



Information Note

towards a Horizon 2020 platform for open access

Date: 21/12/2017

Research and
Innovation

O. Main points

The Commission proposes to fund a European Commission Open Research Publishing Platform ('the platform') The main aim of the platform is to offer Horizon 2020 beneficiaries a free and fast publication possibility for peer reviewed articles as well as pre-prints resulting from Horizon 2020 funding.

The platform will complement the current policy in Horizon 2020 – where open access to publication is mandatory – in order to balance obligations with incentives. The platform will be free to use for Horizon 2020 grantees at the point of delivery (the costs being fully covered by the proposed public procurement) and operate on a strictly voluntary basis. Furthermore, the platform will explore many features not found in traditional journals: not only open access but also open peer review, next generation metrics, and access to pre-prints; all of these are important components of Open Science (and part of the 2016 Amsterdam Call for Action).

To implement such a demand –driven platform we need a robust service, *on par* with the highest quality standards of scientific publishing; this can only be provided by outsourcing the implementation of the platform through a fully transparent public procurement process, allowing any entity to apply. Such an action has therefore been included in the Work Programme 2018.¹ Over a duration of 4 years a maximum of 6.4 million € are foreseen for this action.

Through this action the Commission builds on and further develops the best practice example of other funders, such as the Wellcome Trust and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

1. Description of the Action

In May 2016 the Competitiveness Council called for full open access to scientific publications in Europe by 2020 and *inter alia* concluded that other specific actions could be taken to move towards facilitating greater access to publicly funded scientific publications. The action described in the tender specifications intended to be launched in early 2018 is thus a direct follow up of the Council Conclusions of May 2016.

In essence, the Commission proposes to fund the European Commission Open Research Publishing Platform ('the Platform') for Horizon 2020 beneficiaries to assist them in complying with the Horizon 2020 open access mandate, and to increase the uptake of open access peer reviewed publications in Horizon 2020.² This would come *additionally* to the currently existing options to fulfil the open access obligations in Horizon 2020.³ Providing beneficiaries with a larger number of options for achieving open access will not only bring higher compliance rates but also increase the acceptance of the H2020 open access mandate since it will give more flexibility to researchers, allowing them to choose the open access route most appropriate for their discipline and/or national context.

The primary objectives of the Platform are to:

¹ Under Work Programme 18. *Dissemination, Exploitation and Evaluation, item 8, page 12. Available at http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/wp/2018-2020/main/h2020-wp1820-comm-diss_en.pdf*

² In Horizon 2020 an early analysis (summer 2016) showed that 60-68% of scientific publications produced were open access.

³ See the Open Access guidelines at http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/docs/h2020-funding-guide/cross-cutting-issues/open-access-dissemination_en.htm

1. Offer a **reliable, easy** and **fast open access** publishing venue, which is **free** to Horizon 2020 grantees at the point of delivery (the costs being fully covered by this tender)⁴, thus providing them with another option to fulfil the open access obligations in Horizon 2020.
2. Reinforce the position of the Commission as **leading by example in operationalising open science** through Horizon 2020, by providing not only open access but also a form of open peer review, pre-prints support and innovative ('alternative') metrics services as part of the Platform.
3. Contribute to **a more diversified and competitive open access publishing market**, by being fully transparent as regards the costs and cost allocation.

The success of the platform will primarily depend on the *quality* of the scientific publication service provided. An analysis of the tools available to the Commission to implement such a platform concluded that a robust service, *on par* with the highest quality standards of scientific publishing can only be provided by outsourcing the implementation of the platform through a fully transparent public procurement process. Such an action has therefore been included in the Work Programme 2018.

The contract will run for an initial duration of 4 (four) years. There will be one contractor (or a consortium led by one contractor with or without subcontractors) who will be awarded a framework contract through a fully transparent public procurement procedure and who will execute the tasks according to the specific contracts which will be signed thereafter. The tasks cover all the aspects related to the platform:

- (i) its technical IT implementation
- (ii) the management of the publication process and
- (iii) communication, take-up and sustainability.

The contractor will be required to commit to a minimum number of pre-prints and articles to be published during the four years of the contract (to be defined in the Tender Specifications). Furthermore, the contractor is responsible for ensuring uptake of the Platform through ongoing communications activities as well as developing a plan for sustainability of the service beyond the initial funding period. From its side, the European Commission will support the tenderer in its communication activities.

⁴ The Platform thus addresses criticism of current Horizon 2020 policy, in which gold open access needs to be financed from within the grant.

2. Frequently Asked Questions

This section provides input to raises questions raised by stakeholders and Member States as part of the consultation process in the Open Science Policy Platform, the Strategic Programme Committee and the Research Working Party.

Why is an EC operated platform needed?

