

Economic and Social History Society of Ireland

Irish Historical Studies

Joint Submission to NORF and cOAlition S on ‘Plan S’

We represent the two leading journals in the field of Irish history: *Irish Historical Studies* (published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of the Irish Historical Society and the Ulster Society for Irish Historical Studies) and *Irish Economic and Social History* (published by Sage on behalf of the Irish Economic and Social History Society). Since their inception in 1938 (*Irish Historical Studies*) and 1974 (*Irish Economic and Social History*), these two journals have been in the vanguard in providing a platform for the publication of research in Irish history by young, established and independent scholars, and in promoting innovation, inquiry and engagement in that field. We have, in the process, contributed in a constructive and supportive manner to the development of the discipline, which is one of the most research-intensive in the Humanities and Social Sciences. We have also sought, through our active engagement in public discourse and ongoing participation in the public realm, to make a significant and positive contribution towards the realisation of the goal, identified on the occasion in May 2018 of the launch of the *Cambridge History of Ireland* by President Higgins, of ensuring that History, as ‘the inheritance of all our people’, is ‘accessible to as many people as possible’. Our journals are available for consultation in public as well as university libraries. We sustain a healthy number of individual as well as institutional subscribers, and we contrive, by supporting an active culture of annual conferences, symposia and paper-reading societies, to make the most up-to-date thinking in History available to the community. We are enabled, by these means, not only to maintain the discipline but to contribute in a manner that combines intellectual rigour with promoting scholarship and accessibility.

Prompted by the wish to ensure that this important and ongoing contribution to society and scholarship is not diminished, and that the journals upon which it depends are not put at risk, we wish, in the first instance, on behalf of both journals, to thank the National Open Research Forum and the Royal Irish Academy for organising the informative briefing

session on ‘Plan S’ held on 22 January. This is a matter of vital importance to the academic community at large, as the impressive attendance attested. It is also evident that the implementation will impact the constituents of that community differently, as was manifest on the occasion by comments from both the podium and the floor. It is essential that these comments are not just acknowledged, but taken on board, and that the movement towards ‘Open Access’ is modified accordingly. Otherwise, we apprehend that the awful vista, identified in the ALLEA (All European Academies) response to Plan S, will become a reality: that is, that journals maintained by ‘learned societies’, such as *Irish Historical Studies* and *Irish Economic and Social History*, ‘will become “collateral damage” of Plan S’.

It is important that we put on record that we do not object in principle to Open Access. The generation and dissemination of knowledge is not only integral to our activities; it is our *raison d’être*. As a result, the principle of Gold OA for scholarly publication is endorsed within our discipline. Furthermore, we are no less ill at ease than our colleagues in the sciences at the extraordinary profits currently being made by certain publishers of scientific journals, which has informed the drive, embodied in the proposed Plan S, to supersede journal publication altogether in favour of digital repositories for Gold OA. It may be helpful in this context to put on record that in the interval since the announcement of this objective in 2012 both *Irish Historical Studies* and *Irish Economic and Social History* have restructured their publications. They have done so in order to be in a position to meet the demand for Open Access while sustaining the subscription model of publication that is intrinsic to the viability and functionality of learned societies, and by extension, the discipline of which they are an essential infrastructural manifestation. In exactly the same way as other academic journals in History now function, *Irish Historical Studies* and *Irish Economic and Social History* have become ‘hybrid journals’, in which some articles are published according to Gold OA criteria, and the majority on a Green OA basis. This model is not without its challenges, administrative and fiscal, but it works, and while it would be an exaggeration to say that it provides the best of both worlds, it should not be dispensed with in the absence of a better alternative. This is why our societies, and indeed every learned society within the discipline in Ireland and the U.K., regard with unease the proposal to embrace Open Access in the manner identified in the elaborations of Plan S emanating from the European Union and the National Open Research Forum, and why we urgently request that it be revisited and modified in a way that takes full cognizance of the fact that a ‘one model fits all’ approach

will not merely not work, but can have seriously deleterious consequences for disciplines such as History.

