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An Action Plan for Advancing Diamond Open Access

by Caroline Winter | 6 January 2023 | English, Observations, Observations and Responses | 0 comments



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At a glance:

Title	Action Plan for Diamond Open Access
Creator	Science Europe, cOAlition S, OPERAS, French National Research Agency
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In March 2022, [Science Europe](#), [cOAlition S](#), [Open Scholarly Communication in the European Research Area for Social Sciences and Humanities \(OPERAS\)](#), and the [French National Research Agency](#) announced the release of an [Action Plan for Diamond Open Access](#) (Ancion et al. 2022). This *Action Plan* includes recommendations for supporting and expanding the diamond model of open access (OA). Whereas gold OA refers to publications made openly available to read on journals' websites (often, though not

necessarily, supported by article processing charges or APCs) and green OA refers to publications made free to read through deposit in a repository, diamond OA refers to publications that are free for readers and for authors (see [“What are the Different Types of Open Access”](#) from Open Access Australasia).

The recommendations in the *Action Plan* were informed by the [Open Access Diamond Journals Study](#) (Bosman et al. 2021), which was supported by cOAlition S and Science Europe and conducted by a consortium of 10 organizations.

The study found that diamond OA is used by between 17,000 and 19,000 journals worldwide, representing about 8%–9% of articles in total (Bosman et al. p. 47–48). Diamond OA is especially popular in Eastern Europe and Latin America, and in terms of discipline, more than half of all diamond OA journals are in the humanities and social sciences (p. 48).

Diamond OA journals tend to be small in scale (publishing fewer than 25 articles each year), national in authorship but international in readership, and more multilingual than OA journals supported by article processing charges (APCs) (p. 41–44).

Nearly half (42%) of Diamond OA journals are owned by university presses and other university-owned publishers, another 14% are owned by learned societies, and 8% by other research organizations (p. 79). As the *Action Plan* notes, “Serving a fine-grained variety of generally small-scale, multilingual, and multicultural scholarly communities, these journals and platforms embody the concept of bibliodiversity” (Ancion et al. p. 3).

This emphasis on community ownership has several advantages, including autonomy, continuing traditions (e.g., the “club” model), freedom to innovate, and community governance (Bosman et al. p. 83). However, community ownership also contributes to the operational and technical challenges faced by many diamond OA journals.

The study also found that, in terms of operational challenges, many of these journals lack legal documentation of their status. Other challenges include analyzing and reporting metrics, managing peer review, and indexing and discoverability. Although diamond OA is well aligned with the principles of open scholarship and, more specifically, with the principles of Plan S, many diamond OA journals do not meet the technical specifications it outlines, which include using open licenses, DOIs, and XML or HTML and having preservation policies in place (see [“Plan S and cOAlition S”](#)). In addition, there are many high quality diamond OA journals that are not indexed in the [Directory of Open Access Journals \(DOAJ\)](#) because of technical reasons or capacity limitations (Bosman et al. p. 87).

Many diamond OA journals rely on unpaid labour, and although there are some infrastructures for acknowledging this labour, such as the [Contributor Roles Taxonomy \(CRediT\)](#) and the [Taxonomy of Digital Research Activities in the Humanities \(TaDiRAH\)](#), they are not widely used. Institutional memory is a related challenge, since many journals rely on the work of a few dedicated people who take their knowledge with them when they relocate or retire (Bosman et al. p. 90). Community-led journals also lack the resources of larger publishers, including marketing funds, lower visibility, and reduced bargaining power (p. 35).

In terms of sustainability, although diamond OA journals report relatively low operational expenses, they tend to rely on grant funding, donations, and other contingent funding sources. Many journals lack a clear sense of their financial status, and most either break even (40%) or report financial losses (25%) in a given year (p. 8). Although the diversity of diamond OA journals is in many ways a strength, it also means that finding efficiencies and economies of scale across these journals is challenging. In terms of sustainability, the number of articles published in diamond OA journals rose slowly between 2014 and 2018, then began to decline, in contrast to the stronger and increasing growth seen in APC-based journals over the same period (p. 31).

