

Equity in OA
Workshop Report commissioned by

Open Access Scholarly Publishing
Association (OASPA)



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Equity in OA Workshop 2: Report

This second workshop in the Equity in OA series took place on 28 March 2023, with publishers, librarians, funders, and other stakeholders. Participants came from a wide range of countries: Austria, Bangladesh, Canada, Germany, Hong Kong, Kenya, Mozambique, Netherlands, Panamá, Portugal, South Africa, Switzerland, Ukraine, United Kingdom, and the United States.

Participants built on the [first workshop](#) in which participants discussed why equity is important, current challenges to global equity, examples of good practice, and priorities for increasing equity in OA.

In the second workshop we explored ways to increase equity in two categories of OA models: those where transactions are per-article or where prices are based on article volume, and those where there are no author fees and prices are de-coupled from article numbers. We also explored ways to reassure researchers around the world that OA publishing is as credible as other forms of publishing.

Publisher participants were reminded not to share any information that was private or in any way commercially sensitive. We also asked publishing participants not to explain what their organizations are doing at present, nor what their organizations might/could contemplate doing in future. The purpose of the workshop was instead to brainstorm potential ideas for increasing equity, and to identify any barriers or challenges that would need to be overcome.

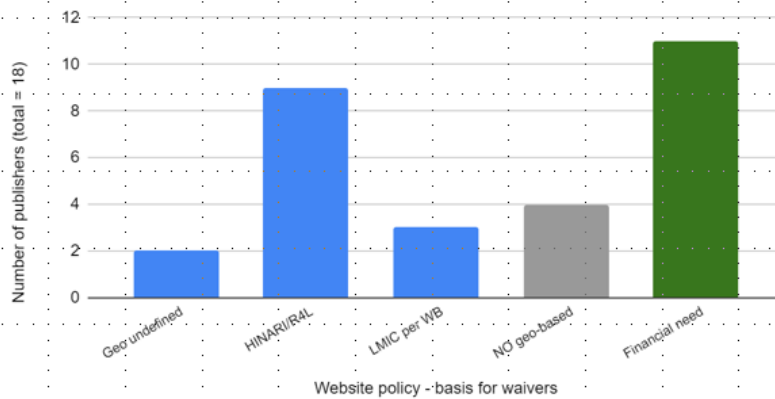
OA models where prices are based on the volume of articles

We began by asking participants how can equity be improved in OA models where prices are based on the volume of articles? Examples include APCs (along with discounts and waivers), Capped Read & Publish agreements, Publish & Read agreements, and Pure Publish agreements.

Some participants in the first workshop had identified these OA models as inherently inequitable and a fundamental barrier for inclusion and participation to researchers in less wealthy countries and to unfunded researchers around the globe. Waivers and discounts, often used to make these approaches fairer, had triggered significant concerns because they were seen as a form of charity which was viewed as intrinsically condescending and undermining of solidarity in the global research community.

Participants in workshop 2 discussed ways to increase equity in these models. As background to the discussion Malavika Legge (OASPA) shared anonymized research from October 2022 on the policies and practices of 18 publishers. She shared this slide:

Triggers for considering / granting waivers across 18 publishers per websites



14 of 18 publishers have some form of geographically geared waiver policies but practice is disparate. Publishers in the grey bar have a policy against using countries/geography as a basis for triggering waivers. They all additionally fall into the green bar where the policy is to grant discretionary waivers based on lack of funding.

Figure 1 contains abbreviations including Low- & Middle-Income Countries (LMIC), World Bank (WB) and refers to Research4Life (<https://www.research4life.org/>)

She found that APC waivers fell into two types: waivers based on the location of the researcher and waivers based on financial need wherever the author is located. She discovered that sometimes eligibility checks are in place and authors are required to provide information at submission to support their request for a waiver. For example, there were in some cases a requirement to provide a letter signed by the author’s head of department to verify need.

Automated workflows

Workflows could be made more automated and author experiences improved, for waivers and also for eligibility checks for Read & Publish agreements. Shared author workflows across publishers could improve author experiences.

Shared vocabulary

If authors encountered shared vocabulary across publishers this could also improve clarity and author experiences. A role of OASPA could be in defining clear, understandable terminology that different publishers could use.

