AN OPEN ACCESS MANDATE IN ICELAND
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Recently Bifröst University became the first higher education institution in Iceland to adopt an Open Access mandate. The mandate, or policy depending on definitional preferences, was initiated by the faculty and is a declaration of the faculty member's preference to publish in Open Access journals and their obligation to store research articles in the university's open repository. The mandate, which is closely modelled on similar ones passed by for instance Harvard's Faculty of Arts and Sciences and by the Harvard Law School,[1] was then taken up by the Bifrost University Council, which gave it a status as a university wide policy. Below is a rough translation of the text with a brief explanation on its meaning and rational.

The Mandate
Bifrost University is committed to the objective of making the research output of its faculty available to as many as possible. For that purpose the academic staff of Bifrost University will seek to make their scientific articles available in open access, either by publishing in open access research journals or by depositing them in a research repository. Every member of the academic staff allows the university to make their published research articles available and to store them in an open repository, such as "Skemman". This holds for every research article published in a scientific journal authored by the researcher, alone or with others, during the time of his or her tenure at Bifrost University.

Exempt from this policy are books, teaching material, reports or other material that does not fall under the category of research articles published in scientific journals. Exempt are also research articles that are completed before the adoption of this policy and articles that were already underway and are bound by restrictions that are incompatible with this policy.

The Rector or the Rector's designate, will waive application of the policy for a particular article, or delay its appearance in the open repository, upon written request by a Faculty member explaining the need.

Each Faculty member will at no charge provide an electronic copy of the final version of the article no later than at its publication date, to the appropriate representative of the Rector's Office in an appropriate format (such as PDF) specified by the Rector's Office.

The Rector's Office may make the article available to the public in an open-access repository. The Rector will be responsible for interpreting this policy, resolving disputes concerning its interpretation and application, and recommending changes to the Faculty when appropriate. The policy will be reviewed after three years and a report presented to the Faculty.

Discussion
The next few months and years will be a trial period and no doubt there will be obstacles in implementing the policy. However, with the issue of Open Access becoming an ever more pressing issue for both academics and the general public, it is worthwhile to reflect on the process of introducing policy change in an institution. What is it that helps reaching consensus on a policy? Bifröst University is a fairly small institution, even by Icelandic standards; the process of reaching an agreement is perhaps not as long winding as in larger organizations. Nevertheless, it took some discussion to reach an agreement, and the focus that helped in the discussions at Biföst were: 1) keeping the message simple; 2) the use of exemplary institutions abroad as a reference; 3) the benefit of being early adopters in your area; 4) the idea of Open Access as a public good, and 5) emphasize the opt out available in exceptional cases.

Readers knowledgeable about Open Access discussions, policies and mandates, see from the start the resemblance with the Harvard policy mentioned

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[1] http://www.earlham.edu/~peters/fos/2008/02/text-of-harvard-policy.html http://www.earlham.edu/~peters/fos/2009/03/mit-adopts-university-wide-oa-mandate.html

above. When discussing the mandate and gathering support this became important, since there were "respectable" research universities abroad that had already adopted a similar policy.

In a similar way as the Harvard model mandate, the first part of the Bifröst mandate describes the intent and what the faculty is committed to do. The purpose of the mandate is to make the scientific output at Bifröst accessible to everyone, everywhere, on the Internet. The way to do that is to either publish in open access journals or by depositing the articles in the university repository.

This point was mentioned during the debates about the rationale of the mandate, and the argument about more democratic and fairer distribution of knowledge was convincing. Other important lessons from the discussion process at this time was to keep the message simple and not let the discussion spin into a general debate about intellectual property, the scientific merit of particular journals or the general developments in publishing across the globe.

The next part of the mandate differs from the Harvard one. With the mention of Open Access journals in the Bifröst mandate, the emphasis is on the University's commitment to OA publishing. The University publishes its own open access journal Bifröst Journal of Social Science (bjss.bifrost.is) that uses international open access software (OJS) and is listed in the Directory of Open Access Journals (doaj.org).[2] This fact, and the relevance of the journal to the researchers at Bifröst, made the idea of publishing generally in OA journals more natural than perhaps in other places were the culture is different.

It came out in the discussion, that Bifröst had already adopted an Open Access culture and now it could be the first in Iceland to decide upon an OA mandate.

The reader will notice, that the wording at this point doesn't require the faculty to send their material directly to the repository, which might sound "weak". However, there is a clause that gives the University permission to store every article in the repository. Skemman is the one we use at Bifrost together with several other Icelandic institutions,[3] and makes the University at least partly responsible for gathering and making the material available. The later sentence: "Each Faculty member will at no charge provide an electronic copy of the final version of the article no later than at its publication date…" makes it however clear, that it is also the faculties' responsibility to make the material available. The University can demand that a given article is sent to the repository, and that the administration has the responsibility to gather the material.

The "exemptions" clause in the end was necessary to convince the skeptics, and is, with the rest of the mandate, similar to the Harvard one. Being able to opt out became an important point in the discussion, i.e. that in any unforeseeable, circumstances it is possible to be exempt from the policy by writing a request. How often this option will be used in the future we will have to see.

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[2] http://www.sciecom.org/ojs/index.php/sciecominfo/article/view/1765/1398

[3] http://www.sciecom.org/ojs/index.php/sciecominfo/article/view/4762/4323