

Plan S

A policy position from the Royal Society of Chemistry.

Summary

The Royal Society of Chemistry (RSC) is highly committed to increasing Open Access to high quality scholarly research. Our Charter states our commitment to fostering and encouraging the growth and application of the chemical sciences through the dissemination of chemical knowledge.

Overall, the RSC supports many of the principles outlined in Plan S, and recognises that its implementation has the potential to create opportunities to further accelerate the move to Open Access. At the same time, the RSC believes that implementation needs to be pragmatic, and designed to reduce, not increase researchers' workloads. The RSC recommends that:

- The roll-out of Plan S needs to be part of a full global transition to make sure it succeeds, as science is a global endeavour. It should allow time for full consultation with the global science community and for agreement to be reached at a global level across researchers, funders, institutions, learned societies and publishers.
- During and after the transition, appropriate support must be in place to ensure that researchers everywhere can publish Open Access in high quality journals that are read and respected by their peers. The RSC welcomes the cOAlition S's principle that all scientists should be able to publish their work Open Access, but advocates that cOAlition S works with the global science community to develop a plan to ensure Open Access is achievable in practice for institutions with limited means.
- The plan needs to be implemented in a way which ensures that the vitality of the learned societies, as providers of knowledge, services and support to the scholarship of their discipline, is maintained. The RSC is keen to work with cOAlition S, and UKRI and the Wellcome Trust among others, to develop support structures and mitigate potential risks for the sector.

Background

Open Access

Open Access to the RSC means that there is free and permanent unrestricted online access to scholarly research, that authors retain copyright to their work, and that a licence is applied which allows users to download, copy, reuse and distribute data.

Plan S

In 2018 a coalition of research funders referred to as cOAlition S, including UKRI and Wellcome Trust, expressed their commitment to Plan S. This sets out 10 principles which the plan's architects hope will ensure that 'after 1 January 2020 scientific publications on the results from research funded by public grants provided by national and European research councils and funding bodies, must be published in compliant Open Access Journals or on compliant Open Access Platforms'.

A global transition

For a transition to Open Access to be successful and without major unintended consequences, it should rely on a coordinated and large-scale global transition, and be rolled out at a pace at which the interests of the global science community, and the society that it benefits, can be considered.

Potential unintended consequences of a transition in isolation, as a result of which European researchers would be limited in where they publish compared to researchers elsewhere, include;

- negative impact on the visibility of European science and scientists on a global stage,
- negative impact on collaboration between researchers that are restricted by Plan S and those that are not, and wish to retain the ability to publish in non-Open Access journals,
- negative impact on career opportunities for cOAlition S funded researchers who compete with researchers that are not restricted by Plan S, with early career researchers likely to be affected most.

Far from a sufficient critical mass - Current Plan S countries' share of global research articles is estimated at 15% and the share of research articles funded by the Plan S funders is estimated at 3.3%¹. This is not a sufficient critical mass of articles to encourage global publishers to change their business model and transition their entire portfolio to Open Access.

Potential negative impact on early career researchers - The journals researchers publish in, and their impact factors, are still often considered in decision-making in academia about hiring, promotion, grants and awards. This means that restricting journal choice can have negative implications for researchers in a scenario where they are competing with peers not restricted by their funder or institution. Since early career researchers change jobs more often and have a shorter track record and publication list than established researchers, they are likely to be particularly disadvantaged.

Additional efforts are needed to make sure that researchers, funders, institutions, learned societies and publishers around the world find agreement on Open Access policies, otherwise Plan S is likely to negatively impact on European science and scientists.

Open Access for everyone

In the current subscription-based publication system, some scholars are unable to read high quality work that is behind paywalls that their institutions cannot afford. If a shift from subscription-based to Open Access is achieved predominantly via article processing charges (APC)-based models, these same scholars might be unable to publish their work in high quality journals because their institutions now cannot afford APCs and/or their funders are not supporting APCs.

cOAlition S has committed to establish a fair and reasonable APC level, including equitable waiver policies and to commission an independent study on Open Access publication costs and fees (including APCs). In addition, research is required on the cost implications for institutions and cOAlition S should work with the global science community to develop a plan of how Open Access will be achieved in practice for institutions with limited means.

Learned societies

Learned societies engage in work that benefits their community through the advancement of knowledge, supporting and representing their members and bringing together researchers, as well as the broader public through outreach and educational activities.

Learned society journals are driven by researchers for researchers, they are of the highest quality and deeply valued by their communities. Surpluses generated by learned society publishers are reinvested in a broad range of activities, to the benefit of their discipline and society. The RSC community has expressed concerns around potential implications of Plan S on the effectiveness of learned societies to serve and benefit their communities, and these need to be understood and mitigated.

¹ <https://deltathink.com/news-views-potential-impact-of-plan-s/>

About the Royal Society of Chemistry

With about 50,000 members and an international publishing and knowledge business the Royal Society of Chemistry (RSC) is the UK's professional body for chemical scientists, supporting and representing our members and bringing together chemical scientists from all over the world.

The RSC is working to shape the future of the chemical sciences and is leading the way in a global move towards Open Access. The RSC published over 25% of its articles via Gold Open Access routes in 2017, this equates to almost 10,000 articles. The RSC further is one of the first publishers to sign Read & Publish agreements – a recognised stepping stone to Open Access.

The RSC is transparent about its finances, these are published every year and it is no secret that much of the RSC's surpluses that are reinvested into our charitable activities and running costs, are obtained from our activities as a publisher. In developing and disseminating our views on Open Access and Plan S, the RSC has prioritised the needs and views of the scientific community.

Contact

The Royal Society of Chemistry would be happy to discuss any of the issues raised in our response in more detail. Any questions should be directed to Karen Stroobants, stroobantsk@rsc.org, +44(0)1223438355.