With the overall aim of increasing the capacity of diamond OA journals, the *Action Plan* offers recommendations related to efficiency, quality standards, capacity building, and sustainability, summarized here:

- Efficiency: align and share infrastructures, operational systems, and other resources while respecting differences across disciplines and research communities
- Quality standards: align existing standards to develop an international Diamond OA publishing framework, as well as a self-assessment tool for journals
- Capacity building: engage and support stakeholders by developing a suite of tools for diamond OA publishing and founding a nonprofit Capacity Centre for Diamond Publishing
- Sustainability: develop frameworks to ensure the recognition and protection of journals' ownership and governance and the financial transparency; ensure that the costs of Diamond OA publishing are distributed and advocate for stronger financial support

The *Action Plan* in the Press

Although the *Action Plan* was not widely covered in the academic or popular press, an article about it in *Research Professional News* notes that “The model [diamond OA] is seen by advocates as a way for academia to retain or regain greater control over scholarly publishing, because many diamond platforms are run by academics or scholarly societies using volunteers and institutional resources” (Bisson 2022).

The *Action Plan* and the INKE Partnership

In a response to the 2021 study called *PKP Enables Diamond Open Access*, John Willinsky and Juan Pablo Alperin distill findings from that study relevant to the Public Knowledge Project (PKP) and its *Open Journal Systems (OJS)* software. Three of its key points are that

- “With 60% of the journals using OJS, PKP has been instrumental in making OA diamond journals a reality.
- No other platform or tool, with the exception of email in some contexts, is as widely used as OJS by OA diamond journals for their operations, especially as they grow in size.
- No other system has contributed as much to supporting the linguistic or geographic diversity of scholarly publishing as OJS.” (p. 3)

The response also points out that OJS enables Plan S compliance, including by defaulting to copyright retention by authors and machine readable licensing (see “*Plan S Update: Rights Retention Strategy*”). OJS also has the necessary technical capabilities to assign DOIs and publish in multiple formats, and it offers a *Guide to Plan S compliance*. In terms of preservation, the *PKP Preservation Network* provides archiving for journals using compatible versions of OJS, and PKP partners with *CLOCKSS*, *DOAJ*, *Keepers Registry*, and *Internet Archive* to help journals using other versions preserve their content. OJS also acts as a common platform to help streamline operations and costs, and its journals can be indexed and harvested.

Alperin also argues in a piece in *Nature* that, although the diamond OA model has been popular and successful in Latin America and the global south for decades, the popularity of APC-based publishing models puts this model at risk. Noting that Latin American researchers feel pressured to publish in prestigious, often APC-based journals based in the global north, Alperin argues that “APCs beget APCs. The more funds that are available to pay them, and the more researchers who have the ability to do so, the more journals will feel pressured to charge them” (2022). He states that diverting funds allocated to APCs into investments in infrastructure to support diamond OA journals would lead to higher quality content, lower operating costs, and higher prestige for those journals.

Coalition Publica, a partnership between INKE partners *Érudit* and PKP released a *statement* in support of

the *Action Plan* in March 2022. Noting that diamond OA journals have received limited resources over the past 20 years, Coalition Publica calls upon funding and other organizations around the world—not just in Europe—to explore solutions to the challenges faced by these journals. Coalition Publica also emphasizes that those solutions must respect the diverse contexts in which these journals operate, recognizing that “Actions that do not directly support the wide-range of institutional, national, and cultural contexts in which Diamond OA journals already operate may end up inadvertently diminishing the most diverse and inclusive form of scholarly publishing that exists today” (2022). Coalition Publica, Érudit, and PKP have all **endorsed** the *Action Plan*.

The *Action Plan* has also been endorsed by **Open Access Australasia**, an INKE partner through the **Canadian–Australian Partnership for Open Scholarship (CAPOS)**.

The *Action Plan* and the Broader Academic Community

As of fall 2022, the *Action Plan* had been endorsed by more than 130 research institutions, journals, libraries and library associations, universities, research councils, funding organizations, and individuals worldwide.

