# Semi-structured interview with a PhD Student from the Faculty of Science and Technology.

**Interviewer**: So, here’s a copy of the University of Reading’s statement on Open Research. Please take some time to have a read through, is that OK?

**Interviewee**: Yep, Will do.

**Interviewer**: So, what is your opinion on Open Research?

**Interviewee**: So, when we say Open Research, I am guessing you mean – is that sharing data, or is that in terms of Open Access Publications as well as everything – bundled together?

**Interviewer**: Everything bundled together, so a combination of things – including Open Access, and Open Data.

**Interviewer**: Then, I think it should be completely open. As far as you can possibly make it. Obviously, some things are confidential and, shouldn’t be shared, or should be anonymised. Or through sharing that it could be that you may have to, may want to, wait prior to publication, because obviously if someone has already done the theoretical framework, they could just naff your data, and then... The only question with that is – would it just come down to citing where you have got the data from? So, would that person then be allowed to be on publications rights - for example, if you used their data? Because that happens in natural sciences, for example. So, if someone has made a graph, they will be acknowledged as one of the authors. But, by and large, I think it should be completely Open Access. Especially with Higher Education – the questions currently around universities of about what their relevance is. Obviously, the usual rebuttal given by the sector is that it is a public service.

**Interviewer**: U-hum.

**Interviewee**: Obviously the public is body multiple. Who is it actually serving? So, if you put a paywall up, no one can access it, or only the wealthy can access it – so then, straight away there is an inequality. And you know, another society critique of the university is that it is the Ivory Tower – no one can get in. You can at least remove that barrier, and in terms of publications, if it is Open Access, people actually read it. Because I do not see – the confusion that I feel by some Academics, or some in Management of ‘why don’t the public understand this?’ Well, if you put a paywall up, and they cannot access it, and then you do nothing in terms of public engagement, well, it is your responsibility, surely, that is one of your responsibilities. You cannot bemoan people not knowing something, and not explain it. So, all of it should be open, in my opinion. As far, you know, as reasonable, as you can be.

**Interviewer**: U-hum. How important do you think that public engagement aspect is, so for example, are you familiar with the Citizen Science Movement?

**Interviewee**: Yes. I think it is incredibly important, and, you know, this is what we do in social science all the time, you know, question ‘What is Science?’, and how do you actually make it official? The public should be involved more, because again, if we are a public service, that means public engagement, but not just engaging it in terms of talking at or down to. Talking with, and creating that conversation.

So, in terms of, to take something contemporary, like climate change for example. There is natural science and stuff in it; you can throw graphs, figures, plots and everything out all you like. If you do not engage with people and explain it, and again I think it comes back to that idea of responsibility as an Academic… You need to be able to co-switch, or at least translate your work to a layperson. In the sense of layperson, I mean layperson not in the derisory sense, but very much in the sense of: not everyone has been trained in atmospheric science, for example. Or, you know, even we do it, if you go from one discipline to another, people use specialist language, and even as an Academic – just like: ‘I don’t know what you are on about, you need to explain the terminology’.

So, I think Public engagement is incredibly important, especially if you want to justify University’s existence, which is being questioned in public discourse at the moment.

And so, to bring around… anti-intellectualism. And, I wonder, is it anti-intellectualism in the sense of your intelligence by quote unquote ‘intelligent’ (dependent on however we define that)? Ergo I am inherently against you? Or is it anti-intellectualism in the sense of what the Academic figure is perceived to be. That figure that may well talk down to you, and the fact that a lot of people feel that campus universities, or some universities, settings are not for them, in a sense. So, in terms of public engagement I think you need to create an open environment but also it is a responsibility of the Heads of Universities as well as the Academic Staff and Professional Services to be able to talk *to* people, rather than, as I say, *at* or *down* to them, and engage with thoroughly. That is what I mean by public engagement I suppose, is *engaging* rather than talking *at*.

**Interviewer**: So, do you think that there is a role for Senior Leadership to play in relation to Open Research?

**Interviewee**: Yes. This is one of my gripes as an Early Career Researcher, I suppose, or at my stage, pre-career Academic.

