

Publisher Wheeling and Dealing: Open Access Via National and Global McNopoly?

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Comments on: [Open Access in the UK: Reinventing the Big Deal](#)
(Journalist Richard Poynder interviews publisher Jan Velterop)

Part I: Richard Poynder's Overview of Velterop Interview

Richard Poynder:

"The scholarly communication system has been in serious difficulties for several decades now, a problem generally referred to as the "serials crisis"... the price of scholarly journals has consistently risen faster than the consumer price index... the Big Deal [single or multiple institutions committing to continue to pay single or multiple publishers the asking price for site licenses to all the journals to which they already subscribe in exchange for co-bundled access to all the journals to which they do not subscribe, at no extra cost] is by its very nature monopolistic... it locks libraries into an expensive and inflexible system that they can only extricate themselves from with great difficulty. Keen to find an alternative approach, the research community began to take an interest in Open Access (OA)."

It is important to keep in mind throughout this discussion that the origin and objective of the OA movement was not the serials crisis but the [research accessibility problem](#): making peer-reviewed research accessible to all users, not just to users at institutions that can afford to subscribe to the journal in which it was published. The two problems are related, but they are not the same problem, and the solution to one is not necessarily a solution to the other.

Richard Poynder:

"The Big Deal... meant that anyone working in a higher education (HE) institution in the UK got free-at-the-point-of-use access to AP's entire journal portfolio"

What about UK users not working at a HE institution?

Richard Poynder:

"most subsequent Big Deals were signed not with national funding bodies but with library consortia"

What about UK users other than those at consortial institutions?

Richard Poynder:

“to find an alternative approach [to the serials crisis], the research community began to take an interest in Open Access (OA). If papers were made freely available on the Internet, they reasoned, not only would researchers have access to everything they needed, but self-archiving (or green OA as it later became known) might ease the affordability problem, by enabling libraries to begin to cancel some of their journal subscriptions”

OA self-archiving was born not as an alternative approach to the serials crisis but as a natural way to use the new online medium to maximize research usage and access. (But, yes, the thought was and is that it will eventually solve the serials crisis too.)

Richard Poynder:

“bulk purchase “membership” schemes that OA publishers like BioMed Central and Springer began to offer... bought the institution’s researchers the right to publish in OA journals without having to pay on a per-article basis”

This is not the same deal when journal is pure Gold and hybrid Gold.

Pure Gold is pure “membership” (how many peer-reviewed articles per journal per institution are publishable per year, per membership deal? is acceptance guaranteed? how many journals in the deal?).

Hybrid Gold is consortial subscription membership (incoming), plus pay-to-publish membership (outgoing) (raising the same questions as above).

Richard Poynder:

“[there was the] belief that OA publishing ... would impose price restraint on publishers... with author-pays-OA, the buying decision is made by researchers themselves, not by an intermediary. And since authors are able to publish in a variety of different journals, they can shop around...”

Authors pay, but journals accept/reject. Author-pays creates conflict of interest for the journal (quality standards versus revenue). And authors don’t want the cheapest journal but the highest quality journal. (There is a solution - [no-fault peer review](#) - but it can only work *after* publishing has been forced by global Green OA to downsize to just the peer-review service alone.)

Richard Poynder:

“Membership schemes also tend to push authors in the direction of those publishers that their library has a publishing contract with, thus limiting choice”

Correct. And this choice constraint is perhaps even worse for authors’ own outgoing articles than for their incoming reading matter.

Richard Poynder:

“[With] gold OA funds... the money does not come from the author’s own research budget, so price is unlikely to be a deciding factor when an author is looking for an OA journal in which to publish”

Why should it be? Shouldn’t quality standards be the deciding factor? And why should publication be paid out of a researcher’s (scarce) research funds? (After Green OA has become universal, the no-fault peer review service can be paid out of a fraction of the institution’s annual subscription cancelation windfall savings.)

Richard Poynder:

“as self-archiving took off, subscription publishers soon concluded that it posed a serious threat to their revenues. And... insisted on self-archiving embargoes”

Under researcher pressure for OA (e.g., PLoS petition in 2001, BOAI, Berlin Declaration), 60% of publishers (including most of the top publishers) endorsed immediate, no-embargo Green OA.

(But I don’t doubt that, unless fixed, the recent Finch/RCUK U-turn, the result of successful publisher lobbying, will motivate publishers to adopt and lengthen embargoes and accept still more UK money instead for hybrid Gold OA...)

