

Transparency Statement

Your Details

1 Are you answering on behalf of your organisation or institution, or as an individual?

Organisation or institution

2 What is your organisation/institution?

Organisation:
British Sociological Association

3 Country

Other (Please state below)

Other:
All of the above - National Subject Association

Section A: open access developments in the sector

4 What are the most important changes in the open access landscape since the development of the REF 2021 open access policy?1) How do these differ across disciplinary areas?2) What are the implications of these changes for the REF 2029 open access policy?

OA landscape changes:

The most significant development for the sociological community has been transformative publishing deals, facilitating gold OA by removing barriers (drawn out processes and funding) for the OA publication of the version of record. For REF purposes, the Jisc deal is the most significant.

These developments have not made gold OA publishing universally accessible for sociologists but we see a rise in the amount of sociological work that is available OA.

Another significant development in early stages is OA requirements for UKRI funded monographs. We welcome the funding provided alongside this policy. We wait to see how the policy and funds affect monographs.

The 4 BSA journals have seen an increase in the volume of OA. These deals are not 'transformative' in that they would not enable the move to fully OA journals. Many articles published do not quote an external funding source and are dependent on institutional funds and publisher deals. We conducted a survey of the sociological community to seek views on the REF OA proposals. It indicated that the majority of respondents are relying on institutional funds and publisher-university deals for gold OA publishing. The continuance of these deals will be essential to the continued gold OA publishing of sociological work.

As these deals are not universally accessible across all institutions and researchers, it is vital that Green OA/deposit is an eligible form of open access - as proposed. On the one hand, OA for the version of record allows for accuracy in the academic record and the suitable tracking and recording of changes that may be made post-publication. The proliferation of 'versions' on a variety of platforms undermines the integrity of the academic record. However, Green OA helps mitigate against deepening existing inequalities across different institutions and differently funded authors. Currently, there are too many authors without the ability to publish gold OA and in the sociological discipline, as with many, these inequalities are currently deepening. These deepening inequalities will have an impact on the way in which work is published and also whose work is published, with greater disadvantage likely to fall on early career scholars, those on fixed term contracts and those at teaching-intensive universities (the latter two groups likely to have a higher representation of racially minoritised scholars. It is crucial that both Green and Gold OA models are seen as equally eligible to avoid perceptions that green OA is less valued by REF, meaning that work using the green model is less likely to be submitted.

The policy for OA UK funded monographs and the funds made available may facilitate OA book publishing, but these developments are too new to have had a material effect on book publishing for sociology researchers. As the implications are unclear and we suggest that it is too soon for REF to impose OA requirements on longform publications.

Section B: journal articles and conference proceedings

Section B: publication, deposit

5 Should deposit requirements post acceptance be maintained where publication isn't immediately open access?

No

If yes, why? What would be an appropriate time limit for deposit post acceptance?:

Section B: access, licensing

6 Do you agree with alignment to the UKRI open access policy in respect of licensing for journal publications by requiring licensing terms equivalent to CC-BY or CC-BY-ND licensing for journal publications?

No

What, if any, negative or positive impacts might there be from this change?:

Alongside the non-derivative option, the non-commercial licensing option should be acceptable for REF submissions so as not to exclude material from REF, particularly where researchers are choosing the NC option to protect their IP and any commercial dimensions of their work. These protections are important to the sociological community to prevent distortion and uncontrolled reuse of work out of context.

Sociological work submitted to REF goes beyond that which is directly supported by any funding body, nor are publishing decisions made solely with REF in mind. The publishing decisions made for any journal article will be influenced by a variety of factors. The REF requirements should be inclusive.

Section B: pre-prints, alternative platforms

7 Do you agree with recognition of alternative platforms as meeting open access requirements as primary platform for publication?

Not sure

Please provide any further comment:

Our view is that both green and gold methods of OA are required for REF. Open Access for the version of record allows for accuracy in the academic record and the suitable tracking and recording of changes that may be made post-publication. The proliferation of 'versions' on a variety of different platforms undermines the integrity of the academic record. However, Green open access is important in mitigating against deepening existing inequalities across different types of institutions and differently funded authors. It is important to have green platforms that are legitimised and embedded in the academic publishing structure so that they are able to respond to and take account of important changes to the academic record.

Section B: embargo periods

8 Do you agree with the proposed changes to embargo periods for journal publications for main panels A and B (12 months reduced to six months) and main panels C and D (24 months reduced to 12 months), in light of changing standards and practice?

