

Plan S: A response from the Heads of Chemistry UK

Plan S could be a way for funders to streamline and simplify their OA policies. Currently, OA mandates set by funders have resulted in different (and constantly evolving) OA options and models. This has created significant additional burden on the research community to navigate the different models and to ensure compliance with funder mandates.

Plan S focuses on Gold OA publishing but clarification on the specific conditions for compliant Green OA is also required.

In addition, the Heads of Chemistry UK would like to raise the following comments about Plan S:

Academic freedom: Scientists value choice of where to publish the results of their research and view this as being linked to the tenets of academic freedom. The intention of Plan S is to change publishers open access (OA) practices relating to access, licensing, copyright, embargo periods and publication costs. However, Plan S as currently envisaged will significantly limit the journals to which researchers can submit publications (unless they fully comply with Plan S) thereby impacting both on the visibility of their research and potentially on the collaboration options with researchers supported by non-cOAlition S funders. This has implications for all researchers but is likely to be more acutely felt by early career researchers or others who are making career transitions where publication list might be one of the evaluation metrics.

Visibility of European research: An unintended consequence of Plan S would be to limit where European researchers (or those funded by cOAlition S funders) can publish compared to their global counterparts. This could have consequences for the international prominence of European science and scientists and could also impact research collaborations with non-cOAlition S funded researchers, if collaborators wish to publish in non-OA journals.

Timeline to implementation: Plan S proposes changes to how research is disseminated, and correspondingly will cause changes in publishing behaviours and current frameworks for research evaluation. It is important to have time for extensive consultation and dialogue with the science community to ensure engagement across all stakeholders including researchers, institutions, learned societies, librarians, publishers and funders.

Funding/Finance: The practicalities around financing a complete transition to OA are crucial. The new policy must be fully supported by the funders with a recognition of the real cost of research, which includes the costs of publication. It is essential that OA should support researchers in disseminating their research and in accessing research findings in a sustainable and equitable way that is workable for all researchers and institutions.

Research not funded by cOAlition S: Not all research activity is sponsored by cOAlition S funders. There are many examples of research funded by charities, industry or by universities themselves. There is concern that the additional publication costs for this research will have to be borne by universities (and hence departments). OA policies must not restrict researchers from being able to disseminate this research via the most appropriate publication.

Potential implications for Learned Societies: Many learned societies publish important journals for their communities, disciplines or for specific research fields. Full compliance with Plan S may result in

some learned society publishers becoming unsustainable. Learned societies have a broader role beyond dissemination of knowledge, for example supporting their community with conferences, grants, networking activities, resources for teaching and so on. Surpluses generated by learned society publishers are reinvested to this end – a reduction in income could seriously undermine this activity and impact the community it supports.

About the Heads of Chemistry UK

The Heads of Chemistry UK is an independent body representing the interests of departments engaged in chemical education, scholarship and research in universities and similar institutions throughout the United Kingdom and Ireland. It seeks to further the interests of the chemical sciences in higher education in the broadest sense and is a key stakeholder group in higher education. Its membership currently consists of 72 Heads of UK and Irish University chemistry departments.