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Open Access Publishing

Open access publishing has arrived. There are now more than 7000 titles listed by the Directory of Open Access Journals and hundreds of thousands of open access articles deposited with institutions, subject specific repositories and published in open access journals. But these figures don't represent a mature industry, the revolution is still underway and there is much potential still to be realized.

In 2011 the overall picture of open access publishing has been not only one of growth, but also of diversification. Open access is beginning to spill out from the academic fields where it was enthusiastically pioneered, including medicine and earth sciences, into a range of disciplines. This development is accelerating the take-up of open access publishing and opening new possibilities for showcasing multi-disciplinary work.

Innovative new publishers exploring new subjects, technologies and ways of working with authors and readers are rapidly joining the marketplace, to complement established open access publishers such as BioMed Central and the Public Library of Science. QScience.com from Bloomsbury Qatar Foundation Journals is one of the newest of these open access publishing platforms.

[An introduction to BQFJ and QScience.com](#)

QScience.com has been developed by Bloomsbury Qatar Foundation Journals (BQFJ), a member of the Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development. Its mission is to disseminate research quickly to a global audience. The journals are open to submissions from anywhere in the world to give authors a platform to communicate their findings and collaborate with other researchers. BQFJ publishes research across all disciplines, to the highest international peer review standards and connects the international research community to one of the fastest growing economies in the world; Qatar.

Qatar's 2,500 acre Education City hosts the campuses of many international universities, including Carnegie Mellon, Weill Cornell Medical College and Texas A&M. Nearby, an US\$8 billion hospital and biomedical research facility, Sidra, will open in 2012. Qatar is actively restructuring its economy and its society, so that the pursuit of knowledge sits alongside the extraction of natural resources.

Showcasing the renaissance of scientific thought and academic research in the Middle East is at the heart of the publishing initiative. But QScience.com also aims to develop new ways of collaborating and researching that are genuinely more democratic and make the most of new technological possibilities.

When deciding on a business model for this brand new publisher, Gold open access was an immediately obvious choice.

Gold Open Access

Gold OA ensures that articles are immediately available online at no cost to the reader. In addition, the author retains the copyright on their own work. A Creative Commons licensing model allows the work to be reused across the globe, so long as the original work is properly cited.

As a brand new publishing company BQFJ had no existing subscription journals to protect. When using QScience.com, readers do not have to wait for a period until information becomes free to access after being showcased in a subscription journal. Furthermore unrestricted use, distribution and copying allow readers to act as advocates, forwarding the work to a research group, informal network or a class of students. This harnesses the full power of the social web to disseminate new thinking and knowledge.

Publishing using Gold OA is immediate, internationally focussed and sits most easily with the mission of the Qatar Foundation. Institutional repositories tend to benefit the members of their own institution the most¹. They may not be a 'walled garden' in the technical sense of the word, having no demand for a password or payment for access, but in practical terms researchers do not always know where to find the best research carried out on another continent and published in a different language, particularly if it is peripheral or tangential to their own core research. The BQFJ mission goes beyond establishing a simple, intellectually isolated research hub. Academic research is important for everybody and the research community is spread across the globe. The mission of QScience.com is to take an active role in disseminating research, stepping beyond the important work of a repository. Open access

journals showcase research more easily than institutional data stores.

Publishing can contribute more to the progress of academic study when the business model is based on a funder or research group paying for publication than when a publicly funded library pays for a subscription. Much of this contribution derives from the increased discoverability and reuse of open access articles.

Open Access and Discoverability

For authors, the reputation of the journal in which they publish is a key factor, and this benefits established subscription-based journals with many reputation-building years behind them. However authors who opt for open access publishing may see huge returns in terms of the discoverability of their work.

Traditional journals offer an established method of communicating with other university departments and research institutions with a subscription to the journal. Open access publishing offers authors the opportunity to step outside this traditional network and communicate with a far wider audience.

This audience includes universities across the world, whose libraries will not carry a subscription to every journal, in every academic discipline, in every language. It also includes non-institutional users in global companies, foundations, charities and government departments.

The democratization of research is not only global, it is also local. Companies, particularly smaller ones, do not often subscribe to expensive research journals, or realise that they can organize free access through a local university library. By bringing access to research right into the workplace, and removing the practical barriers of organizing access to it, open access publishing can join researchers to companies on their doorstep, contributing to wealth creation, and turning ideas into practical advances in industry².

There is a growing awareness from corporations that there is more financial gain in sharing than in protecting content, and this offers further benefits for research. Information sharing is not simply the creation of a one way channel out of universities into the wider world, it allows new partnerships and associations to be formed by any organisations who can see benefit in doing so, and open access publishing sits at the heart of this new way of connecting knowledge to benefit all of society.

