



# Institutional policies on the use of Open Access Funds

A report from the Jisc  
Pathways to Open Access project

Catherine Sharp (UCL)\*  
November 2015

\*[catherine.sharp@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:catherine.sharp@ucl.ac.uk)  
Project blog: <https://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/open-access>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International Licence:  
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

## Contents

1.	Executive Summary.....	3
1.1	Background.....	3
1.2	Methodology.....	3
1.3	Findings .....	3
2.	Policy Interpretation.....	5
3.	Eligibility for Open Access Funds.....	7
4.	Prepayment Arrangements.....	9
5.	Institutional Funds.....	10
6.	Next Steps .....	12
	Appendix A: Survey Questions and Summary Responses	

# 1. Executive Summary

## 1.1 Background

The growth of open access funding in the UK since the introduction of the RCUK Open Access Policy has led to a proliferation of different institutional practices in managing APC funds. With RCUK convening a practitioners group to consider operational issues in implementing the policy,<sup>1</sup> the Pathways to Open Access project considered this an opportune time to articulate the different practices, and to investigate their prevalence. This report is designed to inform both funders' guidance and institutions' own decision-making, leading to greater harmonisation of policies and procedures, and making open access funding arrangements more predictable for authors, publishers and funders.

## 1.2 Methodology

The project ran a survey on institutions' APC payment practices between 15 September and 16 October 2015. All UK institutions were invited to contribute to the survey, which was advertised extensively on the following lists:

[ukcorr-discussion@jiscmail.ac.uk](mailto:ukcorr-discussion@jiscmail.ac.uk): UK Council of Research Repositories

[oagoodpractice@jiscmail.ac.uk](mailto:oagoodpractice@jiscmail.ac.uk): Open Access Good Practice list

[pathfindersoa@jiscmail.ac.uk](mailto:pathfindersoa@jiscmail.ac.uk): Jisc Pathfinder projects

[oapp@jiscmail.ac.uk](mailto:oapp@jiscmail.ac.uk): RLUK Open Access Publisher Processes Group

[openaccess-london@jiscmail.ac.uk](mailto:openaccess-london@jiscmail.ac.uk): London Open Access Group

The survey comprised 19 questions. Twelve applied to all institutions with block grants, the remaining seven only to institutions with a central institutional open access fund (as opposed to RCUK/COAF block grants). The full survey appears at Appendix A. The questions for all institutions focused on three areas: (1) how institutions interpret the RCUK policy, and their advice to authors on the Green and Gold options; (2) eligibility criteria that institutions have adopted for RCUK/COAF funding (including how they deal with multi-institution papers and papers with joint RCUK/COAF funding); (3) prepayment schemes. The questions for institutions with central institutional open access funding focused on eligibility for funding and the interaction of the funds with funders' block grants. Each question included an option to add comments, and there was a section for general comments at the end of the survey. Both RCUK and the Wellcome Trust commented on the draft questions, as did members of other Pathfinder project institutions.

## 1.3 Findings

Sixty complete responses to the first section of the survey were received. The summary responses appear at Appendix A. There was a high response rate from the top twenty institutions in receipt of RCUK block grants, eighteen of which completed the survey. Institutions with small- or medium-sized RCUK block grants are also very well represented in the results, which give a good overview of the sector as a whole. Some institutions who responded also have COAF grants; many do not.

---

<sup>1</sup> Review of the implementation of the RCUK Policy on Open Access  
<http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/research/openaccess/2014review/> p. 9

The results confirm that there is a variety of different approaches both to complying with the RCUK policy and on advising authors on whether they are eligible for funding. However, even institutions with relatively strict criteria for determining whether an APC can be funded recognise the need for flexibility and judgement (particularly in the case of papers funded by RCUK grants at different institutions, or where authors have moved institution). There is concern about the lack of policy harmonisation. Unsurprisingly, institutions are in broad agreement about avoiding unnecessary administrative costs (for example, most are firmly opposed to splitting payments between institutions). Most institutions participate in publisher prepayment schemes, but there are different approaches to funding papers under a prepayment scheme, some choosing to restrict use of their deposited funds to RCUK papers only (even where they also have a COAF block grant).

Eighteen institutions who responded to the survey have a central institutional fund (not provided by RCUK/COAF). Institutions have different criteria for using these funds, but most pay for both hybrid and fully open access journals.

In the light of these findings, the Pathways to Open Access project strongly supports efforts to simplify and standardise the implementation of funders' open access policies, with joint work between institutions and funders the best way to achieve workable guidance and greater clarity.

## 2. Policy Interpretation

The first section of the survey examined how institutions interpret the RCUK policy. The results demonstrate that authors are receiving quite different guidance on embargo periods, and on choosing between the Gold and Green options, depending on their institution. 37 respondents (53%) apply the strict embargo periods in the RCUK policy: 6 months for STEM disciplines, and 12 months for arts, humanities and social sciences, while 29 respondents (41%) apply the longer transitional periods of 6 (MRC), 12 (STEM) and 24 months (AHSS) set out in the guidance (Fig. 1). One respondent observed that SHERPA/FACT uses the longer embargo periods, and funders support the use of SHERPA/FACT to determine compliance. Others commented that this is a transition period, and that there could be a number of reasons why funds might be unavailable, so they use the longer periods. On the other hand, a number of institutions apply the shorter periods, on the basis that they have not yet run out of funds.

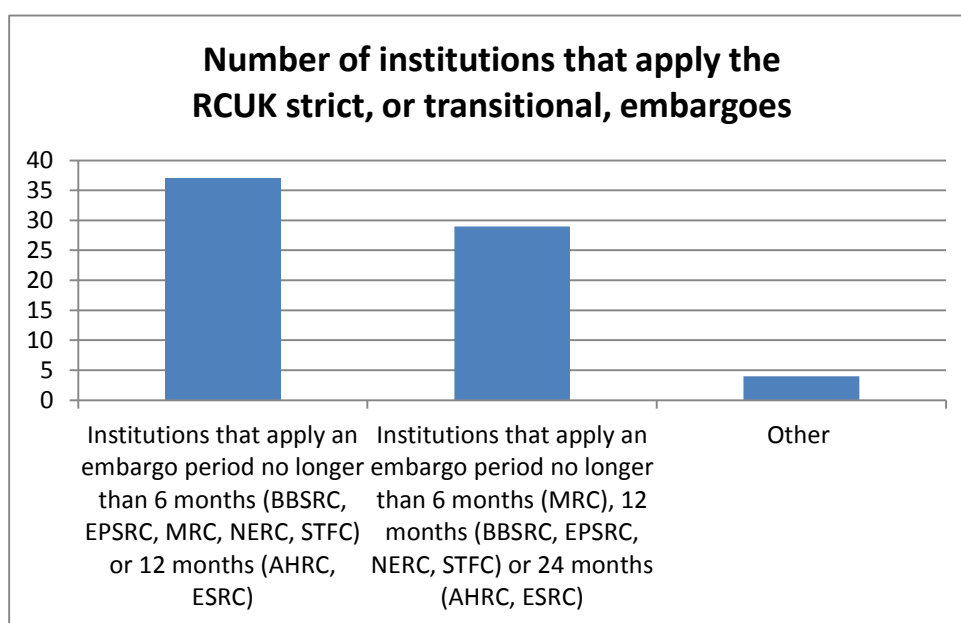


Fig. 1. Number of institutions that apply the RCUK strict, or transitional, embargoes.

Approaches to the Gold and Green options also differ considerably. If they consider that a publisher's Gold and Green options both comply with the RCUK requirements, 34% of respondents advise the author to choose whichever option they, the author, considers most appropriate. Conversely, 31% advise or encourage the author to choose Green; and 23% advise or encourage Gold (Fig. 2). A number of institutions noted the importance of allowing authors to make an informed choice (on the basis of the length of the embargo, and the additional benefits of Gold, including deposit in PubMed Central), where the institution has funding available. Some pointed out that the perceived quality of the output plays a part in these decisions.

