Five ways to optimize open access uptake after a signed read and publish contract: lessons learned from the Dutch UKB consortium

Consortia and publishers invest a lot of time and expertise in the negotiation process. A well-drafted read and publish contract is, however, not enough to guarantee an optimal open access publishing service. The Dutch UKB consortium uses several tools and practices to actively monitor and manage open access uptake during an agreement. Library help desks are provided with a knowledge base covering most frequently asked questions from authors. A journal list gives an integral overview of the more than 11,000 journals that are part of 16 consortium deals. Because researchers wanted to know about open access publishing possibilities from a journal perspective, a journal browser was developed. Workflow improvement and retrospective open access are regular topics in mid-term meetings with publishers, resulting in increased open access uptake. A purpose-built datahub provides the consortium and libraries with publication data that helps monitoring and managing output on both article and deal level. Finally, licence choice including funder compliance is taken into account, resulting in an increasing percentage of CC BY versus the more restricted CC BY-NC and CC BY-NC-ND options.

Keywords

open access; consortia; read and publish deals; UKSG Conference 2022; Netherlands; UKB

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Introduction

Read and publish agreements are a main driver in the worldwide uptake of open access (OA) for peer-reviewed research articles. More and more consortia and individual organizations are closing deals with publishers. The Dutch consortium of University Libraries (UKB) signed its first read and publish deal in 2015. By mid-2022 the consortium was managing 16 of these agreements, making it one of the international frontrunners according to the ESAC Market Watch.[1] This is done in close collaboration with SURF, the co-operative association of Dutch educational and research institutions that administratively and financially manages the consortium agreements. Despite the effort and expertise invested in the process of negotiation and drafting the contract, the real open access results are achieved during the execution of the contract. Based on lessons learned from the UKB consortium, five ways to optimize open access after a signed contract are addressed here in which tooling plays a key role. This case study was also presented during the UKSG Annual Conference on 31 May and 1 June 2022.

> 'the real open access results are achieved during the execution of the contract'

Be transparent about the provisions in the contract

In order to support researchers with open access publishing, to evaluate the service of the publisher and to manage open access workflow processes efficiently, key stakeholders need to understand the details of the contract. Which article types are eligible? Are there financial risks when a cap is reached? How is the affiliation of the author checked? Does the publisher only offer funder-compliant licences? However, a contract is not a helpfile. If negotiation teams and OA support teams are not closely connected, if contracts are difficult to read and understand by library help desks or if concrete information is 'hidden' between pages of legal sum-ups, then essential open access related information is easily overlooked or misunderstood. This becomes worse when the number of deals increases because in practice no two contracts are the same, even with the 'model licence' the consortium uses as a starting point. And not only does the number of deals grow, in most libraries the number of staff providing open access services also increases.

The Dutch consortium strives to be transparent about the provisions in the contract to all internal and external stakeholders. For example, by presenting a structured overview of all read and publish agreements on **openaccess.nl**,[2] combining information about the workflow (including screenshots) and conditions. All UKB read and publish contracts are also registered on ESAC[3] (using the search term 'VSNU') including a link to the contract itself, making it transparent to the international community. But this is not enough to help library open access experts and support desks in their daily work.

Based on frequently asked questions, a knowledge base was built with structured information on: the duration of the contract, participating institutes, journal types in the deal (hybrid, full OA), dynamics in the journal portfolio, covered publication types (for example: research and review articles, brief communication and/or case reports), licence options, copyright, reporting, retrospective OA options, possible funder compliance issues, cap information, how author eligibility is defined and if there are known workflow issues. This information is managed and updated by the consortium, so open access experts and help desk librarians always have the latest information available.

'librarians keep sight of the portfolio dynamics in order to inform and advise corresponding authors'

A second crucial tool is the SURF Journal List. All of the more than 11,000 journals covered by the 16 deals are presented in one convenient overview that is regularly updated by SURF, based on contract changes and/or journal updates from publishers. By filtering on, for example, institution, publisher, contract end date or journal type (hybrid, full OA), librarians keep sight of the portfolio dynamics in order to inform and advise corresponding authors.