¹ *Open Access Business Models*: <http://www.knowledge-exchange.info/Default.aspx?ID=459>

² *The Impact of Open Access Outside European Universities* <http://www.knowledge-exchange.info/Default.aspx?ID=412>

Authors, Researchers and OA

For authors who are advocating for their work to be published through open access a big challenge to overcome is the article processing charge. Institutions and grant awarding bodies have not traditionally had to pay to have research published and the benefits of open access publishing have not always been immediate to them.

As open access publishing begins to mature this hurdle is beginning to fall away, more and more grant awarding bodies now realise that making their results as widely available as possible offers them huge advantages in terms of showcasing their work. Where work is publicly funded there is also a growing acceptance that the public has a right to see the results. An article processing charge that allows the work to be truly open access is a more transparent process than a publicly funded university library paying an ongoing subscription, potentially for work that no-one within that institution is making use of.

Authors tend to choose open access journals on the quality of the material published in the journal and the speed of the publishing process rather than purely on the level of article processing charges. Currently authors pay larger article processing charges from grant funds and smaller charges from institutional funds³. There's no doubt that open access shifts the process of identifying available funds from librarians to authors, but more stable funding mechanisms may well develop over time. In particular research grants will increasingly have funds set aside for publishing, since funding bodies have both a duty and a desire to see the widest possible dissemination of research they have funded.

Editorial boards

Key to the quality of any open access journal is the commitment to peer review. Authors and researchers, who are of course the same people just at different stages of a research cycle, have always shared their research in informal ways. Conferences offer not only the opportunity to present papers, but also the opportunity to discuss research over dinner and in the bar. Between these events academics have traditionally been great letter writers, and many advances in thinking were developed through private correspondence.

The Internet offers greater opportunities to keep in touch between events, through email, blogging, commenting in forums, and now using social platforms like Twitter,

Facebook and Mendeley. However these informal ways of communicating do not negate the need for publishing serious peer reviewed work. Finding key figures to act as an editorial board is vital for any open access journal.

At BQFJ the editorial boards play a vital part in ensuring the quality of the journals as well as contributing to the overall feel and direction of each title. Leaders in their fields, they reflect BQFJ's commitment to an international scope with a Middle Eastern Focus.

Editor-in-Chief of *Aswan Heart Centre Science and Practice Series*⁴, Sir Magdi Yacoub, is Professor of Cardiothoracic Surgery at the National Heart and Lung Institute, Imperial College London and founder and Director of Research at the Harefield Heart Science Centre. His initial training was at Cairo University, he's held an assistant professorship at the University of Chicago and is involved with projects in Egypt, Mozambique, Ethiopia and Jamaica. His charity, Chain of Hope, treats children with correctable heart conditions from war torn and developing countries. He brings to the journal not only his considerable international reputation but also a depth of knowledge in his chosen field, as he has developed several new techniques for operations correcting a number of complex congenital heart anomalies.

Open access journals in every discipline must attract editors with wide-ranging experience in their chosen field and a passion for developing their subject through teaching and publication. The editors and editorial board of a new journal are a reflection of the intended quality that the journal is striving for. Publishing is more than simple provision of research data and summaries.

Open Access and the Internet

The global possibilities of communicating research through open access publishing have been made possible by the development of the Internet, and there are possibilities inherent in this technology that offer far more than the simple provision of information.

Publishing on paper is limited to words and illustrations. Electronic publishing offers the possibility to present data in innovative ways, including video, three-dimensional modelling and animations. The QScience.com platform has been developed to make full use of the latest technological and social developments in viewing information online. Access to the Internet via mobile devices is exploding, and journals can be accessed across a variety of mobile devices

³Publication Fees in Open Access Publishing: Sources of Funding and Factors Influencing Choice of Journal <http://www.openaccesspublishing.org/apc/>

⁴ Aswan Heart Centre Science and Practice Series: <http://www.qscience.com/loi/ahcsp>

via QScience Mobile an HTML5 interface to all content on the platform.

It's also possible to streamline peer review, making the process of publishing articles faster and more transparent. *QScience Connect*⁵ operates an open peer review process, where reviewers agree to give up anonymity, but testify that the work has been carried out in an appropriate way and that the results, positive or negative, are clear and accessible. This ensures even greater transparency, true to the spirit of open access publishing.

And since one of the strengths of open access publishing is allowing readers to become advocates of a particular article, full social media integration is key.

Open Access – The Future

Open Access is gaining ground, both as a business model for publishers and a way of working within research organisations. At present support for open access publishing can still be sporadic. As institutions gain experience in dealing with this funding model for publication, the environment for open access publishing will become stable, an accepted part of the research process rather than a foray into a new business model.

