Máire GEOGHEGAN-QUINN  
European Commissioner responsible for Research, Innovation and Science

Berlin 10 Conference "Networked scholarship in a networked world: participation in open access"

Berlin 10 Conference / Cape Town  
7 November 2012
Ladies and Gentlemen

The Berlin Open Access Conferences have already taken place in Europe, China and the US, and now I am delighted to be here at this tenth edition in South Africa.

The conferences are truly global in nature – and rightly so. Knowledge is increasingly being produced, not just in the established industrialised economies, but worldwide.

And we need to share this knowledge, especially when we are faced with global challenges, such as climate change, clean energy or food and water security, which are so complex that no one country or company can provide the answers.

Luckily, thanks to the internet, scientists around the world are developing new habits of communication and collaboration.

This offers tremendous opportunities that must be harnessed.

We need to work together to achieve this.

Indeed, nine years on, it is clear just how visionary the Berlin Declaration was, and how important it is to implement the principles it outlined.

Communications technologies are also changing the wider political and cultural environment within which scientists operate.

The public expects much greater engagement with science.

In this context, it is increasingly difficult to ask taxpayers in any country to put their money towards research, if they are then barred from accessing its results.

That is one of the reasons why open access is so important.

Open access is also a means of maximising the economic value and impact of publicly funded research.

In these difficult times, this is something that policy makers around the world are obviously very concerned about.

We can only justify spending public money if we can get the most out of it.

It is small companies – the motor of economic growth in so many parts of the world – that perhaps have the most to gain from open access.

In a recent study of innovative SMEs in Denmark, carried out on behalf of the Danish government, 64% of those in research roles rated research articles as very or extremely important.

But, in contrast to bigger firms, SMEs cannot afford to subscribe to dozens or hundreds of journals every year.

They can access individual articles online, but with very limited resources, even this option can only be used infrequently.

No surprise then that more than two thirds of SMEs in the Danish study reported difficulties in accessing research articles and almost 60% want better access.

Indeed, there is plenty of economic evidence underpinning the move towards open access.

For example, the Human Genome Project results were made openly available in 2003. This increased the take up of knowledge and commercialisation. By 2010, every dollar invested from federal funds in the US had generated activity worth 141 dollars for the US economy.
Meanwhile, a report this year from the US Committee for Economic Development stated that the US National Institute of Health’s policy of open access after one year has accelerated the transition from basic research to commercialisation – so increasing the US government’s return on its investment in research.

The conclusion is clear: open access spurs innovation, generates jobs and creates wealth.

So, what are we in Europe doing to promote it?

Well, there have been some very significant developments since the Berlin 9 conference in Washington DC last year.

In July, we launched a major new drive to complete our European Research Area.

The aim is to open up the EU Member States’ national research systems - to each other and the rest of the world - and to allow researchers and knowledge to move freely from one country to another.

The 27 EU Heads of State and Government have set a deadline for the completion of the European Research Area by 2014.

Our new plan sets out the measures which are necessary to achieve this goal; and of course, open access is at its heart.

So, how do we intend to act on this?

Well, first of all, it is reflected in our plans for our new funding instrument, which will be called Horizon 2020.

The European Commission has proposed a budget of 80 billion euro (around 104 billion dollars) over seven years for Horizon 2020. It will start running in 2014.

We are committed to promoting open access to the results of the research that we will support under Horizon 2020.

We have already tested the approach under the current 7th Framework Programme for Research, through a pilot project. But now we are proposing that open access to peer-reviewed scientific publications should be the default setting across the whole of the programme.

Our approach is set out in a policy document, a Commission Communication entitled “Towards better access to scientific information”, which I would urge you to take a look at.

The scale of our programme makes it an ideal test-bed for open access. In fact, the European Union is still one of the world’s biggest research funders. Of course, we are just one part of a bigger and growing picture, but I sincerely hope that, by making this move, we will contribute to the global movement which is now gathering pace.

I believe that it is vital for all funders in different parts of the world to adopt consistent policies with each other. This will create greater certainty for stakeholders, sending them a clear signal that the shift to open access is irreversible, and encouraging them to take the necessary steps to adapt.

My own department has been working on open access for some years now and we have met with and listened to all the main stakeholders and communities. The policy document I referred to is the culmination of these efforts.

