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Plan S is an exciting development for the research community. So what exactly is Plan S?

The key goal of Plan S is that, by 2020, publications from research funded by public grants must be published in open access journals or platforms. Plan S also has ten principles. These cover factors such as copyright, funding and timelines.

The initiative comes from the group cOAlition S. This is a group of 15 national research funding organizations and four charities. Members include the French National Research Agency, the Irish Science Foundation and UK Research and Innovation. COAlition S launched Plan S in September 2018. Although some countries already had their own open access policies in place, Plan S is the first to bring so many nations together.

Why is Plan S Important?

If you work in research, Plan S could fundamentally change the way you approach publishing your work . Here, two research scientists explain why.

PhD student(S):

“As I’m just starting my career as a researcher, I know that I need to choose carefully which journals to approach for publication. I’ve heard about Plan S. I know that it means that our work must be published in open access journals, but I’m not sure how that will affect me.”

Professor(P):

“You are right. At present, we can choose whether to publish in an open access journal or a traditional subscription journal. However, we receive public funding for our research, so we must publish in open access journals from next year.”

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Transformative Agreements

S:"So how can I find a journal that is open access but also has a high impact factor? What will happen to the traditional subscription journals?"

P:"These are good questions. First, let's talk about how subscription journals – including those with the highest impact factors – will manage this change. To allow the move towards open access, transformative agreements (TAs) can be used. Basically, a TA changes the contract between a subscriber, such as a library, and a publisher. The change is from a subscription model to an open access model."

S: "How long will these agreements last?"

P: "Contracts need to be negotiated by the end of 2021, and cannot last for longer than three years. This gives publishers some breathing space, and lets the research community adjust to the requirements of Plan S."

Paying for Publishing

S:"I can see the benefits of open access publishing for the research community. But how will journals make money under these new arrangements?"

P:"There are two types of TA. Confusingly, they have very similar names! The first is known as **read-and-publish**. Under this agreement, a publisher receives payment for both reading and publishing in a single contract."

S:"What does this mean for researchers?"

P:"For researchers, this means that payment for publishing will be dealt with by a contract with the institution. This is in contrast to the current situation, where authors choose open access on an individual basis. The idea is that funds will be used to pay for publishing, rather than journal subscriptions."

S:"OK, I understand. What is the second type?"

P: "The second type is called **publish-and-read**. In these agreements, the publisher is paid only for publishing. Reading is included at no extra cost. Libraries might find that there is no real difference between the two types of agreement, as long as the overall cost remains the same."

S: "Will this be more expensive for libraries?"

P: "Libraries are aiming to spend the same as they do at present. Hopefully, Plan S will not prove to be more expensive for libraries."

The Risks

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S: “What about publishers? Are there any downsides to TAs?”

P: “TAs might give advantages to larger publishers. In fact, PLOS, a leading open access publisher, has warned that TAs could reduce choice and narrow the journal market. This is because larger publishers will have an advantage when negotiating TAs with libraries and institutions. Smaller publishers could lose out. PLOS believes that cOAlition S should prioritise enabling a wider choice of open access journals.”

What Does Plan S Mean for Me?

S:“I understand how Plan S and TAs work. But what does this mean for scientists like me?”

P:“In the next few years, you might publish your research in a subscription journal that has a TA. This means that your article would be open access, within a subscription journal. This is sometimes known as hybrid open access. It is important to remember that hybrid journals are only a temporary step, as they do not meet the requirements of Plan S.”

S:“So can I still target the same journals for publication?”

P:“Yes. You asked how to find a journal that is open access but also has a high impact factor. The answer is that the same, high-impact-factor journals will still be available. As a scientist receiving public funding, you should still be able to target these journals. However, from 2020, your articles will be open access.”

With the 2020 target for Plan S approaching, exciting times are ahead for the research community.

Do you need more information on Plan S? Go through

What do you think of Plan S? How will Plan S and TAs change the world of research publishing? Share your thoughts in the comments below.

Category

1. Publishing Research
2. Selecting Journals

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