OSI ISSUE BRIEFS

PLAN S

& THE QUEST FOR GLOBAL OPEN ACCESS

Plan S is an ambitious, EU-based effort attempting to accelerate the global transition to open access. While this plan isn't the only one trying to improve open, or the first, it has generated much interest and discussion. What does the future hold for this plan and for global open efforts in general?
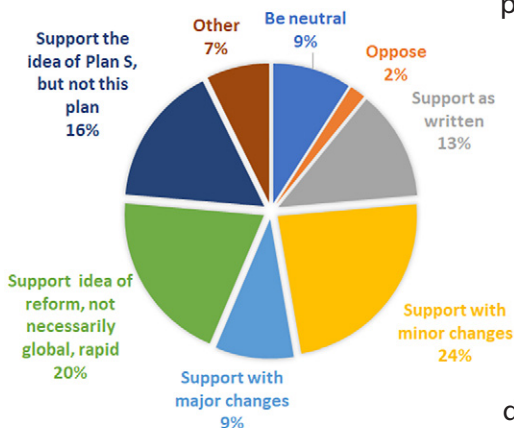
In September 2018, a group of EU research funding agencies known as cOAlition S unveiled a plan to rapidly transition the world into a new scholarly publishing system. The central feature of this plan—Plan S—is that starting no later than January 1, 2020, all research funded by these agencies must be published in open access (OA) journals or platforms where articles are free to read and reuse without delay. After this date, these agencies will discontinue funding for publishing in subscription and hybrid journals (which include a combination of open access and subscription articles).

Many of the details about Plan S are at once highly important, poorly understood, hotly debated, and beyond the scope of this summary report to examine in depth. This report touches on only a few of the more salient points of Plan S. In brief, many pathways to compliance with this plan are being promoted and widely discussed. Noncompliant journals can become compliant once they begin transitioning into preferred open formats or business models. Transition terms will be approved for each publisher, price caps or standards will be instituted for the scholarly publishing market (along with a

December 2018 survey of OSI participant attitudes toward Plan S

Pie chart segments:
- Be neutral 9%
- Oppose 2%
- Support as written 13%
- Support with minor changes 24%
- Support with major changes 9%
- Support idea of reform, not necessarily global, rapid 20%
- Support the idea of Plan S, but not this plan 16%
- Other 7%

The Open Scholarship Initiative (OSI) is a diverse, inclusive, global network of high level experts and stakeholder representatives working together in partnership with UNESCO to develop broadly accepted, comprehensive, sustainable solutions to the future of open scholarship that work for everyone everywhere. This document reflects the input of the author(s) listed here as well as contributions from other OSI participants. The findings and recommendations expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the authors or all OSI participants, nor their agencies, trustees, officers, or staff.

OSI serves as the Network for Open Access to Scientific Information and Research (NOASIR) for the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). For more information about OSI, please visit osiglobal.org.

OSI

cost waiver system), new global publishing guidelines will be adopted, and as yet unspecified non-compliance penalties will be assessed.

If and when Plan S gets implemented, around 3-5% of scholarly publications worldwide might become subject to its requirements (Pollock and Michael 2018; these estimates have been increasing as new funders sign on). However, the goal is for Plan S to continue to have increasingly important implications for the expenditure of public funds, both in the EU and globally, and to create a more unified global scholarly communication landscape.

Eleven funders were original signatories to this plan. At last count this number is now 15 funders, and the European Commission itself is eventually expected to follow suit. China has also given preliminary indications of support for the principles underlying Plan S (Schiermeier 2018).

SUPPORT VS. CRITIQUE

In the five months between the announcement of Plan S and the publishing of this report, thousands of position statements about the plan have been issued by researchers, commercial publishers, research institutions, funders, scholarly societies, academic groups and other experts. Some of these statements have been supportive of the plan, others have been critical, and still others have been both supportive and critical (see Johnson 2018 for analysis; see the Plan S Wikipedia page for links; see Suber 2018 and COAR 2018 for examples of support letters that also include significant critique). In the words of long-time open access leader Cameron Neylon, Plan S is a Rorschach test where people find whatever they want to find, or don't want to find.