With ca. 68% of Horizon 2020 publications open access so far (2016 data), the Commission needs to undertake further steps to reach 100% open access. From our point of view the circulation of knowledge needs to be not only open but also fast and cost effective – this is a responsibility we have to the taxpayers that fund research. The open research platform will contribute to all three goals (openness, fast and cheap publication) The EC will fund this platform for its own grantees in order to offer more variety in the options available to beneficiaries for fulfilling their open access obligations in Horizon 2020. In this, we follow the best practice example of other funders, such as the Wellcome Trust and the Gates Foundation.

Why do you offer yet another tool for Open Access?

Research is often co-funded and publications co-authored, which necessitates a policy that can accommodate different routes towards open access. The platform comes as an additional tool to the currently existing options⁵ to fulfil the open access obligations in Horizon 2020. These multiple approaches offer the maximum freedom for researchers to choose the open access route most appropriate to them.

What kind of research output can researchers provide through this platform?

This EC Horizon 2020 Open Research Platform, provisionally entitled 'Open research Europe', will not only allow Horizon 2020 to rapidly publish peer reviewed articles but also those pre-prints which meet basic criteria on authorship, non-plagiarism and ethical conduct. Furthermore, the peer review process in 'Open Research Europe' will be open and a suit of innovative ('alternative') metrics will be provided. 'Open Research Europe' thus operationalises Commissioner Moedas key priority of Open Science in Horizon 2020 and showcases the Commission's intent to be on the vanguard of these developments.

What is the quality of the peer review in this platform?

A high quality of peer review is essential. The peer review will be open and hence more transparent than traditional forms of peer review. The contractor will manage the peer review process. Open peer review has been established as a part of open science and this action will be an important component in operationalising the concept.

What kind of incentives do researchers have to use the platform?

The main incentive to use the platform must be the high quality of the service, which points to the need to select a first class contractor. The Commission points to the fact that some research funders already successfully operate such a platform. The platform is one means to achieve open access, complementary actions certainly include looking at review systems. In this context the Commission's expert group on rewards and skills has provided valuable input.

⁵ See http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/docs/h2020-funding-guide/cross-cutting-issues/open-access-dissemination_en.htm

How will this action be implemented? Has a contractor been decided on already?

The Commission is implementing this action through a public procurement procedure, which a cost-benefit analysis has shown to be the most effective and transparent tool. This allows for a fully transparent process where any entity can apply. The Commission stresses that no specific contractor has yet been selected, since the Tender Specifications have not been published at the time of writing. The Commission expects several offers from a variety of entities, which will be reviewed by an independent internal evaluation committee. Should the Commission find that no offer is satisfactory it will terminate the evaluation process.

Why is the Commission intervening?

Commissioner Moedas has repeatedly called for new publishing models to be developed in order for the transition to open access to be accomplished by 2020. The decision to set up a platform aims to support this transformation. Public procurement allows all entities with publishing experience to apply for the action.

Why is the service not run by the Publications Office and/or CORDIS?

The Publications Office (PO) provides very valuable services but produces general and not scientific publications. As such, it lacks the expertise necessary in scientific publishing, such as organising peer review on a large scale. Furthermore, the PO does not have a reputation in the scientific community – there is a risk that the platform will be rejected if it is not operated by an entity with very well recognised credentials as a scientific publisher.

Is this not a duplication of existing services such as OpenAIRE? How are already existing actors in the ecosystem included?

OpenAIRE is a EU funded project which has delivered significant additional value. However, it does not currently offer the services proposed for tendering, in particular, neither OpenAIRE or ZENODO (the joint CERN-OpenAIRE repository) offer peer review of scientific articles. Rather, ZENODO is a database where publications can be deposited after peer-review (green open access).

All existing actors, including but not limited to OpenAIRE are invited to participate in the tendering process, as far as they comply with the specifications.

While there is no direct relation of this action with the European Open Science Cloud, the platform – once operational – will certainly be considered part of the ecosystem to involve.

What are the long term perspective and plans for the platform?

The Commission will fund the platform for an initial four years and will review its uptake and success during that period. The contractor will need to provide a sustainability strategy.

Will this not lead to a fragmented ecosystem, with a mushrooming of funder specific platforms?

The platform needs to ensure interoperability as well as portability of content. Potential collaboration with other initiatives needs to be addressed by the tenderer as part of the sustainability strategy.

Are other funders implementing similar actions?

As part of its actions to support open access, the Commission has been analysing innovative new ways of releasing information. From the side of funders, two initiatives are particularly noteworthy in the context of the proposed EC platform:

(i) Wellcome Open Research provides all Wellcome researchers with a place to rapidly publish any results they think are worth sharing. All articles benefit from immediate publication, transparent refereeing and the inclusion of all source data.

(ii) Gates Open Research is a platform for rapid author-led publication and open peer review of research funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. It (i) enables researchers to publish any research outputs they want to share, supporting reproducibility and transparency, (ii) uses an open research publishing model: immediate publication followed by open invited peer review and (iii) includes all supporting data, enabling reanalyses, replication and reuse.

This analysis in no way pre-judges the selection of the contractor to operate the Commission's platform.