Richard Poynder:

“hybrid OA allows publishers to “double dip” – i.e. earn revenues from both APCs and subscriptions.”

If the UK paid publishers extra fees for Gold OA to all of its research output, that would increase publishers’ total subscription revenues by about 6%, and then the UK would get back 6% of that extra 6% as a rebate on their contribution to lowering worldwide subscription fees by 6%.

But let’s suppose instead that -- in a remarkable feat of collective vendor-cartel vs. consumer-consortium bargaining -- a cartel of all the world’s publishers (now all transformed into hybrid subscription/Gold publishers + pure Gold publishers) -- faithfully converted every penny of UK Gold revenue into UK subscription reductions for a consortium of all UK HE institutions. This would be tantamount to giving UK HE subscribers the bonus of hybrid Gold OA to their own outgoing research output at the same price that they are currently paying via subscriptions for incoming research output from the UK [6%] and the rest of the world [94%].

Here are some questions to ask about the probability, desirability, sustainability and scalability of such an arrangement:

Probability: Can the UK government negotiate on behalf of all potential

UK users of research journals – not just HE institutions, but industries, big and small, public and private libraries, etc. – using UK tax revenues earmarked for research, in order to ensure that they all have not only Gold OA to UK research output, but also subscription access to non-UK output (94%)?

And once that's settled, can and would all the world's publishers, Gold and Hybrid, collaborate in such a cartel? (Though [long urged by journal publishers](#), this sort of McNopolistic collective producer-cartel/consumer-consortium bargaining is not notably successful in the case of global necessities such as water, food and oil -- and those are not even hybrid -- otherwise surely McDonalds and Burger King would surely get into the whopping national prepaid Big Mac licensing business too.)

Desirability: Do we really want to lock in publishers' current revenue streams in exchange for Gold OA? Are we so sure publishers are providing anywhere near fair value for fair cost today, with their current prices and current co-bundled print-era products and services (text-production, print edition, online edition, access-provision, archiving and peer review)? Do we want to lock in all those add-ons and price-tags year upon year, inescapably, with no hope of phasing out the inessentials, cost-cutting and downsizing?

As you read on, below, keep in mind that in promoting this Whopping New Deal -- Cartel/Consortial McLicense McNopoly bargaining -- Jan Velterop seems to agree (though I'm not altogether sure whether this is indeed what he means) *that managing peer review is really all that's left that publishers need to do in the OA era:*

Is managing peer review for (say) 200,000 outgoing UK paper submissions per year (peers review for free) really worth locking in what the UK is currently paying for incoming subscriptions *in perpetuo*?

Because that's what a Gold OA McNopoly would be, if peer review services were bought and sold nationally *en bloc*, instead of per individual paper, at a fair per-paper price for just the peer review management alone.

And the difference in price is roughly of the order of \$1000-\$5000+ per paper (as co-bundled today) versus \$100-\$200 per paper, per round of review, unbundled: in other words, a difference of the order of more than 10/1.

(An editor picks the referees; software plus an editorial assistant manage the review; the editor does the disposition once the reviews are received. -- I know how it goes: I edited a rigorously peer-reviewed journal for a [quarter century](#).)

Does this sort of simple per-paper service transaction really warrant a national (or global) McNopoly, locking in all the obsolete co-bundled extras, and their prices?

Sustainability: Would paying a UK collective cartel/consortial McNopoly McLicense in exchange for Gold OA be stable year after year, with waxing and waning national finances? Subscriptions can be cancelled by the piece (journal), but where's the bargaining power in a McNopoly? Lower your price or I'll revert to subscriptions (and lose Gold OA)?

Scalability: Is it likely that other countries have the finances (or desire) to follow suit, and make similar national McNopoly arrangements too? Would little Belgium willingly lock itself into its current total national subscription outlay, in exchange for Gold OA for its outgoing (say) 20,000 papers a year? (Remember that the ratio between the print-subscription era cost and the downsized peer-review-alone cost is probably over 10/1.)

Richard Poynder:

“As a result, rather than reducing costs, Finch estimated that its proposal would require an additional £50-60 million a year, £38m of which would be needed to pay APCs”

Correct. But the worst of it is not that the UK pays more in exchange for making UK research Gold OA, instead of just mandating Green OA at no extra cost, but that *the RCUK policy incentivizes publishers worldwide to offer hybrid Gold OA and increase their Green OA embargoes*, thereby reducing Green Open Access to the rest of the world's research (94%).

