

European Federation of Psychology Students' Associations (EFPSA) Position Paper on Open Access

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Background

The majority of research in healthcare related science is not available to the public: Rather than being able to freely access any paper they need, every student at one point in time is confronted with pop-up windows telling them to pay 25 USD, or more, in order to retrieve a specific piece of work.

It is, however, not the paper's authors who charge these amounts of money. Instead, if a researcher's work is accepted for publication in a scientific journal, the researcher usually passes all copyright to the journal's publishing house, which in turn makes the article available online and (sometimes) in printed form. The articles which are published online, however, are often hidden behind a "paywall", which means that access is only available at a certain price - which either comes in the form of a pay-per-journals subscription basis (often for institutions, libraries, and universities), or in the form of a fee per article (usually for single people).

Over the past years, the prices for subscriptions of scientific journals have risen by 5-7% - which is a much steeper increase than the general Consumer Index in most countries. Today, the large publishing houses sell their journals in bundles, consisting of a few high-impact journals (which the libraries actually want) and some small journals (which they normally would not buy). The publishers charge subscription fees of up to € 60,000 per year for these bundles (e.g., Elsevier, 2017). This has led the director of Harvard Library, which belongs to one of the richest and most prestigious universities in the world, to state that "We simply cannot go on paying the increase in subscription prices." These circumstances have not only created a lot of upstir in the scientific community; they have even garnered the attention of mainstream media (Sample, 2012).

In the recent discussions on these matters, many people have pointed out that Open Access is an alternative solution: The term "**Open Access**" (OA) generally refers to the public availability of scientific results. In these specific fields, Open Access can be divided into the following:

- **Gold Open Access**, which means that scientific articles are made available to the public by the publishing house without a fee or other restrictions to access as well as also indexed in the respective databases, and
- **Green Open Access**, which refers to self-storage by the article's authors, e.g. on their institution's website.

Furthermore, Open Access practices are divided into gratis (free to read) and libre (free to read, but also granting further usage rights, e.g. via Creative Commons licence) Open Access.

Over the last two decades, the amount of Open Access publications has risen overproportionally, compared to the general number of scientific publications (Laakso et al., 2011). Still, only 17% of all scientific publications in 2011 were Open Access (Laakso & Björk, 2012).

In order to emphasise the importance of Open Access, students associations participating in the European Healthcare Students Associations' Summit (EHSAS) namely, European Dental Students

Association (EDSA), the European Medical Students' Association (EMSA) and the European Pharmaceutical Students' Associations (EPSA) endorsed this position paper. As we will point out below, access restrictions do have an enormous impact on science, and on the way scientists, students, and institutions work. Open Access is on the rise, but still constitutes only a small fraction of published scientific works. Since we believe that research should be available to the public, we would like to present students with the key points of what we urge them to do:

- ❖ **Help yourself!** Many students know the pain of being unable to retrieve papers they need for their research. The internet offers means and ways to circumvent these problems, though. The Open Access button (<https://openaccessbutton.org/>) is one tool that might help you access the article you need.
- ❖ **Go Green Open Access!** Although copyright is transferred to the publishing house when you publish, most publishers allow researchers store a personal copy of their work on an online repository; for example, their institute's website or a commercial service. In some cases they have to wait till a certain 'embargo period' has passed, but this is rarely more than a year. Here, we strongly urge students to check with their publishers beforehand whether they are allowed to do Green Open Access, and use this opportunity.
- ❖ **Gold Open Access for publication!** An increasing number of journals now offers Open Access to publications, for varying Article Processing Charges (APCs) which are either paid by the authors or their institutions. However, many journals (e.g. PLOS ONE) grant waivers to students who can't come up for the APCs. Keeping this in mind, we strongly urge students to keep Open Access in mind when they pick a journal for publication.
- ❖ **Spread the word!** We encourage all students to increase awareness and promote Open Access as much as possible. It can be done in personal conversations with other students and researchers, by organising campaigns and events, or by urging universities to implement a policy regarding this important matter. We also encourage other student organisations, including our own member organisations, to implement their own Open Access policies.

In the following paragraphs, we will substantiate our recommendations by presenting key points supporting the public availability on scientific work, but also critical remarks. We hope that this will allow readers to build their own opinion on this topic.

Why we need Open Access?

Access to science is a human right. As Article 27 (1) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights says, “Everyone has the right freely to [...] share in scientific advancement and its benefits.” (UN General Assembly, 1948) Here, scientific advancement can be divided into academic impact, but also economic and societal impact (Research Council UK, 2017). In order for research to have its intended impact, it is crucial that those who might benefit from it can access it, and it becomes clear that this cannot be limited to scientists working at a research institution - but also to clinicians, teachers, human resources managers, journalists, state employees and so on. This is not the case in today’s world, however, where only those associated with institutions who pay for access to research can read it, and we believe that this is quite an obstacle for advancements in science.