Sifting through the mountains of position statements and discussions on this plan, what is clear is that no one is arguing against the idea of open access. There are simply lots of different opinions about the best way to reach this goal. This debate has broken along the same fault lines that have separated the scholarly communication community for the past 20 years (as detailed later in this report), but is more strident now because of the proposed scope and timeline of Plan S, and because of this plan's lack of clarity and detail in places. This has resulted in confusion, misinformation, hurried meetings and improvised explanations, all of which has amplified concerns that this plan is not ready to be turned into global policy. Still, there are those who support Plan S as written and are ready to take a leap of faith that all will end well.

Are we at an impasse? It feels that way to many who have been watching this debate for years. But from a glass-half-full perspective, the scholarly communication community may actually have a lot of common ground to build upon. Consider the statement of Sven Stafström, for instance, director of the Swedish Research Council: "Research will form the basis for solutions to the challenges that we are facing today, but will also lead to entirely new knowledge that is beyond today's knowledge horizon. It is therefore important that all actors in society have the opportunity to partake of research results…[and that we] enable more people than only those involved in academia to absorb research results in the form of scientific publications." (SRC 2018)

In his preamble to Plan S the president of Science Europe, Marc Schiltz, speaks in a similar way about the importance of ensuring that research is accessible to researchers. "Universality," writes Schiltz, "is a fundamental principle of science: only results that can be discussed, challenged, and, where appropriate, tested and reproduced by others qualify as scientific. Science, as an institution of organised criticism, can therefore only function properly if research results are made openly available to the community so that they can be submitted to the test and scrutiny of other researchers. Furthermore, new research builds on established results from previous research. The chain, whereby new scientific discoveries are built on previously established results, can only work optimally if all research results are made openly available to the scientific community." (Schiltz 2018)

A response to Plan S issued by the Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association (OASPA) also contains universal aspirations about how Plan S has the potential "to help to coordinate open access policy at an international level, which is in the interests of all stakeholders" (see OASPA 2018). And OASPA's letter cites Schiltz's sentiments about the need to "fundamentally revise" the current approach to research evaluation. "Such reform," writes OASPA, "is essential if scholars are to be empowered to publish in journals that provide them with the best quality of service, value, and wide dissemination, rather than being judged on their ability to publish their work in a limited range of high-prestige journals." In addition, OASPA applauds the plan's focus on ensuring that journals and platforms used for open access publishing exercise the highest quality policies and practices and the plan's commitment to making the necessary funding available so all researchers can publish their work under an open access model.

There is probably even broad global agreement on many of the specific recommendations made by Plan S such as:

- supporting long-term digital preservation programs;
- improving open infrastructure;
- improving global indexing;
- improving the capacity of open journals;
- improving machine-readability;
- making DOI use universal;
- conducting research to improve our understanding of open needs;
- reducing the influence of impact factors; and
- establishing global publishing standards.

OSI

There may even be broad agreement on costs, an issue which has catalyzed reform efforts for years—not necessarily agreement on the rationale for these costs but agreement that we need to find a better way to keep costs affordable and/or get more value for our money (such as more open). Publishers might point out that in fact more research is being published today for less than ever before, but cost concerns have figured prominently in this community for years now, lurching from serials crises at libraries to big deal cancellations to Plan S's intent to completely ban hybrid journals due to their expense (and address the rising cost of transitioning to open in general), to the impasse in subscription negotiations in some European countries (European Commission 2018, Mathews 2017, Else 2018). There is a persistent disconnect between perceptions on the cost issue, and this disconnect as well as the issue itself deserves more attention.

