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OPEN SCHOLARSHIP POLICY OBSERVATORY



Plan S and cOAlition S

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This post was written by Caroline Winter.

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At a glance:

Title	Plan S and cOAlition S
Creators	Science Europe
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cOAlition S is a group of national research funding agencies that are working together to realize the principles of Plan S, which calls for full and immediate open access to publicly funded research across Europe. The coalition is supported by the European Commission and the European Research Council (ERC) and was announced in September 2018.

Plan S is an initiative of Science Europe, in collaboration with the open access envoy of the European Commission and national funding organizations, and the Scientific Council of the ERC. The Plan includes

10 principles that uphold the notion of universality upon which scientific research—a term meant to include the humanities and social sciences—depends (Schlitz). The 10 principles of Plan S support the following key principle:

“After 1 January 2020 scientific publications on the results from research funded by public grants provided by national and European research councils and funding bodies, must be published in compliant Open Access Journals or on compliant Open Access Platforms” (Schlitz 2018, 3)

In its [statement of support for Plan S and cOAlition S](#), the European Commission argues that “Free access to all scientific publications from publicly funded research is a moral right of citizens,” and calls for collective and immediate support from other research funding agencies (European Commission).

In order to implement Plan S, the cOAlition has established a task force led by John-Arne Røttingen (Research Council of Norway) and David Sweeny (UK Research and Innovation). It is inviting other research funding agencies to join the coalition, which to date includes 13 funding agencies from 12 countries: Austria, Finland, France, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Slovenia, Sweden, and the UK (Science Europe).

The announcement of Plan S and cOAlition S has been covered extensively in European press. The response is generally positive, although criticism of the Plan are voiced by opponents and supporters alike. An article in *Science* offers an overview of the response from various sectors, noting that OA advocates and many researchers are “delighted,” while many publishers have expressed concerns about the impact of the plan on commercial publishers and its potential to limit academic freedom (Enserink 2018).

Negative responses express concern about the challenges publishers will face to meet the 2020 deadline, the effect of the plan on established journals—*Science* and *Nature* specifically—and the Plan’s role in dictating which journals a researcher can publish in (A.B. 2018; Pells 2018a; Pells 2018c). An article in *The Economist* also notes that, with Plan S, “the era of the subscription scientific journal, which began with the publication in 1665 of the Royal Society’s *Philosophical Transactions*, may come to an abrupt end” (A.B. 2018). Other responses concern the impact of the Plan on scholarly societies who rely on subscription fees to subsidize other activities (Pells 2018d) and the possibility of the Plan’s reach extending to the United States (Pells 2018b).

Responses that are neutral or generally positive praise the boldness of the Plan as necessary for prompting real change. The *Times Literary Supplement* voices support for the Plan in an article by Tim Crane (2018) that compares the current academic publishing system to a state bakery that hires cake brokers to make the point that “journal publishing appears little better than a scam.” Crane notes that the academic community must work together to change the status quo and refers to [Timothy Gowers’s piece in the TLS](#) outlining some alternatives to the existing peer review model. Hubbard (2018) similarly calls for an overhaul of the current peer review system but notes the potential of the existing repository infrastructures to mitigate the challenges these widespread changes will pose. David Kernohan (2018), writing for *Wonkhe*, similarly highlights the challenge of the Plan’s call for standardization across European institutions, and characterizes the response from some publishers—including Springer Nature—as “apocalyptic.”

Among the academic community, responses to the announcement have been quite positive, but many express concern about implementation. OA advocates Peter Suber (2018) and Martin Paul Eve (2018) find many strong points in the plan, but both express concerns about how the principles will be implemented. Like Hubbard, Suber (2018) argues that Plan S downplays the importance of OA repositories as a means of implementing widespread change and argues that they are a means of implementing OA faster and on a broader scale than is practical for OA journals.

The Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) praises the plan, noting that its principles are in line with its own preferred mode of OA. SPARC (2018) calls it “ambitious” and, like Suber and Eve, notes that “the implementation details will be critically important.” Representatives for Springer Nature and *Nature* have released statements expressing agreement with the principle of open access while raising concerns about the Plan’s timeline, its effect on the global research community, and its refusal to accept hybrid publishing models (Else 2018; Inchcoombe 2018).

In terms of how the policy will affect Canadian research, Kate Shuttleworth from Simon Fraser University notes that Canada’s three federal research funding agencies have in place an open access policy that is similar, at least in principle, to that of Plan S (2018). The major difference between Plan S and the **Tri-Agency Open Access Policy on Publications** is that the Policy allows a 12-month embargo period rather than immediate open access, has no restrictions over hybrid journals, and is arguably less easily enforceable (Shuttleworth 2018).

Plan S mandates that European research funding agencies take meaningful action to make research open access, with cOAlition S in place to see ensure this mandate is achieved. Although commercial publishers have voiced concerns about the effect of the Plan on scholarly publishing as a whole and some OA advocates have raised concerns about how it will be implemented, overall the response to the plan is fairly positive, with many seeing it as a necessary step in the movement toward truly open access scholarship.

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