

Webinar - The impact of Plan S: a discussion on findings so far– Q&A

Panelists: Ashley Farley, Pablo de Castro, Wolfgang Benedikt Schmal and chaired by Iryna Kuchma

Q. Was the quantitative analysis done with Bayesian methods? Do you have a causal model or DAG defined?

WBS: Thank you for the question. It's a frequentist difference-in-differences regression design

Q. Wouldn't it have made more sense to choose comparison groups from the same countries?

PC: Good point, thanks for the Q. There are three main reasons why the choice of funders for the CIE study was the one Ben showed:

1. Taking different funders from the same few countries would inevitably have narrowed the scope of a study that was asked to "assess the impact Plan S has had on the global scholarly communication ecosystem".
2. The inclusion of "faraway funders" (geographical considerations having played a key role in funder selection) in the analysis has allowed direct conversations to be occasionally held with them as part of the qualitative analysis section of the project.
3. Given the fact that the quantitative analysis relies on subsets of publication funded by specific research funders, it was considered that the data is bound to be far more reliable the larger and more "nationwide" the chosen funder is. This is based on the assumption that large funders are able to clearly indicate to their funded researchers how to adequately acknowledge the sources of funding in their manuscripts. The smaller the funder (and they would need to be smaller considering the 'big ones' are already in cOAlition S) the larger the inaccuracy in the data sample would be likely to be

Q. How could you explain the "stubborn" 10-15% of papers that get published in closed access, despite the funders' mandate?

AF: There could be many reasons: lack of awareness of OA policy, publishers not allowing for any OA options, funding not declared, incorrect funding declared, publisher using incorrect license or incorrectly paywalling the article

PC: Some detailed data analysis would be required in order to properly answer this, but from many years' experience working at the coalface of OA implementation, this is largely due to Open Access not being available as an option (not even Green Open Access) at some publishing venues and to sheer lack of awareness and/or carelessness by funded researchers. There's also the quality aspect for the publications: if there was an easy way to filter the best publications stemming from a given funded project, the percentage of OA availability for those would be closer to 99% rather than 85-90%.

Q. Could you discuss how libraries / institutions can push back on the costs (APC, TAs) publishers are charging, in the context of profit margins in big publishing houses.

AF: There is a lot of great work happening in libraries globally. SPARC has a library big deal cancelation tracker. More libraries who lead with aligning their budget spend with their values and missions will lead to meaningful change. Demanding more transparency & transformation in publisher agreements is critical. Some libraries have created metrics to evaluate vendor partnerships to ensure alignment with values.

PC: There was a preliminary recommendation in Pablo's slides for institutions to "diversify funding workflows" (meaning exploring other non-APC models) and to "develop coordinated frameworks to assess the value of TAs". Some of these lines have already seen some progress, notably via the ESAC Reference Guide to Transformative

Agreements and the cOAlition S-convened "Beyond article-based charges" WG, but plenty of work remains to be done here, particularly in the area of "highlighting best practices" also mentioned in the recommendations.

Q. Why include 'Bronze' for analyzing OA when it's neither always permanently open (sometimes it is, sometimes it becomes closed again), nor true OA (because it does not have a license allowing re-use)? It probably also doesn't give any insight relevant to funder actions.

PC: Also a good point, thanks. It's mostly a methodological reason: it's been done because it was possible to do it on the basis of the data we analysed and because it helps clarify the evolution of "closed access" for funded publications, which bronze OA would not really be a part of. But the points raised are valid.

Q. The Jisc review of transitional agreements showed that 25% of UK research articles were from institutions/authors who weren't Jisc members, these were things like pharma companies, independent researchers and hospital staff. How can Plan S help make this sizable chunk of national research output open access?

AF: More institutions and funders would need to adopt Plan S aligned policies

PC: It may be early days yet to expect Plan S to solve this issue on its own, but there is a trend for policy instruments like transformative agreements to gradually extend their coverage to an increasing number of organisations (pharma companies may be stretching it a bit too far though). The responsibility to work this out would be for university consortia, and it would involve figuring out the OA business models they want to implement and what organisations to involve in them. Plan S provides the basic principles that should guide these developments but does not necessarily descend into such detail (individual funders might however)

Q. Emma - how does your new OA model differ from current Read and Publish agreements from other Publishers?

EW: There is no 'read' and 'publish' fee within our model. The 'base/membership' fee that all participating institutions pay is a fee to cover the holistic publishing services we provide including quality assurance, hosting content, discoverability etc. The 'publishing' add-on component is also not tied directly to article numbers (as in traditional R&P) agreements but split across the consortium and discounted depending on the level of participation in the deal (the community aspect of the model).