Where real differences of opinion start to emerge in the open access debate is on the issue of value. Critics of the current norms in scholarly publishing question whether the publishing models we're investing in are the right ones for today's world, whether our map to the future of scholarly communication is modern and responsive enough, whether we have responded adequately to the challenge of improving access globally, whether change is happening fast enough, and whether our public investments in research should result in free public access to the published documents arising from this research. Cascading from these questions are a torrent of subquestions involving who should make changes, where, what kind, and so on; this is discussed in more detail in the next section of this report.

In all, there are many important, complicated issues to discuss that have not been discussed yet in any inclusive, respectful, comprehensive way at a global level. And absent this, the scholarly communication community has argued instead, with many on all sides who care deeply about the future of scholarly communication in general and open access in particular doing far more talking than listening.

This passion has been divisive, but it has also driven progress. Despite—and because—of lack of communication about our common interests and concerns, we have seen a constant stream of entrepreneurial and even heroic efforts to improve the future of research communication: institutions that embark on their own open solutions, each with their own unique audiences and solving their own subsets of issues, from repositories to peer review to copyright, and attempts like Plan S to make a multitude of changes globally in one fell swoop. Much of this activity is healthy, enlightening and invigorating. Some of it is duplicative, confusing and ill-fated. Very little of this activity is coordinated globally across regions, agencies, institutions and disciplines, however, and even less is developed with broad global input.

Plan S is not the first attempt at global change nor did it emerge out of thin air. In fact, many of its principles (see the sidebar on page 2) grew out of a variety of previous EU policy documents, policies and mandates (Kingsley 2018). Plan S also complements the principles embraced by the Open Access 2020 Initiative (OA2020), which includes over 120 individual and umbrella research organizations on five continents and is coordinated by the Max Planck Digital Library on behalf of the research community. The objective of OA2020 is to accelerate the global transition to open access by repurposing subscription funds to support publishing models that produce open and reusable content, and for which costs are transparent and economically sustainable. OA2020 continues to gain momentum globally (see the OA2020 website for details) but more participation from the global research community is required.

In summary, the motivations behind Plan S are deep, sincere and widely held, underpinned by years of dreaming about and trying to achieve more open, and constantly spurred on by concerns about the rising cost of access, and about seemingly slow progress on open, reform plans that address only a few problems at a time, overall approaches that seem ill-suited to meet our future challenges, and a stakeholder community that has been arguing for decades. It's understandable why many support an attempt to reform scholarly communication with a bold, sweeping, global effort, even if this effort is less than ideally constructed. The impulse to back Plan S is undeniable and may in the end be correct. But apart from these sentiments, is Plan S actually the right solution—not the right sentiment but the right policy instrument? This is the question we try to answer in this report.

OSI'S OBSERVATIONS

OSI is a varied group with a wide variety of opinions. In a recent survey of the OSI listserv (see above notes for figures 1A and 1B), about a third of OSI feels the future of scholarship should be one in which all research is made freely and immediately available without any restrictions on access or reuse. Two-thirds think this future should look like something else— the most popular position (about 45%) being that more but not necessarily all scholarship should be immediately and freely available. With regard to Plan S itself, most OSI respondents did not support this plan as written; about 37% were willing to support it as-is or with minor changes.

Underlying these responses and the entire wide-ranging multi-stakeholder conversations that have been happening in OSI since 2014 are many different perspectives on the fundamental who, what, why, where, when and how questions of scholarly communication reform:

OSI

- Who has the right to reform the scholarly communication system for everyone and on what authority? Who decides this question?

- What interests should be considered and how should they be prioritized? Different people see different problems—escalating library costs, undiscoverable work, poor transparency. Which goals should we tackle first? And at what scope? Should we aim for completely open research processes or just OA?

- Why? What problem(s) are we trying to solve? Is the system broken or just in need of adjustment?

- Where? Should reform happen EU-wide? Globally? Institution-by-institution, and then develop lessons of experience and best practices to roll out?

- When? Should major changes happen immediately? Gradually? At some point in the not too distant future? How urgent are the issues we're trying to solve?

- How do we get behind good ideas and make them work? Collaboration? Cooperation? Mandates? New incentive structures? Fundamental reform of incentive and reward structures?