Purchasing power parity

In this approach prices are differentiated globally to reflect differences in currencies and economy. cOAlition S and partner organizations are preparing to commission some work in this area.

There was thoughtful discussion of this approach:

- In principle this is a helpful way to improve equity.
- This approach is already used in academic publishing.
- When used in a transparent way (e.g. [Research4Life](https://www.research4life.org/)) it can be seen as equitable by a wide array of stakeholders.

- Individual organizations deploy a similar approach but in a way that is not transparent and open for assessment by other stakeholders.
- Transparency is important for making PPP approaches equitable.
- There is tension between differentiated pricing and calls for open and transparent cost-based pricing. Would it really be seen as acceptable for publishers to charge different authors different amounts when the cost of publishing their articles was roughly the same?
- Some guidance about how to make PPP work well in practice would be helpful.
- Pilot projects on ‘pay what you can’ or ‘pay it forward’ models could be helpful.
- There is a risk with PPP that everyone would be expected to pay something. In reality, some researchers/institutions would still not be able to pay anything at all.
- Gradual movement from full discounts/waivers to deeply discounted payments is essential, it is a complex change, and it takes time to transition economies, mindsets, and systems.
- Publishers might find it helpful to have flexibility to use PPP in some parts of the world and not others.
- There was also some push back to this suggestion, and a call for discussion and agreement between stakeholders to develop open, transparent, and mutually agreeable flexible approaches.
- The move to equity is a process and no one stakeholder should be able to unilaterally impose a system that suits only, or primarily, themselves.
- Shared data is needed so that all actors involved in scholarly publishing can discuss acceptable ways forward and agree immediate, mid-term, and long-term steps.
- The way forward should be informed by many perspectives because, in a world full of inequality, that are many different dimensions to improving equity.

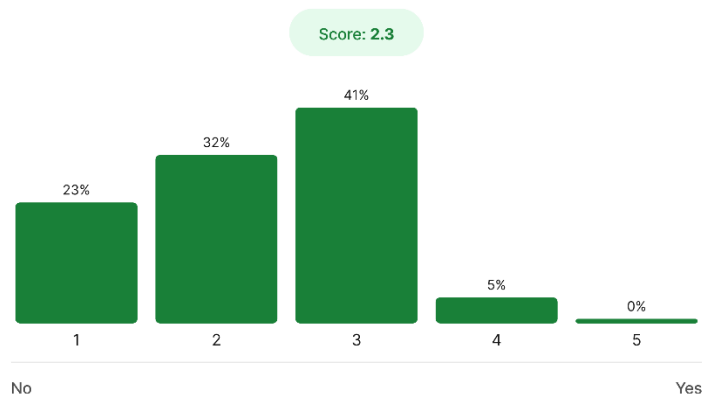
At the end of this part of the workshop, a participant noted that researchers don’t find most of the models based on per-article invoices to authors either affordable or sustainable. Variation in practice between publishers using such OA models – for example with the discount levels and process for waivers – is problematic for researchers. Another participant eloquently reiterated the view that all of the ideas that emerged in the discussion are good short-term options but they are sticking plasters over the old broken system, and this is not an ideal system.

OA models where prices are *not* based on volume

We next asked participants how can equity be improved in OA models where prices are *not* based on volume? Examples include Diamond OA, centrally funded hosting platforms (e.g., Redalyc & SciELO), and Subscribe to Open. Generally, these models do not involve researchers contributing to the cost of publishing. None of these models is free, and publishing costs are covered through grants, institutional contributions, national programs, and/or subsidies of various kinds.

On a scale of one to five (with 1 being no and 5 being yes) participants were asked if equity is the key challenge with these models.

☆ Is equity the key challenge with models not based on article volume?
Rating Poll 22 votes 22 participants



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In thoughtful discussion it emerged that participants generally perceived fewer equity challenges *for researchers* with models that are free from volume-based pricing and/or per-article charges. Once in place these models could free stakeholders up to address other equity issues such as representation on editorial boards and in peer review.

Some participants perceived more equity challenges *for smaller independent publishers* with these models relating to risk, scale, and sustainability. Some smaller publishers were unsure how to begin to move to these models as they would face challenges accessing funding and would need to invest additional resources to write grants. Grant funding might be secured for only two or three years, and this was not viewed to be sustainable. It was unclear how a smaller publisher using these models would ever be able to increase their revenue enough to grow or launch new journals in their disciplines. Smaller publishers without financial reserves could face more risk as losing even a single subscriber in a Subscribe to Open model could leave them struggling to support their journal.

