



## PUBLISHING

# Radical open-access plan is delayed a year

In response to criticisms, Plan S also lifts cap on article fees

By Tania Rabesandratana

**P**lan S, the program to crack down on scientific journals' paywalls led by European funders, last week fleshed out and relaxed some of the rules researchers will have to abide by. The update addresses concerns raised by researchers, librarians, and scientific publishers after initial guidelines came out in November 2018. It allows more time before researchers will have to publish their papers with full, immediate open access (OA) and drops, for now, the proposed cap on publishing fees that funders pay to OA journals.

The architects of Plan S "have engaged in a good quality dialogue" with the people who will deal with the plan's consequences, says Lidia Borrell-Damián, director for research and innovation at the European University Association in Brussels. As a result, the revised guidelines seem "much more nuanced and more realistic" than the initial set, says astrophysicist Luke Drury, former president of the Royal Irish Academy in Dublin.

Still unclear is whether the changes will convince other funders to join the movement (*Science*, 4 January, p. 11). And they have not mollified the plan's fiercest detractors, who maintain it restricts their freedom to publish. "The changes are cosmetic and trivial. They

more or less ignored the critique," says Lynn Kamerlin, a structural biologist at Uppsala University in Sweden who co-authored an open letter against Plan S in November 2018 that now has about 1800 signatories.

Launched in September 2018, Plan S will require immediate OA for scientific papers stemming from research funded by the members of cOAlition S, a group that now has 19 public and private funders. One of the main changes in the update is a 1-year extension: Plan S rules will apply at the latest to research proposals solicited by funders starting in 2021, instead of 2020. That means the mandate will apply to papers published starting in 2022 or 2023, John-Arne Røttingen, chief executive of the Research Council of Norway in Oslo and a Plan S leader, said last week.

In another big change that several critics had called for, Plan S has shelved the idea of capping the amount funders will pay for article-processing charges (APCs), which some journals charge to publish OA articles. Instead, the funders will require a breakdown of what's behind APCs so that researchers can compare publishing venues before choosing one. (The funders may later introduce a cap "if unreasonable price levels are observed.")

"It is significant that cOAlition S listened to feedback that different approaches to peer

review, as part of publishing, require different APCs," said Bill Moran, publisher of *Science* in Washington, D.C. (*Science's* News section is editorially independent.)

Many publishers are happy to provide transparency about their fees, says Niamh O'Connor, chair-elect of the Association of Learned and Professional Society Publishers in London. "It's not uncommon for authors or referees to wonder about them."

Plan S funders hope more transparency will help authors make efficient, evidence-based decisions about where to publish, rather than relying on journals' perceived quality. That would support a secondary goal for cOAlition S—to shake up research assessment. Plan S now includes a pledge to base funding decisions on the intrinsic merit of researchers' work—not the names or impact factors of journals where they published previously.

The revised guidelines also spell out Plan S funders' support for the Open Access 2020 Initiative, which encourages national consortia of institutions to negotiate "read-and-publish" deals with publishers. The agreements allow researchers at those institutions to read paywalled content and publish OA papers for a single fee. But because the often-lengthy contract negotiations can be burdensome for publishers, cOAlition S now says it will develop model contracts to help smaller publishers enter these so-called "transformative agreements." It also now offers a "transformative journal" option, in which Plan S funders pay OA fees for authors to publish in subscription journals, providing those publications reduce subscription fees to offset their income from APCs and commit to 100% OA within an agreed time frame.

The updated guidance also clarifies Plan S's stance on hybrid journals—publications that charge subscription fees as well as APCs for authors who choose to publish OA—that lack the "transformative" commitment to full OA. The cOAlition S funders won't pay hybrid journals' APCs, but researchers can pay with other funds and remain Plan S compliant.

Finally, Plan S's revamped rules give more prominence to its version of "green" OA, in which scientists post peer-reviewed papers in OA repositories (*Science*, 17 May, p. 620) as soon as they are published in a paywalled journal. The new guidelines also relaxed the technical requirements for such repositories.

Overall, cOAlition S "really seem[s] to have listened to the research community. There are no major sticking points anymore," says Gareth O'Neill, a linguist at Leiden University in the Netherlands and past president of the European Council of Doctoral Candidates and Junior Researchers. "Now, we'll watch them, see what works and what doesn't, and hold them accountable." ■

# Science

## Radical open-access plan is delayed a year

Tania Rabesandratana

*Science* **364** (6444), 919.

DOI: 10.1126/science.364.6444.919

### ARTICLE TOOLS

<http://science.sciencemag.org/content/364/6444/919>

### PERMISSIONS

<http://www.sciencemag.org/help/reprints-and-permissions>

Use of this article is subject to the [Terms of Service](#)

---

*Science* (print ISSN 0036-8075; online ISSN 1095-9203) is published by the American Association for the Advancement of Science, 1200 New York Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20005. 2017 © The Authors, some rights reserved; exclusive licensee American Association for the Advancement of Science. No claim to original U.S. Government Works. The title *Science* is a registered trademark of AAAS.