There are many specific aspects of Plan S on which we might comment. Focussing on the drawbacks of Plan S for journals such as our own (which, if Plan S is adopted without modification will no longer be deemed OA compliant), we wish to highlight the following:

Finance: In the absence of a vibrant hybrid model of journal publication, where Open Access exists side by side with the subscription model of journal publication, *how will OA publication be financed?* HSS journals do not attract sufficient income by way of APCs to go anywhere near compensating for *the loss of subscription income*, and at present Irish universities have nothing like the financial resources required to cover such costs. It has been suggested that designated sums from public funding will be assigned, but this is unlikely to compensate in full for what is lost, and will, almost by definition, introduce another (unnecessary and unwelcome) layer of administration. Moreover, this is simply not a workable solution in disciplines such as History, as many independent authors whose research makes a highly valuable contribution to scholarship, including those based in archives, museums, and heritage centres, have no access to university or other funding. The risk is not only that a rich tradition and heritage of journals is being endangered but also that *the opportunity for the publication of research will be diminished*. Alternatively, a *two-tier model will take its place* in which funded scholars will write and publish in certain locations and non-funded and independent scholars in another, to the certain impoverishment of the discipline.

Depletion of the Research Infrastructure in the Humanities: The abolition of journal publication will call in question the *very existence of many learned societies*, which not only oversee the editorial process for their journals, ensuring (for instance) the proper provision of peer review (again, not merely for HSS subjects), but which also produce book series, fund bursaries, symposia and colloquia, invite visiting scholars and experts, etc.

Many learned societies also have the status of charities, which enables them to play a constructive role in the public realm by extending modest financial assistance in keeping with their resources to other scholarly organisations. *Irish Historical Studies*, for instance, represents over eighty years of cross-border cooperation, offering regular subventions to Irish History Online (the Irish partner in the major network of fourteen European-based historical bibliographies) which is based in the Royal Irish Academy, and the Irish History Students

Association. Further, though the order of the contribution is not enormous (because the funds possessed by the societies is typically modest), the support provided by learned societies such as ours assist younger scholars through the provision of small bursaries and publication supports.

Implications for quality: Moving to an exclusive Gold OA system will have negative consequences for those in HSS subject areas (notably in History), where the publication of monographs (alongside journal publication) is not only the normative but the fullest expression of research in these disciplines. Immediate OA for research theses and published articles, which is also envisaged, is not equally optimal and may raise serious dangers of intellectual property appropriation, or of plagiarism, which assertions of copyright are insufficient to counter. Indeed, contrary to the opposite assumption, defined embargo periods can be extremely valuable both to Early Career Researchers and to other academics in those fields.

Career Implications: Finally, in the absence of a fully elaborated, properly funded and generally accepted alternative, the weakening of the existing journal base will present challenges for Early Career Researchers. Much more thought needs to be given to this matter, and to the broader implications of the allied San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA) on the role of journal impact factors for academic career progression.

In conclusion, it is our contention that, far from being ‘dysfunctional’, as was suggested at the Plan S Briefing Session held by NORF in conjunction with the Royal Irish Academy on 22 January, the subscription model has many merits and advantages, particularly in HSS areas, where it is dealing with the considerable complexities that face scholars in these fields. This is not to suggest that changes are unnecessary: both our journals are receptive to change and are eager to engage with and to accommodate Open Access in a positive and constructive fashion in order to enhance knowledge generation, research publication and information dissemination. We call on the proponents of Plan S to ensure that these complexities are properly acknowledged and their implications addressed. The idea that one size fits all is seriously flawed; the timetable for change set out by Plan S is completely unrealistic; and the uncertainties as to how it will be funded represent a serious limitation of an initiative around which the world of scholarship should be in agreement. Instead, it has prompted unease, disquiet and uncertainty among all who are committed to the promotion of inquiry and its accessible, affordable, and efficient publication, and it is our

earnest wish that this might be allayed by a revised and modified plan, which takes our circumstances and requirements fully into account.

Yours sincerely,

Jacqueline Hill, Secretary (on behalf of the management committee of *Irish Historical Studies*)

James Kelly, President (on behalf of the Irish Economic and Social History Society).