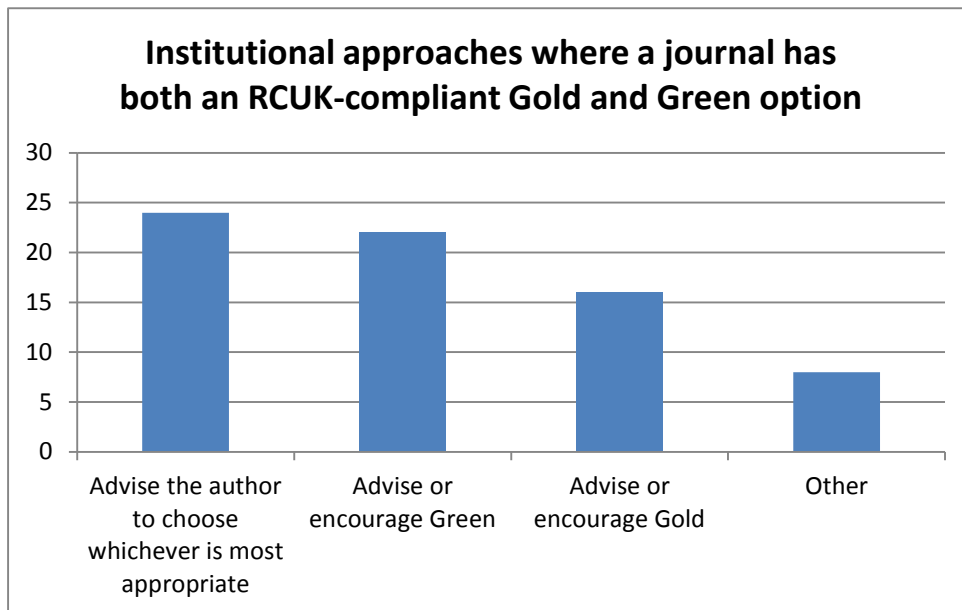


Fig. 2. Institutional approaches where a journal has both an RCUK-compliant Gold and Green option.

### 3. Eligibility for Open Access Funds

The results of this section of the survey strongly emphasise the need for flexibility when determining whether a paper is eligible for funding from an institution's RCUK/COAF block grants. There are marked differences in institutions' general approaches to eligibility. More than a third of institutions treat papers as eligible for funding regardless of which of the authors is based at their institution. For 23%, the main criterion is where the award or PI is based, while 17% see the location of the corresponding or lead author as more important. The comments in this section stressed that in many cases a degree of judgement is necessary, particularly where the corresponding author's institution cannot pay (or is based overseas) or authors have moved institution.

Unsurprisingly, there is broad agreement that splitting payments between institutions is inefficient and unnecessary. Where papers are funded by RCUK/COAF grants held at more than one institution, the majority of institutions either apply their usual criteria (corresponding or lead author being based at the paying institution, for example), or take a pragmatic approach – on the basis, for instance, of limited grant information being available when the author requests the payment, the relative contribution of each institution to the output (in grants or number of authors at the institution), or the size of block grant funding at each institution.

#### ***Comments on splitting payments between institutions***

*'Assuming we are the "responsible" organisation ... we would expect to pay the full cost. Splitting APCs [is] much more of a headache than the money involved would justify.'*

*'Splitting payments between institutions is not cost effective.'*

*'If ownership of most of the grants was at our organisation we would pay. If mostly at another organisation with sufficient funds we would suggest they might like to pay. [In some greyer cases where most of the funding [is held] elsewhere but most of the authors [are] here we would probably pay - case-by-case.'*

20% of respondents indicated that where a paper is funded by a Research Council and one of the COAF funders, they would split the costs 50/50 between their RCUK and COAF block grants. 22% would ask authors to estimate the relative contribution of each funder. A number of these pointed out that it can be complex to pay from two different budgets, and that in some cases it is more appropriate for the majority funder's block grant to pay. More than a third of respondents had a grant from RCUK, but not from COAF.

Where authors move institution, judgements need to be made about which institution should pay APCs. These situations do not seem to cause problems very often. In general, though, 58% of respondents were willing to pay APCs where the relevant grant has closed and the author is now elsewhere (with 35% requiring the author's affiliation to be their own institution), and a number of others would consider the particular situation and pay if appropriate (Fig. 3). Where the author and the grant have moved, 55% of respondents would generally expect the new institution to pay,

although this is often not clear-cut, and might depend on the affiliation details in the paper. 23% were willing to pay themselves in this situation (Fig. 4).

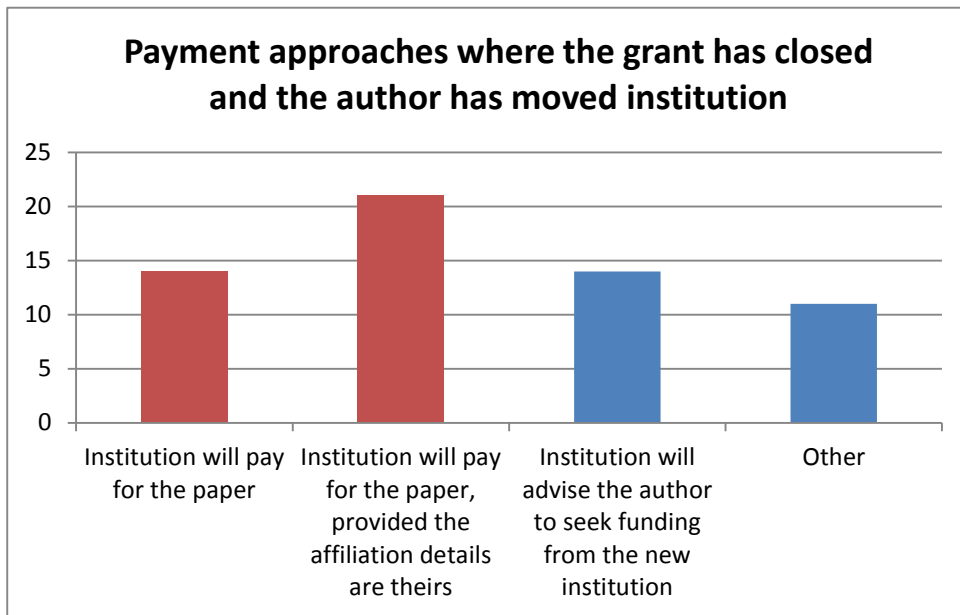


Fig. 3. Payment approaches where the grant has closed and the author has moved institution.

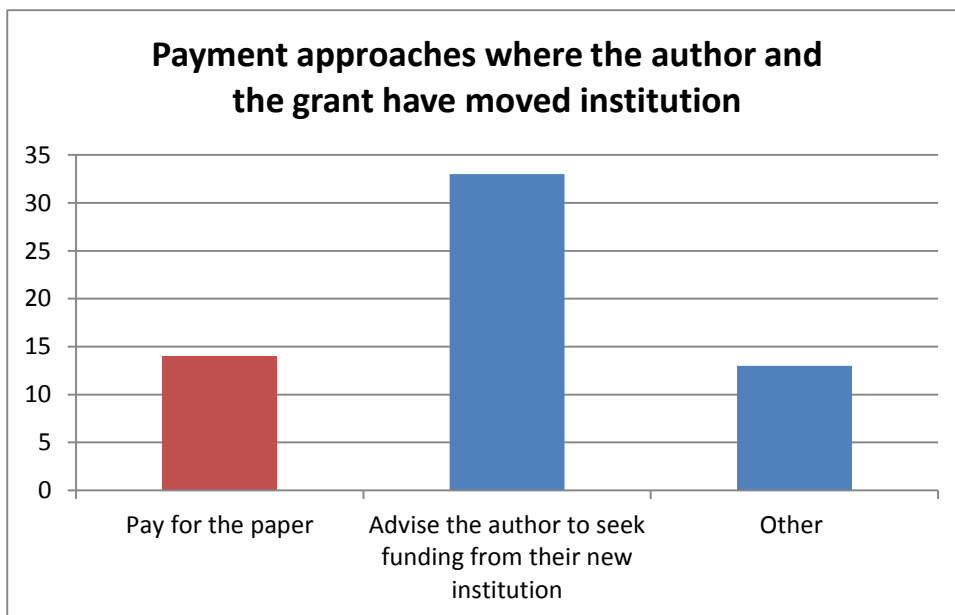


Fig. 4. Payment approaches where the author and the grant have moved institution.



## 4. Prepayment Arrangements

68% of respondents participate in publisher prepayment schemes (Fig. 5). This is a high percentage, given that smaller institutions are generally less able to deposit substantial sums than larger ones – and given the number of smaller institutions that participated in the survey. There is a variety of approaches to using prepayment schemes. A number of institutions who make all their payments to a particular publisher under a prepayment scheme remarked that they want all papers to benefit from both discounts and the relative simplicity of prepayment schemes (compared with invoicing). Some institutions pointed out, though, that reconciling budgets (where deposited funds are used for RCUK, COAF and sometimes other papers) can be awkward. For this reason, some institutions restrict their prepayment schemes to RCUK papers only, paying for COAF papers by invoice despite the lack of discount.