Not sure

What, if any, negative or positive impacts might there be from this change?:

We support the recognition of disciplinary differences. Outputs published with many of the major publishers and journals in sociology will meet the 12 month embargo.

As a caveat, members of our community have raised concerns about publications submitted to international journals that would not meet these requirements. These journal articles could be submitted as part of the non-compliance tolerance limit but such a regulation is more likely to drive publication in larger journals, with larger publishers who have clearly stated policies.

We ask REF to consider the impacts of the green OA model with short embargo periods on the wider publishing ecosystem. With what may be shrinking access to gold open access as transformative deals come to an end and inequalities between universities deepen, we may see a greater reliance on green open access. There have long been questions about the long term sustainability of this model of open access. If many journals in sociology were to disappear as a result of freely accessible, easily discoverable versions of academic work, the discipline as a whole would suffer.

Section B: tolerance limits, implementation date

9 Do you agree that changes to the open access policy for journal-based publications should be implemented from 1 January 2025?

No

Please provide any further comment:

Setting the compliance date to the publication date of articles is a positive move.

We feel the implementation date should be articles published from January 2026 to be aligned with the implementation dates of all outputs, including long form to the longest of the dates. This will materially reduce confusion. (This recommendation is based on the assumption that longform outputs will have OA requirements, though we recommend otherwise later on.)

Materially, the timeframe between the announcement of the policy (end 2024) and implementation (1 January 2025) will be too short for anyone needing to make adjustments to their publishing plans - i.e. to seek open access funding and/or confirm compliance with the green model.

10 Do you consider that tolerance limit for articles and conference proceedings should be retained at 5% of any submission?

No

please provide any further comment :

We recommend a tolerance limit of at least 10%. Many sociological Units of Assessment (UofA) are facing significant change, funding cuts and general turbulence. Against this background a non-compliance tolerance level is likely to create significant difficulties in meeting requirements or to be statistically meaningless in small UofAs. To offer a material and useable tolerance limit, it needs to be higher.

Section B: exceptions

11 Do you agree with the proposed exceptions for journal publications?

Yes

Should any of the above be removed?:

No

What, if any, additional exceptions might be required?:

We recommend clarification that the cost of third party licences be an acceptable reason for exception under #1 - Third-party content was included for which licences could not be obtained. As funding is limited or not available for publication, funding for making 3rd party material open access, either in the version or record or through the green model, is even less often available.

Where researchers are using the green model, the obtaining of licences for 3rd party material can be challenging beyond the funding question as all parties have to understand the implications and be confident that the platform on which the work is deposited will allow for respecting these licences. Where these issues cannot be confidently addressed, REF could see work excluded from submission.

Section C: longform outputs (monographs, book chapters and edited collections)

Section C: publication, deposit and embargo

12 Do you agree that there should be no deposit requirement for longform publications, but that they should be made immediately available as open access upon publication (or no later than 24 months following publication if subject to an embargo)?

Not sure

Please provide further comment:

We agree that there should be no deposit requirement and that the date of publication should be the significant moment for compliance. However, there are significant barriers to making longform outputs open access.

13 Do you agree with the proposal of a maximum embargo period of 24 months for longform publications?

No

Please provide any further comment:

We do not feel that longform outputs can have effective OA requirements for REF 2029. This embargo may be suitable for depositing book chapters but not for full books. Many publishers do not allow deposit after a 24-month embargo, if at all, making gold the only route by which OA requirements can be met.

This is likely to disincentivise the submission of books, which have traditionally been very important for sociology. In our survey, just over 50% of respondents likely to submit to REF are very likely to submit a book but also expressed concern about meeting requirements. Survey responses indicate that gold OA publishing for books is still in the minority and that funding is difficult to find, coming from a large variety of sources. This indicates that there is no reliable, widely accessible method of making the version of record OA. This embargo means that the green option is also not feasible.

We recommend a long embargo period, in consultation with publishers and libraries so that OA practices for books are encouraged and lack of funding is addressed. Our survey indicated that the majority of respondents have not made books OA by any method so incentivisation needs to take account of this starting point.

Books within the sociological discipline bring sales long after their publication. Making them OA after 24 months undermines the business model for publishers and for authors who earn royalties.

Section C: access, licensing

14 Is licensing for third party materials not being granted a reasonable ground for exemption from open access requirements?

Yes

Please provide any further comment:

In addition to licensing not being granted, licence permissions being too expensive should also be clarified as a valid reason for exception. The funds for open access publication for longform outputs is not available widely enough to stretch to licensing permissions. Longform outputs are also more likely to include material that requires permission and the absence of this material would be detrimental to the work.