Restricting access to science will corroborate inequality. As we mentioned above, every student has probably encountered access restrictions in some form. In general, different institutions, for example different universities, have different levels of access dependant on their economic means and priorities. Universities in countries with less resources can only pay for limited access for their students. The inequality between students in different universities across different countries is thus increased, and with lacking access to research they do not have the same learning opportunities. People have started talking about knowledge as a human right (Elliot, 2014) and we can promote this by fighting for open access to all academic research to all people.

Open Access might help improving scientific practices. There is an ongoing research crisis across the social sciences, whereby further replication of methodologies is necessary to determine the reliability of previous results and interventions. In their paper, Asendorpf et al. (2012) point out transparency as a key point of good research practices, and they highlight the importance of Open Access as a critical prerequisite for transparency.

The stakeholders called upon need to be well defined. Call upon (Medicine, Dental Medicine, Pharmaceutical and Social Sciences such as Psychology) universities, research institutions, ministries of research, innovation and education (and all the equivalents to this) within European states to sign the [Berlin Declaration](#) on Open Access to Knowledge in the Sciences and Humanities. As a signatory party you devote your activities in the active dissemination the knowledge regarding the Open Access movement, establish and commit to a sustainable network of Open Access contribution, and support the transition to the Electronic Open Access Paradigm. This will in turn lead to the increase in the number of stakeholders committing to the Open Access movement and consequently increase the number of Open Access publications.

A more efficient allocation of funds. The subscription model in which access to academic information ,either publications or data, is granted usually via subscription. The subscription is paid by the universities. If the contrary was achieved that meaning the wide and sustainable implementation of the Open Access model then the funds spent on the subscriptions could be reallocated to research projects conducted by

young scientists or for the coverage of the Article Processing Costs (APCs). The APCs are the publication costs usually paid by the author or his/her institution when publishing via the golden route. By doing this, there will be an increase in the motivation of young scientists to start up research projects as well as ensure high quality of the projects and their outcomes.

Rethink the assessment/ evaluation system of the scientists. Most universities assess their academic staff based on a system that includes the number of publications and citations in high impact factor journals. This enacts as fundamental obstacle to a wider and sustainable implementation of the Open Access movement. If we as a society strive to have free immediate access to, and unrestricted reuse of, original works of all types, universities need to change the system of ranking academia and the criteria system for funding applications. If the system suffered changes towards a more substantial recognition of the number of publications in Open Access journals, then the Open Access movement is pushed forward.

Interprofessional joint actions. The students associations participating in the European Healthcare Students Associations' Summit (EHSAS) namely, European Dental Students Association (EDSA), European Federation of Psychology Students' Associations (EFPSA), the European Medical Students' Association (EMSA) and the European Pharmaceutical Students' Associations (EPSA) could advocate for the Open Access movement by fulfilling the following actions:

- Sharing the knowledge regarding Open Access within their networks such as local organizations or universities via joint webinars, Open Access conferences on an interprofessional level.
- Bring this concept as close as possible to the organisations' members and not only, by organizing "How to publish Open Access" and "Open Access mythbusters" sessions.

Rethinking the administration when publishing in open access journals. "Publishing in open access journals sometimes involves additional administration, whereas delivering articles to traditional journals can usually be done easily online." As a solution to this disadvantage of Open Access there is the need of a task force aiming to revise and rethink the administration to facilitate the publication in such journals.

Establish an aiding network for the publishing process. "Supplying publication data and the full text of publications to repositories means extra work for researchers." We call upon the academia who already published Open Access to establish a network meant to aid the authors when in the supplying process to repositories.

What has happened so far?

Laakso et al. (2011) conducted a systematic review of the Directory of Open Access Journal (DOAJ), consisting of over 5,000 Green and Gold Open Access articles. According to Laakso et al., the amount of Open Access articles published is growing at a much faster rate than the amount of all over peer reviewed research articles combined. They also note that Open Access journals are more suitable and reachable through search engines such as Google Scholar than traditional journals which require subscriptions. In an internet age, this is a very student friendly way for people to access large bodies of

research.

The Study of Open Access Publishing (SOAP) (2011) found that 90% of tens of thousands of researchers surveyed found OA beneficial for their research field, as well as improving the way that the scientific community works. They also found that although numbers of Open Access articles are increasing, the number of psychology papers is still relatively low.

Wang et al (2015) compared the impact between Open Access and non-Open Access articles, and found that Open Access papers have a greater advantage, given their ease of sharing on social media. They also found that Open Access have a high number of downloads, not only at initial publication, but also sustained steady downloads over an extended period of time.