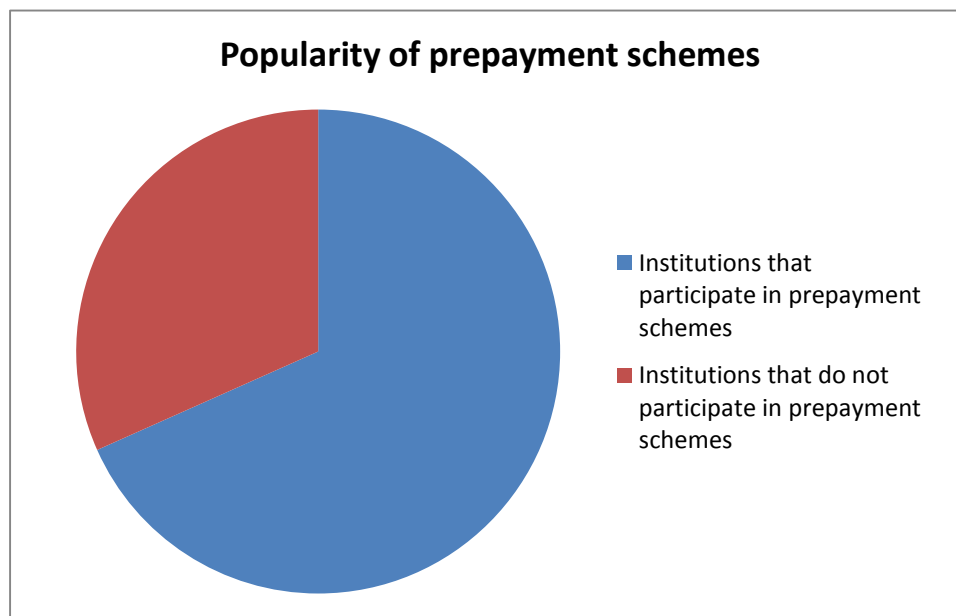


Fig. 5. Popularity of prepayment schemes.

## 5. Institutional Funds

18 institutions that responded (30%) have an institutional fund to cover non-RCUK/COAF APCs. Four others indicated that they have limited funds available on a trial basis, or in individual departments. 13 (22%) of respondents would like to bid for central open access funding (Fig. 5).

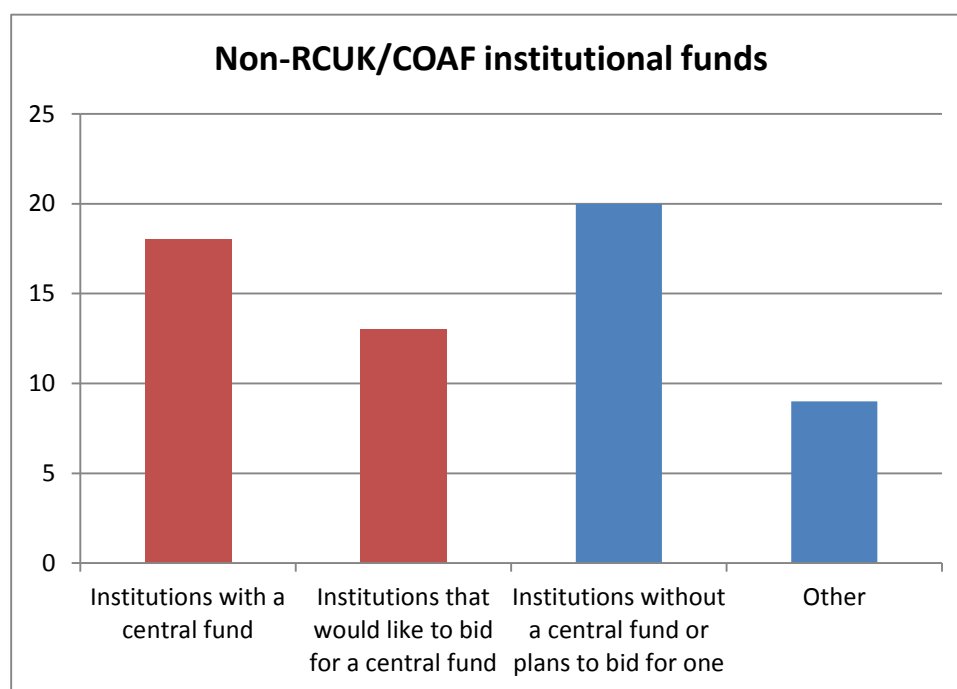


Fig. 5. Institutional funds.

There are different approaches to using these central funds. Four institutions pay for papers in fully open access journals only; four pay for papers in both fully open access and hybrid journals, without encouraging authors in favour of Green or Gold; and five institutions encourage authors to choose Green where possible (Fig. 6). Others commented that decisions are made on a case-by-case basis, often depending on the quality of the paper. Most institutions with a central fund prefer a Creative Commons licence, but are willing to pay for papers in journals that do not offer a Creative Commons option (60%). Eligibility criteria vary, with four institutions funding only academic staff on the institution's payroll, five also funding research students, and others also prepared to allow visitors or honorary members of staff to use the funds. Institutions generally treat their own fund as a last resort. Where a funder other than RCUK/COAF requires or prefers Gold, the vast majority of institutions ask authors to exhaust the funder's avenues for APC funding (through the research grant or other sources) before agreeing to pay.

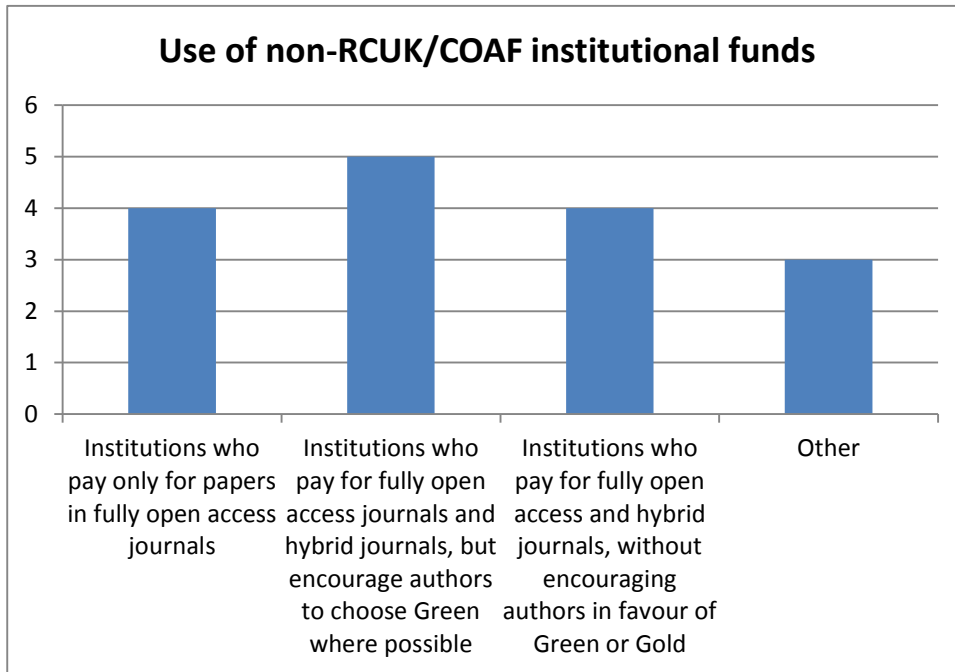


Fig. 6. Use of non-RCUK/COAF institutional funds.

## 6. Next Steps

Institutions' pragmatic approaches to managing their COAF and (particularly) RCUK open access block grants have enabled them to make efficient decisions about how to allocate funding in the first two-and-a-half years of the RCUK open access policy. Although institutions appreciate the importance of flexibility in implementing policies on APC payments, in general there is appetite for greater convergence, both of policies and processes. A selection of comments from the survey responses reflects this.

### **Comments**

*'Alignment of policies/rules would be helpful, eg over page charges/colour charges.'*

*'Harmonisation of processes & policy across the different bodies would help greatly, as would consistent unambiguous advice on multi-centre/multi-funder outputs.'*

*'The lack of clarity over who should pay when multiple institutions are involved - and particularly when authors move institutions - creates uncertainty and means that articles are likely to slip through the cracks.'*

*'Even the less well funded institutions have to address these issues. [Our policies will] be different from those of the research intensives, but they shouldn't be forgotten.'*

The Pathways to Open Access Project looks forward to further engagement between funders and institutions on the practicalities of allocating block grant open access funding, with a view to achieving greater consistency for all stakeholders.

