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cOAlition S: The Future of Research

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On September 4th of this year, Open Access advocates and scientists around the world woke up to some big news: eleven European national research agencies, the European Commission, and the European Research Council (which represents all the national

scientific organizations of European Union member states) announced that they were launching cOAlition S which will require all research funded by these organizations to be fully Open Access by January 1st 2020.

This is a major coup for Open Access activists and a step in the right direction for worldwide scientific research. Not only will cutting-edge and high quality research papers be easy and free for anyone to access, but this will also help to kick-start innovation among open access publications and encourage more institutions, funders and scientists to be deliberate in choosing an Open Access journals and platforms for their research.

Along with this requirement, the cOAlition S announced ten guiding principles in their Plan S, which I will break down below:

Copyright:

• Authors retain copyright of their publications without restrictions. All publications must be published under an open license, preferably the Creative Commons Attribution Licence CC BY. In all cases, the license applied should fulfill the requirements defined by the Berlin Declaration;

Perhaps one of the most important guiding principles of Open Access, Plan S recognizes that authors should a) retain copyright to their work, b) get credit for the work they do, and c) enable anyone to share, adapt, remix, and build upon their work. You can also read more about CC-BY in this fantastic post by the Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association.

Funding and Organization

• The Funders will ensure jointly the establishment of robust criteria and requirements for the services that compliant high quality Open Access journals and Open Access platforms must provide
• In case such high quality Open Access journals or platforms do not yet exist, the Funders will, in a coordinated way, provide incentives to establish and support them when appropriate; support will also be provided for Open Access infrastructures where necessary;
• The 'hybrid' model of publishing is not compliant with the above principles;

These three points are absolutely crucial to understanding–the Funders are clearly spelling out their support for establishing platforms, services, journals, and incentives for the publication of scientific research. They are also saying that even if these routes of publication do not yet exist that they will support them. What this means is that we may begin to see increasing academic, financial and intellectual support behind OA platforms, journals and monographs. Finally, they are taking the stance that hybrid models are not

compliant with their principals, and that they will support increasing openness. A hybrid model is, for example, when a journal will allow authors to make their article open access–but only for a fee. cOAlition S is taking steps to do away with this hybrid model.

Institutional Support

• Where applicable, Open Access publication fees are covered by the Funders or universities, not by individual researchers; it is acknowledged that all scientists should be able to publish their work • Open Access even if their institutions have limited means; When Open Access publication fees are applied, their funding is standardised and capped (across Europe);
• The Funders will ask universities, research organisations, and libraries to align their policies and strategies, notably to ensure transparency;
• The importance of open archives and repositories for hosting research outputs is acknowledged because of their long-term archiving function and their potential for editorial innovation;

These four bullet points show that the Funders are bringing real heavyweight institutional support to the forefront of the agenda. The first point especially, that the Funders or author universities will cover the cost of publication fees is momentous for researchers. As covered in great detail by Nature and Paywall: The Movie, the fees charged to authors who want to make their articles Open Access can be burdensome. Additionally, the policy of standardizing Open Access fees will help to bring down costs across disciplines in Europe.

It is notable that cOAlition S gives high praise to archives, libraries and repositories. As demonstrated by our own experience at IU, institutional repositories like IU ScholarWorks and IU Scholarworks Open are great ways to distribute Open Access research as they allow access by an international community of learners to research and information.

The Plan S goal is that all journal and other non-book scholarly work should be Open Access by 1 January 2020–and they that they will monitor compliance and sanction non-compliance. You can read more about cOAlition S, the member organizations, and their plans here.

Plan S is an exciting Open Access breakthrough that promises a more accessible and transparent future for research.

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