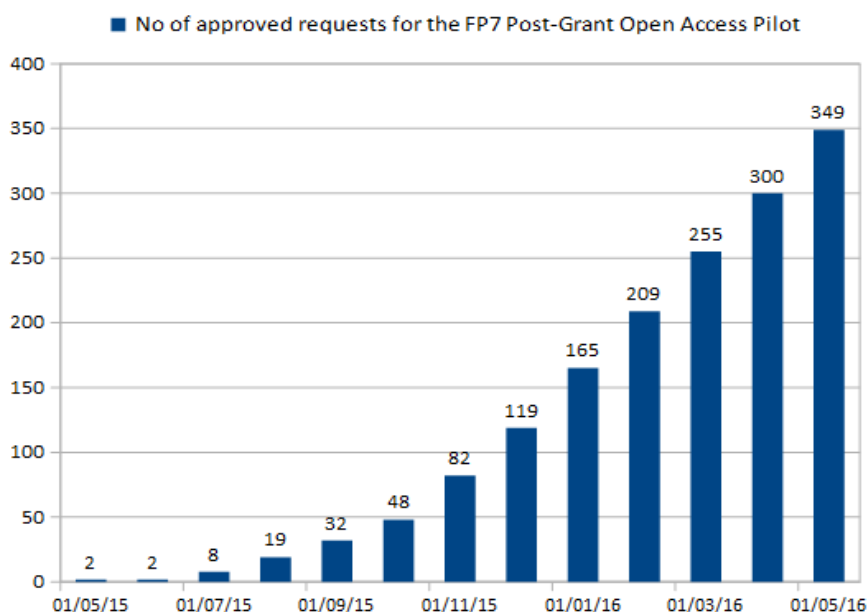


Fig 1. Number of approved funding requests as of May 1st, 2016

Bi-monthly reports are being produced on top of the information provided by the live reporting module [8], where an analysis is performed on aspects not covered by this module such as the impact of the no-hybrid policy in the number of rejected requests, the most popular fully OA journals that funded researchers have selected or the evolution of the average APC fees.

Country	Approved funding requests
Spain	65
UK	59
Italy	39
Germany	36
Netherlands	22
France, Switzerland	20
Portugal	12
Belgium, Sweden	11
Greece	10
Austria, Finland	9
Israel	8
Hungary, Ireland, Turkey	5
Denmark, Norway	4
Lithuania, Poland	3
Australia, Czech Republic, Slovenia, South Africa	2
Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Croatia, Luxembourg, Mexico, Serbia, Slovakia	1
Cyprus, Estonia, Latvia, Malta, Romania (EU only)	0

Table 1.- Distribution of approved funding requests by country as of May 22nd, 2016

Following a somewhat slow start of the initiative in the summer of 2015, the total number of approved funding requests shown in figure 1 has kept steadily growing since a letter was sent in early October 2015 from the European Commission to every FP7 project coordinator announcing

this new funding initiative. The large number of dissemination actions carried out since the FP7 Post-Grant OA Pilot was launched at the end of May 2015, including webinars, presentations at events, articles in research journals [9], distribution of dissemination materials and a significant number of posts in the OpenAIRE and other blogs have helped reaching out to researchers. The OpenAIRE network of National Open Access Desks (NOADs), institutions and libraries is also providing an invaluable support for the initiative by locally dealing with dissemination and support to researchers in the different countries. On top of that, the FP7 Post-Grant Open Access Pilot has recently started collaborating with specific OA publishers in order to jointly identify the eligible manuscripts at submission time, thus increasing the efficiency of the dissemination actions. The fact that only a few FP7 project so far have made use of their maximum of three opportunities for collecting funding for a post-grant publication shows that there is room for improvement in this area.

