

National licence negotiations advancing the open access transition – a view from Sweden

The National Library of Sweden (NLS) has been working on advancing open access (OA) to scholarly output since 2006. In 2017 the NLS received an appropriation directive from the Government to act as a national co-ordinating body in the effort towards a transition to immediate OA for all research output by 2026. As a consequence, the NLS has included this objective in its vision for 2025: to lead the work moving from subscription-based to immediate openly accessible research publications. As part of this objective, the Bibsam Consortium negotiates journal licence agreements including OA components in order to help achieve a rapid and sustainable transition to OA.

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A broken system

The current subscription-based system is outmoded and no longer viable. Firstly, the system keeps scientific articles locked behind publishers' paywalls. Secondly, library budgets can no longer meet the demands for exorbitant price increases in a non-competitive market. The largest five publishers have profit margins well exceeding those of Google and Amazon and are asking for annual price increases high above the Consumer Price Index. Publishers are

2 able to uphold these high prices as no journal can be substituted for another in the current research assessment and reward systems, which are often based on traditional citation metrics and journal impact factors.

Since the introduction of mandates and policies demanding immediate open access (OA), publishers are able to continue to charge for subscriptions for reading, traditionally paid for by libraries, while at the same time charge for making them open upon publishing through article processing charges (APCs). These publication charges are paid directly to publishers at list prices by individual researchers or higher education institutions (HEIs). This situation, with two separate revenue streams for the publishers, results in 'double-dipping' whereby publishers are able to charge twice for the same content. Today's publishing system is neither transparent, nor comparable across organizations and consortia, nor between one nation and another. To achieve this, we need to gain an overview of the total cost of publication (TCP).

'Today's publishing system is neither transparent, nor comparable across organizations and consortia'

The total cost of publication and state of OA in Sweden

The NLS has worked on advancing OA to scholarly publications since 2006. In 2016 the Swedish Government's research policy directive for the next ten years, as set out in the Swedish Government's Research Bill (ref No. 2016/17:50) 'Knowledge in Collaboration', includes the goal that scientific publications which are the result of publicly funded research should be made immediately OA on publication. In order to acquire an overview of the total number of OA articles published yearly, the NLS has introduced a new evidence-based way of collecting publication data to be used as a basis for publisher negotiations.

'scientific publications which are the result of publicly funded research should be made immediately OA on publication'

In 2016 the NLS set up a pilot repository on GitHub called Open APC Sweden, inspired by the German initiative Open Intact.¹ There are currently eight HEIs contributing data about their collective spending on APCs, based on information retrieved from local finance systems.² As a result of the pilot, a recommendation was introduced by the Swedish Rectors' Conference that HEIs should use a special code when registering invoices for APCs in local finance systems.^{3,4}

