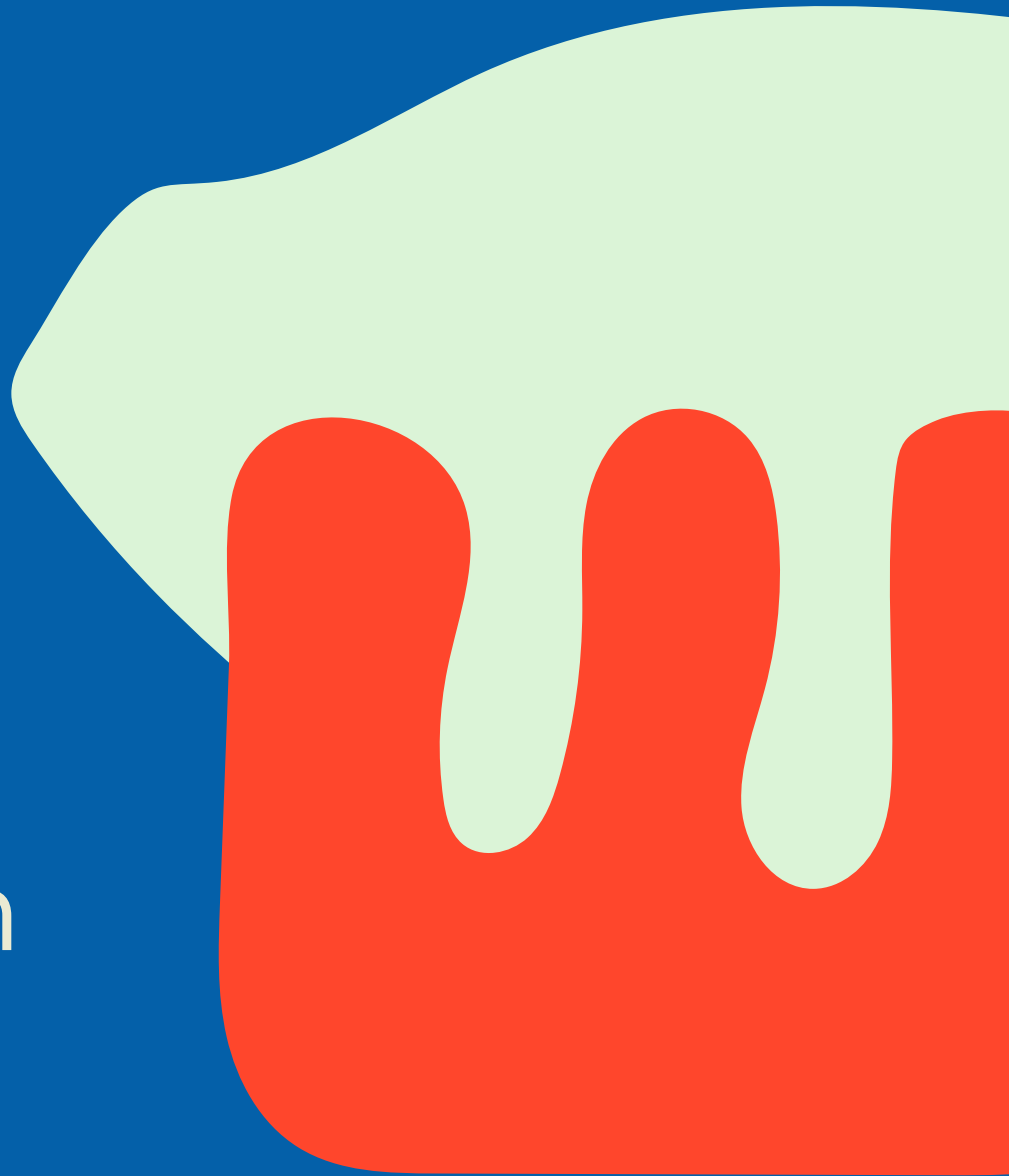


Open-Access Principles and Policies

Research
note

FEBRUARY 2021



Since 2015, Canada's three research councils — the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC), and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) — have adhered to a Tri-Agency Open Access Policy on Publications. The results of subsidized research must be freely accessible within a maximum of 12 months, whether through a scientific journal or an institutional repository. The Fonds de recherche du Québec (FRQ) followed suit in 2019. Meanwhile, in Europe, granting bodies united as cOAlition S and launched an initiative in Fall 2018, Plan S, that requires that all research be immediately published open access since January 2021.

What are the basic principles behind open access and how do these various policies attempt to follow them?

Research note prepared by the Research team at Consortium Érudit, with the contribution of Marie Léger-St-Jean, independent researcher, under the supervision of Vincent Larivière, professor at the Université de Montréal.