Q. Emma - fascinated by your new OA proposition in Germany. Have you modelled or explored how that might operate with any customer groups in LMICs?

EW: We are starting to explore what this might mean for our customers in LMICs and understanding these customers' needs and requirements is a focus for 2024. The new models have elements that we anticipate working for different customer groups. We will start to test these assumptions with customers in 2024 alongside the modeling work.

Q. I think the majority of APCs are sponsored by government funding. When Donald Trump is becoming US president and if he makes decisions not to support OA. Can we stop his decisions?

AF: I doubt this is a topic at the presidential level. With the OSTP memo it is up to the agencies to decide how to implement the requirements of the Nelson memo. There are routes to achieving immediate open access that do not require APCs.

Q. Emma - Given that China is a core market for the chemical sciences, I would be interested to hear more about the alternative models you will offer to cater for this market's complex needs, if possible. Thank you.

EW: Given the high article output from China in the chemical science and the level of institutional spend, it is likely that models for China will include article payment fees that sit alongside institutional models. As mentioned in the talk, a sustainable transition to OA will require policy and customer support for OA models.

Q. Emma - thank you for describing the Royal Society of Chemistry's approach to OA. In the New Consortium Model (RSC Platinum), could you please explain what the advantage for non-publishing institutions is to be a Member? If I understand correctly, the Member Component applies to them, but all they would be needing is read-access (since they are presumably not publishing). If so, what is the advantage of the agreement for them? Is it purely altruistic, i.e. to support global OA?

EW: Our goal is to move away from the dichotomy of 'read' and 'publish' to a more holistic publishing services model; these terms imply that the value that publishers provide is solely in either granting access to content or publishing content, whereas we offer a plethora of additional value to the academic community including quality assurance, hosting content, preservation, discoverability, etc. The advantage for non-publishing institutions to participate in our model is therefore to remain active players in supporting the scholarly communications landscape; ensuring that the content they are reading is scientifically sound, discoverable, preserved and disseminated.

Q. Libraries were negotiating open access, first via offsetting agreements, then as things evolved, via transformative agreements (which are evolving to open publishing agreements), before the formation of cOAlition S and the publication of the Plan S principles. How does Scidecode propose to assess the impact of cOAlition S as differentiated from the negotiation strategies that institutions and consortia have put in place?

PC: This was addressed in Benedikt's slide describing the foundations for the difference-in-differences method that provides the basis for the Counterfactual Impact Evaluation. The assumption is that the changes observed in the treatment group with regard to the control group are due to the treatment, i.e. to Plan S in this case. Because the CIE analyses funded publications only, it's fair to assume that any impact on OA flavour distribution is mostly a result of the funder Open Access policy (funders also directly cover the costs of APCs and TAs in many "cOAlition S countries"). So while there is indeed a background effect due to the general evolution of the OA landscape, it is embedded in the general trend and will be described in the section devoted to the limitations of the (quantitative) study. This is one of the reasons why there is a complementary qualitative analysis.

Q. Ashley - Bill and Melinda Gates seem to support Plan U (posting papers on preprint servers without peer-review) rather than Plan P (<http://planp.science>) which is preprints + paying communities for peer-review. Wouldn't it be a responsibility of a funder, especially if publications are used as a unit to assess grantees?

AF: While we are still part of cOAlition S I don't think implementing specific named policies is a good idea. We aren't calling the policy changes Plan U while largely aligned. Through the years of Plan S we have seen there is still little awareness of what this means within the research community. This also allows for the flexibility for us to support peer review of preprints instead of paying APCs. The foundation does not use publications as a unit to assess grantees and most funders are changing this practice.

Q. Wolfgang - can you provide a clear summary of the results in one statement? The data in the last figure didn't seem to show significant impact except on increased control value in the hybrid cohort. Overall, did PlanS have an impact or not?

PC: These are still only preliminary results (the final ones will be in the project report and will contain far more funder-specific level of detail) but if you want a broad, simplified summary at this stage it would be like this: Based on the analysis of the period 2018-2023, the main impact of Plan S that the Counterfactual Impact Evaluation reveals is the increase in hybrid OA resulting from the widespread adoption of transformative agreements. This is however just the quantitative assessment; the qualitative one being conducted in parallel shows a far more diverse set of impact areas and hints at future ones we cannot quantitatively measure right now because it's too early yet.