Richard Poynder:

“as directed by Finch, RCUK will require that authors prioritise gold over green, with institutional repositories relegated to the role of preservation and data archiving”

Not quite. Finch declared the latter (i.e., that Green is just good for preservation, not for OA), but RCUK still “allow” Green for OA if the chosen journal does not offer Gold.

([Mark Thorley's clarification](#) of the intended meaning of the “where a publisher does not offer Gold... journal must allow... [Green]” wording as meaning “You may choose Gold or Green”, does suggest that fundees may freely choose Gold or Green – though it is not at all clear why RCUK does not wish to fix the wording so that it says so.)

Richard Poynder:

“Nevertheless, [RCUK] has refused to change the wording of its policy, which **clearly states** that researchers must prefer gold over green”

And that, in itself, is a curious fact, especially if, as Mark Thorley keeps repeating, the wording actually *means* that researchers are free to pick either gold or green. (Ambivalence? Feeling the pinch from Finch – or rather, the bite from BIS?)

Richard Poynder:

“With Finch/RCUK, says Harnad, ‘publishers get their grotesquely inflated revenues, and the world gets gold OA in exchange’”

Gold OA to UK research, that is (6%)...

Richard Poynder:

“The question is whether at some point this could morph into Velterop’s New Big Deal and, if it did, whether such an approach would solve the affordability problem.”

Hybrid Gold can certainly morph into pure Gold, at the same total price as current subscriptions. (But the remaining 94% of the world is not going to follow the UK’s lead in double-paying for it pre-emptively – instead of mandating Green, and letting that provide OA, and perhaps eventually also forcing publishers to downsize to peer review service alone, paid, per submission, via fair and affordable Gold.)

Richard Poynder:

“...UCL’s [David Price](#) would like to see a kind of Big Deal approach used to help the transition to OA – what he *calls* a ‘true national licence’”

A UK national hybrid license (subscription + Gold) cannot possibly give the UK Gold OA to the UK’s own 6% output (plus subscription access to the rest of the world’s 94% output) for less than or even the same amount as the UK is paying for subscriptions today. Think it through:

If worldwide publishers’ subscription revenue were increased by 6% over what it is now, through hybrid Gold payment, and publishers were to give it all back to the UK in the form of a subscription rebate, then that would be exactly the same as saying “We will give you Gold OA for free, over and above what you are already paying us for subscriptions.” So if hybrid publishers do give back any of their 6% windfall, it is unlikely to be right back to the UK, but distributed to *subscribers worldwide*. The UK only gets back about 6% of that 6% (assuming the UK’s buy-in costs are about the same as its share of total research output).

So I think David Price should not be advocating a national hybrid Gold license but a national Green OA mandate (by RCUK, as well as by UK universities).

(And the mandatory deposit locus should be each institution’s repository -- where compliance can be verified by the institution, and the institution can showcase its own research assets -- not in some [central institution-external repository](#).)

[David Price](#) (in interview with Richard Poynder):

“to help the UK transition to OA... For an agreed amount, publishers allow access to their content by all sectors in society”

Not quite. A national hybrid Gold license would mean the whole world gets OA to the UK's 6% output, fine.

But then what about *access to all the rest of publishers' content for all sectors in UK society*? How does that work? Free UK-wide online access to all content (both the UK's 6% Gold and the rest of the world's 94% subscription content?)?

More likely, this would just mean that UK HE institutions plus designated industrial user sites and libraries get subscription access to the rest of the world's 94% output, at about the same cost to the UK as the cost of the UK's current subscription costs, plus the Gold OA surcharge (say, 6% of publishers' current worldwide subscription revenue, minus a rebate to the UK of 6% of 6%).

That's a pricey transition for the UK in exchange for OA to its own research output – compared to just mandating Green OA at no added cost -- but it's also an unaffordable, unscalable solution for the rest of the world (and probably not sustainable in the UK either). So it's certainly not a transition scenario for global OA, but rather an obstacle to it (inducing publishers to offer hybrid Gold and to lengthen their Green embargoes).

Part II: Comments on Jan Velterop's Responses in Poynder Interview:

Jan Velterop:

“‘Gold’ is to a large degree developed by new entrants, not the traditional publishers. It should be built up alongside ‘green’. That is more likely to force the traditional publishers’ hands than ‘green’ alone.”

Not if the UK motivates traditional publishers to offer optional *hybrid Gold*, while continuing to collect subscriptions (and adopting and increasing embargoes on Green). (Jan seems to systematically misunderstand or forget hybrid Gold, thinking instead that the contest is just between pure Gold and subscriptions.)

