

## Short Embargos and Negative Impact on Publishers – a review

### Evidence of harm

1. *Journal of Dental Research* (see separate figure which is from Mike Kalutkiewicz [[MKalutkiewicz@iadr.org](mailto:MKalutkiewicz@iadr.org)]). The chart shows how institutional subscriptions to the *Journal for Dental Research (JDR)* fell as the NIH public access mandate progressed. Prices were relatively flat during this period, so price rises do not account for the decline in revenue.
2. *Journal of Clinical Investigation* – went open access with a zero month embargo in 1996 and lost c. 40% of institutional subscriptions. It blighted the economics of the journal which was forced to return to the subscription model in 2009:-  
<https://scholarlykitchen.sspnet.org/2009/02/26/end-of-free-access/>
3. The *Annals of Mathematics* experiment in green open access was a sobering lesson: libraries cancelled 34% of the subscriptions between 2003 and 2008 when the journal was freely available online. The *Annals* is one of the very best journals in mathematics and one of the cheapest journals; and so it came as a surprise to many that some of the best-funded libraries in the US had decided to save on the subscription rather than support the experiment in widening access. A mathematics workshop suggested research community support for a 5 year embargo period in this field given that arXiv is also available.  
See <http://www.msri.org/attachments/workshops/587/MSRIfinalreport.pdf>
4. *American Journal of Pathology* lengthened its embargo period and began working with a commercial publisher (Elsevier) because of the negative impact on subscriptions of a 6 month embargo.
5. *Genetics* has increased its embargo period from 3, then to 6, then to 12 months because of a negative impact on subscriptions. They have needed to balance a 12 month embargo with the addition of an author payment in order to make this embargo length work – even though they publish in the life sciences.

### Usage Evidence

In 2014 Phil Davis published a study commissioned by the Association of American Publishers <http://publishers.org/sites/default/files/uploads/PSP/journalusagehalflife.pdf> which demonstrates that journal article usage varies widely within and across disciplines, and that only 3% of journals have half-lives of 12 months or less. Health sciences articles have the shortest median half-life of the journals analyzed, but still more than 50% of health science journals have usage half-lives longer than 24 months. In fields with the longest usage half-lives, including mathematics and the humanities, more than 50% of the journals have usage half-lives longer than 48 months.

- Scholarly Kitchen article, [Getting Open Access Embargoes Right: Rational Policy Must Be Evidence-Based](#)
- Scholarly Kitchen article, [What is the Lifespan of a Research Article?](#)

In 2014 the British Academy published [a Study on Open Access in the Humanities and Social Sciences](#) which shows that article half-lives are likely longer than previously suggested. A 1:2 ratio for embargo period lengths is concluded to be appropriate, but the dividing point should not be STEM:HSS, rather given the actual usage patterns of articles, it should be Medicine (1): HSS, Physics, Mathematics, Chemistry and Life Sciences (2). Suggested embargo lengths are 12 months (Biomedicine) and 24 months (all other fields)

## Evidence for the link between embargoes, usage, and cancellations

The 2014 the British Academy [Study on Open Access](#) in the Humanities and Social Sciences referenced above which concludes - unlike other studies - that embargo length does not play a role in decisions to retain or drop journal subscriptions. This is because readers want access to the Version of Record (VoR) for papers, rather than the Author's Accepted Manuscript (AAM) - and because Green OA compliance is so haphazard. Papers are scattered, hard to find, and because of low compliance, often unavailable, which makes subscriptions necessary.

[\*See below for an overview of work underway within the library community to overcome these perceived problems.]

- Scholarly Kitchen article, <https://scholarlykitchen.sspnet.org/2014/04/17/open-access-in-the-humanities-and-social-sciences-an-interview-with-chris-wickham/>

A 2012 study by ALPSP was a simple one-question survey: "If the (majority of) content of research journals was freely available within 6 months of publication, would you continue to subscribe?"

The results "indicate that only 56% of those subscribing to journals in the STM field would definitely continue to subscribe. In AHSS, this drops to just 35%."

More information is available on the ALPSP site and here:

<http://www.alpsp.org/ebusiness/AboutALPSP/ALPSPStatements/Statementdetails.aspx?ID=407>

This result builds on earlier, more nuanced studies undertaken for ALPSP in 2009 and 2006 and by PRC in 2006.

- The [2009 ALPSP study](#) (see the next to last bullet) found that "overall usage" is the prime factor that librarians use in making cancellation decisions.
- The [2006 ALPSP study](#) (see points 7 and 8) found that "the length of any embargo" would be the most important factor in making cancellation decisions.
- The [2006 PRC study](#) (see pages 1-3) shows that a significant number of librarians are likely to substitute green OA materials for subscribed resources, given certain levels of reliability, peer review and currency of the information available. With a 24 month embargo, 50% of librarians would use the green OA material over paying for subscriptions, and 70% would use the green OA material if it is available after 6 months.

### **\*Evidence that repositories are being enhanced to make them more discoverable and usable**

The UK Open Access Implementation Group (of which RCUK is a member) has interoperability between repositories as its stated objective 5 to improve the ways repositories work to provide more benefits to researchers, funders and institutions. – see <http://open-access.org.uk/strategy-workplan/>

Internationally, the Confederation of Open Access Repositories is also focused on interoperability between, and improved services over, distributed repositories: <https://www.coar-repositories.org/activities/repository-interoperability>