

The Future of Open Access: What's the Plan (S)?

Title slide

Welcome to this webinar on Plan S – something many people have heard of but not a lot of people understand. The implementation of the Plan will have a huge impact on the future of Open Access publishing over the next few years and by extension an impact on those working with researchers.

Topics

There are four key topics to cover in this webinar which will help you get to grips with the basics of Plan S. We'll explore:

- What Plan S actually is and why it's important
- How it aims to improve the future of Open Access publication
- Some of the concerns that have already been raised
- And how the Plan could be implemented

What is Plan S?

Plan S was launched in September 2018 as an initiative of a group known as cOAlition S. This is a consortium of European research funders which includes big names such as UK Research and Innovation, the European Research Council and several national research funders who have come together under the coordination of Science Europe who have a combined research budget of approximately £15 billion.

Aim of Plan S

The aim of Plan S is clear: making the results of research funded by participating groups publically accessible upon publication. This is something Open Access advocates have been calling for for over a decade now and although more research is being made available the system as a whole has been slow to change. Plan S seeks to take things a step further by providing steps that researchers and publishers can take and giving a clear deadline of January 2020.

At this point it's important to note that although the wording talks about scientific publications, the group have confirmed that all disciplines of research are included under this. They view all research as rigorous and objective in scope and are just using the term scientific to make things easier.

Principles of Plan S

As well as the overall aim the Plan is made up of ten key principles. The first thing to stress is that despite its name, Plan S is not itself a policy but a statement of principles which those involved in scholarly publishing should adopt. Exactly how these principles translate into policy will be up to the individual research funders and publishers and we'll talk more about implementation later in the webinar.

Most of the principles in the Plan are not new and just formalise some aspects of Open Access which have been around for a long time. Many funders already have guidelines in place about Open Access and what they are and are not prepared to pay for. Most Open Access fees are covered as part of a funding application or from a central university fund and it's rare (although not unheard of) to find researchers paying for them out of their own pocket. The last few years have also seen a rise in audits and sanctions for non-compliance as the Open Access message has become well known and funders have sought to protect their investments. Although these principles don't really contribute anything new it's good to have them written down as part of a formal plan.

There are also aspects of the Plan which will be really helpful for those working to administer Open Access in their institutions. Standardising and capping OA fees will hopefully make the whole process less complicated for both researchers and librarians alike, as will organisations working to align their policies. The Open Access compliance message varies across institutions which doesn't help the promotion of the benefits of making work open and usually just ends up confusing people more. Anything which offers clarification can only be a positive!

Some of the principles have proved more controversial. We will talk about this in more detail later in the webinar but the four highlighted have already caused grumbles from those involved in the sector. People are concerned about the licences that will be attached to their materials, the perceived loss of academic freedom that comes with the move towards hybrid Open Access being non-compliant and the implication that funders are having to create new platforms which will conform to Plan S. In addition to this the deadline given for these changes is January 1st 2020 – not that far away at the time of recording! Although the principles acknowledge that making the transition to OA monographs may take longer, that still doesn't leave much time for all other formats and this is not a small task.

Currently 13 institutions and funders have signed up to Plan S including SPARC Europe, OpenAire, the Swiss National Science Foundation and LIBER.

How can Plan S help the future of Open Access?

Let's take another look at the positive impact of the Plan and some of the problems it's hoping to solve.

What problems could Plan S solve?

- Plan S can help to **advance research**. Although the concept of Open Access to research publications has been discussed for more than a decade, progress towards adoption has been slow with lots of frustrations along the way. Those involved in the Plan argue that the whole point of research is to use previous work to create new knowledge and that we can't do that if the research is behind a paywall – a standard argument in favour of Open Access. Plan S will help advance this goal by forcing those involved in publishing research to take some type of action.
- **[Working together]** It can also bring those involved in securing Open Access more in line with each other. There is an increased appetite for change from lots of institutions but there's little point in all of them working separately towards the same goal. Plan S can give them something to unite behind and hopes to combine the power of these institutions into a force for real change. Funders are also realising that they have a great deal of financial power and can use this to negotiate. Remember that the funders already involved have research funds of about £15 billion which gives them some leverage!
- Linked to these points is the desire to **change the system**. The traditional model of fees and subscriptions could be justified when most research outputs were printed in physical journals and they needed a lot of work to produce but you could argue that this isn't true anymore. Open Access makes sharing research easier than ever before for less money so why are we still spending money on a second system to do the same thing? Plan S is aiming to avoid pushing for one particular Open system over another and encourages innovation but it does want to create an Open system – something the traditional move towards Open Access doesn't seem to have achieved.
- Finally, Plan S could help the move towards **open and responsible research**. It encourages the sharing of not only final papers and books but also research data and preprints – anything that can help to advance knowledge and create more for people to build upon – which helps it fit in with the open research agenda. Plan S also supports DORA – the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment – which advocates that research is assessed on its own merits not which journal it's published in. A move from this group of research funders supporting openness helps to send a strong message to the wider community about responsible research.