Diamond journals and their hosting platforms also face challenges in terms of securing funding, capacity building, and multi-stakeholder engagement. It was noted that regional platforms do not always receive the recognition and trust they warrant because they are not indexed and therefore discoverable. This is sometimes because they proactively disseminate research outputs in languages other than English and are supportive of authors who are non-native English speakers.

Language was mentioned as a separate equity issue in many parts of the world, whatever the publishing model used. There were calls for stakeholders to discuss how we can create a global research environment that is more supportive of languages other than English. Inclusive language policies, for example [this one from the South African Journal of Science](#), can be helpful.

How to improve the credibility of Open Access

A strong concern that had emerged in the first Equity in OA workshop is that OA models are not always recognized as being high-quality and trustworthy. How might this be addressed?

It was noted that quite a lot of work is already underway to address this challenge:

- Publishers of all kinds who are focused on research integrity, are transparent about their practices, and openly admit to challenges where they exist and take steps to address them are credible publishers.
- OASPA is well positioned to identify and champion good practice. [OASPA's membership criteria and code of conduct](#) are useful standard setting instruments but there was a feeling from some that the time is right for OASPA to review and potentially tighten up.
- [Think, Check, Submit](#) is a helpful shared resource.
- More work is needed to really understand researcher views and any concerns.
- It could be fruitful for publishers to work in partnership with each other and with other stakeholders such as libraries to engage, communicate, and myth-bust.

This OASPA workshop series continues, and further outputs on Equity in OA are expected to be based on forthcoming workshop discussions.

Participants

The following people participated in this workshop. Please note that this does not mean they agree with all the points made in the workshop.

Joanna Ball (DOAJ, UK)
Christiane Barranguet (Elsevier, Netherlands)
Curtis Brundy (Iowa State University, USA)
Colleen Campbell (Max Planck Digital Library, Germany)
Elisha Chiware (CPUT, South Africa)
Lorraine Estelle (Information Power, UK)
Emily Farrell (Taylor & Francis, USA)
Nasra Gathoni (Agha Khan University, Kenya)
Sybille Geisenheyner (ACS, USA)
Phil Hurst (Royal Society, UK)
Haseeb Md. Irfanullah (INASP Advisor & Associate, Bangladesh)
Amanda James (Emory University, USA)
Andrew Joseph (Wits University Press, South Africa)
Susan King (Rockefeller University Press, USA)
Bonnie Ko (JULAC, Hong Kong)
Iryna Kuchma (EIFL, Ukraine)
Stephan Kuster (Frontiers, Switzerland)
Katy Ladbrook (British Geriatric Society, UK)
Malavika Legge (OASPA, UK)
Rebecca McLeod (Harvard Data Science Review, USA)
Wendy Patterson (Beilstein-Institut, Germany)
Gaynor Redvers-Mutton (Portland Press, Biochemical Society, UK)
Eloy Rodrigues (Universidade do Minho, Portugal)
Tony Ross-Hellauer (ORRG / Know Gmbh, Austria)
Peter Roth (MDPI, Switzerland)
Kathryn Sharples (Wiley, USA)
Elaine Stott (Canadian Science Publishing, Canada)
Mathew Willmott (California Digital Library, USA)
Alicia Wise (Information Power, UK)
Robinson Zapata (SENACYT, Panamá)
Horacio Zimba (Universidade Eduardo Mondlane, Mozambique)

About OASPA (<https://oaspa.org/>)

Representing a diverse community of organisations engaged in open scholarship, OASPA works to encourage and enable open access as the predominant model of communication for scholarly outputs. We are committed to our mission of developing and disseminating solutions that advance open access and ensuring a diverse, vibrant, and healthy open access community.



About Information Power (<https://www.informationpower.co.uk/>)

Information Power Ltd is a woman-owned microbusiness based in the UK. We have provided consultancy services in the research information space since 2006. We bring together bespoke teams of consultants with diverse, yet complementary, backgrounds and skills to provide support that spans the spectrum of challenges facing research funders, libraries, and publishers. Together we specialise in engagement on sensitive issues including business strategies and open access policy and practice.



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