15 Is sharing of a version of an output without third-party materials if licensing can't be obtained, mirroring the UKRI open access policy for longform outputs, appropriate to meet the open access requirements for REF 2029 policy?

No

Does this present issues for output submission and assessment?:

The 3rd party material may represent a significant aspect of the output, without which the impact, value and quality of the work would be impossible to assess. The longer term impacts are worth considering here as well in terms of the disincentivisation to submit (and to create) work that may include 3rd party material.

Section C: tolerance level

16 Do you agree with the principle of a tolerance level for non-compliant longform outputs?

Yes

Please provide any further comment:

We do not think that REF 2029 can include effective OA requirements for longform outputs. However, if they are included, there must be a tolerance for non-compliant longform outputs as open access publishing options for longform outputs are limited and not well used within the community.

We would prefer to see OA requirements for longform outputs postponed for the next REF, but if they are to be included a generous tolerance level is essential.

17 Do you agree with the proposed tolerance level of 10% for longform outputs?

No

Please provide any further comment:

We recommend that OA requirements for books are left for a future REF.

If included, the tolerance level should be higher as the ability to make books OA is still low. Of respondents surveyed, 56% said they had not published books OA. For books and chapters to be included, a larger tolerance level will be required. We recommend an allowance of at least 30%.

Books are important output types for the sociological community (50% of respondents likely to submit to REF were very likely to want to include a book) and OA requirements for longform outputs run the risk of driving author behaviour to submit journal articles.

Exception 7 made for longer embargos is likely to be heavily used for books (see question 13) and so the tolerance needs to be large enough to include those uses. Our survey of the sociological community indicated a higher use of green OA for longform outputs amongst the minority who had used OA publication for longform works. Early career researchers on short term contracts will have limited access to Gold OA funding over multi-year development of a book and a high tolerance band would be needed to ensure these outputs can be eligible.

We ask REF to consider the institutional inequalities in terms of access to funding for OA but also in terms of resource to interpret and support REF submission. We are conscious that UofAs have very different resources for REF: unclear policies, complex requirements, etc. will affect submissions from less resourced units.

Section C: implementation

18 Do you agree with the proposed date for implementation of an open access policy for longform outputs in REF 2029 being for all longform publications for which contracts are agreed from 1 January 2026?

No

Please provide any further comment.:

Our view is that OA requirements would be better left for a future REF.

Setting the implementation date according to the contract date is welcome. However, 1 Jan 2026 is too soon. Books contracted from this point may be published in time for submission but many will not or will be rushed/delayed, making it meaningless.

The date, in conjunction with Exception #7, may allow most books to be submitted without meeting OA requirements but this relies heavily on interpretation of exceptions/tolerance levels. We recommend waiting for a future REF when OA book publishing is better established.

The gold OA model is the only one available through these REF proposals (see Question 13). Access to funding to make books OA is still very limited: some universities will be able to pay for OA books, but most will not. These institutional inequalities should not be reinforced through REF policy, excluding or disadvantaging eligible books or requiring heavy reliance on tolerance levels due to lack of funds. Without significant changes in the available funding for OA books, and changes to publisher deposit policies, books contracted from 1 Jan '26 are not likely to meet these requirements.

The uncertainty about whether a book will be published or not, with the added challenges of OA compliance within suitable tolerance levels, is likely to disincentivise the submission of books. This would be detrimental to sociology.

Section C: exceptions

19 Do you agree with the proposed exceptions for longform publications?

Yes

Should any of the above be removed?:

No

Are there other exceptions you think are necessary for longform outputs? Please provide evidence in support.:

We recommend consistency with the UKRI policy around conference work (i.e. conference proceedings as different from books/chapters that result from conferences). The books/chapters should be treated as such. Requirements for textbooks, text editions, scholarly illustrated catalogues and exhibition catalogues should match UKRI OA requirements and be exempt.

We welcome the exception of 'trade books'. We recommend some reflection on the terminology and definition. Trade books have come to encapsulate self-publishing, digital publishing, practitioner and public engagement publications. They may also have both public and academic appeal. Crossover titles may have publishing arrangements like 'trade' even when they are intended for students and academics. We also note the anecdotal growth in importance of trade books for ECRs, precarious academics and disadvantaged groups, including those from practitioner backgrounds and non-career academics. We recommend clarity that cross over books are excluded from OA requirements, with a generous definition of what qualifies as trade and cross over.

We encourage a light touch process for claiming exceptions so that the broadest range of work can be included and so that pressures are kept minimal, particularly as all units of assessment are not equally resourced.