The updated distribution of approved funding request by country in table 1 above shows that 11 countries have already reached ten approved funding requests. This classification also shows a significant bias towards Western Europe that is being researched in order to confirm the hypothesis that there is a shift towards corresponding authors in Western European countries as a result of the availability of funding to cover the OA publishing fees. A bias that is not reflected by this classification is the one that could potentially exist between countries where Gold OA funds are made available from national research funders and those where they do not exist: the presence of countries like Spain or Italy on top positions in the list shows that the potential advantage of countries where the workflows for the implementation of Gold OA policies are well established is not a relevant factor in this distribution.

The sample of approved funding requests one year into the project shows – as expected – that the vast majority of funded publications are journal articles. The FP7 Post-Grant OA Pilot is subsequently carefully monitoring the evolution of the average APC fee that is being paid, in order to make sure that such evolution is reasonably steady and remains well below the €2,000 funding cap.

3. Discussion

The analysis of the nearly 400 funding requests granted so far shows an overwhelming presence of journal articles from the biomedical sciences. This is no surprise, since this is the research area where funders are making the highest emphasis on Open Access, in order to ensure the instant and worldwide availability of potentially life-saving research outputs and their highest possible impact.

Moreover, around 40% of the funding requests granted so far by the EC FP7 Post-Grant Open Access Pilot have been awarded to research centres and university hospitals, while the remaining 60% went to universities, see table 4 below. This distribution, which is totally in line with the disciplinary bias towards the biomedical sciences, doesn't match however the default distribution by type of research-performing organization in the database of FP7 project partners. Non-university stakeholders including research centres and university hospitals are overrepresented in the funding request sample collected so far, and this poses a pressing challenge for the dissemination of this funding initiative. OA working groups and the whole OpenAIRE repository infrastructure across Europe are mainly focused on universities, where the libraries play a key role in its promotion. Libraries at research centres and university hospitals, while often detached from the OA collaboration networks built across university libraries, have however a key role to play in the dissemination of this funding initiative and in supporting their researchers to navigate its policy requirements in order to be able to collect the funding they are eligible for.

Non-University organisation	Country
BC3	ES
CAR-CSIC	ES
CBM-CSIC	ES
Centre de Recerca en Agrigenomica (CRAG)	ES
Centre de Recerca en Sanitat Animal (CReSA), IRTA	ES
CIB-CSIC	ES
CIBERES	ES
CNIC	ES
CNIO	ES
Consorci de Salut i d'Atenció Social de Catalunya	ES
Fundació Clínic per a la Recerca Biomèdica	ES
FUNITEC La Salle - Engineering	ES
GSK R&D	ES
IATA-CSIC	ES
IATS-CSIC	ES
ICFO	ES
ICMM-CSIC	ES
ICN2	ES
IDAEA-CSIC	ES
IFF-CSIC	ES
IG-CSIC	ES
Institut Avedis Donabedian	ES
NEIKER	ES
Centro Euro-Mediterraneo sui CC (CMCC)	IT
CNR-ISAC	IT
CNR-ISTC	IT
Elettra-Sincrotrone Trieste	IT
Fondazione Edmund Mach	IT
Humanitas Mirasole SpA	IT
Instituto Italiano di Tecnologia	IT
IRPPS-CNR	IT
Istituto Superiore di Sanità	IT
Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine	UK
London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM)	UK
National Health Service (NHS)	UK
NERC	UK
Oxford Technologies Ltd	UK
Plymouth Marine Laboratory	UK
The James Hutton Institute	UK

Table 2.- Non-university organisations funded by the FP7 Post-Grant Open Access Pilot so far (top three countries). In bold, organisations associated to life sciences

The OA expertise at libraries will also be key for the dissemination of the alternative funding mechanism that this EC FP7 Post-Grant OA Pilot aims to implement in order to support journals that charge no publication fees to their authors. This additional project workline aims to support specific technical improvements of the publishing workflows for these journals as a means to balance the funding approach and cover a wider range of business models for OA publishing. A webinar was held shortly after the release of this alternative funding initiative where a thorough description was provided and questions from the over 100 attendees were answered [10].

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