

*Position Paper*  
*on*  
*Open Access*

*of the European Federation of Psychology Students'  
Associations (EFPSA)*

Approved at the Joint Executive Board & Member Representatives Meeting 2019  
Zgornje Gorje, Slovenia



## Background

Currently, an important concern within the scientific community is that the majority of research is not available for free to the public. Students, academics, professionals or simply interested citizens are all, at one point in time, confronted with a “paywall” telling them to pay 20 EUR or more in order to retrieve a specific journal article. This **paywall** 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 individuals). 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.

Over the past years, the prices for subscriptions of scientific journals have annually risen by 5% (UCSF Library, n.d.) - 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). These circumstances have not only created a lot of upstir in the scientific community but they have also garnered the attention of mainstream media. For example, when Robert Darnton, the director of Harvard Library, one of the richest and most prestigious universities in the world, publicly stated that “We simply cannot go on paying the increase in subscription prices” (Sample, 2012).

In the recent discussions on these matters, many people have pointed out that a freely accessible body of scientific literature is an alternative solution, which emerged in the form of **Open Access** publishing models. The term Open Access generally refers to the public availability of scientific results. According to Laakso et al. (2011), Open Access can be divided into (a) **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 and (b) **Green Open Access**, which refers to **self-archiving** articles by their authors, e.g. on their personal or institution’s website. Notably, the lack of Open Access did not stop the scientific community from uploading and accessing research articles without subscription, often through social media or pirate-copy websites, a practice referred to as **Black Open Access** (Björk, 2017). Only 41% of researchers indicated that they had never used black open access (Travis, 2016).

In the following paragraphs, we will address the reasons for why we need Open Access, what we know about Open Access so far, describe some existing policies on Open Access and, finally, conclude with key points on how to move Open Access forward. We hope that this will allow readers to build an informed opinion on the topic.

### Why do we need Open Access?

In the previous paragraphs, we introduced problems arising with restricted access, but there are multiple other reasons to promote Open Access as well. We decided to group them in three categories: *societal*, *scientific*, and *economic* benefits. Advantages in all three domains indicate that Open Access is here to stay.

#### *Societal benefits:*

*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). 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 must extend 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 poses both an obstacle for advancements in science and detrimental for societal progression.

*Restricting access to science will corroborate inequality.* As we mentioned above, every student, academic, professional or interested citizen 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.

#### *Scientific benefits:*

*Open Access might help improving scientific practices.* There is an ongoing research crisis across the sciences, whereby further replication of methodologies is necessary to determine the reliability of previous results and interventions. In their paper, Asendorpf et al. (2013) 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. Open Access grants a better overview over the published scientific literature, so that people won't miss any (new) developments. Moreover, Open Access is connected to other practices like open data sharing or accessible materials.

*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.

#### *Economic Benefits:*

*Publishing costs have decreased, but journals' access prices have not.* In the past, it made sense to pay for a journal. After all it had to be printed and shipped, often in multiple copies so more than one student at a time could read the journal in the library. In modern times however, papers are almost exclusively read in digital form, with zero cost to copy an article, as often as one wants. This means that everyone able to use a computer, either at home or in a public library, is theoretically able to access any article at any point in time. Since printing and shipping articles is more expensive than the server maintenance cost of a website, prices to access publications should reflect the shift towards digital media. Nevertheless, we see that the opposite is true and accessibility gets more expensive each and every year (UCSF Library, n.d.). Given the aforementioned improvements in availability and decreases in publication costs, the consistent increases in journal access fees are simply unacceptable. Instead, the typical financial model of Open Access publications reflects modern technology much better. To publish an Open Access article researchers pay so called **Article Processing Charge (APC)**. These costs generally include editing costs for an article as well as the cost to maintain the article's online availability (Multidisciplinary Digital Publishing Institute, n.d.). Since APCs are a one time payment and the availability of the article is unlimited, the cost efficiency is much higher than the classic financial model.

