Webinar - Funding Open Access after the Transformation – Q&A

This document contains responses to those (anonymised) questions there was not time to respond to fully live during the webinar.

Panelists: Ashley Farley (AF), Katharina Rieck (KR), Ross Mounce (RM), Faranah Osman (FO)

Chair: Jeroen Sondervan (JS)

Q. Are cOAlition S working with stakeholders on a similar tool to the Journal Checker for OA books/book publishers/venues for publication?

JS: Not at the moment. But we will take it to the expert group.

RM: A good idea. Perhaps this is a service that an organisation like OA.Works might look at doing?

KR: No, not at the moment.

Q. I would like to understand how the data in the Journal Comparison Service is being used. Does it guide authors to some journals over others? Librarians to pursue some transformative agreements over others? What’s the impact of the transparency data?

JS: This is a question which should be addressed at the Expert Group - and more specifically Robert Kiley.

AF: I would say that unfortunately usage is quite low. In order to persuade publishers to provide the data there are quite a few hoops to jump through to access the data. There is a lot of potential and I think the tool is quite cool. We just need more publisher involvement and there is little incentive for us. It’s been several months since I’ve seen an update on usage so I could be missing something. I do not think that this has had an impact on TAs at this point. There is potential and cOAlition S strongly encourages price transparency when negotiating & tracking TAs.

KR: See https://www.coalition-s.org/journal-comparison-service/ : The JCS provides libraries, library consortia, and funders with the ability to quickly compare journal publishing services and fees. It does not guide authors to one or another journal. Members of the research community have called for greater transparency regarding the services publishers provide and the fees they charge. Many publishers are willing to be responsive to this need, but there is no standardised or secure way for publishers to share this information with their customers.

Q. I’m from Brazil. It’s been a difficult road for developing countries to create their own base of researchers and become part of the research world as active players. Now, the business model promoted by PlanS (I do not mean the principles promoted by open science in any way, which are pretty good) is having terrible repercussions because it “opens access” to *consumption* of science but effectively *closes* the access to produce science due to unaffordable APCs. Moreover, even society non-profit publishers are struggling to fit into this new business model. We now start to see fees being created that go beyond APCs. Publishing is becoming more of a Wall Street business profit machine, with hidden fees in every step of the way, instead of a functioning system to disseminate science. How do funders in Europe see their role in leading the world towards open science without harming equity and access to doing science from those who cannot “pay to play” in the APC world inadvertently created by PlanS?

AF: APCs existed well before Plan S. The "high impact" journals have an exclusionary past for LMIC researchers, both from a business model perspective and the publishing model. For many journals/publishers, it has always been about the money. I can see why funders want to remain business model agnostic - we see good and bad players on each side of for or non-profit. I think APCs & Plan S have been successful in truly highlighting the issues and bad practices in traditional publishing. Publishing has always been very expensive; it's just libraries that have mainly borne the cost. With APCs, publishers like Springer Nature have felt more confident to put the 12K price out there publicly. Now funders & researchers have the data to make more informed decisions. Researchers have
the power to change where they decide to publish and funders can do a better job of lifting up better publishing options.

**RM:** I don't perceive that Plan S 1.0 made any preference as to how open access is achieved. They were happy with routes which do not involve payment of an APC, including 'diamond' and 'green'. See: [https://www.coalition-s.org/guidance-on-the-implementation-of-plan-s/](https://www.coalition-s.org/guidance-on-the-implementation-of-plan-s/)

**Q.** For Katharina - Your funding for open access publication can a non-Austria Journal apply for funding?

**KR:** Only Austrian journals can apply for the journal funding.

**Q.** How does NRF ensure that Research Data related to publications made open is also made openly available?

**FO:** The NRF does not prescribe to research institutions and we do not take ownership of any research outputs that emanate from NRF funding. We do however require that funding recipients confirm that they have a data management plan that conforms to their institutional policies given that their institutions are ultimately the owners of the outputs.

**Q.** Can we define international and is finance the only barrier to Africans getting published?

**JS:** I think we don't need to go into the definition of 'international', but maybe Faranah can say something about other challenges besides funding?

**FO:** The cost of APCs is by far the most significant barrier to the compliance with Open Access, and I say compliance, as I believe that most African countries have seen the value and embrace the philosophy of open access and open science as far as possible. However, while African researchers are not always able to publish in mainstream journals, they do still share information and knowledge through community engagement which is the African way. There is just no recognition in the formal sense in terms of citations etc. but the value and impact is no less real and tangible.