Several endorsing organizations released statements in support of the *Action Plan*, including

- the **Academy of Finland**
- **CESAER**
- **Cybergeo**
- the **Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (German Research Foundation)**
- **Electronic Information for Libraries (EIFL)**
- the **European University Association (EUA)**
- **DOAJ**
- **Harvard Library**
- the **Guild of European Research-Intensive Universities**
- **Helmholtz Open Science**
- the **League of European Research Universities (LERU)**
- the **Leibniz-Informationszentrum Technik und Naturwissenschaften Universitätsbibliothek (TIB)**
- **OpenEdition**
- **ULAKBIM (the Turkish Academic Network and Information Centre)**
- the **Universidade d Coimbra**
- the **Young European Research Universities Network (YERUN)**.

In September 2022, Science Europe hosted the **Diamond Open Access Conference** in Zadar, Croatia, an event that brought together organizations and individuals who endorsed the *Action Plan* to discuss best practices and implementation and to be introduced to the **Developing Institutional Open Access Publishing Models to Advance Scholarly Communication (DIAMAS) project**. The DIAMAS project is led by the Université d’Aix-Marseille and was launched in September 2022, with cOAlition S and Science Europe participating. This three-year, €3 million project involves 23 European organizations and will lead some of the initiatives outlined in the *Action Plan*. **Creating a Robust Accessible Federated Technology for Open Access (CRAFT-OA)**, funded by Horizon Europe, is a sibling project led by the University of Göttingen’s Public Law Foundation, with the goal of consolidating the infrastructures that support diamond OA publishing in Europe.

Kristen Ratan of Educopia’s **Next Generation Library Publishing** project notes that, although there is particularly strong energy behind the OA movement at the moment, in the wake of the **Budapest Open Access Initiative’s 20th anniversary** and its accompanying recommendations, the **UNESCO Recommendation on Open Science**, and the US’s recent **Nelson Memo**, the development of robust, sustainable open infrastructures is necessary to advance OA, and that development will take time (see

“UNESCO’s Recommendation on Open Science” and “The Nelson Memo: Ensuring Free, Immediate, and Equitable Access to Federally Funded Research in the US”). Ratan states that universities and non-profit organizations have a key role to play in developing the open, community-led infrastructures called for in the *Action Plan*, and that consortia will be important in developing and deploying them at scale. May Copsey discusses the role of scholarly societies in supporting diamond OA similarly in a piece reflecting on the study by Bosman et al. in relation to the Royal Society of Chemistry’s journal *Chemical Science*, which flipped to diamond OA in 2015.

Redalyc and AmeliCA, initiatives of the University of the State of Mexico with funding through Arcadia, develop and promote open, collaborative, community-owned infrastructure for diamond OA journal publishing and indexing in Latin America. These projects aim to improve the sustainability and bibliodiversity of scholarly publishing.

In a post for the cOAlition S blog, Martin Paul Eve highlights the issue of preservation addressed in the report and in the *Action Plan* as a key concern for diamond OA journals, but notes that the problem could be solved relatively easily and inexpensively through the establishment of a digital preservation network developed collaboratively by a few funding organizations (“Diamond Mining”).

The *Action Plan* and Open Scholarship

There is widespread consensus that diamond OA is an important component of the scholarly publishing ecosystem. The study by Bosman et al. states, for example, that it “uncovers the full dimension of an important part of the world of scholarly dissemination that is as old as science itself: the scientific community assessing scientific quality and managing scholarly communication on its own” (p. 6). Although a common theme emerging from responses to the *Action Plan* is that supporting diamond OA publishing is important for advancing a robust, sustainable, and equitable open scholarship ecosystem, but that doing so will require investments in technological and human infrastructures.

Another, related theme is that scholarly publishing is at a tipping point, or what Martin Paul Eve describes as a “crossroads”: “We will either, now, succumb to APCs and the research publication ecosystem will become even more stratified that it has been to date, along the lines of those-with APCs vs those without. Or we could embrace a revolution. Most diamond OA journals represent such a revolution in microcosm” (2021).