*Research and education are publicly funded and are therefore a public good.* Many countries in Europe see research and education as an investment in their citizens. This is why some countries choose to financially cover access to higher education (e.g. Germany and Austria), while countries like Finland and Denmark

go as far as to pay students a monthly fee while they attend university. In most European countries, research is overwhelmingly funded with public money, either due to countries paying the university a fee for each enrolled student, by national initiatives like the *Fonds zur Förderung der wissenschaftlichen Forschung* (FWF) in Austria, or by European wide initiatives like the *Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions* (MSCA) issued by the European Commission. The scientific world however, seems to be an exception to the principle that public money is used to directly enhance the life of citizens (contrary to road construction for example). It is simply unacceptable that the public pays for scientific publications it can't openly access.

## What do we know about Open Access 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. They found that over the last two decades, the amount of Open Access publications has risen over-proportionally compared to the general number of scientific publications. 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 user-friendly way for people to access large bodies of research.

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 disciplines. They mention that “*It no longer seems to be a question whether Open Access is a viable alternative to the traditional subscription model for scholarly journal publishing; the question is rather when Open Access publishing will become the mainstream mode*” (Laakso & Bjork, 2012, p. 8). Still, only 17% of all scientific publications in 2011 were Open Access. They did not, however, mention how many of these publications are in the field of health science, nor did they mention the cost of distributing Open Access.

The Study of Open Access Publishing (Dallmeier-Tiessen et al., 2011) showed that 89% of all surveyed researchers found Open Access beneficial for their research field, as well as an improvement to the way that the scientific community works. They also found that although numbers of Open Access articles are increasing, the number of Open Access psychology papers is still relatively low.

Wang, Liu, Mao and Fang (2015) compared the impact between Open Access and non-Open Access articles, and found that Open Access papers get more social media attention given their ease of sharing. They also found that Open Access research has a high number of downloads at initial publication, as well as sustained steady downloads over an extended period of time. Additionally citation rates for Open Access sources were found to be slightly higher.

According to Swan (2012), the first Open Access policy to have an actual effect was one that made Green Open Access mandatory. 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 needs to focus on Green Open Access, as Gold Open Access would force researchers to publish in journals that have fully adapted Open Access already. The content of Open Access should be peer-reviewed literature, mainly journal articles but could also cover master's

and doctoral theses (Swan, 2012). The European Commission also requested a quantitative analysis to discover what elements of 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 policies made it *mandatory* for research articles to be 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).

## Existing policies on Open Access

It seems that not only the occasional PhD student or professor has discovered that they can gather more publicity and citations with Open Access papers. Many researchers have welcomed the increase in Open Access (Dallmeier-Tiessen et al., 2011). Over the past years, universities and research funders have discovered the advantages of Open Access as well.

Early declarations towards Open Access have been done since the early 2000s. Examples of such declarations, include the Budapest Open Access Initiative (2002) and the Berlin Declaration on Open Access (Max Planck Gesellschaft, 2003). Still, new declarations are written even today, such as the São Paulo Statement on Open Access (Science Europe, 2019).

Ever since the first declarations have been made, a lot of organisations have tried to implement Open Access demands of these declarations into their policies. 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.). A lot of these policies are made by organisations that fund research on the national, as well as the international level. The aforementioned Austrian FWF signed the Berlin Declaration (FWF, n.d.), while the German Ministry of Science and Education (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung; BMBF) calls the same declaration a “Milestone to establish Open Access in the German scientific system” (BMBF, 2016). Both of these institutions try to expand Open Access publishing in their respective countries. 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).

The latest development sees universities trying to pressure large publishers into adopting Open Access practices. In 2017 major German universities cancelled contracts with the Dutch publisher Elsevier over disputes of publishing costs. Christian Thomsen, President of the Technical University Berlin, publicly stated that “The general issue is that large parts of the research done is publicly funded, the type setting and quality control (peer review) is done by people who are paid by the public, (and) the purchase of the journals is also paid by the public”, and further: “They should be paid fairly for their good service. The problem is, we no longer see what their good service is.” (Kwon, 2017 cite). A year later Swedish universities cut ties with Elsevier over the same issue (Yeager, 2018), while French universities also cut ties with the German publisher Springer (Kwon, 2018a). Universities in other countries demonstrated that cancellation is not the only option in this dispute when Dutch universities were able to negotiate an Open Access deal with publishers in 2018 (Kwon, 2018b), while Norwegian universities also struck a deal with Elsevier in 2019 (Nilsson, 2019).