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What is open access?

Long associated with poorer-quality and even predatory journals, open access first appeared outside traditional publishing. Today, it is increasingly adopted throughout the world under the effect of public policies or the desire to implement knowledge transfer principles. While there is broad agreement over the general objective, approaches to reaching it diverge.

The open-access definition in the glossary at the end of the *Politique de diffusion en libre accès des Fonds de recherche du Québec* is extracted from the Budapest Open Access Initiative and presents open access thus:

[The] free availability [of literature] on the public internet, permitting any users to read, download, copy, distribute, print, search, or link to the full texts of these articles, crawl them for indexing, pass them as data to software, or use them for any other lawful purpose, without financial, legal, or technical barriers other than those inseparable from gaining access to the internet itself. The only constraint on reproduction and distribution, and the only role for copyright in this domain, should be to give authors control over the integrity of their work and the right to be properly acknowledged and cited.¹

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The Budapest Open Access Initiative puts forth two strategies to achieve open access: self-archiving and open-access journals. They form respectively the Green and Gold Roads.

¹ «Budapest Open Access Initiative», February 14, 2002.
budapestopenaccessinitiative.org/read



GREEN ROAD, GOLD ROAD... AND DIAMOND ROAD

The Green and Gold Roads are the terms designating the two main paths to open access. Other open-access variations include Bronze Open Access, describing work published online without a clearly identifiable license, and Black Open Access, describing work published on pirate sites like SciHub.

The Green Road, self-archiving, entails depositing a digital copy of one's own research results in a freely accessible repository. Most universities now have institutional repositories (Papyrus at the Université de Montréal, Space at the University of Toronto, etc.). There are also disciplinary repositories, such as arXiv, used in the fields of physics, mathematics, and computer science since 1991; and SocArXiv, used in the social sciences.

The Gold Road entails publishing in a free and immediate open-access journal. Open access publication funding models vary; the author-pays model, in which a journal charges authors with a fee for publication, is the most common. Diamond Open Access is when an open-access journal does not impose article processing charges (APCs). Diamond Open Access funding can be collective, based on partnerships, or ensured through a freemium model in which added-value services are charged.

OPEN ACCESS ACCORDING TO THE DOAJ

Launched in 2003 as a direct continuation of the Budapest Open Access Initiative, the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) is a non-profit that indexes journals meeting its open-access criteria. Its Seal of Approval for Open Access Journals is recognized worldwide by key stakeholder groups. Criteria for this seal pertain to, among other things, the URL of the articles and the structure of the journal's website; its editorial policy; its Creative Commons licence; and information published about its editorial board.²

The DOAJ lists 13,000 open-access journals. A recent study shows that only 28% of Canadian journals that consider themselves open access are currently indexed in the DOAJ. This rate could go up in the coming years as the DOAJ makes efforts to accelerate its indexation of non-Anglophone open-access journals.

² For a detailed analysis of DOAJ criteria, see table 10, p. 15-16, in Couture, Marc. "Canadian OA Scholarly Journals: An Exhaustive Survey." TÉLUQ, February 6, 2020. <https://r-libre.telug.ca/106/1/MCouture-OA-Canada-report.pdf>

Where are we after twenty years of open access?

Depending on the calculation method and the criteria, between 28% and 47% of research worldwide was published open access in 2018.³ Despite this considerable advance of open access, the financial burden that research commercialization places on libraries has not lightened. On the contrary, as a 2017 UK study revealed, costs to libraries have increased due to the growing number of publications and APCs, as well as rising subscription fees.⁴ Plan S aims to be, among other things, a solution to this problem in the implementation of open access.

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³ Piwowar, Heather, Jason Priem, Vincent Larivière, Juan Pablo Alperin, Lisa Matthias, Bree Norlander, Ashley Farley, Jevin West, and Stefanie Haustein. "The State of OA: A Large-Scale Analysis of the Prevalence and Impact of Open Access Articles." PeerJ 6 (February 13, 2018): e4375. <https://doi.org/10.7717/peerj.4375>

⁴ Earney, Liam. "National Licence Negotiations Advancing the Open Access Transition – A View from the UK." Insights 31 (April 24, 2018): 11. <https://doi.org/10.1629/uksg.412>

PLAN S

In September 2018, under the leadership of Science Europe and with the support of the European Commission and the European Research Council, the “cOAlition S” consortium launched Plan S under the slogan “Making full and immediate Open Access a reality.”⁵ It aims to transform scientific publishing to make research immediately, freely available. Plan S seeks to achieve this goal by requiring it of all publications stemming from publicly funded research.

