The White Horse Press

Report 2023/2024: The Open Book Collective

Context

The White Horse Press (WHP) has operated on a traditional (gated) publishing model for over thirty years but is now working actively to transition to an Open Access future across its book and journal publishing. As a very small press, many of the Open Access publishing models commonly used elsewhere in the sector are impractical or impossible for us. More generally, we lack the resource to form and maintain a significant network of relationships with the many institutional libraries around the world who form our natural customer base.

A priority for our OA transition is therefore to find approaches and infrastructures that allow us to access adequate OA publishing revenue despite not having the tools or labour capacity taken for granted at larger companies.

We joined the Open Book Collective (OBC) in early 2023, just as it was starting. The aim of participating in OBC is to accelerate our OA transition for books, with staged goals:

1   Make our book frontlist fully Open Access.
2   Eliminate reliance on author fees, BPCs etc.
3   Grow from 4–5 books to 8–9 books a year, while maintaining full OA publishing.

Since joining OBC, we have seen a steady accumulation of subscriber support, with revenue coming in at a level that has made a direct impact on our ability to publish OA books.

Revenue to Date

OBC revenue to date is as follows:

Funds received:
        GBP £8,257

Funds committed but not yet received:
        EUR €1,805
        GBP £495
        CAD $796

Our average book production cost is GBP £8,000 (a slight increase on a year ago due to sustained high inflation). We have already accrued sufficient OBC funds to cover the full cost of more than one book. Our aim in deploying OBC revenue is to maximise impact, where 'impact' is measured by the increase in the proportion of our frontlist that is published OA. At this stage of our development, the route to highest impact lies in allocating OBC funds
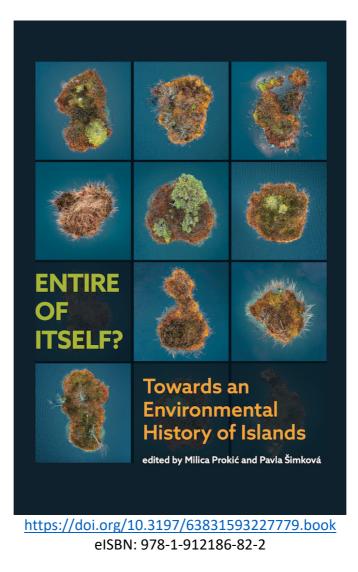
judiciously in combination with other financial support that may be available for particular books. This way, every deployed penny of OBC revenue directly increases OA outcomes, without 'wasting' OBC funds on books that might become OA by other means.

We monitor this by tracking all OBC revenue in a restricted account and releasing funds from that account when allocated against specific book projects.

Publishing Impact

As of March 2023, we have allocated £6,500 of OBC revenue towards rendering one frontlist book Open Access, when it would otherwise have been published gated. This book attracted a chapter fee of £1,500, so the £6,500 makes up the difference and allows us to publish it OA without undue financial risk.

The book that has benefited from OBC support is 'Entire of Itself? Towards an Environmental History of Islands' (edited by Milica Prokić and Pavla Šimková) (https://www.whpress.co.uk/publications/2023/10/13/entire-of-itself/). This is an accessible scholarly volume presenting innovative new work by authors from around the world, including from the Global South. Each chapter is a case study of one specific location, but the book's relevance is global.

https://doi.org/10.3197/63831593227779.book
eISBN: 978-1-912186-82-2

During the same annual period, we published five other new books (excluding reprints and re-issues), of which:

- Two (2) are gated.
- Three (3) are Open Access with costs covered by the author(s) or their institution(s).

This means that for the year 2023/2024, we published 2/3 of our new books Open Access. This is an increase from a proportion of 2/5 Open Access for new books published in the year 2022/2023. OBC revenue accounts for a significant proportion of this increase.

Supporter Credits
We list all OBC supporters on the 'Open Access Thanks Page' on our website, alongside others who are supporting our OA transition in significant ways (outside OBC).

https://www.whpress.co.uk/publications/oasupporters/

We also credit supporters on the verso of the book(s) towards which their OBC subscription funds have been allocated. In the case of 'Entire of Itself?', the following institutions are credited on the verso:

KU Leuven Libraries
Lancaster University Library
Liverpool John Moores University Library
Macalester University Library
University of Arizona Library
University of Bristol Library
University of California Santa Barbara Library
University of Loughborough
University of Manchester Library
University of Salford Library
University of Sheffield Library
University of Sussex Library
University of York Library

Usage Impact
Our OA books reach far more online readers than our gated books. We do not yet have any data for OBC-supported titles, since we are just in the process of publishing the first OBC-supported book at the time of writing. For our existing booklist, though, the following statistics from JSTOR (our main hosting platform) illustrate the impact of open access. For context, please note that we only started focussing on online eBook publication of any kind (gated or OA) at the start of 2022, when we loaded all our books onto JSTOR. We had only partial online availability before then, and there was little usage, so our meaningful book usage dataset starts in 2022.