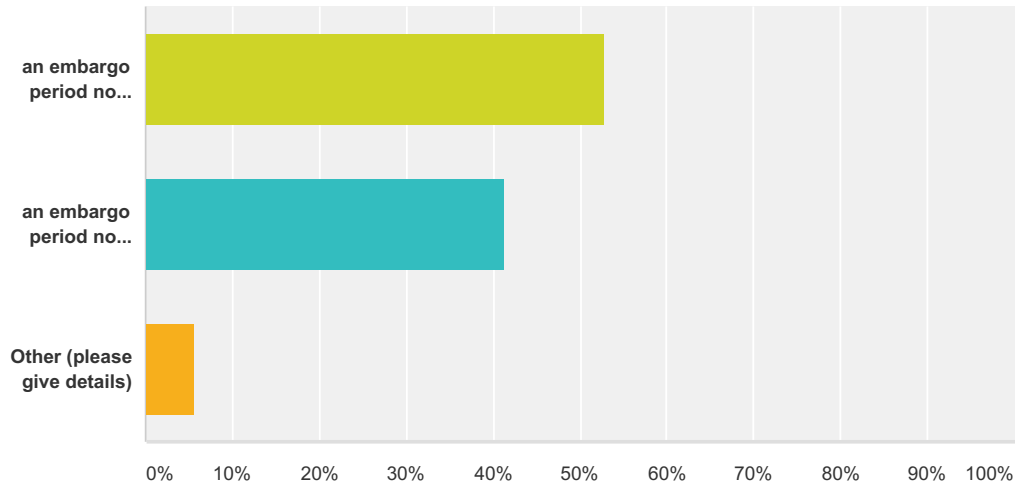
**Q1 To start with, if you are happy to provide your details, please give them below.**

Answered: 60 Skipped: 13

Answer Choices	Responses	
Your name	100.00%	60
Your institution	100.00%	60
Address	0.00%	0
Address 2	0.00%	0
City/Town	0.00%	0
State/Province	0.00%	0
ZIP/Postal Code	0.00%	0
Country	0.00%	0
Your e-mail address	100.00%	60
Phone Number	0.00%	0

**Q2 This question is about your interpretation of RCUK's Green embargo periods. Do you treat a journal as compliant with the RCUK policy if it offers**

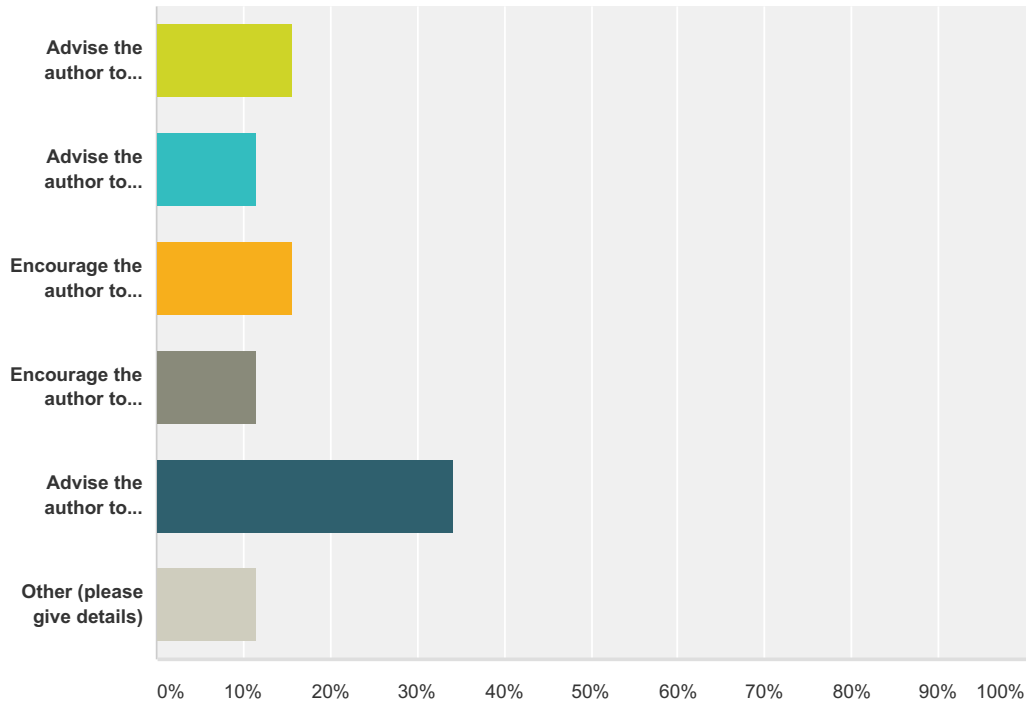
Answered: 70 Skipped: 3



Answer Choices	Responses
an embargo period no longer than 6 months (BBSRC, EPSRC, MRC, NERC, STFC) or 12 months (AHRC, ESRC)	52.86% 37
an embargo period no longer than 6 months (MRC), 12 months (BBSRC, EPSRC, NERC, STFC) or 24 months (AHRC, ESRC)	41.43% 29
Other (please give details)	5.71% 4
<b>Total</b>	<b>70</b>

**Q3 This question is about how you advise RCUK authors on their Gold/Green options. If you consider that a publisher’s Gold and Green options both comply with RCUK’s requirements, do you**

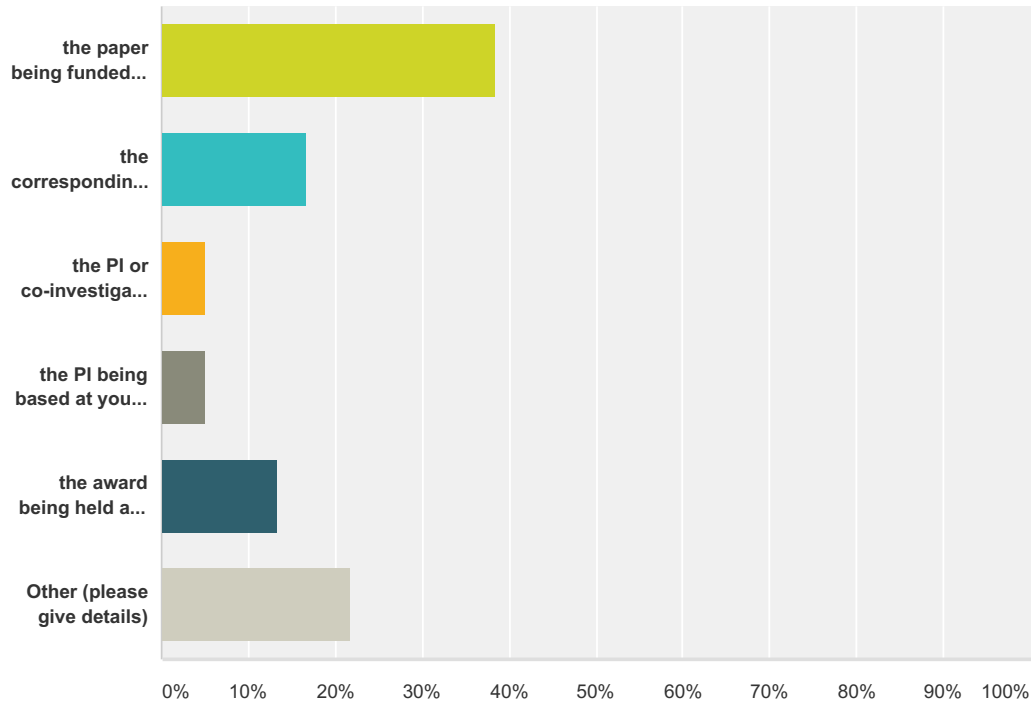
Answered: 70 Skipped: 3



Answer Choices	Responses
Advise the author to choose Green open access	15.71% 11
Advise the author to choose Gold open access	11.43% 8
Encourage the author to choose Green open access	15.71% 11
Encourage the author to choose Gold open access	11.43% 8
Advise the author to choose whichever option they consider most appropriate	34.29% 24
Other (please give details)	11.43% 8
<b>Total</b>	<b>70</b>

**Q4 What is your general approach when determining whether a paper is eligible for open access funding from your RCUK and COAF block grants? Do you determine eligibility on the basis of**

