

## **An HSS Perspective on Plan S**

This is an open letter to all funding agencies, government bodies and institutions that support Plan S. It is written from the perspective of publishers working across the humanities and social sciences (HSS) and will be submitted to the open consultation of cOAlition S. This letter does not represent a comprehensive critique of the recently published guidelines. In the past few weeks, the research community has offered detailed analysis and feedback on the guidelines and we share many of the concerns.<sup>1</sup> This letter focuses on the unintended consequences and deleterious impact of applying a model designed for STM journals to all humanities and social science disciplines. It also offers ideas for a collaborative way forward.

### **Introduction**

The undersigned HSS publishers all support sustainable open access wholeheartedly – in the full variety of options available – and some have been open access advocates for many years. All signatories welcome progressive and wide-ranging initiatives to support, promote and accelerate sustainable open access, and several are already actively driving the transition from subscription to open access models. Together we publish over 2.000 hybrid journals, 160 full open access journals, and 4.000 open access books in HSS.

### **Plan S is not appropriate for HSS**

In our view, Plan S currently offers no suitable mechanism for the HSS community to transition their publications on a large scale to sustainable forms of open access. The mandates and policies that are to be implemented must take the specific situation of HSS into account:

- There is limited access to funding for APCs.
- Journal communities are relatively small and often have a national focus in terms of both scope and language.
- The publishing landscape is as rich and diverse as the HSS community itself, and we need a variety of options to make open access work.

Plan S, as it stands today, will not accelerate the move to open access in HSS. On the contrary, it has the potential to slow down the ongoing transition, or even harm the research communities it intends to serve.

#### **1. The funding situation in HSS is different**

The creators of Plan S have used the well-funded STM (Science, Technology and Medicine) research ecosystem as their main model. Plan S is based on the idea of flipping existing subscription journals to APC-driven full open access journals with payments mainly coming from direct research grants. This idea is incompatible with disciplines in which the majority of research articles is not derived from such grants and researchers have hardly any other access to funding for APCs.

---

<sup>1</sup> E.g. [https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/sites/default/files/British\\_Academy\\_paper\\_on\\_Science\\_Europe\\_Plan\\_S.pdf](https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/sites/default/files/British_Academy_paper_on_Science_Europe_Plan_S.pdf); <http://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/open-access/2019/01/21/ucl-response-to-plan-s-consultation/>; <http://pastandpresent.org.uk/open-letter-from-history-journal-editors-in-response-to-consultation-on-plan-s/>

HSS journals typically contain not only original research articles but also a substantial number of other types of articles such as book reviews, review articles, etc. No funding is currently made available to publish such articles in open access, even though they are equally important for the development of research.

## **2. APC-driven open access models do not work universally in HSS**

Since the majority of researchers in HSS are not able to pay APCs, it is impossible for existing subscription journals to flip to an author-pays model. Currently, the percentage of hybrid APC income for an average HSS publisher is in the low single-digits of total journal revenue and Plan S provides no vision on how this could change in the future.

The lack of available funding also makes it difficult to set up new APC-driven, full open access journals that would be compliant with Plan S. The fact is that many HSS journals serve relatively small research communities. Even if funding was available, it would not make sense to set up a wide range of new open access venues that coexist with subscription journals for those authors that have no funding. The publication volumes and research communities in HSS are simply too small for such a plan.

Over the past 15 years, the HSS community has worked with publishers to gradually increase the number of full open access journals using a variety of means that are suitable for HSS: platinum journals sponsored by institutions; crowdsourcing funding for former subscription journals and flipping journals with public funding. While such initiatives are a significant step forward, they are limited in scale and/or depend on long-term subsidies and are therefore not always sustainable.

Some publishers in HSS have already implemented liberal green OA policies and are willing to share their experience. We think it is necessary to have an open discussion about the possible impact of very short to no embargo periods on subscriptions in HSS. HSS research typically has a long to very long life span with a steady increase of usage in the years following publication of an article.

