

How Will the Revised Plan S Affect Academia?

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Plan S is a trending term in academia. With the concept of open access gaining ground, both the research community and the publishers are concerned with the Plan S coming into effect. At first, the goal of Plan S was to push for publicly-funded research to be published in Open Access by 2020. However, after a large public consultation, cOAlition S has updated the launch date to 1 January 2021. How is this going to affect academia? Let us try to find out.

Plan S Open to Feedback

Plan S is an exciting new program, launched by the group cOAlition S in September 2018 that aims to improve access to research publications. It has one key goal: to allow

publications from research funded by public grants to be published in Open Access platforms. However, the members of Plan S insisted on getting feedback on the academic community and hence, [opened Plan S to public consultation](#) last year. This was the largest ever worldwide consultation on Open Access publishing. In total, cOAlition S received over 600 responses from all the different strata in the academic community. Universities, publishers and individual researchers from more than 40 countries sent responses.

The consultation revealed widespread support for Plan S. As a result, cOAlition S decided to keep their main principles. However, some have been refined according to the feedback received. They also decided to revise their implementation guidance.

Overall, the responses supported the primary aim of Plan S: full and immediate Open Access, which remains unchanged in the revised Plan S.

Have you missed out on the previous discussions on Plan S? [Listen to this podcast](#) before you read more about the revised Plan S.

A Revised Plan S Released

In May 2019, cOAlition S [proposed revisions](#) to some of the Plan S implementation guidance. These changes should help both institutions and funders to comply with Plan S.

The changes incorporated in the revised Plan S are:

- The implementation date has been pushed back by one year, to 2021. This will give researchers, funders and publishers more time to adapt to Plan S.
- Transformative agreements (TAs) will possibly remain until 2024. These agreements change the contract between a subscriber and a publisher. Contracts [will move from a subscription model](#) to an Open Access model.
- There will be more options for the move to Open Access. As well as TAs, model TAs and 'transformative journals' can be used. These journals will increase their Open Access content over time.
- There will be different ways to comply with Plan S. In fact, cOAlition S will be supporting a range of models for Open Access platforms. For example, placing papers in an Open Access repository (such as arXiv) would be one way to comply. These extra options should make it easier for funders and institutions to comply.
- There will be more emphasis on research rewards and incentives. cOAlition S funders will adapt the ways to assess researchers and publications. The prestige of a journal in which a publication appears will not play a role. This is in contrast to the current situation, where researchers who publish in high-impact journals can attract more funding.
- It is very important that publication fees are transparent. Funders may [consider capping publication costs](#) when making grant awards.
- The technical requirements for Open Access repositories have been simplified. This is due to the feedback received that suggests the original requirements being

too demanding. The updated technical requirements should help the development of a new range of repositories.

Plan S: The Unchanged Core Goals

cOAlition S has made some changes in response to feedback. However, the core goals of Plan S remain. These are:

- No publication should be locked behind a paywall. This supports the main goal of Plan S. Namely, publications from publicly-funded research must be published on Open Access platforms.
- Open Access should be granted immediately. cOAlition S does not believe that delayed access is true Open Access. The same applies to access that does not allow wide re-use.
- Full Open Access should be granted by using a Creative Commons CC BY licence.
- Funders will [support reasonable Open Access](#) publication fees. Funders may cap publication costs in future. They will do this if fees seem to be too high.
- Hybrid journals (subscription journals with some Open Access articles) must be part of a TA with a clear end date. Otherwise, funders will not support publication in these journals.

Looking Towards the Future

Since its launch in September 2018, Plan S has prompted fresh debate on Open Access. Carlos Moedas, the EU Commissioner for Research, supports the changes. “Plan S is a bold step forward which the European Commission, along with a growing number of national funders, is committed to implement,” he said.

With the revisions made in Plan S, many researchers want to know what Plan S means for their own careers. In the short term, researchers may publish their work in a journal with a TA. After 2021, researchers will still be able to target the same journals. However, their articles will be Open Access.

What Does the Scientific Community Think of Plan S?

cOAlition S hopes that the changes will help funders and institutions to better comply with Plan S. “This final version of Plan S will [speed up] the necessary transition to full and immediate Open Access,” said Professor John-Arne Røttingen, a cOAlition S member.

Robert-Jan Smits, a science policy maker and the original creator of Plan S, praised the new emphasis on research rewards. He hopes that this will [increase support for Plan S](#) in the scientific community.

Some publishers welcomed the wider range of transition options. The chief publishing officer of *Springer Nature* believes that this will make it easier for the journal *Nature* to become Open Access. However, a few publishers are concerned about costs, particularly for unfunded researchers.

Few early career researchers feel that the Plan S is coming into action too fast. They also feel that possibly Plan S has less global applications. According to them, the plan focuses on the UK and European countries that support it. Researchers are concerned that publishing in Plan S-compliant journals could hamper their ability to move to countries such as China and the US, where publications need to be high-impact and not necessarily open access.

Paul Ayris of University College London [summed up attitudes to Plan S](#). Plan S is “tremendously exciting,” he said. However, making the changes by 2021 “will still be a challenge.” Also, the cOAlition S funders currently represent a small fraction of worldwide research funding. It might therefore be difficult to achieve an easy move to Open Access.

What do you think of the changes to Plan S? Please share your ideas in the comments section below.

Cite this article

Enago Academy, How Will the Revised Plan S Affect Academia?. Enago Academy. 2019/06/15. <https://www.enago.com/academy/how-will-the-revised-plan-s-affect-academia/>