When Plan S was launched, it was hoping that funding bodies worldwide would join. In February 2020, cOAlition S members came from 14 European countries — including the Agence nationale de la recherche in France and the Luxembourg National Research Fund —, South Africa, Zambia, and Jordan, and brought together five international organizations, including the World Health Organization and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

The international agenda of Plan S and the very Euro-centric composition of cOAlition S led Argentinian researchers Dominique Babini (international coordinator at the Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales or CLACSO) and Humberto Debat (researcher at the Instituto nacional de tecnología agropecuaria) to write that:

*The discussion over Plan S as a global proposal for accelerating Open Access has been pivotal to expose how unbalanced the debates are being mostly circumscribed on the Global North between a condensed elite group involved in the scholarly publishing market.*⁶

Despite this shortcoming, the initiative has accelerated thinking about open access. Indeed, given that research and scientific collaborations are often international, the impact of Plan S can be felt around the world, including in countries whose funding bodies have not officially endorsed it.

⁵ Science Europe. “Open Access.” Accessed February 26, 2020. scienceeurope.org/our-priorities/open-access/

⁶ Debat, Humberto, and Dominique Babini. “Plan S in Latin America: A Precautionary Note,” July 11, 2019. PeerJ Preprints. doi.org/10.7287/peerj.preprints.27834v2

OPEN ACCESS ACCORDING TO PLAN S

Plan S defines open access as publication...

- in open-access journals;
- on open-access platforms; or
- through repositories, so long as the publications are immediately accessible (without any embargo period).

The ten fundamental principles of Plan S include the use of open licences so that authors retain their copyright, with a preference for the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) licence [see [copyright management](#)]. It casts aside so-called “hybrid journals” that collect revenue from both subscription fees and APCs. It also calls for the evaluation of research based on merit instead of publication venue prestige [see [scholarly impact metrics](#)].

Plan S has been criticized for favouring the author-pays model, which transforms the barrier to reading (subscription fee) into a barrier to publication (APCs). The plan has also faced criticism for requiring researchers to implement technically complex criteria on too short a timeline. Initially, researchers had little more than a year to adapt to Plan S, although the deadline has been extended to January 2021.⁷

A study conducted using DOAJ-indexed journal metadata concluded that “a large majority of open access journals are not Plan S-compliant.” The study observes

[I]t is small publishers in the humanities and social sciences (HSS) not charging article processing charges (APCs) that will face the largest challenge with becoming compliant. Plan S needs to give special considerations to smaller publishers and/or non-APC based journals.⁸

In response to these challenges, cOAlition S has recently launched a study on Diamond Open Access.⁹

⁷ Plan S. “Rationale for the Revisions Made to the Plan S Principles and Implementation Guidance,” May 31, 2019. coalition-s.org/rationale-for-the-revisions/

⁸ Frantsvåg, Jan Erik, and Tormod Eismann Strømme. “Few Open Access Journals Are Compliant with Plan S.” *Publications* 7, no. 2 (June 2019): 26. doi.org/10.3390/publications7020026

⁹ cOAlition S. “Exploring Collaborative Non-Commercial Publishing Models for Open Access: Apply to Perform a Study.” *Plan S* (blog), March 27, 2020. coalition-s.org/exploring-collaborative-non-commercial-publishing-models-for-open-access/

TOWARDS FAIR OPEN ACCESS IN QUÉBEC AND CANADA?

In Québec and Canada, the funding bodies and research councils have not officially supported Plan S. The relevant federal and provincial policies encourage open access while accepting 12-month embargoes, in contrast with the funding bodies that have endorsed Plan S. However, the Canadian government's recently unveiled Roadmap for Open Science indicates that open access is a priority area for public policy. The recommendations stipulate, among other things, that: "[f]ederal departments and agencies should make federal science articles openly accessible by January 2022."¹⁰ Even if this major support to open access is for the moment focused on the government's own scientific research, and only at the federal level, it will push all Canadian university researchers in the right direction in the coming years.

It remains to be seen whether the recommendations will be implemented in a way that levels the playing field of scholarly communications and benefits the independent non-commercial journals that form the most energetic portion of the scholarly publication ecosystem in this country.

BEST PRACTICES FOR JOURNALS

Design an open-access policy for your journal that takes into account the requirements of your authors' funders (they will be more restrictive in France and in Luxembourg than in Canada)

Display your policy on your website where it can easily be found

Look into the DOAJ's indexation criteria:
<https://doaj.org/publishers>

For more information, consult the Canadian Association of Learned Journals's Position Paper on Journal Open Access Policies
calj-acrs.ca/open-access-policy

¹⁰ Office of the Chief Science Advisor of Canada. "Roadmap for Open Science." Ottawa: Government of Canada, February 2020. science.gc.ca/eic/site/063.nsf/eng/h_97992.html