

Plan S

December 2019

The Royal Society of Chemistry (RSC) is committed to increasing Open Access (OA) to high quality scholarly research. Our position and approach are informed by our role as a voice for the chemical sciences community and as a learned society publisher, underpinned by our Royal Charter. We publish quality journals in order to disseminate chemical knowledge and advance the chemical sciences. We have reached out to our community and encouraged them to share their perspectives on OA and Plan S.

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 publishing, away from the subscription model. **Because science is a global endeavour, we believe that Plan S needs to drive an inclusive global movement for change, and needs to be implemented in a way that is coordinated, ensures dissemination options that satisfy researchers' needs without adding additional burden on their time and promotes real transition.** We recommend that:

1. cOAlition S should focus efforts on global coordination and a well-managed roll-out of Plan S;
 - 1.1 cOAlition S members should coordinate implementation of the Plan S guidelines and the DORA principles with global OA initiatives, and increase efforts to communicate requirements to researchers;
 - 1.2 cOAlition S members should publish impact assessments and mitigation plans for their OA and research assessment policy revision proposals, which show the effect on:
 - the quality of the scientific record
 - the cost of publishing for individual researchers and institutions
 - researchers' opportunities to collaborate internationally
 - researchers' expected career progression.
2. cOAlition S should ensure Plan S permits dissemination options that satisfy global researchers' needs;
 - 2.1 cOAlition S should develop a realistic approach to ensure that researchers everywhere can publish OA using the channels that they consider as most effective for reaching their target audience;
 - 2.2 cOAlition S should champion an approach that supports a broad range of compliant dissemination options, and a transition that is manageable for publishers of all sizes.
3. cOAlition S should incentivise routes that enable a global transition away from the subscription model;
 - 3.1 cOAlition S members should support transformative agreements, when clearly intended to enable transition, in conjunction with hybrid journals at least until 2030;
 - 3.2 cOAlition S members should state clearly that the green OA route for compliance is transitional, or otherwise clarify which revenue stream can compliantly support this route in the longer term.

Open Access

The RSC takes Open Access (OA) to mean free and permanent unrestricted online access to scholarly research, with authors retaining copyright to their work, and with a licence applied that allows users to download, copy, reuse and distribute data. The proportion of articles accessible immediately on publication has been increasing considerably in recent years. For UK articles, the proportion available OA rose from 20% to 37% between 2014 and 2016. Globally, the proportion rose from 18% to 20% in the same time period.²

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 that the plan's architects hope will ensure that 'with effect from 2021, all scholarly publications on the results from research funded by public or private grants provided by national, regional and international research councils and funding bodies, must be published in Open Access Journals (gold route), on Open Access Platforms, or made immediately available through Open Access Repositories without embargo (green route)'.¹

Plan S¹ needs to drive an inclusive global movement for change

Science is a global endeavour, where researchers collaborate and disseminate joint results. Sharing knowledge, skills and resources is second nature to most scientists – from benefitting from another's expertise on a topic that affects their research, to access to international facilities.² cOAlition S should recognise this global dimension and ensure that Plan S drives a global movement for change and does not introduce complexity in the global publishing landscape.

In a recent RSC study, researchers highlighted collaboration as completely essential to advances in chemical sciences, with 81% saying international collaboration is essential.²

*As a globally operating society publisher, the RSC has been proactive in driving the transition to OA. We have championed Read & Publish (R&P) deals, a transformative model, since 2016 and now have almost 80 R&P customers spanning 13 countries in Europe, the Middle East, Asia and North America (with the majority in Europe). **Our approach to transitioning our portfolio considers global markets and their readiness to buy in to new publishing models**, as well as ensuring that such new models safeguard that we can maintain our dissemination standards and continue our charitable operations.*

*As a voice for the chemical sciences community, we asked researchers what they expect will be the positive and negative impacts of Plan S to their work and career. **Two out of the five most mentioned negative impacts* in the responses are relevant only should implementation fail to be part of a global movement**, and compliant researchers be limited in where they publish compared to researchers elsewhere as a result. We keep engaging with our community so that we understand their views, can consider them and communicate them to others.*

* Feedback from our research community

The RSC asked its research community 'what positive or negative impacts might Plan S have on your work and career?' via a short survey. The negative and positive impacts mentioned most by the 248 respondents (among which 10 students, 55 early-career, 62 mid-career, 108 established career researcher, 9 retired and 4 in category other) were:

