

The current version of Plan S is not appropriate for research in Economics and Business

Joost Driessen, Professor of Finance and Vice-Dean Research of Tilburg School of Economics and Management, Tilburg University, the Netherlands

Within the fields of economics and business a strong agreement exists about the ranking of academic journals. This ranking results from a strong tradition of the top journals to have a high quality editorial board, a solid refereeing process, a focus on innovative and high-quality research, and strong selection, with acceptance rates often well below 10%. Many of these top journals are maintained by learned societies.

The majority of the top journals in economics and business does not satisfy the current restrictions imposed by plan S, and it seems very unlikely that this will change quickly, especially given the current lack of full international support for plan S. Plan S would thus prevent researchers on NWO grants to publish in these top journals in economics and business. For most researchers in these fields, the consequence will be that they no longer apply for such grants, since there is no benefit to them (and to the research field) to publish their research in low-ranked journals that are hardly read by scientists or practitioners. Also, performing NWO-funded research would withhold them to work with international researchers from non-plan-S countries. This cannot be the goal of plan S.

Obviously, open access is a laudable goal. But as many others have already indicated, plan S is too radical with a timeline that is far too strict. Journals should be given more time to work towards open access, in particular those journals maintained by societies. These societies are often non-profit, and provide great added value to science by organizing conferences, PhD training, job markets and other activities.

In addition, as indicated by many others, the focus on a model where authors pay for publication (the so-called Article Processing Charge) generates perverse incentives. Either journals need to charge very high APCs if they want remain selective and high quality, or journals choose for low APCs but switch to publishing most submitted papers to survive financially. Both outcomes are not desirable. Plan S should thus not support such a publishing model, but rather stimulate that journals are maintained by non-profit societies instead of commercial publishers.

Finally, with the larger goal of open science in mind, a much simpler first step would be to require that all preprints generated by funded research are made available to the public. In this way, all funded research output will be publicly available, and this increases the transparency of the research process.

In sum, a more carefully designed and more gradual plan S is called for.