Laakso and Bjork (2012) examined over 7,000 journals in the DOAJ from the past 10 years, and found that Open Access journal publishing has grown across all domains, across a wide variety of journal publishers, geographical regions and scientific discipline. They mention that *“It no longer seems to be a question whether OA is a viable alternative to the traditional subscription model for scholarly journal publishing; the question is rather when OA publishing will become the mainstream mode”* (Laakso & Bjork, 2012, p. 8). However, they did not mention how many of these are in the field of health science, nor do they mention the cost of distributing Open Access.

Literature would suggest that there is a hesitance to publishing Open Access by a number of people for numerous reasons. According to Eger, Scherfen and Meierrieks (2015), factors such as copyright law, age, profession or the inherent reward system of a discipline play a role. Therefore, a blanket “one size all” approach to publishing Open Access may not be the best option. However, what will help in the popularisation of Open Access among disciplines to increase the awareness of Open Access, and to educate about Open Access standards to improve the reputation of Open Access.

Existing policies on Open Access

Many researchers have welcomed the increase in Open Access (Dallmeier-Tiessen et al., 2011). The aforementioned Harvard University is urging their researchers to publish Open Access, and the same applies to government institutions like the German Ministry of Science and Education (BMBF, 2016), and non-governmental organisations like UNESCO (Swan, 2012). In 2016, the European Commission sent a strong message by introducing open access as part of The Horizon 2020 programme for Europe. Their goal is to make all publicly funded research open access by 2020 (EU2016, 2016). Another organisation that supports Open Access is UNESCO, and they perceive universal access to information as crucial in building knowledgeable societies, which is one of their main goals. According to UNESCO's policy guidelines for Open Access, the first Open Access policy to have an actual effect was one that made Green Open Access mandatory (Swan, 2012). Institutions where mandatory Open Access policies

are lacking make as little as 20-30% of their research publicly available. Where a mandatory policy is in place, an average of 60% of research is made Open Access. Researchers seem to be happy about these strict guidelines, often voting to introduce such policies. Mandatory policies need to focus on Green Open Access, as Gold Open Access would force researchers to publish in certain journals. The content of Open Access should be peer-reviewed literature, mainly journal articles but can also cover master and doctoral theses (Swan, 2012). Lastly, the UNESCO policy guidelines recommend a maximum 12-month embargo period before an article is shared Open Access, a time frame that should be clearly stated by the Open Access policy.

There are around 800 open access policies already registered worldwide, impacting how members of specific institutions or organisations share their research (Registry of open access repository mandates and policies, n.d.). Recently, a sample of these policies were used in an extensive quantitative analysis requested by the European Commission to discover what elements of open access policies contribute to more research actually being open access (Swan, Gargouri, Hunt & Harnad, 2015). Replicating the results of previous studies, the analysis found that significantly more research was made Open Access when the policy stated that it was *mandatory* that research articles are deposited in institutional repositories and that this *could not* be waived. When there is an embargo period research should still be deposited, and through software automatically be made available at the expiration of the embargo period. The second statistically significant impact on Open Access publication is that deposit of articles in institutional repositories should be part of the assessment procedures of the institution (Swan & Rodrigues, 2015).

It is not the main aim of the federations part of the European Healthcare Students Association Summit to assess the performance or behaviour of its members; it is also not the aim to make it mandatory to publish in journals with Open Access. However, these associations encourage members to follow these recommendations and stand by the suggestions given in this joint position paper.

Conclusion

We hereby strongly urge you to gather more knowledge and share it with others regarding Open Access, encourage your university, government and other institutions to facilitate Open Access and last but not least, deposit your own research in institutional repositories and thus making it green Open Access. By increasing awareness, education and publication in Open Access, we will inherently improve its reputation.

Glossary

Article processing charge (APC): A fee required by some open access journals in order to publish

articles to cover the cost of publishing material (Manchester Metropolitan University, 2016).

Black open access: Uploading and accessing research articles without subscription, often through social media or pirate copy websites (Björk, 2017).

Creative commons (CC) licence: One of several public copyright licenses enabling free distribution of otherwise copyrighted work (Creative commons, n.d.).

Embargo period: The time period that publishers can make authors wait before they are allowed to make their material (green) open access.

Gold open access: Publishing material open access in a journal.

Green open access: Making material open access through self-archiving (Manchester Metropolitan University, 2016).

Gratis open access: Free to read

Libre open access: Free to read and further usage rights, for example via Creative Commons

Open access (OA): Free, immediate, online availability of research articles and the right to use the articles fully in the digital environment (SPARC, n.d.).

Paywall: Feature on a website that requires payment before users can access its contents or services (Technopedia, n.d.).

Repository: An online database for managing and storing open access digital content.

Self-archiving: When the author deposit a free copy of an electronic document online, thus making the document open access (Manchester Metropolitan University, 2016).

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