Q. I think the term 'transformative' is a misnomer - as they are not really transformative but they are trying to make a difference in a very complex system and where publishers are coming from legacy ways of working and systems etc ('Read and Publish' is (and always was) a better term)

AF: My thoughts on TAs <https://crln.acrl.org/index.php/crlnews/article/view/25032/32927>

EW: Agree that Read and Publish is a better term and they have made a significant difference. The recent JISC report showed that "transitional" deals in the UK lead to an increase in articles published via an OA route, from a broader range of researchers and that costs were constrained. But for an OA transition other models are needed, hence RSC Platinum.

PC: You are right, "R&P agreements" or "R&P deals" is a far more accurate term. It's hard however to beat the simplicity of "TAs" as a term (which chimes with a certain propensity towards OA lingo within the schol comms domain). You can see TAs also being called "transitional agreements" in some quarters, probably also be a misnomer though this session included an example.

Q. Transformative or any R&P Agreements are cementing the current market shares of (former) paywall publishers, draining library budgets, and completely ignore the fact that there are "transformed" publishers out there which are penalized by the disappearance of general institutional open access funds.

PC: Worth considering the Sep 2023 Scholarly Kitchen post "Reputation and Publication Volume at MDPI and Frontiers" besides Ashley Farley's link

Q. Reiterating this question from Rod Cookson - as it needs an answer from Plan S. I hope it will be in the follow up. "There is a risk that cOAlition S withdrawing support for Transformative Agreements from 2025 onwards will reduce Open Access article output. Likewise, the ending of APC payments on Transformative Journals will also reduce OA publications. How will cOAlition S work to prevent this - very undesirable - reversal of recent upward trends happening?"

Answered by Róbert Kiley of Plan S: cOAlition S gave more than five years notice that financial support for Transformative Arrangements (Read and Publish agreement, Transformative Journals etc) would cease at the end of 2024.

We reaffirmed this position in 2023, making it clear that providing ongoing financial support for these arrangements beyond 2024 would significantly increase the risk that these arrangements will become permanent and perpetuate hybrid Open Access, which cOAlition S has always firmly opposed.

This view is supported by the results of the TJ data, which showed that in 2022, some 68% of all TJs failed to meet that modest OA growth targets and were removed from the programme.

More recently, the Jisc concluded a critical review of TA's (in the UK) and concluded that "it would take at least 70 years for the big five publishers to flip their TA titles to OA".

To help secure a fair and equitable open access landscape – and mindful that Funders' budgets are finite – cOAlition S members will direct their efforts to more innovative and community-led Open Access publishing

initiatives that aim to deliver full and immediate Open Access in a shorter time frame. To incentivise subscription publishers to transition to full and immediate Open Access, we will also encourage the development of Full-OA Publishing Agreements, which support the publication in venues that make all peer-reviewed research articles immediately Open Access.

Q. We are all committed to equity and diversity in terms of access and ability to publish, across discipline, culture, geography. Why should this not apply to a diversity of models across subscription and Open Access?

AF: Agreed. However, a publishing policy or business model can only effect so much within the ecosystem. Also, I would argue that there are many players in this space where equity and diversity are not their top priority.

Q. Since many S2O, Read to Open, etc. strike me as having Diamond as their sustainable end-point, can DOAJ fill a gap in tracking the rise of Diamond?

AF: There have been discussions to include Diamond/S2O - DOAJ need more funding to scale to make this happen.

Q. Is Plan S beneficial for newly established private publishers? if yes, how?

Answered by Rovert Kiley of Plan S: The single goal of Plan S is to ensure that all research is made Open Access, for the benefit of science and society.

As such Plan S is agnostic on whether delivering this goal is beneficial to new (or indeed legacy) publishers; we simply want research to be published OA.

That said, we believe that there is an opportunity for more agile publishers to respond to the growing calls for open access (as seen in the declarations from UNESCO, the European Council G7 etc.) and provide services which meet the needs of the research community.

For example, we see real value in new publishing models, such as the Publish, Review, Curate (PRC) model. We believe this is an opportunity for publishers (and publishing service providers) to provide a suite of services such as manuscript integrity checks (plagiarism, image manipulation, data availability use of AI etc) and managing the peer review process. The provision of such services could be monetised,

This model also provides the prospect for groups, such as learned societies, to assume a new role, focusing on curation. Under this approach, a learned society can highlight the very best research – published as peer reviewed preprints – as it is no longer restricted to considering just those manuscripts which were previously submitted to it for publication. Again, we envisage that curation services will be highly sought after and could be monetised, although care should be taken to make such monetisation equitable for authors and readers.