## **3. To accelerate OA in HSS we need a full variety of options**

We are convinced that a large-scale transition to open access in HSS can only happen gradually and only with the engagement of existing journal communities through a variety of means – including hybrid. We appreciate that Plan S permits the publication of gold open access articles in hybrid journals if they are part of a transformative agreement. Such read-to-publish or offsetting agreements, however, have so far only been available to the top 3-8 HSS publishers.

The monograph is still the preferred format for shaping and sharing scholarship for many areas of the humanities and social sciences and we are concerned about the lack of clarity about extending Plan S to books.

The publishing landscape in HSS is not dominated by a handful of large publishers. It consists of many small to medium-size businesses, often family-owned, specialized in certain fields and operating on national or international level. Not-for-profit publishers, university presses, society publishers and small to medium-size commercial presses publish a wealth of research in both journal and book form. Plan S can only achieve full and immediate open access if there is a vision for this large and diverse community to join the transition.

Hybrid open access is a gradual, evolutionary method to support open access in HSS. We recognize that it does not provide the revolution that some funders seem to think is needed and we also recognize that hybrid open access can be complicated to administer and organize, but the benefit that hybrid open access has delivered – and can continue to deliver – is significant. Hybrid is considered unacceptable because libraries and funders feel they are paying twice. Developing a common standard on transparent, fair and logical policies to prevent “double-dipping” could be a way to put an end to this problem.

## **Conclusion**

We see many ambiguities in the implementation guidelines of Plan S, in particular around Green OA and embargo periods, transition periods, hybrid and mirror journals, transformative agreements, OA monographs, CC licenses, and infrastructure support. These must be clarified urgently and commitments must be made to engage with the HSS community to enable Plan S to be a key element to a constructive transition to a more open research future.

We believe that the transition away from the current model must be based on fairness, broad equality of outcome, and – of course – openness. Currently, Plan S does little to support this transition in the humanities and social sciences. We believe that this creates an urgent need for transparent dialogue between all parties - funders, associations, libraries, journal editors, individual academics, publishers – and for a firm commitment by all, including those now forcing the pace of change, to develop community-appropriate solutions that deliver sustainable, open outcomes for all researchers, whatever their chosen field of enquiry.

We are ready to support this process, working with the communities we serve.

## **Signatories on 8 February 2019**

1. Amsterdam University Press, The Netherlands
2. Berghahn Books, USA
3. Boom Uitgevers, The Netherlands
4. Böhlau Verlag, Germany
5. Brepols, Belgium
6. Brill, The Netherlands
7. Bristol University Press, UK
8. Budrich Unipress, Germany
9. Campus, Germany
10. De Gruyter, Germany
11. Edinburgh University Press, UK
12. Éditions La Découverte, France
13. Edward Elgar, UK
14. Eleven International Publishing, The Netherlands
15. Emerald Publishing, UK
16. Equinox Publishing, UK
17. Facultas, Austria
18. Ferdinand Schöningh / Wilhelm Fink / mentis, Germany
19. Georg Olms Verlag, Germany
20. Hogrefe, Germany
21. Intellect, UK
22. Intersentia, Belgium

23. John Benjamins, The Netherlands
24. Juventa, Germany
25. Klostermann, Germany
26. Liverpool University Press, UK
27. Manchester University Press, UK
28. Mohr Siebeck, Germany
29. Multilingual Matters, UK
30. Nomos, Germany
31. Pluto Journals, UK
32. SAGE Publishing, USA
33. Transcript, Germany
34. University of Toronto Press, Canada
35. University of Wales Press, UK
36. UTB, Germany
37. Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Germany
38. Verlag Barbara Budrich, Germany
39. Verlag Julius Kinkhardt, Germany
40. Verlagsgruppe Beltz, Germany
41. V&R Unipress, Germany
42. Waxmann Verlag, Germany
43. wbv Media, Germany

**Supporting organizations on 8 February 2019**

44. Cairn.info, France
45. Knowledge Unlatched, Germany

A list of up-to-date signatories can be viewed here: <https://plansinhss.home.blog/>.