In October last year we published an editorial describing the background to the move towards open access publication of research articles1,2 and, in the wake of the Finch report,3 how this is likely to be taken forward for biomedical journals generally and by the BJGP in particular. In open access publishing the publisher makes the paper available to anyone, without charge, as soon as possible after acceptance. In return researchers pay a charge (the article-processing charge or APC) to the publisher for online open access publication of the article once accepted. The thinking behind this is that if research is publicly funded, then the public as well as the science community and those subscribing to journals should be able to see the results of the research right away.

At the time of writing the editorial there was strong government support for a fairly rapid move towards open access, supported by the research councils and major charities,4,5 and also by the National Institute of Health Research (NIHR)6 and the Higher Education Funding Council for England.7 A possible start date for compliance with open access publication of 1 April 2013 was suggested. A recent informal survey of a number of UK journals with similarities to the BJGP indicated that most are moving to what can best be described as a hybrid, gold open access model, at varying speeds and with quite a wide range of APCs.

Towards the end of February 2013 the House of Lords Science and Technology Committee published an important report6 on their findings from an enquiry into the implementation of open access, which resulted in a number of recommendations, many directed at Research Councils UK (RCUK). The Committee wishes RCUK to review its proposals for full implementation of open access and to consider an incremental process over a period of up to 5 years. RCUK needs to be sure about the suitability of the Creative Commons licensing arrangements8 for all types of research output, and there is also a need to ensure coordination with other countries. In evaluating the impact of open access RCUK is asked to examine a number of aspects, including its effect on the quality of peer review, its possible impact on learned societies, and on international collaboration by UK researchers. There will be a need to know if the introduction of APCs has had any effect on the number of international researchers publishing in UK journals. A cost–benefit analysis of open access policy is also recommended.

To enable us to examine some of the implications of open access for the BJGP we have analysed the funding sources of 216 articles published in the Journal over the past 2 years. Approximately 49% appear to be funded by organisations that could be expected to financially support open access publication, with far more UK articles meeting this criterion than articles from outside the UK. We contacted the authors of a number of articles from European countries and it appears that the move towards open access publication is much slower outside the UK, with little evidence at present of the development of national policy on open access, although a few researchers commented that they thought that some funders [both institutional and pharmaceutical] may not be surprised to be asked to fund APCs. The House of Lords report has wisely emphasised the need to keep a watching brief on these developments in case a ‘mid-course correction’ is required.

The move towards open access at the BJGP has been extensively discussed over the past few months. We wished to avoid creating any disincentives to the submission of high quality original research to the Journal, while moving forward in both the spirit and the letter of open access and, of course, adopting a viable business model. From 1 April we will offer open access publication of articles submitted to the BJGP that arise from research grants in which the resources for paying APCs have been included. We will also offer authors wishing to make their work immediately available through open access the option of paying the same APC (currently set by the BJGP at £1700 per article) payable on acceptance. The editorial team at BJGP will be pleased to discuss individual cases and to answer queries arising from this change in policy.

“From 1 April we will offer open access publication of articles submitted to the BJGP ...”

REFERENCES

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DOI: 10.3399/bjgp13X665125