Answered: 60 Skipped: 13

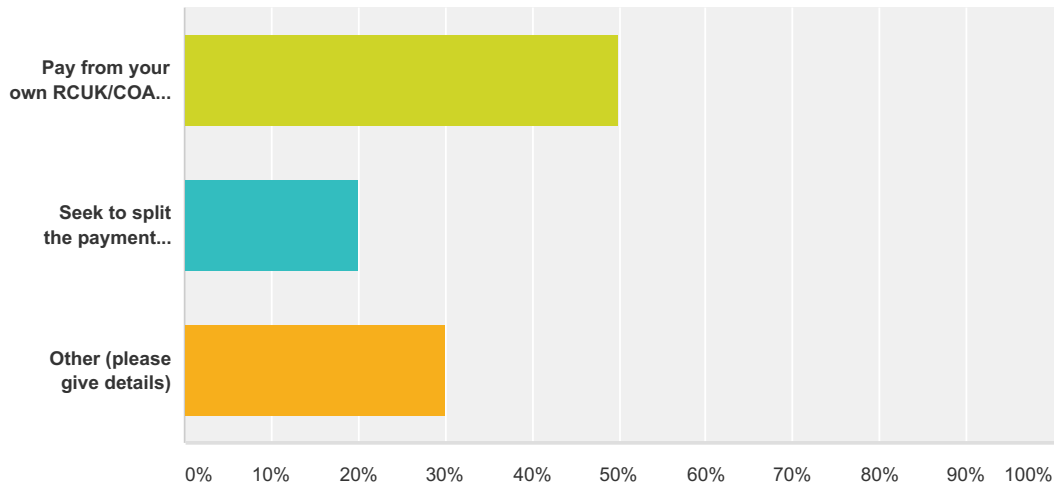


Answer Choices	Responses
the paper being funded by RCUK or COAF, regardless of which author or authors is affiliated with your institution	38.33% 23
the corresponding author being based at your institution	16.67% 10
the PI or co-investigator being based at your institution	5.00% 3
the PI being based at your institution	5.00% 3
the award being held at your institution	13.33% 8
Other (please give details)	21.67% 13
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>



### Q5 Where a paper is funded by RCUK or COAF grants at other institutions, as well as at your own institution, would you generally

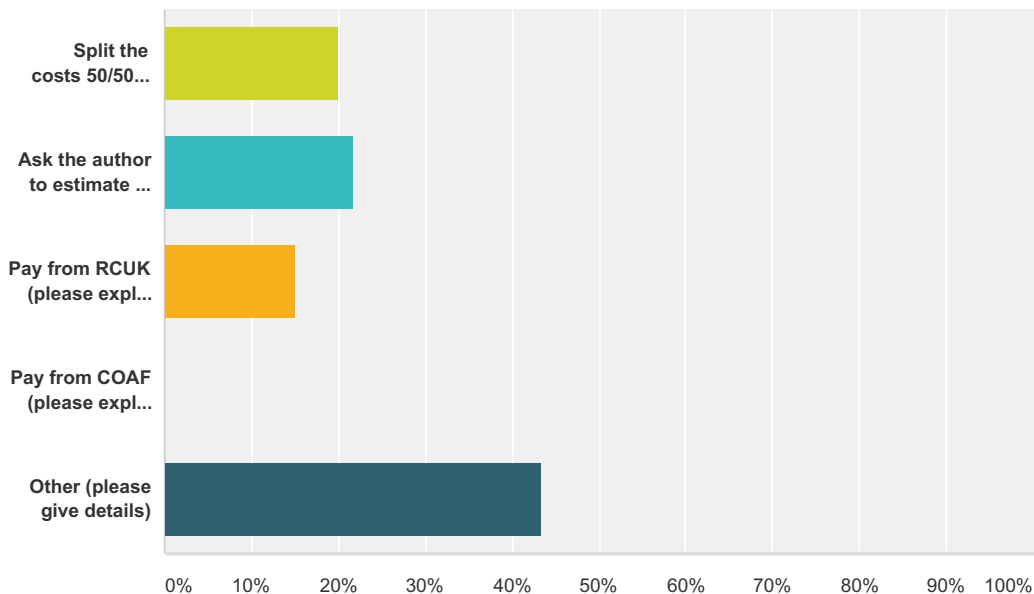
Answered: 60 Skipped: 13



Answer Choices	Responses
Pay from your own RCUK/COAF funds	50.00% 30
Seek to split the payment with the other institution(s)	20.00% 12
Other (please give details)	30.00% 18
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>

### Q6 Where you are paying an APC for a paper whose research was funded by both RCUK and COAF, would you

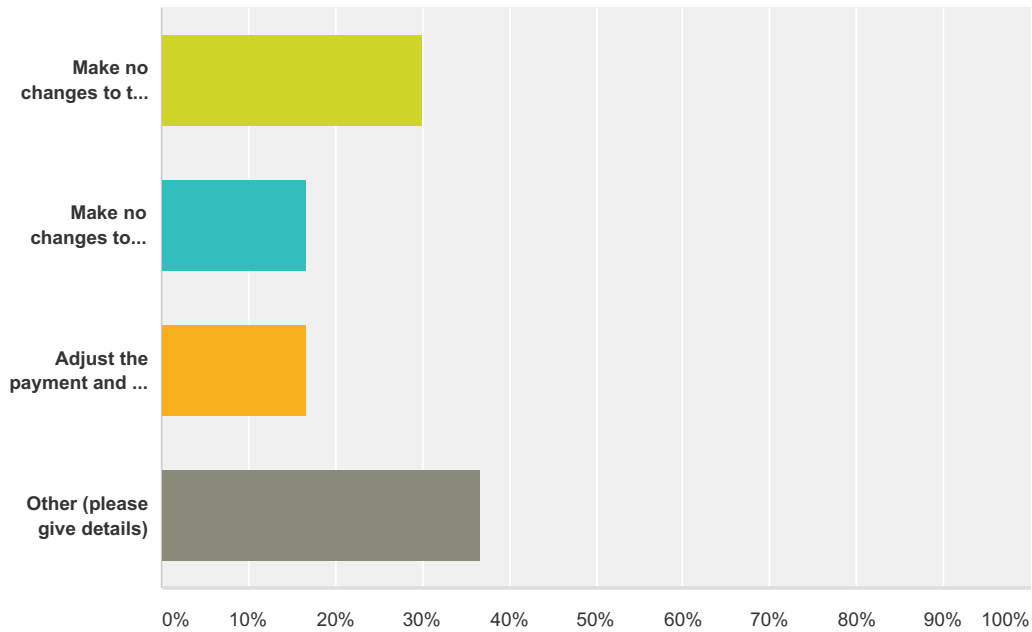
Answered: 60 Skipped: 13



Answer Choices	Responses
Split the costs 50/50 between your RCUK and COAF budgets	20.00% 12
Ask the author to estimate the proportions in which RCUK/COAF contributed to the paper, and split the payment accordingly	21.67% 13
Pay from RCUK (please explain why)	15.00% 9
Pay from COAF (please explain why)	0.00% 0
Other (please give details)	43.33% 26
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>

### Q7 Where you discover, after payment, that a paper was funded by COAF as well as RCUK (or vice versa), would you

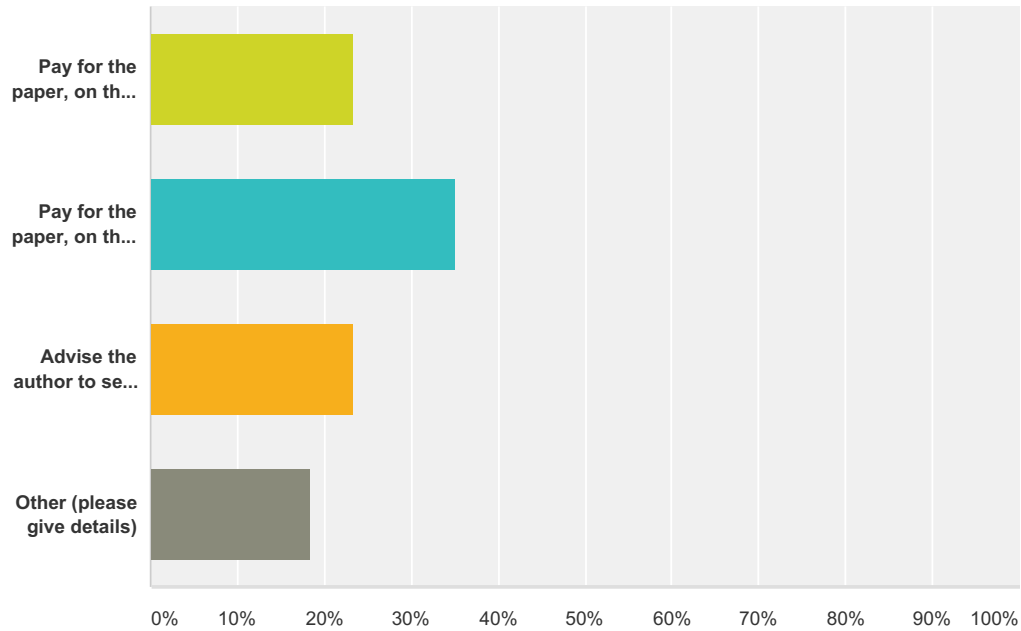
Answered: 60 Skipped: 13



Answer Choices	Responses
Make no changes to the payment; adjust your records and report compliance to RCUK, but only include the paper on your COAF report if your COAF budget paid	30.00% 18
Make no changes to payment or reporting	16.67% 10
Adjust the payment and the reporting to both COAF and RCUK	16.67% 10
Other (please give details)	36.67% 22
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>

