Irish Research Council Statement on Open Access & Plan S

Irish Research Council Supports Open Access
The Irish Research Council fully endorses the principle of Open Access, noting its important role in promoting the exchange of knowledge and the dissemination of research findings.

Commenting today, Peter Brown, Director of the Irish Research Council, said, "The impact and advancement of research are enhanced where the national and international research community has access to as wide a range of shared knowledge and findings as possible. This is particularly important for publicly funded research, where research supports the interests of society, culture and the economy as well as the expansion of knowledge itself."

A number of European research funding organisations (cOAlition S), with the support of the European Commission and the European Research Council, have agreed to require full and immediate Open Access to research publications resulting from their research grants by the year 2020.

The Irish Research Council notes the cOAlition S initiative's coordinated approach and ambitious intent. The current Irish Research Council strategy on Open Access emphasises the central role of the researcher in shaping and facilitating Open Access, reflecting both the researcher's freedom and responsibilities. The Council will continue to support Open Access, taking into account the interests of the research community and society as a whole.

The Irish Research Council works closely with other European research funding organisations in Science Europe and with organisations on a national level, particularly through ongoing discussions under the National Open Research Forum (NORF), with the aim of collaborating to achieve an open access environment that supports excellent research. The Council will continue to collaborate with all relevant stakeholders to achieve Open Access to research: researchers, research funding organisations, research performing organisations, and government departments.

Implementation of Plan S
The Irish Research Council notes the additional technical information provided by the Plan S implementation guidance. Plan S implementation warrants wide-ranging discussion, particularly with the research community. In implementing any significant changes in this area, the engagement and training of researchers is key; it has been found that only around 30% of Europe's researchers have a good knowledge of publishers' OA policies (EUA OA Institutional Survey results). Ultimately, any

measures introduced should be to the benefit of research and not to the detriment of those who conduct it. Where researchers are required to change their publishing practices, compliance should be readily achievable such that research content (rather than the means of publishing) would continue to be researchers' primary focus.

In the ensuing discussions, the Irish Research Council recommends that the following considerations be taken into account:

- **The diversity of research areas and disciplines and unique characteristics of publishing practices among certain disciplines:** The views, circumstances and practices of researchers from Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (AHSS) disciplines have not been sufficiently incorporated into Plan S to date.

  Plan S acknowledges that, for monographs and books, the transition to Open Access may take longer to achieve; as a result, separate implementation guidance is to be issued at a later date. In addition, learned societies and subject associations, which are a common means of publishing AHSS research and offer essential supports and bursaries to researchers, are placed in an especially vulnerable position in the context of Plan S. The Irish Research Council welcomes the recent engagement by the Wellcome Trust and UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) with the Association of Learned and Professional Society Publishers (ALPSP) to explore potential strategies and business models through which learned societies could adapt and thrive under Plan S.

  As the Council supports excellent researchers across (and between) all disciplines, it is particularly cognisant of the need for policy to be inclusive of all researchers. The diversity of circumstances, norms and practices across disciplines should be acknowledged and respected.

- **The safeguarding of early career researchers' prospects:** Researchers have legitimate concerns that their ability to obtain research grants and academic promotions may be harmed if they are prevented from publishing in prestigious, non-compliant journals. This may have particularly adverse effects for early career researchers.

  The widespread transformation of research assessment and higher education appointment and promotion processes will be crucial. This may be achieved through the adoption of San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA) principles, where research is assessed on its own merits rather than based on the journal in which it is published. Notably, the Irish Research Council is a signatory of DORA (as of 9th December 2018). Given the international mobility of researchers, such initiatives would need to be implemented widely, both within and beyond Europe, in order to be truly effective. Recognition of Open Access practices in appointment and promotion processes will be key to securing the necessary cultural shift.

- **The role(s) of open archives and repositories in hosting research outputs:**
  It is important to take into consideration and to value repositories, taking advantage of the variety of functions that they perform and leveraging investments already made. Their archiving function and potential for editorial innovation are acknowledged by Plan S. It is appropriate that the Plan S implementation guidance includes repositories among the three main 'roads' to open access (albeit under specified conditions). It is important that Plan S requirements for repositories not be excessively prescriptive. Open Access repositories are a valid, useful route to ensuring the immediate and unrestricted availability of research outputs.

- **The range of Open Access models available:** Proposals to cap Article Processing Charges (APCs) are welcome and warrant pursuit. Indeed, the charging of APCs is just one business model for Open Access journals.

  Many Open Access publications rely on innovative non-APC funding models. As mentioned above, repositories offer researchers a solution to the problem of having insufficient funding to pay APCs. Acknowledgment in the implementation guidance of these multiple 'roads' to Open Access is an important development.

  Further, as recognised by Plan S, the autonomy of researchers – as experts in their respective disciplines – in determining the most appropriate place to publish their research must be respected insofar as possible while also facilitating the widest possible dissemination of research findings.

- **Details regarding provision of funding to facilitate Plan S:** Plan S commits to making the necessary funding available to enable researchers to publish their work under Open Access without undue financial burden. It is to be hoped that Plan S implementation would result in long-term cost efficiencies in public spending albeit without prejudice to researcher or discipline.

  Nonetheless, initial investment may be needed in order to ensure that repositories are Plan S compliant. Details of how these funds would be made available are of critical importance.

  Further, where research funding and/or performing organisations experience static or declining budgets, the financial support of Open Access publishing through payment of APCs is likely to prove problematic. It would be essential to have a national APC 'pot' of funding available to researchers, including those based at all of Ireland's research performing organisations as well as independent researchers, such that there would be equality of opportunity to publish research findings. This would prevent the development of an unjust multi-tier system that would differentiate between researchers according to whether they have significant research grants, small research awards, or no research funding.

Monitoring of compliance – and sanctioning non-compliance – should only be considered once the issue of funding is fully and fairly addressed for publicly funded researchers across all disciplines, including those with and without project grants.

ENDS
8 February 2019