Jan Velterop:

“The ‘New Big Deal’... unlike the old Big Deal... would comprise both “a national licensing agreement” that gave researchers free-at-the-point-of-use access to all the papers still sitting behind subscription paywalls, plus a “national procurement service”. The latter would buy free-at-the-point-of-use OA publishing services for UK researchers, allowing them to publish in OA journals without having to foot the bill themselves.”

Except if *both* are being offered by and paid to *the very same journals*, because subscription journals go hybrid for UK Gold.

Jan Velterop:

“Yes, the subscription model as applied in the academic world has the drawback that it’s not the user who pays. Neither in his role of reader, nor in his role of author. But that is a very widespread problem with any common resource. Think of the roads, or mail, or rail, or police, or schools, or hospitals.”

Managing peer review (provided for free by researchers) is a *public good*, like roads or hospitals??

What’s wrong with authors paying for the peer review service alone, per paper, once it’s been unbundled and liberated from the obsolete publishing functions and their costs (print edition, online edition, access-provision, archiving) by mandatory Green OA self-archiving in institutional repositories -- and then using just a fraction of the institutional savings from cancelling subscriptions to pay for just that peer review alone?

Jan Velterop:

*“The **“benefit principle”** (only those who actually make use of the provision pay) can only apply in a limited way, if at all, for common provisions. There is a perennial tension between common interests and the ego-system”*

Where’s the tension with [no-fault peer review services](#), paid by authors, out of their institution’s subscription savings?

And how is the management of a peer review service (performed by unpaid peers) a “common” that warrants McNopolistic national licensing instead of just per-piece payment for the service itself? And especially while the service is still co-bundled with a lot of other obsolescent products and services and their costs?

Jan Velterop:

“a shift to an author-side payment for the service of arranging peer review and publication is a logical one”

The service of arranging peer review I understand.

But what’s the rest? What’s “Arranging publication”? Once a paper has been peer-reviewed, revised and accepted, what’s left for publishers to do (for a fee) that authors can’t do for free (by depositing the peer-reviewed, revised, accepted paper in their institutional repository)?

And how to get *there*, from *here* -- and at a fair price for just peer review alone? Publishers won’t unbundle, downsize and renounce revenue until there’s no more market for the extras and their costs - and *Green*

OA is what will put paid to that market. Pre-emptive Gold payment, while subscriptions are still being paid, will not - and especially not hybrid Gold.

Jan Velterop:

“Authors... publish a given paper in only one journal, and more often than not they have a real choice, at least to submit. This introduces market mechanisms that are lacking in the subscription system”

Except that the author’s choice is based on the journal’s quality standards, not its price.

(And what about the journal’s choice? Unless the peer-review is no-fault, why would a journal choose quality over income - especially when readership is no longer a price-factor?)

And where’s the author choice in a national McNopoly?

Jan Velterop:

“the “benefit principle”... is possibly not the best model, but the only one that makes OA possible and sustainable. The “green” model is often portrayed as cheaper, but that’s only the case if the subscription model continues to be paid for. And those costs need to be added to the “green” model, in my view”

There is no “benefit principle.” The publication costs are already being paid today as *subscriptions* – without providing OA. So there’s nothing to “add” but Green OA. And then it is the availability of Green OA that will drive downsizing all the way down to just [no-fault peer review alone](#), at a fair, affordable and sustainable price, paid for on the post- Green Gold OA model, out of the subscription cancellation savings.

Jan Velterop:

“Any transition from subscription to OA is hampered by the fact that in one model the “research-consumption-intensive” institutions pay more; in the other the “research-production-intensive” institutions. They are rarely the same, but the difference is pretty much ironed out if looked at on a large enough scale – a national one”

The differences are also ironed out if the price drops so low as to no longer make a difference. No-fault peer review will be uniform and affordable by all (out of a fraction of institutional subscription cancellation savings). The only differences between journals will be (as now) in their *subject matter* and their *quality standards*. (Authors, as always, will try to meet the highest standards they can meet; and journals will find their niche in the hierarchy.)

Jan Velterop:

“the benefit principle is possibly not the best for academic knowledge sharing... the money now used to pay for the system via subscriptions, on the readers’ side, could be used to pay for the system on the authors’ side. It comes pretty much from the same ultimate source, after all”

But only globally mandated Green OA can force the downsizing to peer review alone, and release the money to pay for it in the form of Gold OA fees. Publishers won’t unbundle and downsize on their own, if double-paid for Gold in advance, and on top of subscriptions. They will just do as they are doing now: preserve their current revenue streams, which in turn makes even a transition to Gold OA *at par* take an eternity, if ever.