**RM:** In the context of open access and journals, I agree that the word 'international' deserves some inspection and criticism. All open access journals can in theory be 'international' / global in terms of their readership. It is true that some journals appear to have authorship patterns that are non-diverse in terms of institutional affiliations. Finance is certainly not the only barrier that researchers in (the continent of) Africa face - language barriers can also be significant.

**Q.** What Faranah had said so far is the major problem we face in Africa, especially Nigeria where I come from. Is there any global body that can help in funding Journal from Africa on the Diamond open access model?

**FO:** I noted that someone posted this in the chat. I unfortunately missed the name. "Soon we will announce diamond OA journals programme for Africa. The project is funded by Wellcome. Check our website for the announcement. www.eifl.net"

**RM:** See this poster for more information about the brand new Wellcome funded scheme: "Collaboration for sustainable open access publishing in Africa" - [https://www.scienceeurope.org/media/3mspzyb/2023-diamond-oa-conf-poster-oa-publishing-africa.pdf](https://www.scienceeurope.org/media/3mspzyb/2023-diamond-oa-conf-poster-oa-publishing-africa.pdf)

**Q.** Do you already see the impact of the Nelson memo on your expenditure? You mentioned institutions supporting TAs as a way to rely less on the research funder picking the APC tab but "national OA policies" can also help?
AF: I don't think we've seen the impact of the Nelson Memo yet (but I am excited for it). What I do think we are seeing is that privileged grantees have more resources to fund OA when we say we won't pay for it. They are the ones with larger & varied grant funding sources and are working at institutions with TAs. I also don't think we focus enough on how publishers are controlling who pays. Some might not have nefarious intentions, but it often is not left up to the author or funder to decide. I often see that we receive payment requests with co-funding from say the Wellcome Trust or NIH and I can't help but think "but why are we getting the invoice". Sometimes I think it's just because BMGF starts with a "B" & is higher on the list. We definitely pay for articles that I think should have been paid under a TA. There are enough payment discussions between institutions and funders - so in the end the big commercial publishers win.

Q. Do any of the funders distinguish between paying for OA in commercial versus not-for-profit journals? And are any likely to encourage researchers to publish in not-for-profit journals?

AF: We don't currently and this is something that I'm constantly struggling with. I can name great for-profit publishers that we partner with like F1000 (now under Informa) and I can name suspect not-for-profit journals like ACS. I would like to think we can maybe use "mission driven" instead and focus on their actions and transparency versus their tax status. I do think that funders will have to make more of a recommendation moving forward as being "business model neutral" is not working.

RM: The trouble is that some journals run by some notionally not-for-profit organisations like the American Chemical Society are not any better in terms of price gouging behaviour than journals operated by for-profit organisations. There is not a simple good/bad binary at play here, it is complex.

KR: We do not differentiate between the funding of publications in journals of for-profit and non-profit publishers.

Q. Wondering why you don't feel that waivers work in pursuit of equity?

AF: Many of the unfunded authors tell us that they have been denied by the journal. It's often felt like a handout or charity if it's not done automatically. No one should have to declare a need for financial support to be able to publish and have their work widely available. I personally couldn't afford a 1k apc to publish something.


Q. Can Journals apply for funding with BM Gates Foundation to cater for authors who cannot afford the APC or only researchers can apply for Gates funding grants?

AF: No - not at this time. Funds are only available for Gates funded authors.

Q. To Ashley - why doesn't the Gates Foundation mandate use of its open platform and not pay APCs to other publishers?

AF: I struggle with this - I would be more than happy to do this but do worry a bit with biblio diversity. I think the platform would need to be run by a non-profit first. Our program staff worry that grantee/partners wouldn't want to work with us as publishing on the platform means you can't publish elsewhere and they want career advancement.
Q. Would the funders agree that some publishers are probably spending more energy on getting access to funder monies to support APCs rather than effecting any sort of transformation to OA?

AF: 100000%. The new ACS ADC is a great example. A whole weird route that affects approx. 200 some articles. I'm also not kidding when I say that trying to pay APCs to most publishers is a nightmare job. I see so much waste that could be used to make the system better for everyone.

RM: Yes. Library money, given in the form of 'subscriptions' is then used by publishers to support anti open access lobbying, and further development of paywall technology (e.g., the SpringerNature 'SharedIt' porous paywall), and pointless litigation in various countries e.g., the lawsuit against SciHub in India. What a waste of money.