### Q8 Where a paper was funded by a closed RCUK/COAF grant, and the RCUK/COAF author has moved to another institution with a block grant, would you generally

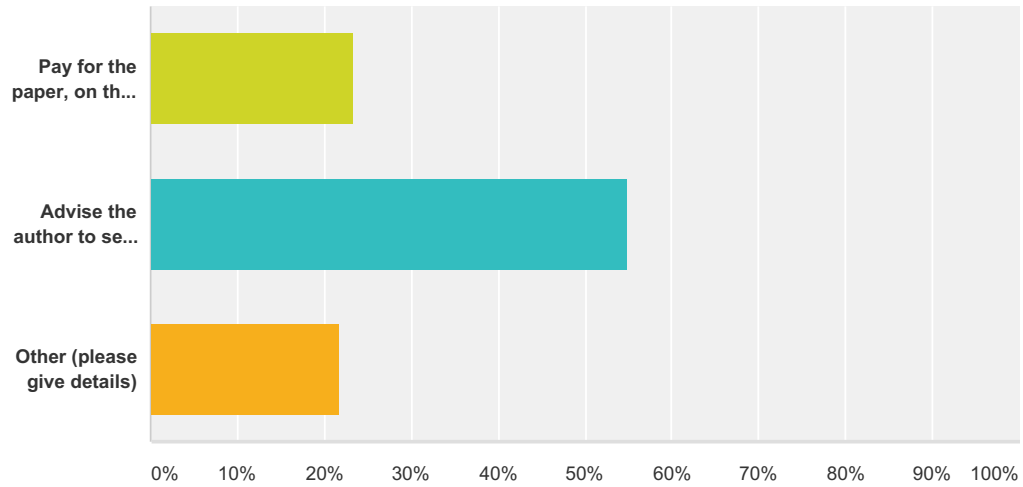
Answered: 60 Skipped: 13



Answer Choices	Responses
Pay for the paper, on the basis that the work was done under a grant held at your institution	23.33% 14
Pay for the paper, on the basis that the work was done under a grant held at your institution, provided the affiliation details are your institution's, rather than the new institution's	35.00% 21
Advise the author to seek funding from his/her new institution	23.33% 14
Other (please give details)	18.33% 11
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>

**Q9 Where a paper was funded by RCUK/COAF, but the author and the grant have moved to another institution with a block grant by the time the open access charge is incurred, would you**

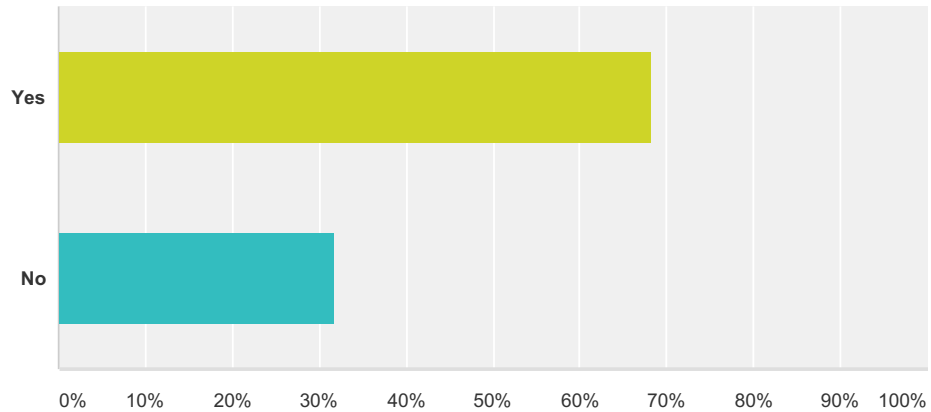
Answered: 60 Skipped: 13



Answer Choices	Responses
Pay for the paper, on the basis that the work was done while the author was at your institution	23.33% 14
Advise the author to seek funding from their new institution, on the basis that the open access liability follows the grant	55.00% 33
Other (please give details)	21.67% 13
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>

**Q10 Does your institution participate in any publisher prepayment schemes (which typically mean that APCs are discounted and payments are made up front, by deposit)?**

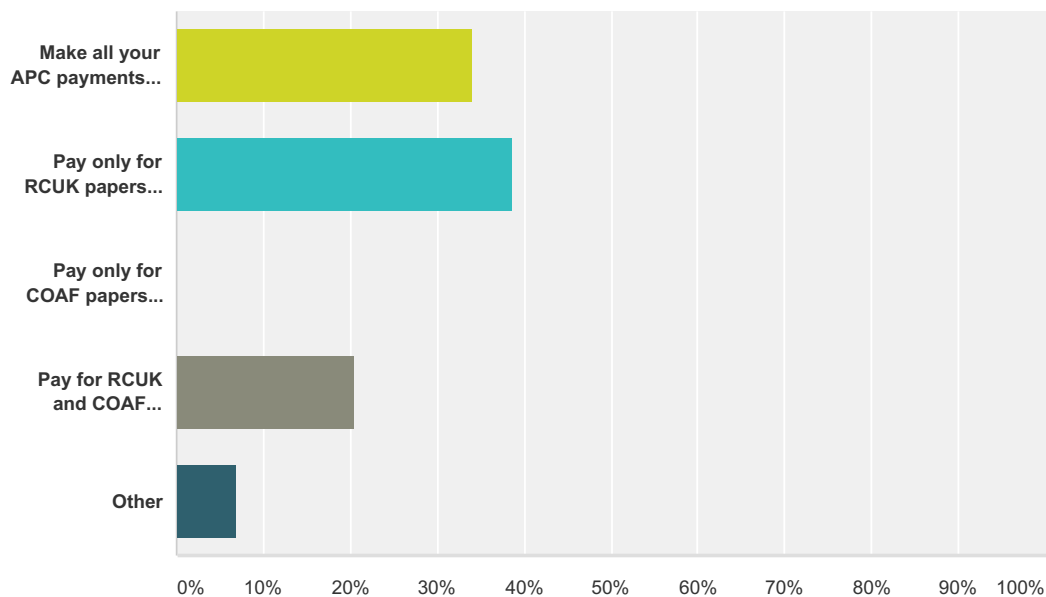
Answered: 60 Skipped: 13



Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	68.33%	41
No	31.67%	19
<b>Total</b>		<b>60</b>

**Q11 Some publishers allow all papers to be paid for under a prepayment arrangement; others are more restrictive. Where you have a prepayment agreement with a publisher, do you prefer to:**

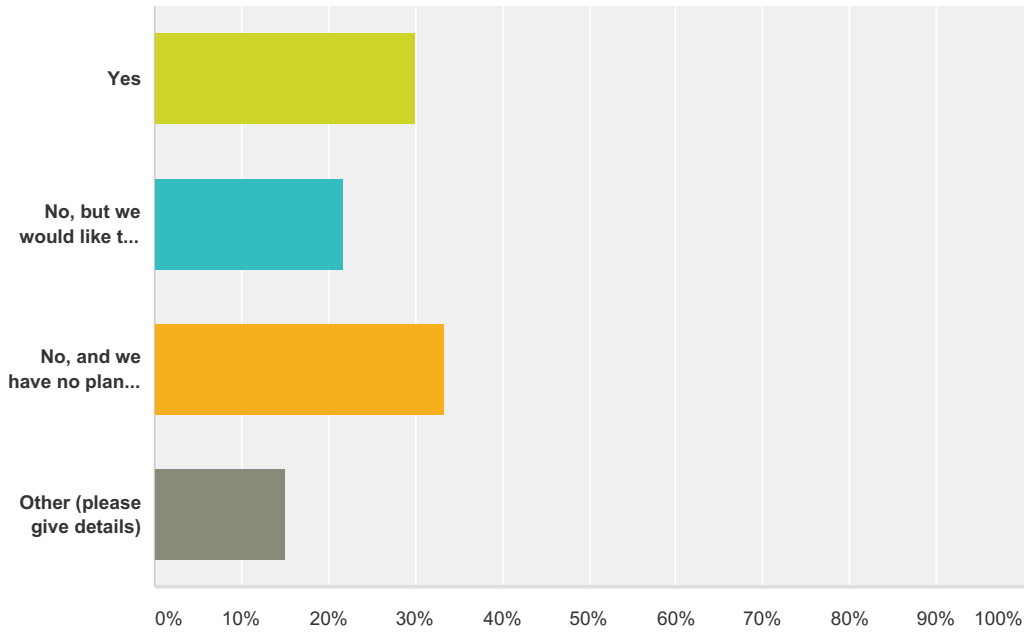
Answered: 44 Skipped: 29



Answer Choices	Responses
Make all your APC payments under the prepayment scheme, if the publisher allows this	34.09% 15
Pay only for RCUK papers under the prepayment scheme	38.64% 17
Pay only for COAF papers under the prepayment scheme	0.00% 0
Pay for RCUK and COAF papers, but no other articles that you choose to fund, under the prepayment scheme	20.45% 9
Other	6.82% 3
<b>Total</b>	<b>44</b>