Concerns around Plan S

On the flip side there have been some concerns around Plan S and even though it's still relatively new there has already been an open letter of protest signed up more than 600 researchers against the Plan. But what are they objecting to? To answer this question we need to think back to the ten principles we looked at earlier.

Lack of academic freedom

Perhaps the most pressing concern is the perceived impact that Plan S will have on the researcher's choice to publish in the title which will be the best fit for their work. This choice has long been an integral part of academic freedom and people are concerned that by making hybrid Open Access non-compliant this will be changed.

As a reminder hybrid journals are those which publish most of their content behind a paywall but will make selected articles available Open Access for a fee. This article processing charge can run into many thousands of pounds and institutions still have to pay a subscription to access the rest of the content. Researchers are worried that this restriction, together with the encouragement to set up new OA platforms, will mean that they are being forced to publish in certain titles which do not have the same levels of prestige as others.

It's important to remember that move towards hybrid non-compliance is not without precedent and that lots of institutions have stopped paying OA fees for hybrid journals but at the same time it's important to recognise that this could be a potential problem. Researchers will still be able to publish in these titles, at least during a transition period if they have some type of offsetting agreement or something known as a transformative agreement. Under this a publisher would publically commit to becoming completely Open Access after a defined period – something that would be carefully monitored to ensure compliance.

It remains to be seen exactly what type of impact these agreements will have but researchers should be assured that they still have plenty of choice about where to publish their work. The current green OA route allows authors to publish anywhere they like along with depositing their accepted manuscript in a repository. Plan S takes this a step further by mandating a zero month embargo but it's not radically different from what's happening now.

In the meantime this feeds into bigger arguments about the nature of the academic reward system and how researchers are rewarded not just for their research but for where it is published – something which links to the responsible research movement discussed earlier.

Impact on collaboration

Another concern is that signing up to Plan S might make it hard for researchers within Europe and subject to these rules to work with those from outside. Of course this adds to certain other large Europe related events to make an uncomfortable situation for some researchers! This is especially true with researchers who are aiming to publish in titles which would be non-compliant under Plan S and how this would impact their choice of collaborators.

This is a legitimate concern and one at the moment that has no easy answers. The hope is that it won't have a negative impact as publishers around the globe move towards Open Access as the norm but realistically we're some way off this.

Predatory publisher problems

Predatory publishers are those which charge authors a high fee to publish their work but without providing any of the review or editing services that this would normally cover. These publishers will essentially publish anything for a fee even if it's completely made up. The danger for researchers is that as well as losing money they'll find their research sitting alongside rubbish and this does nothing for their academic reputation.

There are concerns that these publishers will be looking to take advantage of any confusion around Plan S and what the rules are to try and get researchers to publish their work. This might well happen and researchers (and those who support them) need to be prepared to educate themselves on what a quality publication looks like. Luckily there are lots of tools available to help people do this like the Think. Check. Submit. Website which guides researchers through a checklist of what to look for. The basic rule is that if something seems too good to be true then it probably is and any potential offer to publish should be scrutinised to make sure it's legitimate.

Concerns around copyright

Concerns around copyright and attaching open licences to work are often raised by researchers who are worried about their work being stolen or misinterpreted. A major principle of Plan S is that instead of transferring copyright in their work on publication they instead retain it and add an open licence which enables a publisher to publish it.

Under this system researchers who have published their work need to seek permission to reuse it in any other teaching or work, much as they would any item with third party copyright. This is a complication few understand and leads to a lot of unintentional copyright infringement and it is also at odds with the principle of making research outputs as accessible and reusable as possible.

Adding an open licence is also a problem for some disciplines, especially those in the arts and humanities. A CC-BY licence, the most permissive of the Creative Commons licences, allows anyone to use, adapt or otherwise repurpose the work as long as they credit the author of the original. This is not so much of a problem in the sciences where answers are very black and white but in disciplines where conclusions are based on individual interpretations of documents and circumstances it can be more of a concern and researchers are worried about words being put in their mouths by others. One solution would be to add a clause to the licence which specified no-derivatives but this would conflict with the CC-BY mandated by Plan S.