Q. How does Arcadia make this present more well known?

AF: I think all funders should be more invested in highlighting non-traditional publishing routes - it's too easy to slip into using the same journals as examples.

RM: There are two meanings to the word 'present'. One significant gift Arcadia has given recently is to help MIT Press set up an endowment, ringfenced in support of MIT's open access publishing activities. This has been made public here: https://mitpress.mit.edu/the-mit-press-receives-10-million-endowment-gift-for-open-access-to-knowledge/ . If one assumes the other meaning of present - that diamond open access journals & repositories are present today (and in some instances have existed for decades) and are flourishing and providing excellent service to their communities, well... I think we all need to do a better job of talking about them and explaining why they are superior. I tried to do this in the OASPA webinar with my slide of logos of fee-free places that I think deserve more recognition and are doing a great job (this was of course woefully insufficient - I would need an hour or more to talk through each and every one of them). We should talk more with people about e.g. the Journal of Open Source Software (JOSS) and the European Journal of Taxonomy (EJT) to help people understand why these journals are better, 'healthier', more inclusive, more equitable, more rigorous, and are less financially wasteful. There is a degree of ignorance still out there in the world about open access -- many people are focusing on the worst examples of open access venues e.g. €9,500 APCs charged for relatively little value add. What would happen if we actually turned our attention to the best examples, and learned how to spread best practice more effectively to other communities? Bringing it back to the top my response, I think things like the MIT Press shift+OPEN initiative will help demonstrate that change to a more equitable system is possible, even for communities that are currently 'stuck' with a paywalled/hybrid journal venue: https://mitpress.mit.edu/shiftopen/

Q. Possibly a niche question, but perhaps others might have similar concerns: are there any funding sources or programs for journals that already publish diamond open access?

In particular, I work as an editor for an independently published diamond open access web-only humanities journal. We don't collect fees from anyone (authors, readers, libraries, or conference attendees), and instead get funding from (scholar) board members and their institutions — but that's a bit precarious.

RM: In Canada they have "Aid to Scholarly Journals" grants. This seems like a good model to me: https://www. sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/funding-financement/programs-programmes/scholarly_journals-revues_savantes-eng.aspx In the UK there is the Open Access Community Framework (OACF) https://beta.jisc.ac.uk/news/all/first-successful-projects-selected-for-funding-through-new-open-access-communit y-framework . It would be great if U.S. federal funders thought about instituting similar schemes.

Q. Many not-for-profit society publishers use the surplus from their publishing programs to fund (or partially fund) other activities. With the drive toward transparency in Gold OA APCs, these societies are concerned that people will look at the difference between income and costs, then group the society with highly profitable commercial publishers. Do (any of) you believe that it's relevant how publishers use their surplus? Do you have
advice for societies that need to not only cover their publishing costs, but also ensure other society activities remain sustainable?

**AF:** I think it is very relevant. Libraries for a long time haven’t wanted to use their collection budgets to cover conferences or other society activities. I don’t see a lot of innovation happening in surplus. I think all of these activities need to be examined more closely. I would recommend that societies look at leveraging open source infrastructure. You can look at their 1990 forms to see how they spend and how much the top execs make.

**RM:** I think societies should talk about this with real librarians. There are other sources of revenue available to societies e.g. surplus from conference meetings AND society membership fees AND bequeaths AND advertising... et cetera. Some societies have historically been a bit naughty in feeling that it is acceptable to charge much higher than it costs to run the journal and to spend that excess on other non-publishing society activities. Librarians want to only pay for publishing-related activities.

Q. In physics, there’s always been a strong presence of open and free repositories, especially the arXiv, since the 90s at least. Most publishers used to be nonprofit societies and let their authors post their version-of-record papers on their personal webpages. The open access movement has strengthened commercial publishers in the last decade. Why not fund public repositories instead?

**AF.** There is a lot of funding of public repositories. It’s researcher behavior that needs to change. We could fund public repositories all we want, but if researchers still publish with the big commercial publishers and continue to ignore other options because they don’t meet career advancement needs, nothing will ever change. I also think that those publishers/societies realized with me how much money could really be made. How many societies stopped running their own journals & transfered operations to the big commercial publishers?