Communicate with the author at the right moment, with the right information

Authors need to be aware of the opportunities to publish open access. As part of a deal or otherwise. Information is important during both the submission and approval process. Although many consortia, libraries and publishers have 'landing pages' with deal information, these are in general designed to inform the world about a contract between consortium and publisher. Authors, on the other hand, seek information with their preferred journal(s) in mind. The question 'Can I publish my article open access free of charge in one of my favourite journals?' is not easily answered in an overview of 16 consortium deals. A complicating factor is that contract information is dynamic. Not only because each deal has a start and end date but also because the journal portfolio can change during the agreement and reaching a cap can cause a sudden 'end of paid open access service'. Overview pages are important, but not enough to communicate effectively with authors.

To facilitate the need for journal-oriented, dynamic information, the library of Wageningen University (WUR) built the 'WUR Journal Browser' in 2018[4] and started to manage and host it as a service for the other Dutch university libraries. Based on the affiliation of an author, information is presented from more than 38,000 journals, including all journals in the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ). When searching for a journal, the author is presented with information about an existing consortium or institutional agreement, possible general institutional open access funds and options to share the article in the repository. If a publish deal is in place, the author is presented with information about eligibility, article types that are covered and the start and end dates of the deal. Examples are shown in Figures 1 and 2. Since 2021, the consortium also adds a forecast for an end of service date when a cap may be reached before the end of the year.

An important dataset for the WUR Journal Browser is the SURF Journal List. To present authors with information about institutional deals and funds, libraries also provide local data to the WUR. Use of an institutional corporate identity makes it possible for institutions to promote the tool as their own service to authors. Institutions can also decide if they want to add additional information about impact factors or not.

'If a publish deal is in place, the author is presented with information'

Figure 1. WUR Journal Browser showing researchers from Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam a journal that is part of a consortium agreement

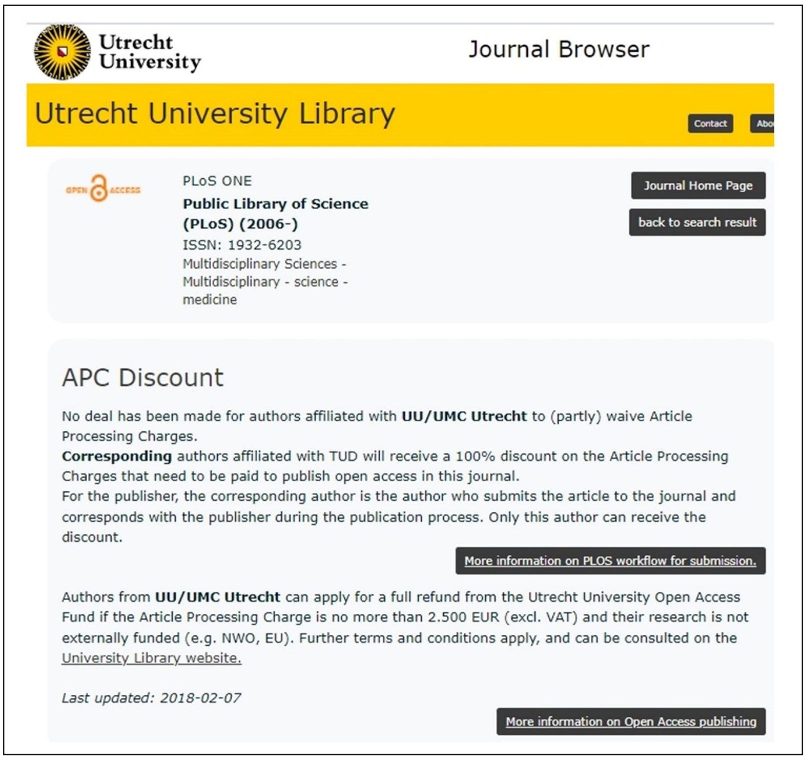

Figure 2. WUR Journal Browser showing researchers from University Utrecht a journal that is not part of a consortium agreement and the option to use the general Open Access Fund instead