Positive

- ✓ Greater accessibility (for me) to published research
- ✓ Greater visibility for me as a researcher
- ✓ Further positive changes in research culture
- ✓ Greater accessibility for general public

Negative

- ✗ Impact on cost of publishing (for me)
- ✗ Limitations in publication venues
- ✗ Impact on international collaboration
- ✗ Cost of publishing for poorer institutions / countries
- ✗ Impact on quality of peer review / publications

To ensure that Plan S successfully drives an inclusive global movement for change, its implementation should be coordinated globally, support dissemination options for everyone and promote real transition.

1. Focus efforts on global coordination and a well-managed roll-out of Plan S

To enable a coordinated transition, OA policies and research assessment policies in line with the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment³ (DORA) should be coordinated globally and potential negative impacts of new policy proposals should be assessed and mitigated.

What are the DORA principles?

'The Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA) recognizes the need to improve the ways in which the outputs of scholarly research are evaluated. The declaration was developed in 2012 during the Annual Meeting of the American Society for Cell Biology in San Francisco. It has become a worldwide initiative covering all scholarly disciplines and all key stakeholders including funders, publishers, professional societies, institutions, and researchers. We encourage all individuals and organizations who are interested in developing and promoting best practice in the assessment of scholarly research to sign DORA.'³

1.1 Coordinate globally and communicate with researchers

cOAlition S members should coordinate implementation of the Plan S guidelines and the DORA principles with global OA initiatives, and increase efforts to communicate requirements to researchers.

cOAlition S members are reframing their OA policies and considering practical implementation of DORA. They should also make efforts to align their requirements with other cOAlition S members as well as with other funders and global OA initiatives. Once requirements are agreed, cOAlition S members need to communicate these clearly and proactively to researchers. A coordinated approach in OA policy will avoid significant divergence in such requirements so that the global research landscape is as easy as possible to navigate, and increased communication should ensure that researchers are aware of the mandates they are subject to.

*'There is wide regional variation, and apparent confusion, in how researchers perceive mandatory open access requirements. Respondents reported a wide range of answers for the open access mandates their research is subject to.'*⁴

1.2 Share risk assessment and mitigation plans of new OA and assessment policy proposals

cOAlition S members should publish impact assessments and mitigation plans for their OA and research assessment policy revision proposals, which show the effect on:

- the quality of the scientific record
- the cost of publishing for individual researchers and institutions
- researchers' opportunities to collaborate internationally
- researchers' expected career progression

Revisions and consequent changes in OA and research(er) assessment policies by cOAlition S members in the context of Plan S are anticipated by researchers to impact on

- the quality of the scientific record (related to new business models and how these affect quality of publication services and acceptance rates)
- the cost of publishing for researchers and institutions (both monetary and in terms of time spent, related to shifts in business models)
- international collaboration (related to expected willingness of non-compliant researchers to collaborate)
- career progression (related to expected limitations in publication venues for compliant researcher compared to non-compliant peers).

Feedback from our research community indicates a general feeling remains that Plan S is rushed and that potential negative impacts on research and researchers have not adequately been addressed.*

2. Ensure Plan S permits a range of dissemination options that satisfy global researchers' needs

To enable an inclusive transition, a realistic approach should be developed that ensures researchers around the globe can reach their target audience and that supports an increase in the range of dissemination options available.

2.1 Develop a realistic approach to ensure that researchers everywhere reach their target audience

cOAlition S should develop a realistic approach to ensure that researchers everywhere can publish OA using the channels that they consider as most effective for reaching their target audience.

There are categories of researchers around the world who cannot access OA funding streams to publish OA in the venues of their choice. Publishers have an important role to play, by pricing in accordance with the value they offer, and providing waivers and discounts where possible. However, it is unrealistic to expect publishers to face this barrier to a full transition to OA alone⁵, and cOAlition S should develop a coordinated approach that is supported by funders, to ensure that researchers everywhere are able to disseminate their work using the channels that are most effective for reaching their readership.

*'When choosing where to publish, the most important factors that influence the decision of chemical researchers are the journal reputation, reaching their readership and publisher reputation.'*¹⁴

2.2 Champion an approach that supports a diverse dissemination landscape

cOAlition S should champion an approach that supports a broad range of compliant dissemination options, and a transition that is manageable for publishers of all sizes.

