Open Access journals, also referred to as “gold” OA, employ funding models that do not charge readers or their institutions for access. According to the Directory of Open Access Journals, there are now over 4000 Open Access journals. This represents about 16% of the approximate 25,000 peer-reviewed academic journals in existence. Some of the more well-known Open Access publishers are in the Science, Technology, and Medicine (STM) fields: Hindawi Publishing Corporation and BioMed Central are both commercial publishers that collectively publish over 300 peer-reviewed journals and the Public Library of Science (PLoS) is a nonprofit organisation that publishes several very high impact Open Access journals in science and medicine.

Like subscription-based journals, however, Open Access journals exist in a wide variety of fields and are of varying quality. There are a growing number of new publishing start-ups using the business model that charges a publication fee, because many people see the opportunity to develop new businesses on this model. Not all of these operate to the standards that are desirable and it is as well to do some careful exploratory research before submitting an article - and a fee - to an Open Access journal.

In addition to the over 4000+ Open Access journals, many subscription-based publishers offer authors the option of paying a fee to make their articles openly accessible. This ‘hybrid model' enables publishers of traditional subscription-based journals to experiment with Open Access, and allows researchers publishing in those journals to adhere to funding agency mandates.

Open Access journals employ a number of different business models to recoup their costs including subsidies, advertising, article-processing fees, charges for hard copy versions, charges for other publication services, membership fees, or some combination of these. It should be noted that most journals do not charge an article-processing fee, but recover their costs in other ways. This is particularly the case with journals published in developing countries and by learned societies, where imposing a processing fee is considered a barrier to the exchange of scholarly information.

Currently, most article processing fees are being paid by funding agencies, with libraries providing the majority of institutional membership funds. It is predicted that as the proportion of Open Access journal literature grows, this will free up monies from library acquisition budgets that can be shifted over to supporting Open Access.
Cooperative initiatives to develop Open Access journal publishing

The transition to Open Access can be accomplished much more efficiently if there is coordination among the various stakeholders: libraries, publishers, researchers, and funding agencies. This is the premise that underlies some recent cooperative approaches to Open Access:

- SciELO (the Scientific Electronic Library Online), for example, is an initiative based in Brazil that publishes over 200 Open Access journals. SciELO is a partnership between scientific agencies and journal publishers in Latin America and the Caribbean. SciELO was conceived to meet the scientific communication needs of developing countries by providing an efficient way to assure universal visibility and accessibility to their scientific literature. It has created new publishing venues for researchers in Latin America, the Caribbean and other lusophone regions who wish to publish in their own languages; as well as enabling the citizens to have access to the research being undertaken in their countries. SciELO is supported by FAPESP (the State of São Paulo Research Foundation), BIREME, the Latin America and Caribbean Center on Health Sciences Information, CNPq of Brazil (Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico) as well as national and international institutions.

- SCOAP3 (Sponsoring Consortium for Open Access Publishing in Particle Physics) is a group of High Energy Physics (HEP) funding agencies and research libraries that are coordinating to cover journal subscription prices- so that publishers can make the electronic versions of their journals freely available to all over the internet. There are no article processing fees, and authors are not charged directly to publish their articles. The project is spearheaded by CERN, with partners in France, Germany, Italy, Sweden and the US. Each SCOAP3 partner will finance its contribution through the cancellation of journal subscriptions for the 7 core peer reviewed journals in HEP. Project partners have estimated that the total amount of money currently spent by the library community on these 7 titles worldwide is about $15M US.

Also see:

Supporting existing Open Access journals

Directory of Open Access Journals
Promoting and cataloguing Open Access journals

Helping researchers to establish Open Access journals

Paying publisher fees

Further resources

1. Caroline Sutton and David Solomon have set up a resource featuring materials and advice from their first workshop on Open Access Publishing held in Vancouver in 2009. They will be offering further workshops and hope to make it an ongoing series. Their website giving details is here.

