

# **Science | Business, Innovation intelligence and networking Bringing together Research | Industry | Policy**

Published: **01 March 2016**

## **Few countries ready to adopt gold standard open access to scientific journals**

**Éanna Kelly, Science|Business**

Dutch EU presidency has vowed to bring countries together on open access, but a new study reveals there is a long way to go in making journals subscription-free

Sander Dekker, Dutch Minister for Education, Culture and Science  
Advertisement

Only five EU countries want to abandon the traditional journal subscription model and move to open access publication of the results of publically-funded research, [according to a new study](#).

Alongside the Dutch government, which is using its presidency of the EU to push the case for open access, only Hungary, Romania, Sweden and the UK, share the view that academic publishers should stop charging readers a subscription and instead charge authors for publishing their papers.

This gold standard open access is the route the Netherlands has been pursuing aggressively at home, and which it has pledged to steer the whole of the EU towards during its current presidency.

However, the European Commission's study on the state of play across Europe, shows that most governments favour the green model of open access, in which researchers deposit versions of their journal articles in an online archive open to everyone. Green open access is preferred in universities and institutes in Belgium, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Greece, Ireland, Lithuania, Malta, Norway, Portugal, Slovakia and Spain.

The Dutch presidency will need to sort through this green and gold tug-of-war in the coming months, as it tries to broker an EU-wide agreement and arrive at a common position by May, when EU research ministers are set to meet.

Given its success in pushing the issue at home, the Netherlands is viewed by many open access advocates as the best country to bring political impetus to the movement and achieve

ambitious EU-wide reform.

The Dutch Minister for Education, Culture and Science Sander Dekker told the European Parliament in January that Europe needs to catch up on open access. “To my frustration, I see data and publications are protected still. The fact is that research funded with public money is simply not open to that very same public,” Dekker said.

Robert van der Vooren, a project coordinator at the Association of Universities in the Netherlands who has been involved in successful open access negotiations with publishers including Springer and Elsevier, said countries must come together to pile pressure on publishers.

“We need to reach the tipping point, which is the moment that publishers will be forced to transform the old publishing models. This will only work if the rest of the world joins in,” van der Vooren said. “The demand for open access publications will then increase globally, and at a certain point, the old publishing models will no longer be needed.”

While there is strong support for the principle of free access in European countries, there are long-running disagreements between academics over the best means of achieving it.

Both green and gold routes have their critics, with many concerned about affordability and delays in access.

For institutes following the gold path, publishers charge a publication fee of up to £3,000, which is usually paid by the author or research funder. In the UK for example, the seven research councils have set aside £20 million for 2015 and 2016 to pay the charges for gold access. This is money that some argue could have been gone to new research instead.

The green model sticks to the familiar subscription model, with no publishing charge. However, researchers face some restrictions on re-use of research as well as embargo periods on open access publication.

Some researchers have urged the European Commission to use its influence and advise on which open access route to take. “With its Horizon 2020 budget of over €70 billion, the EU is capable of a much stronger stand than we can take alone,” said Hans Clevers, a professor at the Hubrecht Institute and president of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences.

For now, the Commission accepts both gold and green open access. Researchers who opt for gold open access can get publication costs reimbursed as part of a Horizon 2020 grant. However, the Commission has warned it will adapt this policy if it finds that publishers are levying excessive article processing charges.

For green open access, researchers deposit the final peer reviewed manuscript in a repository of their choice.

The open access movement is propelled by growing dissatisfaction with the academic publishing business model, under which publishers are in effect charging publically-funded institutions to get access to their own research outputs.

Publishers do not commonly pay for the articles they publish, or for peer review, most of which is performed free-of-charge by employees of academic institutions which, along with government agencies and foundations, also fund all the research that these journal articles are

based upon.

### Building momentum

The Dutch have been stirring the pot on open access for a while now. The government last year announced that 60 per cent of research articles authored by Dutch scientists must be open access by 2019, and 100 per cent by 2024.

Since then, Dutch universities have claimed a number of victories, signing new agreements on open access with publishers including Springer, Wiley, Sage and Amsterdam-based Elsevier, the largest journal publishing house in the world.

Last March, Dekker wrote a paper with his British counterpart Greg Clark, to appeal to other European education ministers to commit to open access, saying it will only be possible to force publishers to move to an open access publication with cross-Europe support.

Dekker also issued a joint statement with EU Research Commissioner Carlos Moedas in August 2015 which called on publishers, “to adjust their business models to the realities of the 21st century.”