When it comes to adapting business models to accommodate Plan S, small publishers are disadvantaged compared to large publishers. Large (often commercial) publishers are better positioned to maintain revenue lines, drive costs down and negotiate deals. Small publishers that are often non-profit and offer good value are not so well positioned and are likely to fall behind in a fast transition. This can result in an overall decrease in the range of compliant dissemination options available. cOAlition S should ensure that their approach to Plan S implementation supports a broad range of dissemination options and that the transition therefore is manageable for publishers of all sizes.

*'Studies have shown that journals from not-for-profit publishers are both lower priced, and offer better value to the community than their commercial counterparts.'*¹⁶

3. Incentivise OA routes that enable global transition away from the subscription model

To enable an effective global transition to full OA publishing away from the subscription-based business model, cOAlition S should support OA routes that accomplish transition for as long as is needed to achieve global buy-in and that enable the subscription-based model to be terminated.

3.1 Support transformative agreements that clearly enable transition until 2030

cOAlition S members should support, rather than tolerate, transformative agreements that are clearly intended to enable transition and include a form of control to avoid double-dipping, at least until 2030.

Read & Publish (a form of transformative) agreements have been a fundamental part of the success of the RSC's efforts to transition our journals and at the same time have allowed institutional customers to repurpose institutional subscription budgets.

'In Sweden, where the RSC has R&P agreements with 13 institutions, 90% of publishing output with us is OA.'

Many institutions globally are not in a position to enter into transformative agreements at this time. Based on our projections, we are confident that we will migrate an increasing proportion of our customers into such agreements by 2030. Therefore, to allow global market buy-in, we recommend that cOAlition S supports such agreements until at least 2030.

What does an effective ‘transformative agreement’ look like to us?

Transformative agreements are effective when they include elements that relate to the transformation they envision. For example, the RSC’s Read & Publish (R&P) agreements include a read part that decreases and a publish part that increases as more content becomes OA. Budgets that are repurposed for R&P deals cause a drop in the read part and thus drive the transition.

Truly transformative agreements, while enabling repurposing of subscription budgets, in the long term cannot ensure cost neutrality at institutional and country level. At this level, these agreements will in some cases result in an increase, and in other cases in a decrease, of the total fee. Rebalancing between countries, and redistributing funds between institutions, is required for agreements to be effective, and funders are best placed to enable this⁵.

3.2 Clarify which revenue streams can support the green route to open access in the longer term

cOAlition S members should state clearly that the green OA route for compliance is transitional, or otherwise clarify which revenue stream can compliantly support this route in the longer term.

On the one hand, the green OA route is valued by the researchers in our community as this is the easiest route to Plan S compliance and the route with minimal changes in terms of cost implications. However, on the other hand, researchers and publishers are increasingly saying that the green route has been transitional and had its best day⁷ or that there needs to be proper thought and clarity on which revenue streams will support this route, and cover the cost of quality control in research dissemination, if not subscription revenue⁵. We recommend that cOAlition S members state clearly that the green route to Plan S compliance is transitional, or otherwise clarify which revenue streams can compliantly support this route in the longer term.

‘The subscription model entirely funds the green approach to OA, and so an important consideration is what will happen to the subscription payments if all, or even a majority, of the journal’s content is available in this way.’⁵

Contact

The Royal Society of Chemistry would be happy to discuss any of the issues raised in our statement in more detail. Any questions should be directed to Dr Karen Stroobants at policy@rsc.org.

About us

With 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.

¹ [About Plan S](#), cOAlition S / Science Europe, September 2018

² [Science Horizons](#), Royal Society of Chemistry, July 2019

³ [San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment](#), DORA, December 2012

⁴ [Researchers’ voice on open access report](#), Royal Society of Chemistry, October 2019

⁵ [Society Publishers Accelerating Open Access and Plan S - Final Project Report](#), Information Power, September 2019

⁶ [Why Society and Not-For-Profit Journals Are Worth Preserving: Better Economic and Continuing Value for the Community](#), David Crotty, December 2018 - and references therein: [lower priced](#) & [better value](#)

⁷ [Plan S – The Road Ahead](#), ALPSP, September 2019