

January 31st, the [Young Academy of Groningen](#) hosted a university-broad Research Lunch to discuss the latest version of Plan S. This lunch made it clear that there is widespread support for Open Access initiatives among early career researchers. It also became clear, however, that support for Open Access can, but need not, entail unequivocal enthusiasm about Plan S.

This document provides an overview of some of the main questions and concerns raised during the meeting, and offers some constructive suggestions as to how researchers, funders and publishers might join forces to open up access to academic publications.

1. *Is there anything **unclear** that has not been addressed by the guidance document?*

- a. There is a widespread concern among early career researchers and other university staff that the implementation of Plan S will negatively impact career opportunities. Although the guidance document promises that [‘cOAlition S will also promote a culture that ensures that young scholars have opportunities to excel and advance their careers’](#), no concrete measures are identified. The intention to put significant restraints on the number of publication venues available to a researcher does not sit easily with the intention to enable researchers to ‘excel and advance’ in a highly competitive environment with a relatively high number of fixed-term contracts. We recommend that the cOAlition outline concrete plans to further the kind of culture described in the guidance document.
- b. The guidance document cites the Berlin Declaration as motivation for requiring the strictest CC BY license as opposed to, for instance, the non-commercial CC BY-NC. However, the exact motivation for this requirement, which will make fewer journals compliant, remains unclear.
- c. It is unclear which titles will be compliant by 2020. In order for researchers to be able to prepare and, after 2020, comply, it is crucial that an online database of compliant journals be made available on the shortest possible terms. As the coalition is in charge of negotiations of the transformative agreements under which some of the currently hybrid journals may become Plan S

compliant, it seems that only the coalition is suitably placed to prepare such a database.

- d. Section 7 of the Guidance document points out that cOAlition members will ‘monitor compliance and sanction non-compliance’. The document, however, remains silent on how this monitoring and sanctioning will work in practice. We recommend that cOAlition members provide updates on this section as soon as possible.
- e. It is unclear what practical implications Plan S will have for grant applications. In particular, the document does not say whether or not non-compliant publications can still be cited in (the CV sections of) grant applications. If the ambition is to evaluate researchers on the basis of their open access publications only, international referees for research proposals will need to receive detailed instructions as to how to appreciate Plan S compliant CV’s.
- f. It is unclear how the costs for APC waivers will be covered (see section 3 of the guidance document). In particular, it is unclear whether the installment of APC waivers for low-income countries will imply higher APC’s for coalition members, and if so, how this will affect grant sizes.
- g. Section 6 of the guidance document announces an evaluation for 2023. However, no concrete success indicators are defined. Is success defined in terms of the number of hybrid journals that will have changed their OA model by 2023? Is the number of coalition members by 2023 an indicator of success? We recommend that clear and measurable success indicators are formulated before 2020.

2. *Are there any other **issues** that are not addressed by the guidance document?*

On the basis of input we have gathered, three issues stand out: **international competitiveness, critical mass** and **timeline**.

a. **Competitiveness**

Although there is no agreement about whether or not, and to what extent, research benefits from competition, it is uncontroversial that academia as it stands is a highly competitive environment. The coalition members themselves have in fact played an important role in organizing academic competition.

In part, this competition is the result of the large number of fixed-term contracts, which force especially younger researchers to look for employment all around the world. A responsible open access policy must take into account the precarious position these researchers have on the job market. It is not clear that this holds true for Plan S in its current form.

The following three scenarios summarize the ways in which a significant number of early career researchers feel implementation of Plan S will jeopardize international competitiveness:

- i. A cOAlition S-funded early career researcher has published in open access journals, thereby complying with Plan S regulations. After the funding period, the researcher applies in a non-participating country, and cannot optimally compete, given the low number of top journals currently compliant.
- ii. An early career researcher from abroad considers applying for a postdoc in a cOAlition S-funded project. If this prohibits the researcher from publishing in highly ranked journals, this will make it harder for the project leaders to attract the most talented researchers.
- iii. Given the restrictions Plan S puts on viable publication venues, collaboration with Plan S funded researchers will become unattractive.

b. **Critical mass**

An important goal of Plan S seems to be to make an impact on the way academic publishing is organized. However, in order to have such an impact a critical mass is needed. Given the current situation a critical mass seems not to have been reached:

- I. Although there are currently no clear data, there are indications that very few journals are compliant with Plan S. According to Carling et al. ([At the crossroads of open access to research](#)), up to 90% of existing journals were not compliant with the November 2018 version of Plan S.
- II. Although estimates vary, coalition-funded researchers seem to be responsible for about 5% of global research output. Without major players such as the USA and Germany joining cOAlition S, it is not clear that this will provide enough of an incentive to publishing houses to reconsider their business models.

c. **Timeline**

It is unclear how many titles are currently Plan S compliant, or will be so by 2020. Given that input is still being gathered and negotiations with publishers are still on their way, it seems unlikely that a complete overview of compliant titles will be available soon enough to allow researchers and institutions to properly prepare.

We therefore recommend that the cOAlition devise a more realistic timeline. Specifically, we recommend that that implementation of Plan S be made conditional on the availability of complete overview of compliant titles.

Also, we recommend that the cOAlition allow for a transition period during which rules for green OA are relaxed in such a way that, for instance, post prints in university repositories are Plan S compliant by default. This will

enable institutions and libraries to prepare and, where necessary, to modify their archiving facilities where necessary.

3. *Are there other **mechanisms or requirements** funders should consider to foster full and immediate Open Access of research outputs?*

Subscription journals are currently an important part of the business model of academic societies (such as British Journal for the History of Philosophy). Apart from providing highly esteemed publications venues, these societies also aid academic communities by providing financial means for conferences and travel stipends. In its current form, Plan S will have a negative impact on society journals, and hence on the academic communities represented by these societies. To minimize that negative impact, a waiver needs to be put in place for society journals. Alternatively, the coalition could support societies financially by helping them transition from, say, hybrid to diamond – a so-called flipping of journals.

In general, in order for Plan S to be a success, the coalition must join forces with (society) journals to make them compliant, rather than place responsibility with the individual researchers it funds, and antagonize societies that now play a welcome role in academia. Plan S could have a larger and more substantial impact by going to the root of the problem, and subsidize journals directly to help them become fully open access.