## Conclusion

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 fits all” approach to publishing Open Access may not be the best option. However, what will help in the popularisation of Open Access among disciplines is to increase the awareness of Open Access, and to educate people about Open Access standards.

We hereby strongly urge readers to gather more knowledge on Open Access, share it with others, encourage their university, government, and other institutions to facilitate Open Access and last but not least, deposit their own research in institutional repositories, thus making it Green Open Access.

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 (Open Access Button, n.d.) 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 take advantage of this opportunity.
- ❖ **Gold Open Access for publication!** An increasing number of journals now offers Open Access to publications, for varying APCs which are either paid by the authors or their institutions. However, many journals (e.g. PLOS ONE, Meta-Psychology, Collabra: Psychology) grant waivers to individuals who cannot 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.

We call upon 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. As a signatory party, you devote your activities in the active dissemination of 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 an increase in the number of stakeholders committing to the Open Access movement and will consequently increase the number of Open Access publications.

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, the associations do wish to encourage their members and the scientific community as a whole to follow these recommendations and stand by the suggestions given in this joint position paper.

### **Reviewed by:**

*Journal of European Psychology Students Associations (2019-2020)*  
Patrick Smela, Boyan Nys & Leonhard Volz

*Policy Team (2019-2020):*  
Eleni Iatridou & Eleftheria Foka

### **Written by:**

*Journal of European Psychology Students Associations (2018-2019)*  
Martin Holst & Laura Griffin

*Social Impact Initiative (2018-2019)*  
Rebecca Hjemdahl

## 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.

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

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

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

**Green open access:** Making material open access through self-archiving.

**Open access (Open Access):** Free, immediate, online availability of research articles and the right to use the articles fully in the digital environment.

**Paywall:** Feature on a website that requires payment before users can access its contents or services.

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

**Self-archiving:** When the author deposits a free copy of an electronic document online, thus making the document open access.

## References

- Asendorpf, J. B., Conner, M., De Fruyt, F., De Houwer, J., Denissen, J. J., Fiedler, K., ... & Perugini, M. (2013). Recommendations for increasing replicability in psychology. *European Journal of Personality*, 27(2), 108-119.
- Björk, B.-C. (2017). Gold, green, and black open access. *Learned Publishing*, advance online publication.
- BMBF (2016). Freier Zugang schafft mehr Wissen. Retrieved from <https://www.bmbf.de/de/freier-zugang-schafft-mehr-wissen-3340.html>
- Budapest Open Access Initiative (n.d.). Read the Budapest open access initiative. Retrieved 03. June from <https://www.budapestopenaccessinitiative.org/read>
- Dallmeier-Tiessen, S., Darby, R., Goerner, B., ... , & van der Stelt, W. (2011). Highlights from the SOpen AccessP project survey. Why scientists think about open access publishing. *ArXiv*.
- Eger, T., Scheufen, M., & Meierrieks, D. (2015). The determinants of open access publishing: Survey evidence from Germany. *European Journal of Law and Economics*, 39(3), 475-503.
- Elsevier (2017). Subscription price list for librarians and agents. Retrieved on the 09. March 2017 from <https://www.elsevier.com/books-and-journals/journal-pricing/print-price-list>
- EU2016 (2016). *Press release. All European scientific articles to be freely accessible by 2020*. Retrieved from <https://english.eu2016.nl/latest/news/2016/05/27/all-european-scientific-articles-to-be-freely-accessible-by-2020>
- Fonds zur Förderung der wissenschaftlichen Forschung (n.d.). Open Access Policy. Retrieved 03. June 2019 from <https://www.fwf.ac.at/en/research-funding/open-access-policy/>
- Kwon, D. (2017). Major german universities cancel elsevier contracts. *The Scientist*. Retrieved 02. June 2019 from <https://www.the-scientist.com/news-analysis/major-german-universities-cancel-elsevier-contracts-31208>
- Kwon, D. (2018a). French universities cancel subscriptions to springer journals. *The Scientist*. Retrieved 02. June 2019 from <https://www.the-scientist.com/daily-news/french-universities-cancel-subscriptions-to-springer-journals-29882>
- Kwon, D. (2018b). Dutch universities, journal publishers agree on open-access deals. *The Scientist*. Retrieved 02. June 2019 from <https://www.the-scientist.com/news-analysis/dutch-universities-journal-publishers-agree-on-open-access-deals-30860>