Collaborate with the publishers on workflow improvement and retrospective open access

When authors choose to publish their eligible article in a journal that is part of a read and publish agreement, there is no guarantee that the article will be published open access. Authors often need to take several steps in the workflow to comply with internal publisher guidelines. These guidelines can be wrapped in information overload and vague terminology, resulting in confusion for the author. Frequent use of trigger words like 'charge', 'cost' and 'pay' in workflow text leads to fear of unforeseen costs. A workflow with many licence options and legal terminology can result in an unfinished workflow and a lost opportunity to publish the article open access.

As a result, open access uptake can lag behind expectations by 20 per cent or more. A UKB survey of almost 200 eligible authors who did not make use of an existing open access deal, revealed that only one of those authors explicitly rejected open access as a publication model. All other authors who entered the open access workflow but did not make use of the opportunity stated that they were not aware of the fact that the deal was applicable for them and/or were afraid of unforeseen costs.

'A workflow with many licence options and legal terminology can result in … a lost opportunity to publish the article open access'

A workflow with mandatory open access is, of course, the most efficient solution to maximize uptake, but a few simple workflow improvements like open access as default (so an author must deliberately choose a subscription licence) also has a significant impact. Mentioning that if eligibility for publishing open access in a hybrid journal is rejected the author can still opt for subscription in order to avoid unforeseen costs, will reassure authors that there is no financial risk. Showing explicitly that the article costs €0 reconfirms for the author that there are no additional costs.

Although improvement of the workflow is key, it also takes time and is an internal publisher process. That is why the UKB consortium also discusses the options for retrospective open access with publishers, which makes it possible to change the article licence from subscription to open access after the article is published. Ideally, retrospective open access is mentioned in the contract as part of the open access publishing service. Even if that is not the case, most publishers are in practice willing to co-operate with improving the open access uptake during the contract period by initiating retrospective open access on a voluntary basis. For both publisher and consortium, tracking down missed open access and implementing changes is time-consuming but, looking at the effect, it pays off. Over the last three years, the average uptake for all consortium deals increased from approximately 80 per cent to around 95 per cent. With more than 15,000 articles published open access under a consortium deal during 2021 and an average article processing charge (APC) of €2,000, each additional per cent of open access uptake represents a contract value of around €300,000. This makes the business case to invest consortium time in retrospective open access a 'no-brainer'.

Work data driven

Publication data is important. Frequency and content of publisher reports is often determined by the contract. Data is not only used for trend analysis and benchmarking but also more and more for monitoring and managing current publication processes. When will the cap be reached? Which articles are not funder compliant? Are eligible articles published outside the deal? Publisher data is of course important for these analyses because it is obtained from publisher systems and is available more quickly than from secondary resources. However, publisher data should not be the only source that is relied on. Publisher reports can contain incomplete or even incorrect metadata. For example, a publication shown to have an open access status is in fact published subscription. Lack of standardization of institutional names, even within a single consortium report, makes it hard to obtain complete overviews on an organizational level. Let alone being able to combine multiple reports from multiple publishers over multiple institutions into one coherent format.

'Publisher reports can contain incomplete or even incorrect metadata'

To get control of the data, UKB has built a data warehouse: a consortium knowledge base that provides information on article, publisher, institutional, national and contract level. Publisher reports are standardized and combined with article data from NARCIS, the national portal for research publications that harvests university research information systems.[5] As part of an available consortium contract, Scopus data are also added. Data from sources like Unpaywall, ISSN and Crossref are used to enrich the publication data. Information from SURF about contracts and the SURF journal list is added to match output with current and previous contracts. The result is a datahub that contains metadata from articles that are published both inside and outside of consortium agreements.

