

Science Europe Press Release: *for immediate release*

Open Access: a new opportunity for the Humanities

(Brussels, 18 November 2013) On the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the Berlin Open Access Declaration and just ahead of the conference organised for it in Berlin by the Max Planck Society, the Science Europe Humanities Scientific Committee is publishing an Opinion Paper that recognises Open Access as the way forward for Humanities disciplines.

“We acknowledge the distinct practices and needs of Humanities disciplines”, said Professor Shearer West, member of the Committee and co-author of the Opinion Paper. *“However, we should not consider the Humanities so different from all other disciplines that are already embracing the change. Open Access can provide greater impact, transformation in the methods of scholarly communication, and innovation in the process of peer review, and these are all positive opportunities”.*

As outlined in the Paper, publishing practices and expectations about reputation, career and achievements in Humanities research remain focused on print rather than digital media. For example, one of the most striking features of the Humanities is the crucial role of books rather than scholarly articles as the primary form of output. While many research organisations – including Science Europe members – are already supporting initiatives that aim at quality-controlled Open Access book publishing, some Humanities scholars seem reluctant to change their habits. However, Open Access can offer more flexible and broader possibilities than with the limitations of hard copies.

Another critical feature for Humanities disciplines that distinguish them from many others is the need to reproduce copyrighted visual images (such as art works and any other objects in museums or private collections) that often involve a contractual agreement and/or fee payments. Since these costs are calculated on the basis of the potential audience that can be reached, they could become prohibitive for an Open Access publication, with a potentially infinite audience.

“The reproduction of costly visual material is indeed one of the challenges that Open Access policies for the Humanities will need to tackle”, added Professor West. *“This is why the Committee is encouraging the Humanities research community to engage with the new possibilities that Open Access can offer, and at the same time is calling on research funding and performing organisations to work together to tackle these specificities and potential obstacles. The ultimate goal is to improve access to research findings that in the long-term will benefit us all”.*

Science Europe comprises 53 Research Funding and Research Performing Organisations from 27 countries, representing around €30 billion per annum. It was founded in October 2011 with the aim of promoting the collective interests of members and providing them with a platform to collaborate at both policy and activity level.

For any further information, please contact:
Elena Torta, Communications Manager at Science Europe
elena.torta@scienceeurope.org
Tel. +32 (0)475 84 01 12