If I want to get a job now in Academia, then in the recruitment process the first thing they ask is ‘How many publications have you got?’. The next question - ‘Where have you been Published?’.

As an Early Career Researcher, as much as I agree with 1) Open Access to be a thing, generally at the moment you have got a few okay Impact Factor ones, because that is what they look at. The higher impact ones in my field are still pay walled. The only way, if I go off and do Open Access now, there is a chance that with the status quo is as it is at present, I will hamstring my career by doing that. I need – as an Early Career – to establish my career and prove that I can get into those high impact ones.

The responsibility and impetus should be put on Senior Management and Senior Academics, because they have to lead that one. If you have already established your career, then why not publish Open Access. You have already proved that you can ‘walk the walk as well as talk the talk’, and I suppose it comes to the old adage: ‘lead by example’.

Also, in those recruitment processes, I think it would be fantastic to see Senior Academics ask, ‘Why did you choose this journal?’ Because then, if you get to the crux of ‘It’s Open Access, I think that’s better for engagement’, then you can spur that. I personally feel that at the moment Senior Academics and a lot of University Management that I have spoken to when it comes to this stuff, I do not personally feel like they really, by and large, acknowledge or really engage with Open Access. As an Early Career Academic, it makes me hesitant to go off and do it – before I have cut my teeth or proven myself in those pay walled ones. I would much rather just see it Open Access.

Also, it is electronic. Well, it is absurd. You are not paying anything for publication, so why might they – at present I think there is one journal – will charge you about £2000 to make your article Open Access. Well, that is completely absurd, because it is not going to cost them two grand to put it online as a PDF. You do not get paid as the author for it. The anonymous reviewers do not get paid for reviewing. The only person getting paid is the person that you email it to at the end of the day.

**Interviewer**: So, do you think that there is a role for the community to play here, and that could include researchers and professional service partners?

**Interviewee**: Yes. Only, obviously, community – as a Social Scientist – community is a bit of a tricky kind of term. But, no, definitely. I suppose if we look at the University Community. So, community is a sector-wide programme, I think it needs to be rolled out and made abundant. There needs to be a movement at *that* level. To say, you know, we fully support and encourage Open Access. Our individual institutions, I think – as I say – it should be factored into the employment process.

Generally, as well, you will have your Impact Factor Assessment, but if you look at Open Access papers, generally they have – actually have – a higher readership because they are Open Access. So, Impact Factor I think normally just uses how many times it’s been cited. Well, that is great, but you know, what is better? Is it that it is being cited twice, read by five people? Or is it better that it has been cited once, and read by a hundred and sixty?

How are you defining that – so I think there needs to be a clear narrative coming from employers, saying: we value Open Access. Because as I say, as an Early Career Researcher, it’s kind of a no-go zone for us at the moment. Well, that is at least how some of us are made to feel. Because the first enquiry will be ‘Why *didn't* you publish it here’ rather than a ‘Why *did* you publish there’, and I think there is an important difference in that. And, recognition on part of Senior Management, well, I say Senior Management – Senior Academics. It is important, you know? Because as I say, you can understand the public, not ‘engaging’ with work if it is not accessible.

**Interviewer**: U-hum. So, the public engagement aspect, is certainly one prong to the fork, but how important do you think that transparency is when it comes to research, and what I mean is that you as a Researcher are able to, say, validate the dataset that a publication is based on.

**Interviewee**: I think it is incredibly important. There is a fellow down in our department at the moment, whose PhD is looking at verification of research on pollutants. Basically, you cannot actually replicate 98% of studies. So, I think it is incredibly important.

You often get this narrative round ‘our advance in the field’. It’s like, well, if all you have done is fire a load of uncertainty into it, because, I have no access to your data, I shall have to take your word for it, and you could just be misleading me the whole way. You have not actually advanced the field, you have just created more uncertainty, which means that I could end up ten miles down the blind alley, find a dead end and then have to backtrack, and be at square one. So, what do you mean by advancement? If you mean ‘yeah I have managed to squeeze out a bunch of publications because’ – as I say – ‘I managed to just cheat my way down here’, then yes, you have advanced it, but if you mean actually it has gone somewhere, done something, and we can double-check that, then yes. It should just be – make it all Open Access! It’s just easier and better that way. (Laughs)

**Interviewer**: Okay, so – I am just going to hand over to you now a modified list based on the Eight Pillars of Open Science, as described by the EU Commission.

