

Plan S and the Impact on Journal Editors



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Editors' Note: This article has been adapted and updated from a [blog post](#) that first appeared on the EASE blog in February 2019.

Open access is an established principle in scholarly communication but the full transition to global OA is nowhere close after almost two decades of discussion. Several grant funders have introduced requirements to mandate OA but still, compliance has not met expectations. To speed up the transition, Plan S was announced last September by [cOAlition S](#), a consortium of (mostly European) funders led by the European Research Council. The proposal would require anyone in receipt of grant funding from signatories to make their work OA at the point of publication.

If the Plan goes ahead, it will affect publishers and editors by changing the submission patterns. Some authors will be unable to publish in traditional journals, and this may lead to a largescale change to the journal environment, perhaps threatening the existence of some journals, benefitting others, and opening the door for new journals to launch.

The Plan is now supported by over 15 funders including several national funders (e.g., Netherlands, Ireland, Finland, France) and a couple of charities, including the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Wellcome Trust. In fact, Robert Kiley, Head of Open Research at the Wellcome Trust, has recently been appointed as Interim cOAlition S Coordinator until a new Plan S 'Champion' is appointed (see the [press release](#)). He replaced Robert-Jan Smits, the European Commission's Special Envoy for Open Access and the person originally heading up Plan S.

Plan S has been proposed with ten principles, all of which are scheduled to come into force for all publications after January 2020:

1. Authors retain copyright.
2. Funders will set the criteria for what services journals must provide.
3. The funders will support new journals and platforms if none are available.
4. OA publication fees will be covered by the grant funders.
5. The amount of publication fee will be capped (but the cap has not been decided yet).
6. Universities, research organizations, and libraries are asked to align their policies.
7. Books will be included later.
8. The importance of repositories is identified.
9. Hybrid journals are not considered compliant.
10. The funders will monitor compliance.

Grantees will be required to make their articles OA at the point of publication under a CC BY licence (*i.e.*, allowing reuse for any purpose including commercial and derivative publications). Compliance is understood to be publication either in a fully OA journal or within a repository. The work can therefore be published in a subscription journal so long as the accepted version is available, at point of publication, in a repository under a CC BY licence. An OA journal is compliant if it is indexed by DOAJ and uses a CC BY licence.

There are three main differences between this policy and others.

- First, publishing OA in a hybrid journal will not satisfy the requirement. (A hybrid journal is a subscription journal that allows authors to select an OA option in return for paying a publication fee.)
- The second major difference is that the plan does not allow for any embargo period, *i.e.*, it stipulates that if the article is published in a subscription journal then the accepted version must be made available at the point of publication in a repository under a CC BY licence. Other policies usually allow a 6- or 12-month embargo period and allow for posting of the accepted version under a non-commercial licence.
- The third difference is that there are more stringent criteria for defining compliant journals. They must be indexed in DOAJ, for example, and must be able to satisfy various technical and quality standards.

After the original announcement at the latter end of 2018, the consortium issued a call for feedback on their guidance for implementation, which closed on February 8. They received over 600 submissions.

Many publishing, library, and research groups submitted comments, most of which were broadly supportive, but many raised concerns about the lack of consultation, the timeline, and the “one size fits all” approach.

Most of the criticisms relate to publishing implementation and the impact on researchers. For example, the [European Physical Society](#) was concerned about researcher freedom to select the most appropriate journal for their work, and the possibility that the requirements for journals may discriminate against smaller, less well-supported journals and strengthen the business of large commercial publishers.

[SAGE](#) already allows all authors to post their accepted articles into repositories without embargo, but their feedback was concerned about the requirement for doing so under a commercial licence rather than the non-commercial and non-derivative licence which they currently require.

Some responses have suggested that the impact on smaller journals, learned and academic societies, and university presses will be more detrimental than to the larger commercial publishers, and there have been strong arguments in favour of continued support for hybrid journals.

[A web page](#) is available that has tracked many of the public submissions and provides links to them.

What impact the Plan will have is dependent on several variables. One of these is that cOAlition S has said that hybrid journals which have a plan to flip to full OA within the next few years will be considered compliant. The other variable is that it allows funders to interpret the Plan for their own circumstances. Therefore the 10-point criteria listed on their

site (and above) may not be fully implemented by all funders! This led to a Smits saying at the APE conference in January that journals included in the deal between Wiley and the German Consortia, DEAL, were compliant—although the majority are hybrid titles with no plan to flip to OA.

Following considerable pushback from many publishers, research groups, and other commentators, one cOAlition S supporter, Riksbankens Jubileumsfond (RJ), has [declared](#) that it no longer supports Plan S.

It is hard to anticipate what impact the Plan will have on journal editors. Much will depend on the content of each journal and how many submissions come from grantees of the funders who have signed up to the Plan. The largest threat is that some journals will be deprived of submissions if they are non-compliant. A smaller issue may be that changes to submission systems are required to identify grantees. This may be a complex issue if one of the author group—but not the corresponding author—is a grantee although the others are not.

Confounding all of this is trying to anticipate impact if individual funders are allowed to interpret the plan differently. This will make the environment more complicated and make it harder for editors to anticipate the impact on their submissions.

The objective of cOAlition S and Plan S is to force a change in the publishing environment by creating stringent requirements. They are responding to the frustrations of librarians who find that OA publication fees are simply increasing their costs rather than saving any money, and to funders whose grantees steadfastly refuse to adopt OA publishing venues. Although the stringent and apparently rushed implementation of Plan S may seem unrealistic, it could serve as a watershed for a largescale movement to OA and force publishers to adopt more open models.

Ira Salkin Scholarship

The application process is open for the 2019 International Society of Managing and Technical Editors Ira Salkin Scholarship. Ira was one of the founding fathers of ISMTE and sadly passed away in 2016. His goal was to ensure editorial office professionals are educated and vigilant in matters of publishing ethics.

The essay topic for 2019 is “How can editorial offices create proactive policies that make handling publication ethics matters smoother?”

The submission deadline for entries is **May 31, 2019**.

Eligible applicants must be members of ISMTE.

Applicants must include a short cover letter stating their position and some background.

Read the official Rules and Regulations [here](#).

We are looking forward to receiving your entries for the 2019 Ira Salkin Scholarship.



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