By storing current and historical data (start date 2018), the datahub can be used for managing current contracts, trend analyses, portfolio management and to audit data that publishers provide for contract negotiations. When it comes to optimizing open access uptake, the datahub is used for example for: checking the correctness of publisher reports (especially open access status), detecting possible missed open access and monitoring cap status. See Figures 3, 4 and 5 for examples of current dashboards.

In 2022 the consortium also started to collect information about funders, the types of licences used and article processing charges. Although this data is not complete and/or easy to interpret, it gives indications about possible funder compliance issues and open access costs outside of consortia deals. In order to optimize the process of collecting, standardizing and processing publisher reports, the consortium actively collaborates with OA Switchboard,[6] a not-for-profit and community-driven central information exchange hub.

Figure 3. A general dashboard from the UKB datahub

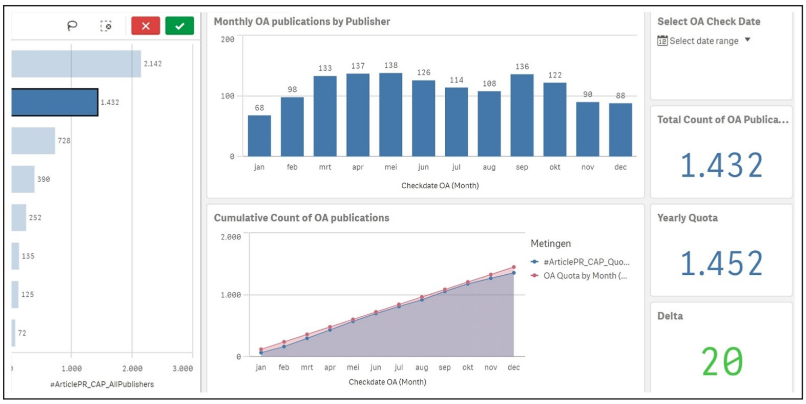

Figure 4. Part of the cap monitoring dashboard (anonymized)

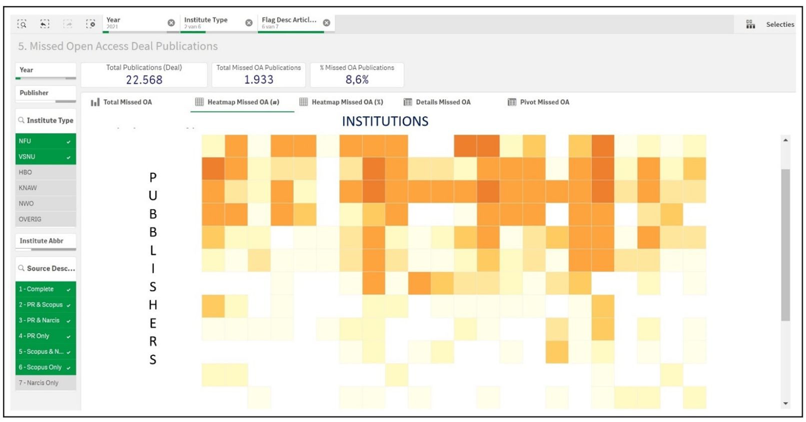

Figure 5. The ‘Missed Open Access’ dashboard in heat map modus (anonymized). Darker colours indicate higher numbers of missed open access

Make the publication as open as possible

Even when an article is published open access, there is still a factor that influences the openness of a publication – the licence that is used. Dutch universities prefer to use an open CC BY licence. More than 20 per cent of consortium publications have funder requirements from cOAlition S partners NWO and ZonMW that, as of 2022, include the use of a compliant CC BY licence. In 2019 around 47 per cent of articles that were published open access under a consortium deal had a more restricted CC BY-NC or CC BY-NC-ND licence.

To improve the percentage of CC BY versus a more restricted licence, the UKB consortium reviewed the workflow process for publishers who scored below average. Talks with several publishers resulted in an improvement of the licence workflow, for example by adding information about the preferred or required licence choice and/or by making CC BY the default option. To help authors to choose a suitable licence, the UKB Working Group on Open Access and funder NWO published a 'Guide to Creative Commons for Scholarly Publications and Educational Resources'.[7]

These actions resulted in an increase of CC BY usage to 70 per cent in 2021 and this seems to have stabilized, see Figure 6. In 2022 the focus has been on monitoring Plan S compliance in licence choices.