Meanwhile, year in and year out, research access and impact are being lost, even though that – and not journal economics – is the real, urgent, and completely soluble problem, fully within the reach of the research community, and still not grasped (by mandating Green OA).

Jan Velterop:

“The potential advantages of a system based on payment for publication, rather than on payment for access, are enormous...”

The advantages of McNopoly hybrid Gold payment for preserving publishers’ income streams are evident -- but not the incentive to unbundle and downsize to fair, no-frills no-fault peer review service costs alone. Nor the publisher incentive for providing global OA any time soon...

Jan Velterop:

“If done properly, and on a national scale, [IDEAL](#)-like arrangements might be possible, covering all institutions in the country, for no more, or even less, than is being paid now.”

As already discussed above, that would be a governmental consortium of all UK institutions bargaining with a publisher cartel of all worldwide publishers - all in order to preserve a subscription/license-like cartel’s current grotesquely bloated revenue streams.

And yet Jan agrees that the only essential service at issue is a peer-review service, per individual article.

This sort of national consortial bargaining scheme could, as I’ve often said, be used to pre-pay for daily Big Macs for every UK citizen: A national McLicense McNopoly.

Does anyone stop to think why we would never dream of doing that for anything else -- apart from Jan Velterop’s common goods like roads and hospitals? But is that really the kind of life-and-death common good that *managing the peer review service* is, too?

And isn’t there something to be said for keeping service-providers

independent and competing (for submission quality as well as APC quantity), as with other products and services, rather than combined and colluding? (Not to mention that no-fault peer review prevents journals from lowering acceptance standards for more revenue: they get paid regardless of the outcome (accept, revise or reject) - and the higher-standard ones will get more authors competing for acceptance.)

Jan Velterop:

“For traditional publishers with hybrid options, such a membership and a national licence could be combined. When I was at Springer we had such a combined deal with The Netherlands for a few years. I don’t think it is still in place... the librarians couldn’t reach consensus to extend it. I am in no doubt that a truly national approach could have achieved more lasting success.”

Why no doubts, if it did not prove sustainable even in a small country like the Netherlands? (What *would* be evidence that would make Jan doubt the sustainability of a McNopoly, then, if failure to sustain it is not evidence enough?)

Jan Velterop:

“On a world scale the same tension exists between “research-consumption-intensive” countries and “research-production-intensive” ones as exists between institutions”

But once journal publishing has been downsized by Green OA mandates to just the essentials -- a no-fault peer-review service, per submission, unbundled from the obsolete hold-overs from the print era -- the cost will be so low that the consumption/production difference makes no difference. (My guess is about \$100-\$200 per round of peer review -- paid for out of a fraction of institutional subscription cancellation savings.)

Jan Velterop:

“If indeed the author-side paid OA model introduces a market mechanism, hybrid journals can be as expensive as they wish, but they won’t have any OA articles, since those would go to cheaper journals”

Does Jan really think that authors would pick journals for their price rather than their quality level? Does he think peer-review standards are generic and uniform? (And has Jan forgotten that with hybrid journals we are talking about *the very same journals that authors are publishing in today?*)

Jan Velterop:

“Hybrid OA’ doesn’t exist. It is just “gold” OA. OA in a hybrid journal is the same as OA in a fully OA journal for any given article.”

Gold OA is indeed Gold OA whether the journal is hybrid or pure (and

whether the Gold is Gratis or CC-BY)

But “hybrid” does not refer to a *kind of OA*, it refers to a *kind of journal*: the kind that charges both subscriptions and (optionally) Gold OA fees.

That kind of journal certainly exists; and they certainly can and do double-dip. And that’s certainly an expensive way to get (Gratis) Gold OA.

And the Finch/RCUK policy will certainly encourage many if not all journals to go hybrid Gold, and publishers, to maximize their chances of making an extra 6% revenue from the UK, will in turn jack up their Green embargoes past RCUK’s permissible limits.

Jan Velterop:

“The “double-dipping” argument is a red herring. There seems to be a notion that subscription prices should be proportional to the number of articles in a journal. How would that work? There are journals with 100 subscribers... and journals with thousands of subscribers. There are journals that publish 25 articles a year and journals that publish 25 or more articles a week.”