**Q12 Does your institution have a central institutional open access fund covering outputs whose research was not funded by RCUK/COAF? (If you do not answer "yes", you will then skip to the end of the survey.)**

Answered: 60 Skipped: 13

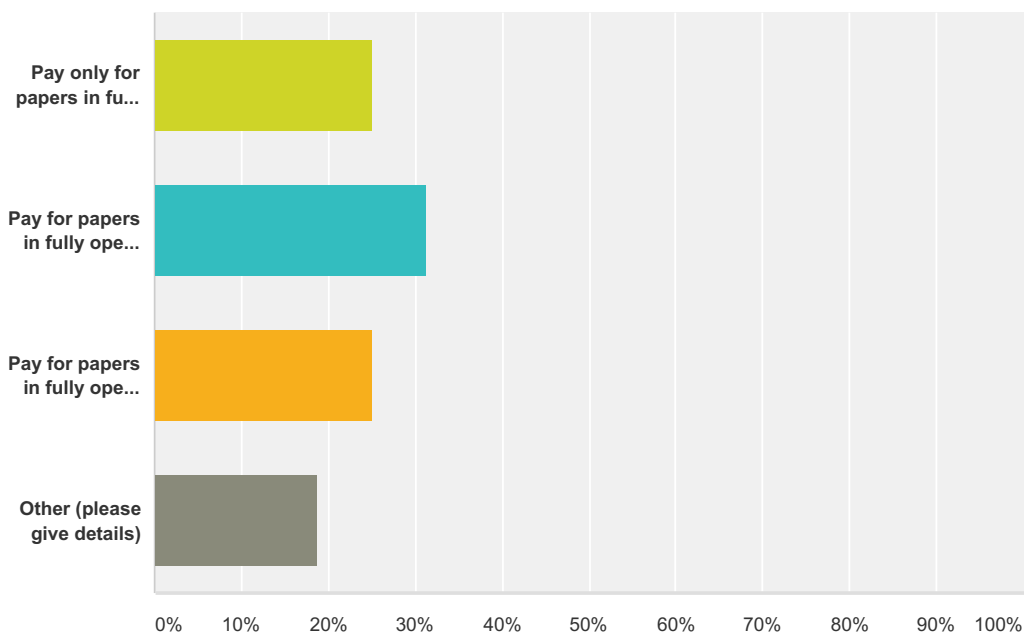


Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	30.00%	18
No, but we would like to bid for a central fund	21.67%	13
No, and we have no plans to bid for a central fund	33.33%	20
Other (please give details)	15.00%	9
<b>Total</b>		<b>60</b>



### Q13 What is your general approach to using your institutional funds? Do you

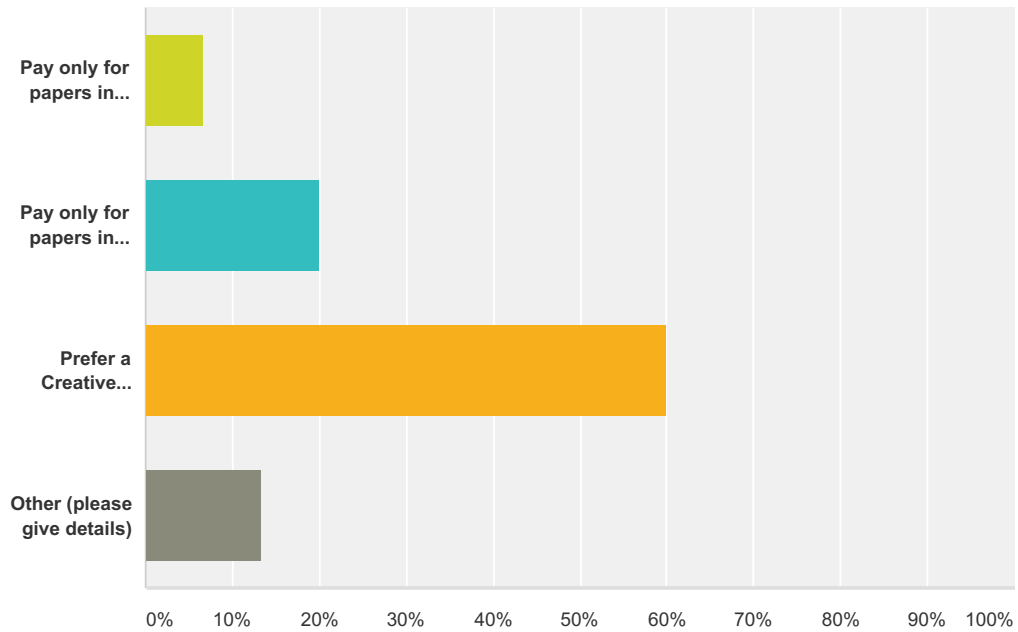
Answered: 16 Skipped: 57



Answer Choices	Responses
Pay only for papers in fully open access journals	25.00% 4
Pay for papers in fully open access journals and hybrid journals, but encourage authors to choose Green open access where possible	31.25% 5
Pay for papers in fully open access journals and hybrid journals, without encouraging authors in favour of Green or Gold	25.00% 4
Other (please give details)	18.75% 3
<b>Total</b>	<b>16</b>

### Q14 What is your approach to licensing when paying for papers from your institutional fund? Do you

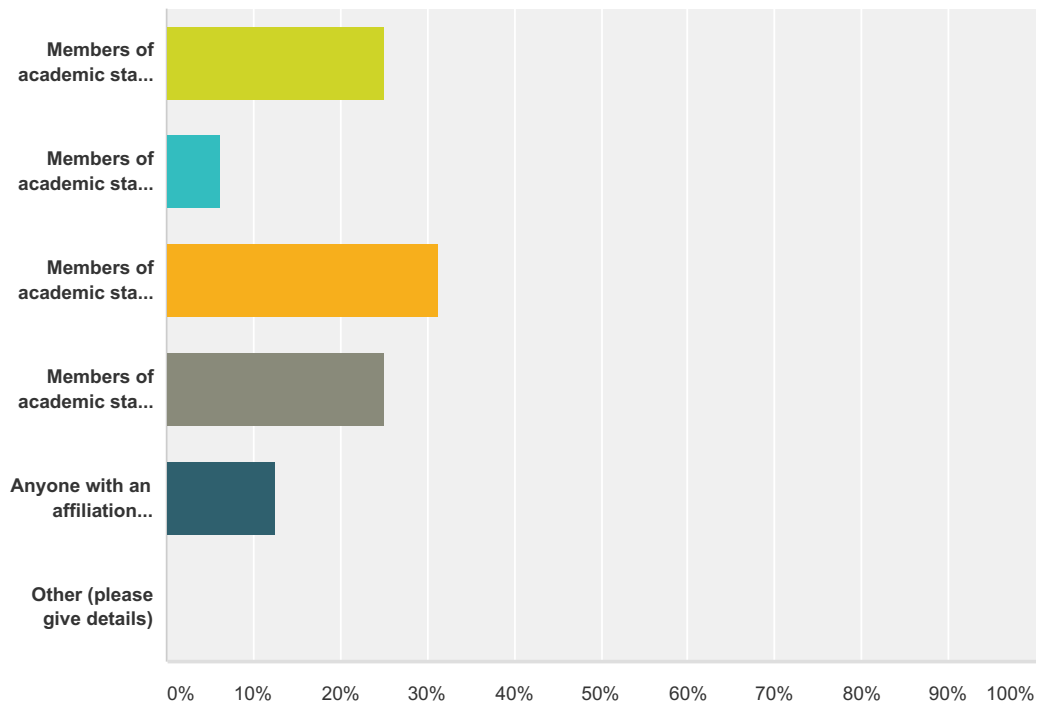
Answered: 15 Skipped: 58



Answer Choices	Responses
Pay only for papers in journals that offer CC BY	6.67% 1
Pay only for papers in journals that offer a Creative Commons licence	20.00% 3
Prefer a Creative Commons licence, but pay for papers in journals that do not offer this option (eg. OSA)	60.00% 9
Other (please give details)	13.33% 2
<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>

