

Global accord on open-access route 'impossible'

The heads of 70 of the world's research funding agencies have not prioritised the green or gold route for open access, despite agreeing a set of broad principles at a three-day meeting of the Global Research Council.

The GRC, which was launched last year as a consultative grouping of research agencies, met from 27 to 29 May to discuss research integrity and open access to publications, endorsing joint statements for each.

In its action plan, the GRC says organisations should promote open access and increase the support available for open-access publication, as well as develop ways to assess implementation of these actions.

However, there is no mention of green or gold open access in the plan. At a press conference on 29 May, Peter Strohschneider, president of the DFG, the German research foundation, said "it is impossible, with respect to the global situation, to prioritise one or the other way right now".

Curt Rice, vice-president for R&D at the University of Tromsø, says this is the right decision for such a large international body. However, he is critical of the "unjustifiably optimistic" idea that agencies could work with publishers to integrate funding for open

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access in cases where journals continue to make money from subscription fees while also charging for article publication.

Meanwhile, Mustafa Özbilgin, a professor of organisational behaviour at Brunel University, described the plan as well intentioned but lacking bite.

"The GRC misses a chance to critically engage with the evolution of science and dissemination of scientific knowledge," he says. "A blanket statement that open access is good makes poor science itself."

The debate is set to continue at the 2014 GRC meeting in Beijing. Helga Nowotny, president of the European Research Council, says the situation is more complex than some initially thought. "There are divided opinions on gold, green or hybrid open access in Europe and the United States, but this is even more complicated when you come to Africa and Latin America," she says.

The joint statement on principles for research integrity includes promoting transparent funding and decision-making processes, and adopting research integrity as a condition of funding.

Academies urge action on carbon capture

National science academies have told the European Commission that it must radically increase spending on carbon capture and storage if the technology is to be part of the EU's energy policy as planned.

Members of the European Academies Science Advisory Council met with Commission representatives on 22 May to urge significant R&D investment in the technology, to make it a viable option to tackle climate change.

The EU has said that by 2050 it wants up to one-third of power generation to include CCS, as part of plans to reduce greenhouse emissions. The technology, which captures carbon at source for later disposal, involves relocating emissions to underground storage sites. But according to a report published by Easac, development of the technology has stalled in recent years because there is no financial incentive to invest.

"Technologies, capacity and infrastructure need to be developed urgently," said Brian Heap, president of Easac. "CCS is not a tap that can simply be turned on, if and when."

"For companies that develop and sell technologies, it had been seen as a big new opportunity," says John

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Holmes, secretary for Easac's energy programme. But the collapse of carbon prices under the EU's Emissions Trading System has "really undermined the business case", he says.

The Commission must provide incentives to "tip the economies in favour of CCS" and share risks between governments and commercial developers, says Easac. This could include feed-in tariffs under the ETS, or public funding for demonstration projects.

Easac says that successful operation of the technology on a commercial scale will require at least 10 years of further R&D, to answer questions such as how to transport carbon dioxide, and to prove the safety of the storage sites. This research is vital, it says, because there are no feasible alternatives to reduce carbon dioxide emissions. "Somehow money needs to go in," says Holmes.

Easac's recommendations are the result of a two-year study into CCS by scientists from its member academies. The Commission has said it will consider them as part of an ongoing consultation on the technology.