Given the prevalence of diamond OA journals in the scholarly communication ecosystem and the significance of their publishing model to open scholarship, whether and how the *Action Plan*’s recommendations are implemented could have widespread effects.

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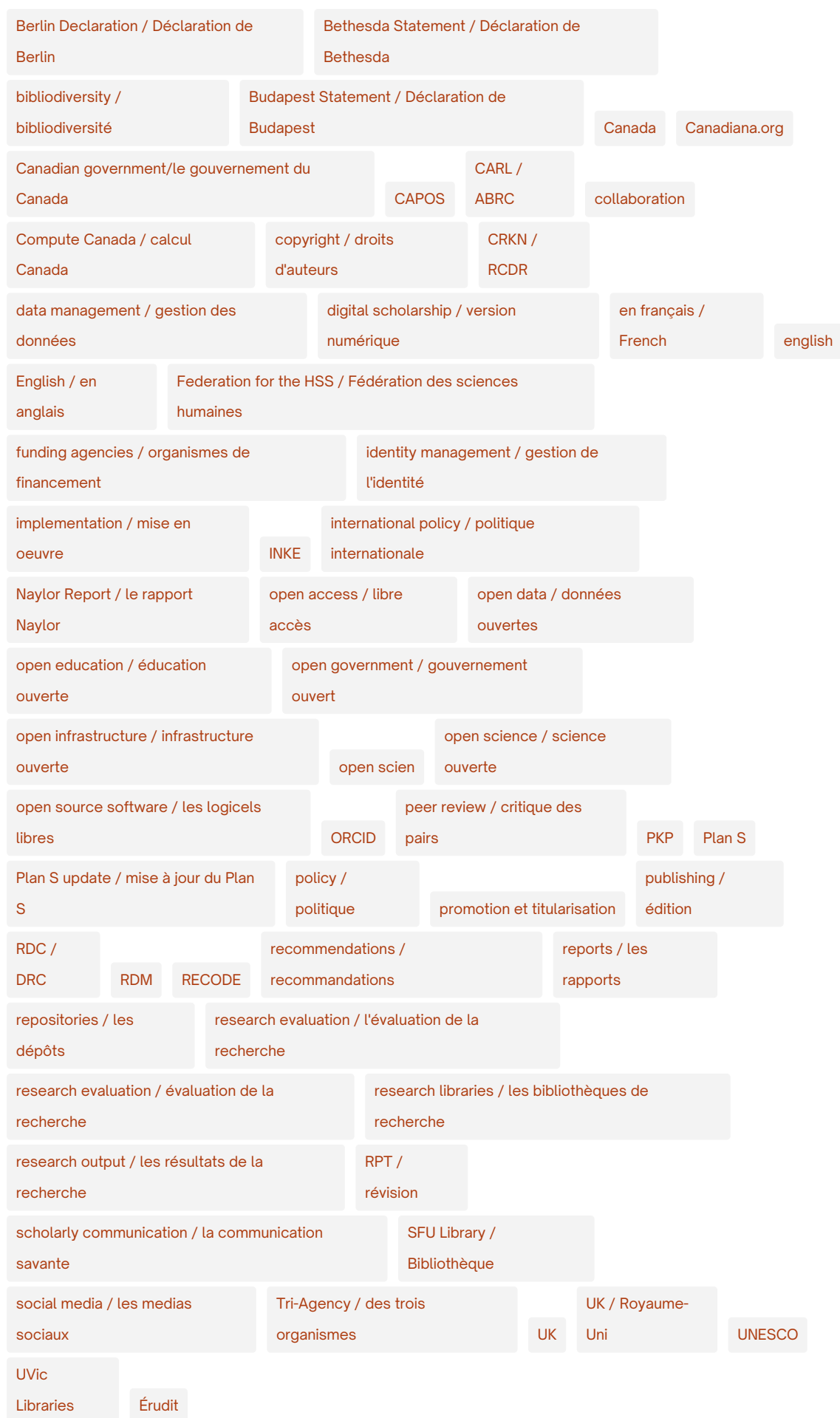
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