Panel summary: open access monographs without author payments?

Dr. Samuel A. Moore, moderator and organiser

As part of the 2021 Open Research Conference at Cambridge, we hosted a panel discussion on the future of open access monographs, specifically those that do not require author payment in the form of book processing charges. This is especially timely given the fact that UK Research and Innovation recently announced a books component to its open access policy. In the humanities, where funding is limited, book processing charges have the potential to make open access a preserve of only those that can afford to pay, potentially excluding junior scholars, unfunded researchers and colleagues from universities outside the Global North. This panel therefore explored the alternatives to author payments that exist and the ways in which the research community can prevent processing charges from becoming the standard model for open access book publishing.

The panel was moderated by Samuel Moore, Scholarly Communication Specialist at the Office of Scholarly Communication, and featured three expert speakers from publishing and policymaking. Kicking off was Rachel Bruce, Head of Research at UK Research and Innovation, to discuss their open access books policy that was recently announced. We learned more of the details of the policy but also how much of the detail relating to funding is yet to be announced. Following Rachel’s presentation were talks by Ben Denne of Cambridge University Press and Rupert Gatti of Open Book Publishers. Ben described the Flip it Open model devised by Cambridge University Press that makes a book openly accessible when it reaches a certain revenue threshold. Rupert described the overall approach of Open Book Publishers to make books available without the need for author payment, through a combination of print sales, grant income and other sources.

The ensuing discussion covered important topics such as the sustainability of such approaches, the technologies that underpin them and the importance of green open access for open access book publishing. We learned that funding needs to be equitably distributed to enable a diverse ecosystem of OA presses and that there is no one-sized model for open access book publishing. The work for this is at once the responsibility of policymakers, publishers, librarians and researchers alike.

Additional resources

Open Book Publishers
UKRI Open Access Policy
University of Cambridge Monographs guidance
Cambridge University Press ‘Flip it Open’ pilot