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## European science funders ban grantees from publishing in paywalled journals

By [Martin Enserink](#) Sep. 4, 2018 , 3:15 AM

Frustrated with the slow transition toward open access (OA) in scientific publishing, 11 national funding organizations in Europe turned up the pressure today. As of 2020, the group, which jointly spends about €7.6 billion on research annually, will require every paper it funds to be freely available from the moment of publication. [In a statement](#), the group said it will no longer allow the 6- or 12-month delays that many subscription journals now require before a paper is made OA, and it won't allow publication in so-called hybrid journals, which charge subscriptions but also make individual papers OA for an extra fee.

The move means grantees [from these 11 funders](#)—which include the national funding agencies in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and France as well as Italy's National Institute for Nuclear Physics—will have to forgo publishing in thousands of journals, including high-profile ones such as *Nature*, *Science*, *Cell*, and *The Lancet*, unless those journals change their business model. "We think this could create a tipping point," says Marc Schiltz, president of Science Europe, the Brussels-based association of science organizations that helped coordinate the plan. "Really the idea was to make a big, decisive step—not to come up with another statement or an expression of intent."

The announcement delighted many OA advocates. "This will put increased pressure on publishers and on the consciousness of individual researchers that an ecosystem change is possible," says Ralf Schimmer, head of Scientific Information Provision at the Max Planck Digital Library in Munich, Germany. Peter Suber, director of the Harvard Library Office for Scholarly Communication, calls the plan "admirably strong." Many other funders support OA, but only the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation applies similarly stringent requirements for "immediate OA," Suber says. The European Commission and the European Research Council support the plan; although they haven't adopted similar requirements for the research they fund, a [statement by EU Commissioner for Research, Science and Innovation Carlos Moedas](#) suggests they may do so in the future and urges the European Parliament and the European Council to endorse the approach.

But traditional publishers are not pleased. The plan "potentially undermines the whole research publishing system," a spokesperson for Springer Nature, which publishes more than 3000 journals, wrote in an email to *ScienceInsider*. "Implementing such a plan, in our view, would disrupt scholarly communications, be a disservice to researchers, and impinge academic freedom," adds a spokesperson for AAAS, *Science's* publisher. "It would also be unsustainable for the *Science* family of journals." The world's biggest academic publisher, Elsevier, declined to comment, referring instead to a statement by the International Association of Scientific, Technical, and Medical Publishers that urged "caution" and said, "Above all, it is vital that researchers have the freedom to publish in the publication outlet of their choice."

Europe has taken the lead in pushing for open access in recent years; EU ministers of research, innovation, trade, and industry [announced a target to make all new papers OA by 2020](#) at a meeting in Brussels in 2016. But the commission's special envoy for OA, Robert-Jan Smits, says the transition was taking far too long. Smits was the "catalyst" behind the new plan, says Stan Gielen, president of the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO) in The Hague.

Under Plan S, as it's called, authors need to retain the copyright on their papers and publish them under an open license. The plan will cap the fees paid for publication in OA journals at a yet-to-be-determined level. Publication in hybrid journals—of which Springer Nature operates more than 1700 and Elsevier more than 1850—will be phased out under the plan because such journals have not proved to be the transition model that many hoped they would be, Schiltz says. In fact, he adds, "We now pay more" because the author publication fees come on top of the subscription price. (The Springer Nature statement says hybrid journals do "support the transition towards full open access"; under special "read and publish" agreements, they allow 70% of authors in four European countries to make their research available immediately.)

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Marc Schiltz, Science Europe

The plan is ambivalent about "green OA," in which researchers or institutions post a copy of their paper in an institutional repository, instead of publishing in an OA journal; it only says the importance of such repositories is "acknowledged." That's an "elementary mistake," Suber says, because green OA has its own advantages; also called self-archiving, it is cheap and easy to scale up, and by allowing researchers to make their work freely available while publishing in a "conventional, venerable" journal, green OA helps young scientists who need the cachet of publishing in top journals, Suber says.

The funders hope to reduce the allure of marquee journals. In today's statement, they pledge to help "fundamentally revise the incentive and reward system of science," for instance by following the 2013 San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment, which advocates abandoning simple metrics such as the journal impact factor when evaluating a scientist's performance.

Schiltz rejects the claim that the plan infringes on academic freedom; authors still have plenty of journals to choose from, and besides, he adds, funders are entitled to say how their money is spent. "The greater good of a well-functioning science system is more important than the right of individual researchers to decide where to submit their papers," he says.

Gielen says NWO will check a certain percentage of the papers it has funded and sanction researchers who don't comply, for instance by asking its money back or temporarily banning researchers from applying for funding.

Many of Science Europe's 18 other funders are likely to come on board in the weeks and months ahead, Schiltz says. But, "We felt this was now strong enough to go public," in part because the 11 participants jointly represent more than half of the funding stream that Science Europe's members control.

Plan S comes at a time when academic institutions in several European countries, seeking to make more papers OA, are in tough negotiations with academic publishers over new "read and publish" deals. Elsevier recently cut off access to its journals [in Germany and Sweden](#) after consortia of labs and universities in those countries refused to back down. Plan S will further increase the pressure, Schimmer says. "There has been enough nice language and waiting and hoping and saying please," he says. "Research communities just aren't willing to tolerate procrastination anymore."

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