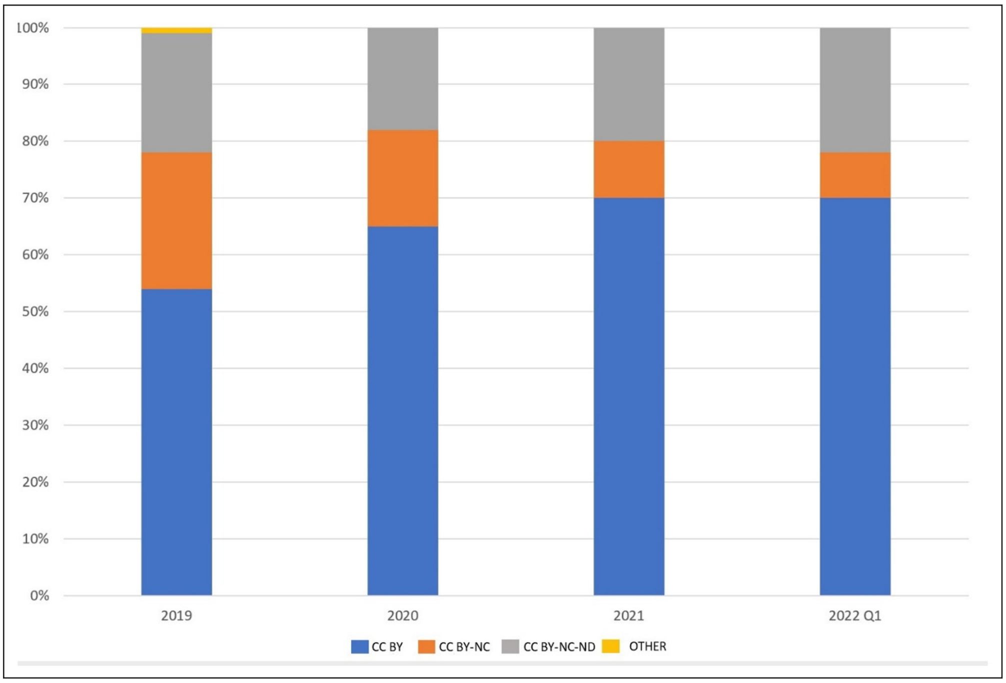

Figure 6. OA licence types of articles published in consortium deals, 2019 – 2022 (first Quarter). Source: UKB datahub 2022

Final remarks

A well-drafted contract helps with many of the activities described in this case study. The UKB consortium addresses retrospective open access, roll over of unused APCs in a capped deal, funder-compliant licences and reporting in contracts. But even if some issues are not fully addressed in a contract, it is important to address these in mid-term meetings with publishers. Finally, it is important to state that the goal of all described activities is optimizing open access uptake, not maximizing it. The consortium does not encourage writing teams to redefine corresponding author roles based on available open access options. Corresponding authors with multiple affiliations are not guided to use a consortium affiliation when the work was primarily done for an external university. Short-term gains because of an increase in open access publications would only lead to pressure on contract costs in the long term. On the other

'the goal … is optimizing open access uptake, not maximizing it'

hand, it is important for both researchers and libraries that corresponding authors who are eligible make optimal use of open access publication options. Because Dutch universities are aiming towards 100 per cent open access, an article that is published behind a paywall will at some point be shared in a university repository. This requires extra work from libraries and authors, while the article in most cases lacks a CC BY licence and is only shared after an embargo period.

Abbreviations and Acronyms

A list of the abbreviations and acronyms used in this and other *Insights* articles can be accessed here – click on the URL below and then select the 'full list of industry A&As' link: http://www.uksg.org/publications#aa.

Competing interests

The author has declared no competing interests.

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