Benefits of Open Access

Librarians may have to work hard to convince both researchers and a wider audience that Open Access is anything more than a compliance exercise which must be dealt with. The following video outlines some of the main benefits of making work available openly.

Benefits of Open Access
This graphic illustrates the various different benefits of Open Access. These can be broadly divided into groups: benefits to researchers and benefits to the general public.

Researchers
Researchers are busy people who are more anxious to move on to their next project than making sure that their research complies with funder mandates. As a result, librarians may find they have to work hard to convince them of the benefits.

More exposure for your work
Releasing work openly means that more people are able to see it, resulting in a greater exposure for both the output and the researcher. The more people that can access a work, the more exposure it’s going to get. It is no longer enough for researchers to publish their work and expect people to come and find it – they need to push it out to those who might make use of it. In a world where researchers are under pressure to make an impact outside academia the more people who can access outputs the better.

Practitioners can apply your findings
Making research outputs available openly means that they are more accessible to practitioners who are working in a professional capacity. Doctors, nurses, pharmacists and teachers can all make practical use of research outputs but they often face barriers in accessing them unless they are members of an academic institution. By making works available Open Access those working in professional roles can access them and apply the findings in their work. Again, this can be a great example when researchers need to demonstrate the impact of their work.

Higher citation rates
Open Access works have higher citation rates than closed access material, principally because they are make more accessible. Higher citation rates mean that more people are talking about a work which can really help to enhance a researcher’s career. Increased citation rates is one of the most persuasive arguments to make to researchers unsure about Open Access as it is something they are often aiming for.
Your research can influence policy
In the same way that practitioners can access the findings of Open Access research there is a chance that it can go on to influence policy, for example government policy on education or NHS policy on a particular treatment. Being able to do this demonstrates a real world impact for research, something in high demand for the REF.

Compliant with grant rules
Perhaps the most persuasive argument for researchers to make their work openly available is that it makes them compliant with the rules of their grant. Funders are increasingly mandating that the outputs of the research they finance are made available Open Access within a certain period. Failure to comply with these mandates may result in punishments such as withholding a portion of the grant which can have huge implications for researchers. There is also a bigger threat – if work is not openly available then it is no longer eligible for the REF. This could potentially result in researchers being unable to submit their best work for assessment which may result in a lower level of future funding for their department.

Public
Many of the benefits of Open Access for the public overlap with those for researchers, albeit from a different perspective. They get to access the research without having to be a member of an academic institution and can apply it to their professional roles including the development of policy but there are also benefits which are unique to the public.

Taxpayers get value for money
In the UK, a portion of the research funding distributed every year comes from public money which has been collected in the form of tax. Currently in order to access the outputs of this research the public needs to pay again, in either time or money. Considering their role in funding the research this represents a poor return on investment.

Researchers in developing countries can see your work
Not having access to the latest research means that the pace of progress internationally is slowed. Those in developing countries may not have the resources to access this information and this can have an impact both within academia and wider society. An example of this is in the recent Ebola crisis in Africa where thousands of people died. Research into effective treatments was available but it was hidden behind a paywall so practitioners were unable to access it. Making these outputs openly available would have been of great help in this situation.

The public can access your findings
Connected to the reasons already mentioned is that the public in general are able to access the findings of research. In an era of fake news, it has become even more important for people to have access to accurate information and be able to check out sources from themselves. Open Access means that the results of research projects can be read by anyone with Internet access and used for research, fact-finding or a million other reasons.
This is one of the primary reasons for making works openly available in the first place and once you start exploring this with your community there is no end to what they can discover.

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