Double-dipping is not about the number articles or subscribers a journal has, but about charging subscriptions and, in addition, charging, per article, for Gold OA. That has nothing to do with number of articles, journals or subscribers: It’s simply double-charging.

Jan Velterop:

“The cost, and indeed the revenue, of an individual article can only usefully – and realistically – be expressed as an average, and then probably company-wide. What would otherwise be the situation for a loss-making hybrid journal that receives in one year 10% of its articles as gold, and the next year only 2%? Impossible to work out. A subscription system is inherently lacking in transparency”

Nothing of the sort, and extremely simple, for a publisher who really does not want to double-dip, but to give all excess back as a rebate:

Count the total number of articles, N , and the total subscription revenue, S .

From that you get the revenue per article: S/N .

Hybrid Gold OA income is then added to that total revenue (say, at a fee of S/N per article).

That means that for k Gold OA articles, total hybrid journal revenue is $S + kS/N$.

And if the journal really wants to reduce subscriptions proportionately, *at the end of the year*, it simply sends a rebate to each subscribing

institution:

Suppose there are U subscribing institutions. Each one gets a year-end rebate of kS/UN (regardless of the yearly value of k , S , U or N).

(Alternatively, if the journal wants to give back *all* of the rebate only to the institutions that actually paid for the extra Gold, *don't charge subscribing institutions for Gold OA at all*: But that approach shows most clearly why and how this pre-emptive morphing scheme for a transition from subscriptions to hybrid Gold to pure Gold is unscalable and unsustainable, hence incoherent. It is an Escher impossible figure, either way, because collective subscriptions/"memberships" – including McNopolies -- only make sense for co-bundled *incoming* content; for individual pieces of outgoing content the peer-review service costs must be paid by the individual piece. There are at least 20,000 research-active institutions on the planet and at least 25,000 peer-reviewed journals, publishing several million individual articles per year. No basis – or need -- for a pre-emptive cartel/consortium McNopoly.)

Jan Velterop:

"If journals should reduce their subscription price when they get a percentage of papers paid for as gold, what should happen if they lose the same percentage (for completely different reasons) of subscriptions?"

Less Gold – the value of the year-end institutional rebate -- kS/UN – is less that year.

Jan Velterop:

"What if a journal which decided to go hybrid has published a steady amount of 50 articles a year for ages and all of a sudden attracts an extra 10 gold OA articles? By how much should it reduce its subscription price?"

By exactly $10S/50U$ per subscribing institution U .

Jan Velterop:

"If an article is worth £2,000 to have published with OA in a full-OA journal, why is it not worth the same £2,000 if published in a hybrid journal?"

Simple answer: it's not worth the price either way. Both prices are grotesquely inflated. No-fault peer review should cost about \$100-200 per round.

Jan Velterop:

"In my view, without CC-BY no article is worth the label OA"

Fine, let those who want and need CC-BY pay extra for it, if they wish, and can.

But mandate that everyone must provide Gratis Green, whether or not they wish to pay for CC-BY.

Jan Velterop:

“Of course, publishers could price themselves out of the market. And then they would simply go under”

Not hybrid Gold publishers. They stay in the market no matter what they charge for Gold, as long as subscriptions hold.

But they will probably be careful not to charge more than 1/Nth of their revenue per article to be sure to get the extra RCUK Gold subsidy...

Jan Velterop:

“Stevan’s solution has characteristics of “having one’s cake and eating it”. It is saying ‘we want open access but we want the dysfunctional market system of subscriptions to survive, too’ ”

Not in the least. It’s saying: The cake’s paid for already, through subscriptions. Let everyone eat (OA).

And we want OA now, and can provide it via Green OA self-archiving.

If and when that goes on to make subscriptions unsustainable, the dysfunctional market will downsize to peer review service alone, paid for, per article, out of the subscription savings, as post-Green Gold OA, fairly, affordably, scalably and sustainably.

But the purpose of OA is OA - access to research for all users, not just those whose institutions can afford subscriptions.

Whether and when Green OA will fix the dysfunctional journal market is a secondary matter. It’s sure that 100% Green OA will provide 100% OA, solving the research access problem - and thereby making the journal affordability problem a much less important matter.

If global Green OA makes subscriptions unsustainable, forcing journals to unbundle, cut costs and downsize to peer review alone (as I think it is eventually likely to do) all the better. It will have fixed the “dysfunctional market” too.