And, in September, I had the chance to present our policy to a meeting in Brussels of European stakeholders and discuss the issues with them. I am very pleased that these stakeholders are willing to work in partnership with us.
There has been much discussion on whether we should follow the 'Green' or 'Gold' route to open access, or other routes, be they called 'Diamond' or 'Platinum'.

At the European level, the European Commission is being very pragmatic: we support both approaches.

That's how it should be, since different national systems have different visions, different situations and different needs. And so do academics in all the different fields of research.

The Commission believes that both systems are valid and that one does not exclude the other. We are in a transition period and we can't predict whether, in the long term, we will use one model or both models.

So, as regards our Horizon 2020 programme, it will be up to researchers to decide whether they want to 'Go for Gold' or 'Think Green'.

As regards green open access, in line with many other funders, we will allow an embargo period of a maximum of 6 months, except for social sciences and humanities, where the maximum will be 12 months. We will let researchers funded by Horizon 2020 decide where to deposit their research. However, we will suggest that they should register the precise location in OpenAIRE - the open access infrastructure for research in Europe that is currently funded by the European Union.

OpenAIRE can then act as a directory of all the other repositories. This is very necessary because, if researchers can deposit their research anywhere, we need to ensure that the articles are easy to find. Otherwise, we jeopardise the whole purpose of open access.

As regards Gold open access we want to maintain the possibility of reimbursing open access publishing fees during the period covered by the research grant, as is already the case with the current 7th Framework Programme.

We have also committed to considering whether and under what conditions open access fees can be reimbursed after the end of the grant agreement. We are studying the feasibility of this, but we also need to take into account the legislation that will establish Horizon 2020, which is still being drafted.

We will encourage authors to retain their copyright and to grant licences to publishers, according to rules applying in their own country.

At the moment, green access and gold access are the only options that we are examining.

This could change, for instance, if different ways of organising peer review were to emerge. This is a long-term prospect, but the European Commission is very interested in exploring the perspectives for alternatives, including wiki systems or 'open source' review.

As part of our policy, we will look at what we can do to support this.

We are also committed to create a framework within Horizon 2020 – such as a pilot project – that will encourage open access to research data. This is a very sensitive issue.

Published research findings may be based on valuable data that has taken a long time to gather and analyse. It is no wonder that researchers – and especially companies - often guard their data so closely. Even after the journal article is published, the supporting data may remain useful for other research for a long time to come.

How can we ensure that data are put at the service of other research without comprising intellectual property, and the hard work to gather it in the first place?

This is an issue that we will be exploring carefully in next few years.
Ladies and gentlemen,

Horizon 2020 is the European Union’s research programme. It is an EU-level programme.

But the 27 Member States all have their own funding arrangements, so the national dimension is also very important.

That is why the European Commission has also issued a Recommendation to the Member States on improving policies and practices on open access to scientific publications and research data, and the preservation and use of scientific information.

The aim is not to harmonise national policies – but to co-ordinate them – to make sure that we are all pointing in the same direction.

Recognising the large number of institutions and other players involved, we are asking each Member State to create a single national contact point to co-ordinate actions in their country.

In this Recommendation, we also encourage European countries to ensure that the academic career system supports and rewards researchers who participate in a culture of sharing the results of their research, in particular by ensuring open access to their publications.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The European Union is part of a global open access movement. The challenges and opportunities are similar wherever research is carried out.

On some issues we are ahead in Europe. On others, we are still learning. But in the spirit of open access, we want to ensure that other research systems are taking similar steps. Open access only reaches its full potential if it works across the globe.

So I congratulate the Stellenbosch University and the leading members of the Association of African Universities for formally adopting open access principles and for their commitment to sharing their research output with the rest of the world.

Developing and implementing open access is a worldwide challenge that calls for solutions that are locally pertinent yet globally compatible – solutions that are flexible enough to adapt to a rapidly-changing environment.

We are all too aware of just how difficult this is. After all, we are already trying to ensure a coherent approach across 27 different counties in the European Union – some of whom have very strong views on the issue.

But any differences or any problems are about how we achieve open access – we are all agreed that open access is definitely the way forward.

Indeed, we believe that our experience of co-ordinating different national policies shows what can be done at an international level.

Innovative solutions and clever strategies are contagious. That is why I am here with members of my staff to learn about and be inspired by other ideas and initiatives that come from beyond our frontiers, because good science and good innovation should have no boundaries.

Breaking down the remaining boundaries is what open access is all about.

Thank you.