**FO:** This is a good question. As long as the global research enterprise remains focused on commercial publishers and the performance metrics we have become so used to using as a proxy of productivity and quality, we will remain in a cycle of trying to keep up with the costs being it subscriptions or APCs. The research system needs to start looking holistically at Open Science where open access is a critical component of the taxonomy which also includes, open peer review which brings in responsible research assessment and the consideration of alternate metrics etc.

**RM:** Yes, institutions should reallocate money away from STM journal subscriptions (where it is clearly being wasted supporting 40% profit margins) to well governed, not-for-profit repositories & preprint servers - upon which communities can perform peer review eg overlay journals. The COAR Notify initiative is doing good work to standardise this across many different repositories and peer-review communities. See [https://www.coar-repositories.org/notify/](https://www.coar-repositories.org/notify/)

Q. Do funders track and report on their funded projects in terms of compliance with their mandates especially open data? We are really struggling with some disciplines (Humanities and Social Sciences) in terms of compliance with funder mandates. These disciplines don’t want to share data and they lay claims that there is no research data.

**AF:** Yes, we partner with OA.Works who has been building up amazing capability to track these elements. I would be happy to talk more about this [ashley.farley@gatesfoundation.org](mailto:ashley.farley@gatesfoundation.org)

**RM:** I think there’s a lot of educational work still to be done in some HSS disciplines to help researchers understand what their data is, how it can be shared, and where it can be shared. People can’t do it if they genuinely don’t know how to.

**KR:** Yes, we track whether project output (publications and data) comply with our open access policy. See [https://www.fwf.ac.at/en/funding/steps-to-your-fwf-project/further-information/final-project-reports](https://www.fwf.ac.at/en/funding/steps-to-your-fwf-project/further-information/final-project-reports)
Q. What kind of transparency do you think should be there for diamond journals? Is it important to know who is funding a journal? That seems like a potential conflict of interest kind of concern.

JS: I would say it is important to know where the supporting money is coming from. And when transparent about this any Col can be addressed in the open. And researchers can decide for themselves if they think it’s problematic when a journal is influenced by a certain (funding) organisation. The non-transparency of for-profit players is also leading to lots of conflict of interest I would argue.

AF: I think knowing funding sources is important. I wouldn’t say that this leads to a conflict of interest. We’ve funded Gates Open Research since 2016 & play no part editorially (although it is only research outputs that we funded).

RM: Should there be financial transparency? Absolutely. If we take a simple definition of diamond eg no fees for authors or readers, then according to DOAJ, Elsevier operates at least 50 diamond OA journals. I want to know what Elsevier is charging institutions for this service - it is extremely unclear for Elsevier’s diamond journals. At the other end of the scale, SciPost offers superb financial transparency and deserves congratulations for this: https://scipost.org/finances/ With full workflow transparency, as put into practice at eg eLife and Journal of Open Source Software you see all the reviewer and editorial comments. Under such a model with full workflow transparency, I don’t think it matters so much _who_ is providing the funding - any alleged conflict of interest going on would be seen and evidenced. All of this request for transparency should not just be directed at diamond OA journals. All journals should have financial transparency, not just diamond OA journals.

KR: I agree with the other panelists, that the transparency of the funding sources is very important.

Q. Thank you for the great presentations. Do you think Plan S is enough representative for funder global wise? What are they doing to be inclusive? Where are authors in this discussions?

JS: The current coalition has a great potential, but compared to the global situation is still small. In the recently proposed vision and principles authors are now being consulted. Everyone is invited to take the survey in order to address the needs of researchers in the most optimal way.

AF: No, I think Plan S is quite limited and has struggled listening to and engaging with global partners. There are cultural norms that are difficult to bridge. I think it’s a struggle (although one that needs to be gone through) for the Global North to step out of their current circle of influence to help make that circle much larger. Funders can also only control so much - I find it interesting that many feel authors are never heard from when we hear from author constantly and we can look at current publishing trends. I often ask how someone defines a “funder” as often funders are very academic adjacent - they came from academia and carry that culture with them.

FO: I most definitely do not believe Plan S is inclusive and, in my experience, there is no real effort made to be inclusive. It’s really disappointing. However, the work to drive Global Equity in OA by MPDL is very positive.

KR: cOAlition S comprises funders coming from Australia, South Africa, Europe and the United States, and is open to any funding institution that wants to join.

In some cases, funders have not joined cOAlition S, but there is policy alignment on key issues (zero embargo, rights retention). With the new proposal cOAlition S invites everyone (researchers, institutions etc.) to participate in the discussion regarding scholarly communication in the 21st century.