But what is urgently needed now, and already a decade overdue even though it is fully within reach, is 100% OA - through global Green OA mandates from institutions and funders.

Jan Velterop: *“I think it is more likely that [it is not because of publisher lobbying that] the Finch group has adopted the view that “gold” is indeed the most straightforward, scalable (proportional to the research effort and funding), and particularly because of this*

proportionality, economically sustainable model. After all, the “green” model needs subscriptions to be maintained, and the cost of those needs to be taken into account when comparing what is financially the best option for the country.”

See above.

But it's not just subscription publishers that were doing the lobbying: so were Gold OA publishers (pure and hybrid). And there was also (very valid and timely) lobbying for Open Data (CC-BY) as well, but the latter was unwittingly conflated by Finch/BIS with the urgent need in some fields only (e.g., crystallography) for CC-BY data-mining rights for journal articles too.

Not only is there no need, but it makes no sense to pay extra for CC-BY gold for all UK journal articles, when most fields only need Gratis OA (which can be provided via cost-free Green). And even for the few fields that do urgently need CC-BY Gold, the UK paying for it pre-emptively will only provide CC-BY for 6% of worldwide journal articles in the field, which is no use when what is needed is data-mining rights for 100% of worldwide output.

Meanwhile, subscriptions are already being paid by the UK and the rest of the world, covering the costs of publication in full and fulsomely. An effective Green OA mandate can provide Gratis OA to 100% of UK output at no extra cost. And if Green OA mandates eventually globalize and make subscriptions unsustainable, it will also provide the means to downsize journal publishing affordably to just the peer review service alone, and will release the subscription funds to pay for it – instead of gratuitously paying extra, pre-emptively, today, out of already scarce research funds, as Finch/BIS proposes (under the lobbying of publishers, for which that would of course be the optimal outcome, at the expense of research and researchers).

And that, in turn, will usher in as much CC-BY as users need and authors wish to provide, with no constraints from publishers, embargoes or copyright transfer.

Jan Velterop:

“What I genuinely don't understand is the enthusiasm of the publishers for the “gold” model (apart from the OA publishers, of course). The current per-article revenues are, in my estimate, on average well over \$5,000, whereas for APCs it's well less than \$3,000. This is revenues, not list-price.”

What difference does it make for subscription publishers who go hybrid Gold? Their bets are hedged. It's win/win, thanks to their UK subsidy (and any others who care to pay for hybrid Gold): $S + kS/N$

Besides, publishers all no doubt see the OA writing on the wall and see

hybrid Gold, subsidized by the UK, as their best bet for preserving their current revenue levels. So they characterizing Green OA to Finch/BIS as inadequate and a failure – and, for good measure, adding that if Green grows then it will destroy journal publishing as well as peer review. (Odd effect for something inadequate...)

Jan Velterop:

“Privately, some publishers have expressed concern about “gold”. The ones I’ve talked to recently much prefer “green” on the premise that the take-up is likely to be relatively low, in spite of mandates, and chaotic, and difficult to find, with some articles of a given journal available in OA and others not, and most only after a delay”

Stay tuned. You haven’t seen how effective Green OA mandates work yet. (And their anarchic growth is a strength, not a weakness.)

Besides, one of the reasons mandates need to be strengthened is because many publishers who “prefer” Gold are at the same time doing their level best to (1) stave off Green mandates with embargoes (making the “delay” they complain of into a self-fulfilling prophecy) – and (2) to talk RCUK out of mandating Green at all (because it is inadequate as well as ruinous)!

But if the ‘inadequacy’ is that Green OA articles are hard to find, publishers should wake up and smell the coffee (and surf, say, Google Scholar). The only content that is hard to find is the content that is not there – because it has not been made Green OA, thanks to publishers’ efforts to prevent it. It is disingenuous (but rather endearing, because of its utter transparency) for publishers to tout as an inadequacy of Green OA obstacle created by publishers themselves!

Jan Velterop:

“National arrangements would deal with Stevan’s problem of increasing APCs for hybrid journals”

My problem is not *increasing APCs!* It’s *increasing Green embargoes* -- and being forced to pick and pay for Gold (out of scarce research funds) instead of being able to fulfill the RCUK OA mandate with cost-free Green.

Jan Velterop:

“[With Gold], the market mechanism... is transposed to a national level from an individual scientist level... and not inflationary like the traditional subscription system... market mechanism... [Gold] keeps unwarranted inflationary price increases at bay... [UK should] use some of Willetts’ £10 million transition fund to hire some good negotiators ... progressively try to offset subscription prices against OA fees so overall costs for UK don’t increase...”