In August 2011, 22 American universities joined together to explore open access policies and among the topics for initial discussion is the diversion of funds from paying journal subscriptions, to paying author submission fees. This shift in institutional outlook will have far reaching effects⁶.

Authors look for the impact a journal can have on their reputation, and that of their research. At present many of the 'top' journals are still subscription based. This impedes the progression of OA by leaving universities paying both subscription fees and article processing charges. It will be difficult for OA to gradually displace these journals, since their reputation ensures that universities feel they have to have access to them.

Anecdotal evidence begins to point to a shift in attitude amongst researchers towards acceptance of the so-called 'mega-journal'. Researchers will still submit their research for inclusion in the top title in their field, but if they are unsuccessful then instead of submitting to smaller journals they will opt instead for the immediate simplicity of a broadly-scoped journal such as *QScience Connect*. In these journals, work is not peer reviewed for interest or novelty, reviewers simply assess that it is correct, that it has been conducted in an appropriate manner and conclusions are concurrent with results. Researchers know their work

will be accessible immediately to a wide audience and they will not be asked to make revisions or conduct further experiments.

The appearance of the broad based, inclusive, mega journal may have implications for mid-range journals with a narrow focus.

However many journals come from scholarly societies rather than direct from publishers, these journals have an established community around them. It will be up to the societies whether or not they wish their flagship journals to move to an OA model and if they do they may hold some ground against the mega-journal, offering as they do the ability for academics to present issues primarily to their peers, their close community.

During the next five years there will almost certainly come a tipping point for open access publishing. Changes in funding conditions, university policies, library budgets, and the approach of societies will combine and the gradual change to open access publishing will become a sudden landslide.

Other fundamental shifts are worth noting. The first is that open access publishing is committed to providing no restrictions on access to research *other than the restriction of accessing the Internet itself*. In many countries in the world, this simple barrier is still an insurmountable one. Over the next five years the development of the mobile web will have different repercussions for developed and developing countries. In developing countries we may begin to see a greater proliferation of access to the Internet. In the developed world usage patterns will no doubt evolve along with mobile devices but there may be problems with bandwidth costs and telephony infrastructure. Publishers with a global outlook will have to respond to these different challenges.

Open access publishing turns many conventions of the application of copyright law upside down. There are many instances of national law, local policy and international agreements that work well to protect authors and their work. Whilst open access may not need new legislation to flourish, outdated legislation may well have to be swept away to remove taint of piracy to the legal re-use of work.

On top of this, while researchers in mainstream institutions may realise that an open access revolution is taking place, many groups, from relatives of patients accessing medical information, to small businesses keeping up with the latest in engineering developments have not yet seen what is now available to them. As open access matures, it will continue

⁵ *QScience Connect*: http://www.qscience.com/page/ji_connect

⁶ *Universities Join Together to Support Open-Access Policies*
<http://chronicle.com/blogs/wiredcampus/universities-join-together-to-support-open-access-policies/32632>

to find new audiences for top quality research, audiences outside the traditional academic networks.

The impact that open access publishing can have on research from outside the traditional stronghold of European and American organisations is perhaps the most exciting area to watch. Greater discoverability for authors working all over the world will stimulate new partnerships, liberating knowledge and contributing to the development of different nations, be it practical ways with journals to share healthcare practices, or advancing thought and ideas through new journals in social sciences and the arts.

The social impact of research cannot be accurately quantified, but the benefits are most certainly there and set to increase as more and more information becomes available.

Open Access journals preserve the practice of peer review, the involvement of a respected editorial board to guide the development of the title provides authors with recognition and reward within their field.

And what does the future hold for BQFJ?

The mission for BQFJ goes beyond simple journal publishing. In the future abstracts, and in some cases whole articles, of particular public interest will be rewritten for the general public. This is to widen the understanding of science in the Arab world.

QScience.com will continue accept submissions from all over the world. Over the coming years participation in the journals will be widened to reflect not only top-level authors but also researchers at the beginning of their career who are publishing their first articles and research papers.

Academics do not come from nowhere, they are the product of an education system that inspired them to be passionate about their subject and strive for excellence in the pursuit of new ideas. BQFJ have plans to involve schoolchildren in the research and publication process, to promote scientific and academic literacy for everyone and to inspire them to do even better, when their time comes.

Undoubtedly the QScience.com platform will add more titles and forge relationships with new authors and readers, but it will also respond to unforeseen challenges firmly within the spirit of open access publishing:

Removing access barriers... will accelerate research, enrich education, share the learning of the rich with the poor and the poor with the rich, make this literature as useful as it can be, and lay the foundation for uniting humanity in a common intellectual conversation and quest for knowledge⁷.



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⁷ Budapest Open Access Initiative <http://www.soros.org/openaccess/read>