### Q15 Who is eligible to use your institutional fund?

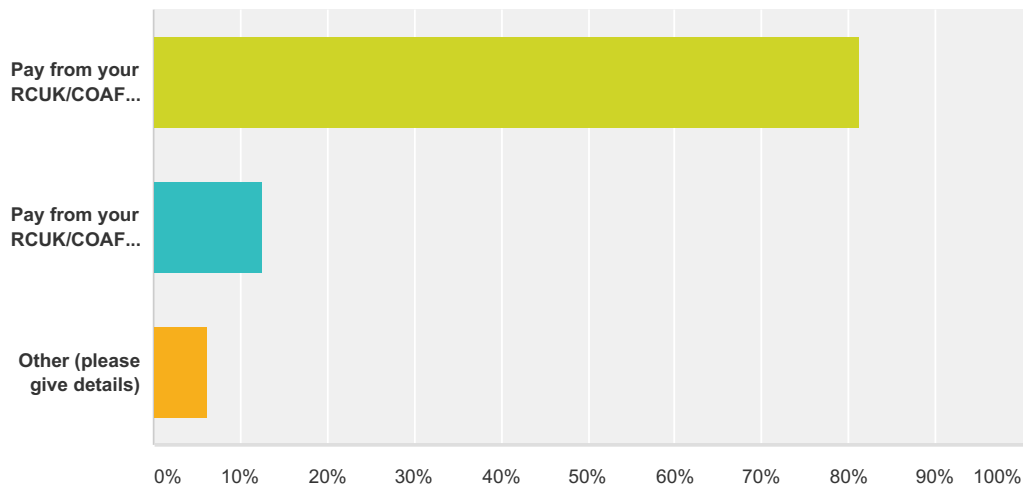
Answered: 16 Skipped: 57



Answer Choices	Responses
Members of academic staff currently on your institution's payroll	25.00% 4
Members of academic staff currently on your institution's payroll, and honorary members of staff (eg. NHS staff with honorary contracts)	6.25% 1
Members of academic staff currently on your institution's payroll and research students currently registered at your institution	31.25% 5
Members of academic staff currently on your institution's payroll, honorary members of staff (eg. NHS staff with honorary contracts), and research students currently registered at your institution	25.00% 4
Anyone with an affiliation with your institution (including visitors)	12.50% 2
Other (please give details)	0.00% 0
<b>Total</b>	<b>16</b>

### Q16 Where a paper is part-funded by RCUK/COAF and the Gold route is chosen, would you

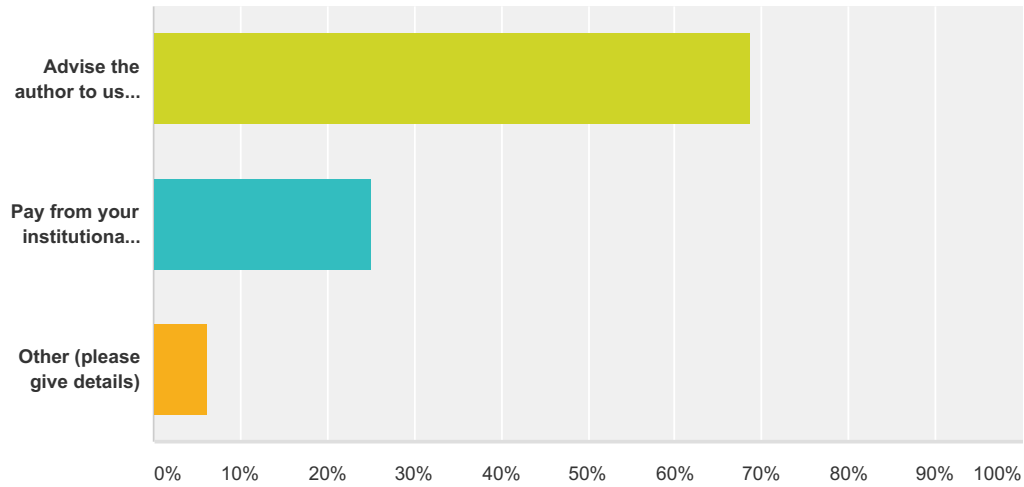
Answered: 16 Skipped: 57



Answer Choices	Responses	
Pay from your RCUK/COAF grant(s)	81.25%	13
Pay from your RCUK/COAF grant(s) and your institutional fund, in proportion to the RCUK/COAF contribution to the paper	12.50%	2
Other (please give details)	6.25%	1
<b>Total</b>		<b>16</b>

**Q17 Where a paper is not funded by RCUK/COAF, but is funded by another funder with an open access policy (eg. NIHR, ERC), and Gold is preferred or required, would you**

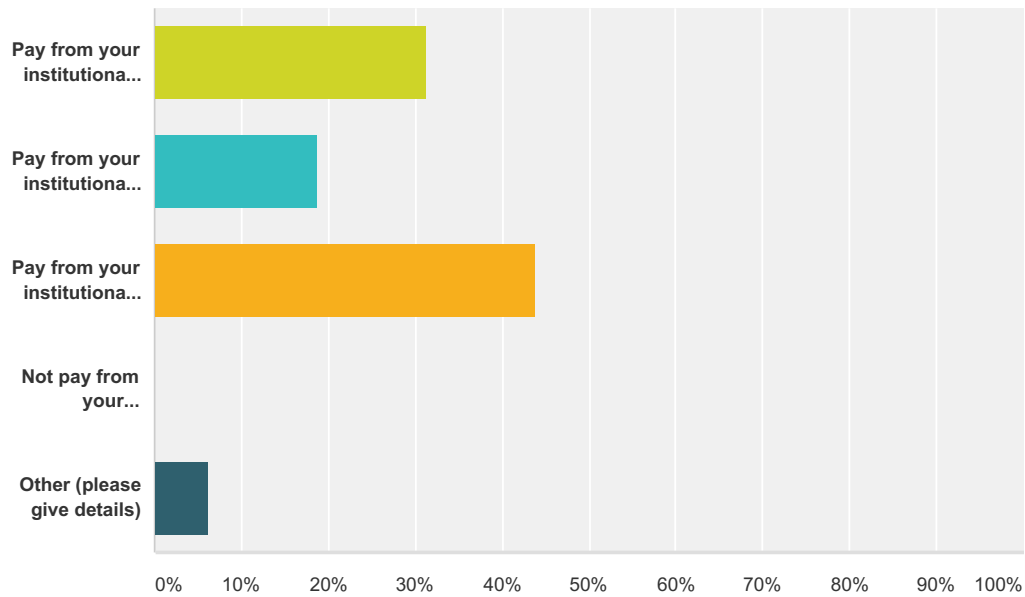
Answered: 16 Skipped: 57



Answer Choices	Responses
Advise the author to use their grant or contact the funder directly for funds	68.75% 11
Pay from your institutional fund	25.00% 4
Other (please give details)	6.25% 1
<b>Total</b>	<b>16</b>

**Q18 Where a paper is not funded by RCUK/COAF, but is funded by another funder with an open access policy (eg. NIHR, ERC), and funds are not available from the other funder (either through the grant or directly), would you**

Answered: 16 Skipped: 57



Answer Choices	Responses
Pay from your institutional funds only if the paper is in a fully open access journal; advise the author to choose Green open access if the paper is in a hybrid journal (even if the Green option will not comply with their funder's requirements)	31.25% 5
Pay from your institutional funds either if the paper is either in a fully open access journal, or if the paper is in a hybrid journal and Gold is required in order to comply with the funder's requirements	18.75% 3
Pay from your institutional funds wherever the author needs or wants Gold open access, provided the journal complies with the funder's requirements	43.75% 7
Not pay from your institutional funds	0.00% 0
Other (please give details)	6.25% 1
<b>Total</b>	<b>16</b>

**Q19 Please enter any further comments that you would like to make on the use of RCUK, COAF and institutional open access funds.**

Answered: 19 Skipped: 54