Let Jan keep speculating about economics and McNopolies, and let publishers keep negotiating licenses to their heart's content - but let RCUK mandate (gratis) Green so we can have OA in the meanwhile, at no added cost.

Jan Velterop:

"I don't buy the argument that a transition to "gold" OA were possible only if done globally and simultaneously. As you say, that would render it impossible."

A global transition to Gold OA is only possible when institutional subscriptions are no longer being paid for – freed up by cancellations to pay for Gold OA, at a fair price.

Pre-emptively subsidizing hybrid Gold OA will not bring any of that about: Mandating Green OA will.

And subscriptions can't be cancelled till all or nearly all journal contents are accessible by another means (Green OA). This is why anarchic growth is possible, and a strength rather than a weakness of mandating Green OA globally.

Jan Velterop:

"I don't mind "green". What I don't see as remotely realistic is the idea that "green" should first force the publishers into submission before "gold" is being built up"

And I don't mind voluntary Gold – as long as Green is first made mandatory.

Green can and will first provide global OA – and that's what this has all been about, for over two long decades now.

Whether and when it makes subscriptions unsustainable, and forces downsizing to peer review and a transition to Gold OA at a fair, affordable, sustainable price is a far less urgent and important matter. Green OA will solve the access problem in the online era. Publishing -- a service profession -- will adapt.

Jan Velterop:

"Gold' is to a large degree developed by new entrants, not the traditional publishers. It should be built up alongside "green". That is more likely to force the traditional publishers' hands than "green" alone."

That would be fine. But RCUK is forcing (hybrid) Gold. And the objective is OA, not Gold.

Jan Velterop:

"Green", especially with embargoes, risks setting the subscription

system in aspic... The defence of traditional publishers is more likely to consist of an increase of subscription prices to compensate for any loss of subscribers as a result of “green”. And to refuse articles unless they come with a full copyright transfer as well as to impose long embargoes.”

1. Because of the distributed, anarchic nature of the growth of Green – article by article and institution by institution rather than journal by journal – Green cannot cause cancellations till it is at or near 100% globally.
2. Green can grow regardless of whether publishers raise journal prices.
3. The most effective Green mandate ([ID/OA](#) + the [Button](#)) is immune to embargoes.
4. If embargoes are lengthened, it's more likely to be because of Finch/RCUK hybrid Gold mandates rather than Green mandates.
5. The purpose of Green mandates is not to fix the subscription system but to get all articles deposited immediately, to provide OA as soon as possible, and to provide Almost-OA via the semi-automated [email-eprint-request Button](#) during any embargo.

Jan Velterop:

“Not being able to persuade RCUK to change its OA policy will be good for OA. And it will only cost more if institutions fail to come together and collectively negotiate what they pay for subscriptions in order to be able to compensate for the cost of APCs”

If RCUK is not fixed, it will fail: researcher resistance, resentment and non-compliance.

And the problem is not how good a McNopoly Deal the UK negotiates for hybrid Gold but the negative effects of the RCUK U-Turn on worldwide OA growth, because it provides a gratuitous incentive to publishers to offer hybrid Gold and lengthen Green embargoes.

Jan Velterop:

“Of course there is the risk – however unlikely – that this happens only in the UK and nowhere else in the world. In that case, cuts will have to be made in subscriptions. What’s new?”

Nothing new, and not much OA to show for all the time and money that will be lost because of Finch/BIS gullibility and RCUK somnambulism.

Jan Velterop:

*“Open access is a means to an end, not an end in itself... Hence the call for CC-BY, or “**libre**” OA if you wish”*

Actually, OA *is* an end in itself -- for research and researchers.

But so far we have not even grasped -- though it's fully within reach -- the means to the means, which is to mandate Green OA in order to have, at long last, global (Gratis) OA instead of access denial and impact loss. The rest can come only after we have reached at least that.

Jan Velterop: "I foresee a situation where a price is being paid for publishing services and "keeping the minutes of science", via APCs or even via subscriptions, whereas the knowledge contained in publications is freely and openly shared. Now we see keeping the record and knowledge sharing as being the same, but that need not be the case in the future."

And I foresee researchers doing research using the full resources of the online medium (which is perfectly capable of storing and preserving its own minutes), with peer-reviewed research openly accessible to all users, and what used to be called publishing now reduced to the management of the peer-review service -- with that, and only that, being paid for via post-Green Gold OA fees.