**Interviewee**: Science?!

**Interviewer**: Indeed.

**Interviewee**: Whatever that may be!?

**Interviewer**: The term we employ is ‘Open Research’ for a number of reasons (e.g. inclusivity), but looking at this list, we have a Lancaster University Open Research Statement, Open Research Rewards and Incentives, Metrics to Measure Openness, Open Access to Publications, Open Peer Review, Open Research Skills and Training, Open Research Systems and Services, and Open Data. So, looking at the list, are there any particular areas that you would like to discuss further?

**Interviewee**: Yes, the first three, I think. So, I will just go through them by number.

The Open Research Statement. It is all well and good to have the Statement. However, I do not think the statement is worth anything if there is no tangible means of progression. If it is merely lip service, it will not do anything to change the state of practice. So, it is all well and good saying that you absolutely love it and think it is magical. But, and this goes for the second point, if people are not rewarded for it, or if it is not really felt that it matters much in terms of career progression or acknowledgement of one’s research or standing in the community, then people are not going to engage with it. There has to be actual traction and action behind that statement.

The Research Rewards and Incentives I think are incredibly important because, going back to that idea around why people do not already publish in a lot of Open Access things, is it is not recognised in, I think, any part – I have never seen a question around Open Access in a job application process, it just basically says ‘We want high Impact Factor journals’.

Higher impact ones tend be owned by the same two or three Publication Houses, who make billions per year through the system. They are not going to make it Open Access any time soon. So, it needs Open Research, and open publication needs to be recognised and rewarded more by institutions.

Again, I suppose that then feeds back into that Research Statement – if it is acknowledged and recognised, rather than mere lip service, more people then get on board with it, I feel.

And I would query the metrics to measure Openness: what metrics would they be? And I query this because of the issue we are all aware of – the long-standing debate and issue around Impact Factor for example.

How do we measure it, what gets included in it, is it simply a h-index, or does it matter if you have a Twitter account with a thousand followers versus five hundred. Does that count towards your impact? What about public engagement – does that count? So, going back to that idea of publishing an article, it has been read thirty times, or – I have done public outreach for the last three weeks with sell-out crowds, three of those events were a hundred and fifty people, making it a four hundred and fifty people I have just reached. Because a lot of impact is incalculable. You do not actually know how that influences or guides someone.

Say, for instance, someone gets hold of an Open Access publication paper, and then when they are sixteen has a read, thinks it is absolutely fantastic, ends up taking it through a PhD and does some ground-braking research. Well – I do not know, because guess what – the sixteen-year-old did not tell me.

So, I would query the metrics part. But, I think the rewards and incentives are incredibly important in making sure that then the Research Open Statement has actually some substance to it, rather than just mere lip service. The Open Access and publications – it should just happen.

I think there is a lot of talk within HE sector, often of how do we take away barriers between universities and such, so right now if you look at it, part of the reason that it is dominated by [*Redacted*] University or the [*Redacted*] Group and is simply because they have more capital. You know, [*Redacted*] University this week has just got given a [*redacted*] pounds (sterling) by one Alumni. Fantastic! Well, guess what – that means that they can pay and have access to all the journal articles and stuff. Just make it all Open Access, not just within the UK, globally. Nations from across the globe can then just access it.

I have some colleagues over in a couple of Indian Universities and in Pakistan – they cannot access a bunch of our journals because they are pay walled. They want access to it, they recognise that it is exceptionally good work. But, when you pay thirty-forty pounds for an article that might be six pages – it is unfair. Everything should just be open. Tear down these walls.

**Interviewer**: Are there any ways that you see that the university could more effectively support Open Research, and I think that you touched on a number of things, but for *you*, as an Early Career Researcher, are there any particular systems that could be put in place, or initiatives? What are the things, perhaps looking at those eight pillars again, that would particularly make a difference? If you were to rank those, what comes top?