	2022	**2023**
Total Online Booklist	45	53
Gated eBooks	39	40
OA eBooks	6	13
Total JSTOR Usage (Gated)	791	816
Total JSTOR Usage (OA)	5,861	10,461
Ave. Usage per Title (Gated)	20	20
Ave. Usage per Title (OA)	977	819
Busiest Book (Gated)	62	149
Busiest Book (OA)	2,800	2,970

These numbers illustrate quite dramatically the impact of making our books Open Access. Clearly there are far more people interested in them than can readily access them under a gated publishing model. This is one of the reasons that our initial experiments with OA, after we started focussing more closely on online publishing in 2022, swiftly evolved into a greater determination to make our books open to all. The White Horse Press chooses to spend all its effort supporting environmental perspectives in the HSS because we believe that doing so will help in some way to address the serious real-world environmental challenges that we all face. Reaching more readers helps us serve that mission better.

BPC Impact
One of our objectives is to eliminate reliance on BPCs (and any other kind of author fee) for OA book publishing. So far, we have only published one OBC-supported OA book so we cannot show a trend in the context of OBC funding, but we can make the simple observation that for this one book, we covered 81% of the necessary costs using OBC funds, and 19% using the one BPC that happened to be available from a chapter author.

Looking across our OA book publishing more widely, we only started publishing books OA in 2021 so we have three years of data. And in that time our BPC trend for frontlist titles (i.e. this excludes some fees received to support flipping backlist titles) has been as follows:

	Number of OA Books funded by BPCs, chapter fees etc.
2021	1 chapter of a serial publication
2022	2 books, plus 3 chapters of a serial publication
2023	4 books, plus 1 chapter of a serial publication

BPCs have thus so far been the primary source of revenue enabling us to take our first steps in Open Access book publishing, in the short time since we set out on this path. Our preference and intention is to find our way to a sustainable basis for OA book publishing that does not use BPCs at all, so we see the current situation as transitional. OBC is an important part of moving towards that goal. Until non-BPC book revenue is enough to fund all our frontlist, however, we will continue to accept BPCs where available so as to maximise the proportion of our books that are published open access, one way or another.

Outlook
Even after funding 'Entire of Itself?', and after only one year of membership (being OBC's first year of operation), we have published one book OA and have a significant sum in reserve to allocate towards a second one – likely to be *Heritage at War*, an essay collection on protection of tangible and intangible cultural heritage during armed conflict, due for publication in Autumn 2024. We publish about five books a year, so OBC support to date has enabled Open Access for at least 20% of our annual output for calendar year 2024, and there is every likelihood that it will increase to 40% in the coming months. We consider this to be a significant success and to represent a meaningful impact from our participation in OBC.

More subscribers have come on board in recent weeks, and we note with interest that OBC's continuing advocacy appears to be bearing fruit, for example with OBC now listed on the JISC website as an option for consortium members. We have seen our first renewals from early subscribers and we are fortunate to have received some multi-year commitments. We are therefore cautiously hopeful that OBC will gain traction and become a central piece of infrastructure enabling small presses like ours to connect with Open Access support from myriad large institutions.

As a final sign of promise, albeit anecdotal, we note that we recently received a very strong book proposal in which the proposing party made specific mention of our OBC membership as a possible support for their book to be published OA. There is a possibility that our membership in OBC will become an additional incentive for strong authors to choose to publish with The White Horse Press, when they do not have OA funds from elsewhere. OBC membership thus has potential to strengthen our frontlist not only in terms of its accessibility and readership, but also in terms of the general scholarly calibre (and quantity) of proposals we receive. This unexpected effect, if borne out over time, would be a welcome boost to our efforts; though of course it will take more time to determine whether this is a real effect.

Governance and Management
In the reporting period, there have been no substantive changes to governance or management arrangements at The White Horse Press.