

Gates Foundation joins shift towards open access platforms

Initiative will emulate Wellcome Trust's publishing model, with European Commission set to follow

One of the world's biggest funders of scientific research is to establish an open access platform that will allow its grant winners to publish their findings, in a move that could be swiftly followed by the European Commission.

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, which invests about \$1.2 billion (£960 million) a year in global health initiatives, said on 23 March that the Gates Open Research initiative would allow researchers funded by the US charity to publish their work on a free-to-access site, beginning this autumn.

The service will be provided by F1000, which [launched a similar platform](#) for the Wellcome Trust, the world's largest biomedical charity, in November 2016.

Meanwhile, the European Commission has said that it is "preparing the groundwork" to launch its own open access platform as an "additional optional service" for the scientists it funds via the Horizon 2020 programme.

Speaking to *Times Higher Education*, Jean-Claude Burgelman, head of the EC's science policy and foresight unit, said it was looking at "existing models such as the Wellcome Trust and Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation" as it developed its own publishing platform to "comply with Horizon 2020's open access requirement".

The announcements by two of the world's biggest funders of scientific research – the EC awards around €1.8 billion (£1.6 billion) annually through the European Research Council – are likely to be viewed as significant milestones for open access research publishing.

Its champions claim that it increases the speed and transparency of scholarly publishing, improves scientific collaboration and reduces the need for expensive institutional subscriptions to journals.

Announcing its partnership with F1000, Trevor Mundel, president of the Gates Foundation's global health division, said there was a need to "accelerate open access to high-quality research on health, education and economic development...to solve the challenges of the 21st century".

"Gates Open Research is designed to ensure that the research we fund can be of immediate benefit to society," he said.

Its deal with F1000 follows the decision by the foundation, established by Microsoft founder Bill Gates and his wife Melinda in 2000, to require all of its grant recipients to publish their research and raw data in an open access journal from January 2017.

The foundation, which distributed about \$4.1 billion in 2015 to education, health and development causes across the world, embraced open access in 2015, but allowed a two-year transition during which researchers could embargo their work for 12 months. This exemption has now expired.

Rebecca Lawrence, managing director of F1000, said the new platform would allow Gates researchers "to take charge of what findings they can share and when".

The open access platforms address the "many challenges faced in the foundation's core areas of funding, where speed, reducing bias in decision making, and access to information are so crucial," she explained.

Alongside the Wellcome Trust platform, the Gates Open Research project would "really start to make a significant shift in how new findings are communicated", Ms Lawrence added.