- Laakso, M., & Björk, B.-C. (2012). Anatomy of open access publishing: A study of longitudinal development and internal structure. *BMC Medicine*, *10*, 124–133. doi:10.1186/1741-7015-10-124
- Laakso, M., Welling, P., Bukova, H., Nyman, L., Björk, B.-C., & Hedlund, T. (2011). The development of open access journal publishing from 1993 to 2009. *PLOS ONE*, *6*(6). doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0020961
- Manchester Metropolitan University (2016). Open access. Retrieved on the 02. February 2016 from <http://libguides.mmu.ac.uk/openaccess/definitions/embargo>
- Max Planck Gesellschaft (2003). Berlin Declaration on Open Access to Knowledge in the Sciences and Humanities. Retrieved 03. June 2019 from <https://openaccess.mpg.de/Berlin-Declaration>
- Multidisciplinary Digital Publishing Institute (n.d.). Retrieved 03. June 2019 from <https://www.mdpi.com/apc>
- Nilsson, P. (2019). Elsevier in €9m Norwegian deal to end paywalls for academic papers. *Financial Times*. Retrieved 02. June 2019 from <https://www.ft.com/content/30ceaafc-6441-11e9-9adc-98bf1d35a056>
- Open Access Button (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://openaccessbutton.org/>
- Sample, I. (2012). Harvard university says it can't afford journal publisher's prices. *The Guardian*. Retrieved 02. June 2019 from <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2012/apr/24/harvard-university-journal-publishers-prices>.
- Science Europe (2019). São Paulo Statement on Open Access. Retrieved on the 3. June 2019 from <https://www.coalition-s.org/sao-paulo-statement-on-open-access/>
- Swan, A. (2012). *Policy Guidelines for the Development and Promotion of Open Access*. Paris, France: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).
- Swan, A., Gargouri, Y., Hunt, M & Harnad, S. (2015). *Working together to promote open access policy alignment in Europe*. (Alignment in Europe Work package 3 report: open access policies.). Retrieved from <http://pasteur4oa.eu/sites/pasteur4oa/files/deliverables/PASTEUR4OpenAccess%20Work%20Package%203%20Report%20final%2010%20March%202015.pdf>
- Swan, A. & Rodrigues, E. (2015). Open access policy effectiveness: A briefing paper for research institutions. Retrieved from <http://www.pasteur4oa.eu/sites/pasteur4oa/files/resource/Policy%20effectiveness%20-%20institutions%20final.pdf>

Travis, J. (2016). In survey, most give thumbs-up to pirated papers. *Science*. Retrieved 02. June 2019 from <https://www.sciencemag.org/news/2016/05/survey-most-give-thumbs-pirated-papers>

UCSF Library (n.d.). Retrieved 02. June 2019 from <https://www.library.ucsf.edu/open-access/journals-costs/>

UN General Assembly. (1948) Universal declaration of human rights (217 [III] A). Paris

Wang, X., Liu, C., Mao, W., & Fang, Z. (2015). The open access advantage considering citation, article usage and social media attention. *Scientometrics*, 103(2), 555-564.

Yeager, A. (2018). Sweden cancels agreement with elsevier over open access. Retrieved 02. June 2019 from <https://www.the-scientist.com/the-nutshell/sweden-cancels-agreement-with-elsevier-over-open-access-64405>