As a group representing a wide variety of opinions across the scholarly communication landscape our survey results provide only a tiny window into how the global stakeholder community might feel about Plan S (including libraries, funders, policy officials, university leaders, publishers, scholarly societies, researchers, non-university research institutions and other groups). While we can't draft statements that speak for everyone in our group it may be fair to say that a majority in OSI sympathize with the sentiments of Plan S (as expressed by Stafström and Schiltz) and may even agree with many of the plan's specific goals. Our common ground is probably significant.

Our main differences about Plan S seem to center around—as mentioned earlier—a lack of clarity with regard to exactly what this plan is proposing, and also differences of opinion about how to achieve our common goals of improving open while at the same time balancing other important interests—the who, what, why, where, when and how questions. With regard to these differences, the main critiques about Plan S that have been discussed in OSI include:

- Differences of opinion in how we're defining "open" and measuring open growth rates;

- Questions about whether gold open is the right vehicle (particularly with regard to the potential impact of this approach on the affordability of access to global south reseaerchers);

- Concerns about the impact of this plan on academic freedom;

- Concerns about the fate of scholarly societies, many of whom rely on a variety of publishing mechanisms (including hybrid);

- Concerns about the implications of this plan for further regulation of scholarly communications; and

- A variety of inconsistencies in the plan and a lack of clarity and specificity in places.

WORK THAT NEEDS TO BE DONE

OSI's purpose is to bring together the scholarly communication community to first understand each other's perspectives, and then find common ground on globally workable and sustainable solutions. Not everyone thinks this common ground exists, or if it does exist, that common ground solutions will be acceptable. We acknowledge these criticisms and the difficulty of this challenge, but at the same time recognize that after four years of debating the future of scholarly communication, we've already uncovered a lot of common ground which deserves to be explored (see the OSI summary reports for 2016, 2017 and 2018 for more details).

With regard to Plan S common ground, some in OSI are ready to support this plan as-is, many are not. In the latter group's estimation, we need to carefully think through this proposal and its potential ramifications and not rush into anything. From all sides, there is undeniable enthusiasm and interest in the fact that the scholarly communication community may be "finally" starting to take steps toward improving open on a broad scale, so this enthusiasm and interest should be embraced.

OSI is ready and willing to help. UNESCO, for instance, has suggested convening a meeting of Plan S leaders and scholarly communication stakeholder leaders at the earliest convenience. Other OSI participants can also help contribute additional thinking about this plan.

ORGANIZATIONS AND EFFORTS FOCUSING ON THIS ISSUE

A wide variety of researchers are involved in this issue, some who are noted in the reference section at the end of this brief.

REFERENCES & RESOURCES

AAP. 2018 (Nov 8). AAP, Researchers, Deeply Concerned About Plan S. Association of American Publishers

AHA. 2019 (Feb 4). AHA Expresses Concerns about Potential Impact of Plan S on the Humanities. American Historical Association

APE. 2019. Academic Publishing in Europe 2019 conference website

OSI

Archambault, É, D Amyot, P Deschamps, AF Nicol, F Provencher, L Rebout, and G Roberge. 2014. Proportion of open access papers published in peer-reviewed journals at the European and world levels–1996–2013. European Commission

Archambault, E. 2018. Universalisation of OA scientific dissemination.

Barrett, K. 2019 (Jan 24). Email exchange with Kim Barrett, Editor-in Chief, Journal of Physiology

Binfield, P. Novel scholarly journal concepts

Björk, BC. 2018. Evolution of the scholarly mega-journal, 2006–2017. PeerJ 2018; 6: e4357. doi:10.7717/peerj.4357

Clarke, M. 2018. Plan S: Impact on Society Publishers. The Scholarly Kitchen

COAR. 2018 (Dec 13). COAR's Feedback on the Guidance on the Implementation of Plan S. Confederation of Open Access Repositories

Cochran, A. 2018. Plan S: A Mandate for Gold OA with Lots of Strings Attached. The Scholarly Kitchen

