

Plan S: A Perspective from Canadian Journals

Introduction

cOAlition S is proposing to institute an initiative called Plan S with the aim of making publicly funded research freely accessible to all users. The Canadian Association of Learned Journals (CALJ-ACRS) sees this as a laudable goal, and indeed, for a number of years, CALJ-ACRS has supported the principle of open access (OA).¹ The promotion of open access, however, must be pursued within the following contexts:

- (1) respect for the freedom of academics to select the most appropriate venue for the publication of their research;
- (2) global research and scholarly publishing realities and needs;
- (3) the long-term viability of scholarly communication and the varying needs of diverse research communities.

Like many UK-based academic journals and societies, including *Past and Present* edited by Alexandra Walsham and Matthew Hilton,² we welcome initiatives that facilitate the dissemination of scholarship to the widest possible audience and view the aim of Plan S as laudable. However, we find the Plan to be highly problematic, posing a number of significant threats and having possible unintended consequences to the scholarly research and communication ecosystem. CALJ-ACRS wishes to support the questioning of the various impacts of forced open access pointed out by *Past and Present* and other UK-based academic journals in History, and to express additional concerns.

CALJ-ACRS Concerns on Plan S

Academic Freedom

Demanding that researchers publish in journals that adhere to a “Gold OA” model takes away the freedom academics have to choose the venue best suited for their research. This freedom of choice is not only an extension of basic academic freedom but also a benefit to the research audience. Demanding that the researcher first considers whether the publication outlet is open access immediately reduces the researcher’s prospective outlets as less than a third of journals published globally are open access.³

¹ <https://www.calj-acrs.ca/open-access-policy>

² http://pastandpresent.org.uk/open-letter-from-history-journal-editors-in-response-to-consultation-on-plan-s/?fbclid=IwAR1RHzxKMJoiRQoWhi25B60tLbtzVNvej_1VQvdN3XWJSnv53S5a2advK0A

³ https://www.stm-assoc.org/2018_10_04_STM_Report_2018.pdf

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Global Research Realities and Needs

Many Canadian journals are read and cited globally, and also receive submissions from global research communities. The demand that research funded by cOAlition S members be published in open access journals is based on the assumption that either journals or researchers will have access to sufficient funds to cover the labour costs of journal publishing. Because the level of funding that is available for research differs from region to region, three consequences detrimental for the research community are likely to emerge:

- (1) unfunded research might not be published if journals are forced to rely on APCs for operations;
- (2) funded research can only be published in a limited number of journals whose performance in reaching relevant readers may be weaker than non-qualifying journals; and
- (3) the combination of the previous two consequences may lead to a divide in the global research community, with researchers based in some regions publishing in one group of journals, while researchers from other regions are restricted to publishing in a different group of journals.

We believe that the value of peer-reviewed research is much too important to risk such a divide in the global scientific community.

Long-Term Viability of Scholarly Journals

Scholarly journals serve an important function in the research ecosystem. The creativity and the work involved in editing and publishing a scholarly journal is severely underappreciated. The primary role of legitimate journals, especially those in which the research content is in the control of academics, is to build knowledge-generating communities. Many scholarly journals in the social sciences and humanities (SSH) are published by not-for-profit scholarly societies, small and medium sized not-for-profit publishers, and university presses, and many such journals serve small niche communities with high-quality research and peer review standards.

For many of these scholarly journals, the recommended Plan S model of Gold OA with APCs is not a viable option. In Canada and typically in many European countries, 75% or more of SSH articles published are not derived from funded research and SSH research grants are often too small to support Article Processing Charges (APCs). In STM fields, Canada Discovery Grants, issued by the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, average C\$35,000. Ready access to APC funds is lacking and, when asked directly, many scientists have claimed that APCs cannot work for them.⁴

While CALJ-ACRS recognizes that cOAlition S is not mandating a model with APCs, it is the only model that is specifically included in Plan S, and no other viable model is available at this time, despite the many years of experimentation by publishers, libraries, and other stakeholders. Because of the significant negative implications Plan S might have on the research community, together with the insufficient funding available to support APCs, it is important to allow scholarly communities to pursue the business models that work for them. Keeping business models that work for individual journals and publishers is necessary to ensure ongoing knowledge development through scholarly communication with cost-effective and efficient journal publishing underwriting the necessary professional labour involved.

⁴ Canadian Science Publishing surveys conducted in 2014 and 2017 of Canadian scientists and its authors.

In order to promote open access, the deposit of an Author's Accepted Manuscript (AAM) in an open access repository is an effective way to ensure that publicly funded research is publicly accessible. As noted in the open letter by the Coalition of Open Access Repositories,⁵ many libraries and research institutions have made significant investments into the development of open access repositories, and CALJ-ACRS is supportive of this approach to permit compliance with Plan S.

In addition, the hybrid model should not be overlooked by Plan S funders as a valid way to support OA. Given that only a small percentage of published research is funded in many research fields, the hybrid model continues to support OA without posing a threat to the full ecosystem. The revenue earned from OA in hybrid journals in Canada is trivial. Until which time that a viable open access model exists for all journals, the hybrid model will continue to allow researchers to publish in the journal(s) that makes sense for them.

Conclusion

The marginalization of author- or producer-controlled vanity publishing by consumers over the long term is an indication of the value of external control in publishing. In the end, OA runs the risk of shifting control of the publishing process out of the hands of the researchers and journal editors and towards external and often, for-profit commercial entities. Secondly, the curtailment of freedom of enterprise in the production and dissemination of knowledge is, or should be, a frightening prospect in democratic societies.

About CALJ-ACRS

The Canadian Association of Learned Journals / L'Association canadienne des revues savantes is a not-for-profit association with the mission to represent, develop and support the academic community of Canadian learned journals in disseminating original research and scholarly information, and to promote intellectual culture in Canada and internationally. We represent 130 member journals in a variety of research fields with a concentration in the social sciences and humanities (SSH), and through interaction with various stakeholders of the research community, CALJ works to strengthen both individual journals and the journal community as a whole.

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⁵ <https://www.coar-repositories.org/files/COAR-response-to-Plan-S-Sept-2018.pdf>