This move towards open licences is something that has been coming for a long time and not new to Plan S. The UK Scholarly Communication Licence also includes a retention of copyright as a fundamental principle as do statements such as the University of California Declaration of Rights and Principles to Transform Scholarly Communication. Whilst the concerns around permissive licences are understandable, researchers should remember that there are some failsafe's built into Creative Commons licences (which are legally binding licences). Authors can choose to have their name removed completely from work and the inclusion of CC-BY does not in any way imply endorsement of any adaptation. There is still some way to go to convince everyone of the benefits but in terms of ensuring that

research is shared and built upon, these benefits far outweigh the problems. Authors will be able to publish their work whilst still retaining the freedom to use it in future works, others will be able to build on the work and help to further knowledge – which is hopefully the reason many researchers got involved in the research process in the first place!

Impact on the global south

The final major concern is the potential impact of the Plan on the global south – areas such as Africa, Latin America and parts of Asia – which have been classed as developing economies. These countries have booming research sectors which do a lot of valuable work, often operating in constrained circumstances. On the face of it Plan S should help them as it will open up access to more materials without them having to pay expensive subscription prices. On the flip side of this there are concerns that the Plan will lead to what is known as a pay to publish system where article processing charges replace subscription charges which puts the financial burden on the author rather than the reader. This means that those in the global south might find themselves in a situation where they can read content in world leading journals but they can't afford to publish their own work in them.

Supporters of Plan S argue that for many the benefits of access to research outweigh issues about publication but cOAlition S have also made it clear that they don't want anyone to be unable to publish because they don't have the funds. What they're less clear on is how they intend to do this but most people have assumed that there will be some sort of waiver system. There have also been deals done in European countries to create something known as publish and read agreements. Under these agreements institutions or consortia pay an upfront fee to publishers which covers the cost of making all of their researcher's outputs openly available with the aim that eventually everything will be available. Of course these plans also have their critics – they're closed deals for a start so other institutions don't know what the specifics are and can't tell if they're getting an equally good deal. Other people say that these deals are still giving preference to the few who can afford them, which obviously doesn't include the global south. This is again something where we might just have to wait and see whilst people figure out how Plan S can be adapted to different systems outside Europe.

Practical Plan S

The million dollar question is *how* will Plan S be implemented? The final response is currently being finalised after an open call for feedback from the wider Open Access community but realistically the deadline of 1st January 2020 is not that far away and people need to start making plans. As of recording there are three main options for implementation.

Implementation options:

- **Option 1:** is the ideal option for many Plan S supporters. Outputs will be Open Access from publication with no waiting period – something usually known as born Open Access. This should be done via journals or other platforms which only publish materials Open Access and all outputs should have a CC-BY licence which is the most open of the CC licences. This option obviously makes things immediately accessible but usually comes with some type of cost which not everyone can afford and as discussed before there are problems attaching CC-BY licences for some researchers.
- **Option 2:** is another option that people are probably familiar with as it's like the green Open Access model. Under this option the version of record (the final published version) or the authors accepted manuscript (the final draft which has been approved by the publisher) should be made available via a compliant repository under a CC-BY license. The major issue with this option is the compliant repository. Guidance will be released about what makes a platform compliant and funders can offer incentives to create new ones but some people are concerned that this might restrict the choice of sharing outlets.
- **Option 3:** is a stop gap measure which allows outputs to be published in hybrid journals where they have something known as a transformative agreement which is the time-bound commitment to transition to full Open Access. This is just being offered as a temporary measure and options 1 and 2 are definitely the preferred choices.

It's important to remember that Plan S is not a policy – it's a set of principles which funders are adopting. Although implementation is scheduled for 2020, realistically the degree to which this happens will vary. Funders have said that the timescales are different for everyone and although some might start enforcing things straight away others might only apply the principles to grants issued after 1st January 2020 and there might be some wiggle room in existing projects.

Individual institutions can sign up to support Plan S by issuing a supporting statement and so far 25 have done this.

What next for Plan S?

So what's next for Plan S? The consultation on feedback is now closed so that's being collated and no doubt there will be changes as a result. There will also be a transition period when it's officially launched in 2020 and there will be a lot of people keeping a close eye on progress. There is a formal review of the Plan scheduled for 2023 which aims to assess progress and the impact so far and a lot of this is likely to focus on the transformative agreements as these are only intended to be a temporary measure.

The most important thing library staff can do about Plan S is try to keep up to date with what's happening and try to provide information to their research community. There are a lot of scare stories out there about the Plan and it's potential impact but hopefully this webinar has offered some balanced arguments which you can pass on to researchers who have questions.