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Feedback on the Guidance on the Implementation of Plan S from The British Sociological Association

The British Sociological Association is the professional association for UK Sociology. We wish to raise some major concerns regarding Plan S, adding our voice to those of many other professional associations critical of this initiative as it is currently proposed.

At the outset, we note that there is considerable sympathy amongst the sociological community for reforming the current publishing model, particularly in relation to those commercial publishers who charge expensive subscriptions and achieve high profits, largely from publicly funded research and the 'free' labour of the academic community. However, the current proposal only goes some way to addressing this and – at the same time - will generate a range of issues for the academic community that are far more serious than those that this initiative solves. Our concerns are as follows:

- a) First, the move from a subscription model to an 'author pays' model would seriously reduce the critical mass of academic publishing and do so in a way that has a range of potentially iniquitous effects. Many researchers simply will not have access to the funds required, either because they do not have appropriate grant funding or because their University does not have the resources to support them.
- b) Whilst a fall in the volume of publications per se may not be regarded as a bad thing in some quarters, the loss of publications from more poorly funded institutions, disciplines and academics is potentially catastrophic. There is no evidence at all to suggest that these outputs are lower quality and their loss could devastate whole subject areas and individual careers.
- c) Furthermore, inequities in funding between different types of institution on the HE landscape combined with the metrics that underpin the Research Excellence Framework mean that Plan S could have seriously divisive consequences. In

addition, non-affiliated researchers and academics from less wealthy nations may also experience insuperable barriers to publishing their work on the global stage, raising broader questions of inequity. *In short, the potential inequities inherent in the current proposal mean that it may not support increasing quality but precisely the inverse* by favoring wealthy institutions and, wealthy individual researchers, where publication success becomes dependent on capacity to pay rather than academic quality. This situation might also readily create friction through internal competition for publishing funds and questions of equality and diversity.

- d) There is no guarantee that profit orientated major publishing houses, answerable to the markets and to their shareholders, might not simply shift their target 'market' from libraries and their readership towards researchers with significant funding, with a business model tailored towards maximizing the volumes of APCs, and with significantly lesser regard for quality and rigorous peer review than is currently the case.
- e) Plan S will also greatly impact upon the income that learned societies receive from in-house journals that they have nurtured for many years, as part of their responsibility towards their profession. The BSA, for example, would lose a modest but significant income stream that is currently 'recycled' for the benefit of the public and academic community. A major reduction in publishing income would impact on the BSA's capacity to support the next generation of UK sociologists through events, mentoring and training and seriously constrain the association's capacity to engage with policymakers the public to contribute to social inclusion and well-being for all. Below are some of the activities that are currently undertaken by us which help to support our academic community.

- Neutral - *i.e. without pressure to promote any particular academic institution or research agenda* - spaces (conferences and workshops) where research is presented and honed by interaction and feedback from peers e.g. BSA Annual Conference
- Bursaries which enable postgraduates and early career researchers to attend conferences and workshops helping to develop their research presentation skills e.g. BSA supports over 60 postgraduates or early career academics to attend events each year
- Mentoring and networking activities for postgraduates and early career researchers where research skills and research connections are developed e.g. one-to-one mentoring sessions at larger BSA conferences and mentoring videos

- Funding, event spaces and online space for research networks to develop ideas and research collaborations e.g. BSA has over 40 research study groups
- Funding, event spaces and online spaces for postgraduate and early career academics to develop ideas and research skills e.g. BSA specialist groups
- Funding for early career research fellowships e.g. BSA Fellowship for Sociology at the British Library
- Funding for public lectures which help to promote academic research to the general public e.g. BSA Annual Equality Lecture at the British Library
- Funding to support editorial and peer review team meetings and special events to develop academic publishing
- Funding to support academic publishing complaint investigations
- Funding to support the discoverability and visibility of the very best of academic research published
- Neutral - *i.e. without pressure to promote any particular academic institution or research agenda* - online and in print materials which promote our academic discipline to new generations of researchers e.g. BSA Discover Sociology website and booklets
- Neutral - *i.e. without pressure to promote any particular academic institution or research agenda* - representation to Government and other policy-makers on behalf our academic discipline e.g. BSA regularly contributes to Government and other consultations, including consulting its thousands of members such that policy can be well-informed

Our conclusion

Overall, Plan S promises to deliver only incremental improvements on the current availability of academic research, but at potentially huge cost to academic freedom, equity and the quality of scholarly works. As proposed, this initiative would be widely detrimental to the academic community as a whole, as well as damaging the many longstanding learned societies such as the BSA who charge modest subscriptions in support of achieving a valuable and broad educational and public purpose.

Founded in 1951, the British Sociological Association promotes sociology, supports sociologists, and is the public face of sociology in Britain. The Association represents UK sociology on key bodies both nationally and internationally and works closely with allied organisations to influence policies affecting sociology within the wider social sciences remit.
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