

Rights Retention

GW4 Update statement

Empowering authors: reflections on the importance of rights retention in academic publishing

In November 2023, the GW4 universities made a joint statement connecting their shared ambitions to embed Rights Retention in our policies. Rights Retention empowers authors to assert control over their scholarly publications. Traditionally when researchers publish their findings in academic journals, they transfer copyright to the publisher. This can limit authors' ability to share work freely and to reuse their own work, including posting it in institutional repositories. This imposes limitations on knowledge exchange as well as causing consequences for REF and funder compliance. Open access has proven benefits for the reach and impact of research, and Rights Retention is increasingly likely to underpin a sustainable approach to open access.

GW4 issued a statement supporting our institutional Rights Retention efforts, and we committed to working together to share experience and learn from each other through the efforts of our university libraries and our staff supporting open research. In doing this we acknowledged a broader direction of travel towards Rights Retention across the sector, and the need to build a commitment to Rights Retention into our negotiations with publishers when we purchase their content, or in publishing.

We committed at the time, to reflect on our progress, and share those reflections with the sector as part of wider support for an open research culture.

Different strokes

Our four universities are at different stages in the embedding of Rights Retention, but we have benefitted hugely from working together and sharing our strategies and experiences.

The involvement and engagement of stakeholders has been key, including advocating for Rights Retention as part of a wider open access strategy with our researchers, or through linking this to institutional Research Culture agendas. This approach feels increasingly relevant as we review how to approach the *People, Culture and Environment* requirements for future REF. Our collaboration through GW4 has the potential to add much value to institutional PCE statements, and our libraries have much to contribute to this process.

Partnership

We've all found it essential to work closely with our HR and Legal teams and engage with campus Trade Unions as a key route to bringing stakeholders on board and making the case for this being a positive move which supports our researchers and gives them the power to assert greater ownership of their outputs.

External bodies, including Jisc, are important partners in this process – especially for our institutional journal subscriptions and the need to assert more control for copyright holders, as we seek better value-for-money and ultimately a more sustainable scholarly publishing market underpinned by ethical principles focusing on fair access and viable costs.

Advocacy

Advocacy has been essential to ensure our researchers understand the rationale for the approach, and the support available to them. The publication journey can be isolating, especially for early-career researchers, who may feel there is little support to draw on when a publisher asks them to sign away their rights. Rights Retention provides a University-backed mechanism for all authors to deposit green open access and meet funder REF open access requirements. It can level the playing field, regardless of career stage, career breaks, etc. unlike gold open access - where publishing in the most prestigious journals is often dependent on the ability to pay Article Processing Charges. We have made support resources available and written directly to publishers to flag Rights Retention as a university position rather than a stance taken by individual researchers.

Rights retention is now covered in inductions for new research staff, and we reach out to our doctoral programmes to ensure new researchers are aware of why it is important to hold on to their rights.

Increasingly with the move towards expanding the recognition of all staff involved in research, we are looking at how our technical teams and professional service colleagues are exposed to these kinds of issues and ensuring they are aware of the support available.

Supporting Open Science

Rights retention aligns with the principles of open science, which advocates for transparency and reproducibility in research. By facilitating open availability, it can lead to more reproducible and trustworthy science as data and findings are more readily accessible for scrutiny.

Mutual Support

GW4 has facilitated much mutual support on this journey as we continue to learn more about embedding Rights Retention and building on our experiences.