Crawford, W. 2015 (Oct). The Gold OA Landscape 2011-2014. Cites & Insights, 15:9

Solomon, DJ. 2014. A survey of authors publishing in four megajournals. PeerJ 2 (2014): e365

Ellers, J, T Crowther, and J Harvey. 2017 (Oct). Gold Open Access Publishing in Mega-Journals. Journal of Scholarly Publishing. doi: 10.3138/jsp.49.1.89

Else, H. 2018 (Jul 19). Dutch publishing giant cuts off researchers in Germany and Sweden. Nature

Enserink, M. 2016 (May 26). In dramatic statement, European leaders call for 'immediate' open access to all scientific papers by 2020. Science

European Commission. 2018 (Sep 4). 'Plan S' and 'cOAlition S' – Accelerating the transition to full and immediate Open Access to scientific publications.

Feng, H, GH Beckett, and D Huang. 2013. From 'import' to 'import—export' oriented internationalization: the impact of national policy on scholarly publication in China. Lang Policy 12: 251. doi: 10.1007/s10993-013-9285-8

Frantsvåg, MJE, and TE Strømme. 2019 (Jan 16). Few Open Access Journals are Plan S Compliant. Preprints 2019, 2019010165

Green, T. 2019. Is open access affordable? Why current models do not work and why we need internet‐era transformation of scholarly communications. Learned Publishing, 32: 13-25. doi:10.1002/leap.1219

Hampson, G. 2018. OSI Issue Brief 2: How fast is open growing? Open Scholaship Initiative

Hampson, G. 2018a. Finding common ground. SciELO conference presentation

Harrington, R. 2018. Statement posted on the UKRI "TheyWorkForYou" website

INASP. 2018 (Aug 1). Assessing and supporting journal publishing practices in the Global South

Johnson, R. 2018 (Oct 26). An overview of the Plan S debate. Open Scholarship Initiative

Jubb, M, S Oeben, A Plume, L Brammer, R Johnson, C Butun, and S Pinfield. 2018. Monitoring the transition to open access. Universities UK

Khoo, SY, and BP Lay. 2018. A Very Long Embargo: Journal Choice Reveals Active Non-Compliance with Funder Open Access Policies by Australian and Canadian Neuroscientists. LIBER Quarterly, 28(1), 1–19. doi: 10.18352/lq.10252

Kingsley, D. 2018 (Sep 12). Most Plan S principles are not contentious. Unlocking Research

Larivière V, S Haustein, and P Mongeon. 2015. The Oligopoly of Academic Publishers in the Digital Era. PLoS ONE 10(6): e0127502. doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0127502

Mathews, D. 2017 (Dec 5). Huge rise in subscription costs despite open access switch. Times Higher Education

McNutt, M. 2019 (Jan). Opinion: "Plan S" falls short for society publishers—and for the researchers they serve. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 201900359. doi:: 10.1073/pnas.1900359116

Minai, NZ. 2018 (Aug 16). Guest Post: Challenges for Academics in the Global South — Resource Constraints, Institutional Issues, and Infrastructural Problems. The Scholarly Kitchen

Montgomery, L and R Xiang. 2018. Understanding open knowledge in China: A Chinese approach to openness? Cultural Science Journal 10(1), 17–26. doi: 10.5334/csci.106

Moore, S. 2017 (Jan). A Genealogy of Open Access: Negotiations between Openness and Access to Research. Copyright, Fair Use, Scholarly Communication, Etc.

Morrison, H. 2018 (Feb 6). DOAJ APC information as of Jan 31, 2018. SustainingtheKnowledgeCommons.com

Mudditt, A. 2018 (Jan 18). Countering the Über-Brands: The Case for the Megajournal. The Scholarly Kitchen

Neylon, Cameron. 2018 (Dec 18). Email exchange with Cameron Neylon.