**Interviewee**: Right, definitely that second point – the Open Research Rewards and Incentives. Because, especially whilst doing a PhD, or a Post-Doc, it is so competitive. That is in part why there is so much stress on PhD’s. Back along, it was just expected, you know – you have done your PhD, you have got a job. Whereas now, it is expected, if you are looking at most lectureships, it is: have the PhD – magical, you need at least, probably, two publications if not three. But they are not enough, they need to be in a High Impact Journal. ‘What conferences have you been to present at?’ My favourite one – preference – ‘organise a conference’, because we have got all that amount of time and resources just lying around willy-nilly. ‘Have you done any teaching?’ ‘What about your marking?’ ‘Have you gone and done public outreach?’

So, in terms of how competitive it is, and the pressure put on us I think:

A lot of post-graduate students are not aware about the Open Access movement,

For those who are, because of this whole narrative and discourse around: ‘it needs to be High Impact – that is what we care about’, ‘we do not care about these journals, they do not matter’ – because the narratives around Impact is not ‘quality of research’, not ‘it is a well written article’. It is ‘high cite’, it has ‘high Impact’. The article could be poor quality that you are publishing, you just managed to get in somewhere. I do know of a practice from back along, where a couple of people deliberately wrote bad articles, to prove a point, that getting an article accepted in a ‘reputable’ journal isn’t necessarily a hallmark of quality.

So, I think that needs to be stressed the most in terms of Early Career. Because right now the only way that you are going to shift the Open Access Movement is to get Senior Academics on board. And we all know that the longer someone has been in the system, the less inclined they are to change.

It is something that [*redacted]* has been bashing their head on at the moment. Their opinion is – they are at the top of their career now, they have been spat out at the other end. They have already had their publications, they have made it, so they can afford to go off, and do that.

But then, I am aware, that they have butted heads with Professors in other Universities around it, who said: ‘Well, why should we do it? That is not how it works. They are not High Impact Factor’ – again, getting back to that point.

So, I think, to reward it, then I think as well, for a start: make people aware of it. You need to reward it; make people aware that it is rewarded and encouraged at the Institutional Level in terms of those incentives. [*Redacted*], I know has compiled a list – the University could do it – of Open Access Journals, and just say: ‘here are options to get published in. They are all Open Access, they are decent, and we as an institution encourage that. So again, that Open Research Statement, if you believe it, support it. So, I think that is the most important one.

**Interviewer**: Excellent. Are there any concluding thoughts or remarks that you might have, or anything that we did not touch on here that you think is within the scope of Open Research?

**Interviewee**: Yes, I suppose added to that is down to the rewards and incentives again. I know I have mentioned it a few times – public engagement. So, on top of acknowledging and realising Open Access, and Open Research, surely part of that ‘opening’ is to then engage with the public, in terms of opening those Ivory Towers.

Also, recognising public engagement as something that it valuable and at the heart of University. Because surely as Academics, if we are ‘knowledge producers’ – that is the thing as well – we are not just ‘data producers’, we are ‘knowledge producers’.

I cannot remember who it is now; there is a famous quote by an academic who says that ‘research is not radical if the lay person cannot understand it.’ – well, because they cannot access it. So there is another informal barrier: yes, you have the barrier of capital (people cannot afford to throw forty quid at an article), but also if you do not engage with the public, explain the research and how it is being interpreted, well then – you cannot really be complaining that the public ‘don’t get it’.

On top of recognising and encouraging publication in Open Access journals, I think it should also be acknowledged around public engagement and disseminating that knowledge through means other than publication. Because yes, there is no h-index, but even if you publish something that someone picks up, you cannot track all the impact. Especially with contemporary public discourse around ‘what is the point of the university’, and the often-cited claim ‘ah, it is all pointless, it does not serve me’. Well, you need to get out there and actually engage, and prove your worth. It is all well and good, if I walk up and down the corridor shouting ‘magical’ – well – prove it. Put your money where your mouth is.

**Interviewer**: Excellent. I think that is everything that I have for you today. Thanks for your time.

**Interviewee**: Awesome, thank you.