OA2020 website

OASPA. 2018. OASPA Offers Support on the Implementation of Plan S. Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association

Open Access Directory. Simmons University

Open Science Initiative Working Group. 2015. Mapping the Future of Scholarly Publishing. Science Communication Institute

OSI. 2016. Summary report. of the Iiaugural conference of the Open Scholarship Initiative

OSI. 2016. Report from the "What is Open?" workgroup. OSI2016 conference paper. doi: 10.13021/G8XK5R

OSI. 2017. Report on the 2nd annual conference of the global Open Scholarship Initiatve

OSI. 2018. Report on the 1st summit meeting of the global Open Scholarship Initiative

Parsons, J. 2016 (Mar 4). Who Pays for Open Access? Library Journal

Pinfield, S, S Salter, and P Bath. 2017. A "Gold-centric" implementation of open access: Hybrid journals, the "Total cost of publication," and policy development in the UK and beyond. JAIST 68:9 doi.org/10.1002/asi.23742

Pinfield, S. 2016 (Oct 13). Mega-journals: the future, a stepping stone to it or a leap into the abyss? Times Higher Education

Piwowar, H, J Priem, V Larivière, JP Alperin, L Matthias, B Norlander, A Farley, J West, and S Haustein. 2018. The state of OA: a large-scale analysis of the prevalence and impact of Open Access articles. PeerJ 6:e4375

Plan S website

Plutchak, TS. 2018. OSI Issue Brief 1: What do we mean by open? Open Scholarship Initiative. doi:10.13021/osi.v3i0.2367

Pollock, D, and A Michael. 2018 (Sep 24). News & views: Potential impact of Plan S. Delta Think

Pollock, D, and A Micheal. 2018a (Nov 25). News & Views: Plan S and Evolving Market Dynamics. Delta Think

Research England. 2018. Monitoring sector progress towards compliance with funder open access policies. UKRI (RE-P-2018-05)

Scaria, AG, and R Shreyashi. 2018. Open Science India Report. OSF Preprints. doi:10.31219/osf.io/aj9gw.

Schiermeier, Q. 2018 (Dec 5). China backs bold plan to tear down journal paywalls, Nature

OSI

Schiltz, M. 2018 (Sep 4). Science Without Publication Paywalls: a Preamble to cOAlition S for the Realisation of Full and Immediate Open Acces. Science Europe

Science-Metrix. 2018. Analytical support for bibliometrics indicators: Open access availability of scientific publications.

Siler K, S Haustein, E Smith, V Larivière, and JP Alperin. 2018. Authorial and institutional stratification in open access publishing: the case of global health research. PeerJ 6:e4269. doi: 10.7717/peerj.4269

SPARC Europe. 2018 (Sep 5). New coalition of European funders join together to place unprecedented mandate on researchers to publish OA. Press release.

SRC. 2018 (Nov 23). The transfer to open access should take place as soon as it is possible Swedish Research Council

Suber, P. 2018. Thoughts on Plan S.

Taylor & Francis Editors. 2018 (Dec 17). cOAlition S, Plan S and accelerating OA. EditorResources

Taylor & Francis Open Access Survey. June 2014. Oxford

Tenopir, C, E Dalton, L Christian, M Jones, M McCabe, M Smith, and A Fish. 2017. Imagining a Gold Open Access Future: Attitudes, Behaviors, and Funding Scenarios among Authors of Academic Scholarship. College & Research Librar-ies, 78(6), 824. doi:10.5860/crl.78.6.824

Wellcome Trust. 2018. Helping learned societies explore Plan S-compliant business models. (Request for proposals)

Wellcome Trust. 2018a. Wellcome and COAF open access spend 2016/17Well-come Trust. 2018a. Wellcome and COAF open access spend 2016/17.

LONGER VERSION AVAILABLE

This brief has been condensed from a longer OSI Policy Perspective report on this issue. For the longer report, please see:
Hampson, G. 2019. OSI Policy Perspective 1: Plan S & the quest for global open access. Open Scholarship Initiative. doi: 10.13021/osi2019.2398

OSI