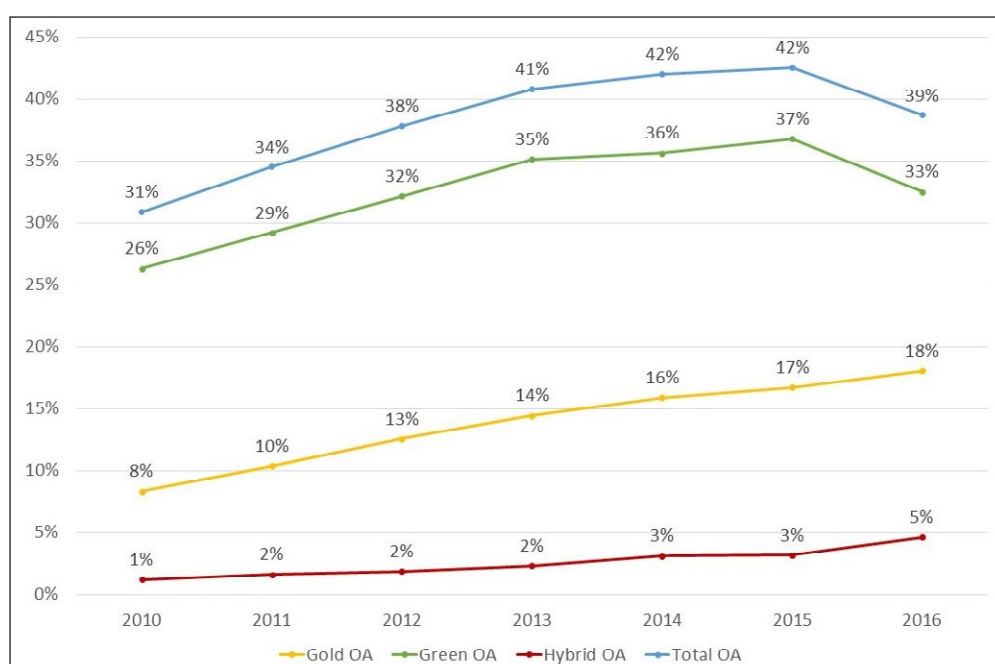


Figure 1. Share of OA for various types of articles and conference proceedings which have been marked as peer reviewed in the Swedish national publications database Swepub 2010–2016

- 3 Open APC Sweden is an important factor in the desired monitoring and overview of the TCP, and from 2018 the NLS has been assigned to monitor and report this cost on a yearly basis to the Swedish Government. Another annual report, which was commissioned and published in 2017, showed that in 2015 42% of Swedish article output was OA (see Figure 1), a percentage similar to statistics published in other, pivotal, international studies.⁵

Enough money in the system

According to a White Paper⁶ produced by the Max Planck Digital Library, there is enough money in the publishing system for a transition to OA. No country would have to finance its entire publication output, but only the share of publications that can be attributed to a particular country's corresponding authors. Calculations carried out by the NLS have shown that this hypothesis holds true for Sweden. The average publication output by corresponding authors affiliated with Swedish HEIs amounts to around 17,000 articles per annum.⁷ Assuming, as in the White Paper mentioned above, a mean APC is well below €2,000 in a purely OA scenario, the total expenditure on APCs would amount to €34 million. This is equivalent to the current spend on e-resource licences today and proves that a flip from a business model based on paying for subscriptions to paying for publishing articles immediately OA is possible.

In order to achieve a transition, though, there is a clear need for national and supranational commitment. Sweden's key stakeholders, such as the Swedish Research Council, the Association of Higher Education and the NLS, have all endorsed the global alliance OA2020 committed to accelerating the transition to OA.⁸

'Sweden's key stakeholders ... have all endorsed the global alliance OA2020'

The Bibsam Consortium

A Swedish library consortium, Bibsam, was formed in 1996 and today consists of 81 participating organizations from Swedish HEIs, research institutes and governmental agencies. (See Table 1 for some facts about Bibsam.) The Consortium is administered by the NLS and governed by a steering committee consisting of representatives nominated by the Swedish Rectors' Conference, the Association of Special Libraries and the NLS. The steering committee is headed by the Vice-Chancellor of Stockholm University, Astrid Söderbergh Widding. Committee members take an active part in high-level negotiations with publishers. The table below summarizes some facts about the Bibsam Consortium.

Facts about the Bibsam Consortium 2018

Participating organizations	81
Participating HEIs	42
Agreements	41
E-resources and packages	282
Turnover 2017	€36 million

Table 1. Facts about the Bibsam Consortium at the NLS

In 2016 the steering committee took the principled decision that every negotiation should contain an OA element. If acceptable terms regarding OA cannot be met, an agreement should be limited to a single calendar year.

'Approximately 1,400 articles were published as immediate OA in 2017'

Negotiations for journal agreements with OA components

The first OA agreement in Sweden was signed with CERN for SCOAP3⁹ in 2014, a consortia agreement for key journals in the field of high-energy physics. SCOAP3 has converted journals to OA at no extra cost for authors and the cost for the Swedish part of the total publication output is shared by six HEIs.

4 Sweden, the first Nordic country to do so, signed a pilot with Springer in July 2016 which will end in December 2018. This 'read and publish' model combines licensing and publishing fees in a single agreement. The aim is to increase OA publishing and at the same time create an overview of the costs involved in order to get control over the total spend. Approximately 1,400 articles were published as immediate OA in 2017. This can be compared to numbers from 2015, when only 157 articles were published OA. As the Springer agreement was the first Swedish OA pilot combining licensing and publishing, an independent national evaluation group was formed with the objective of studying the outcome of the pilot. A third interim report in a series of four was published in February 2018.¹⁰ It provides evidence-based guidelines for the upcoming renegotiation, recommending, for example, inclusion of gold OA journals and lower levels of APCs.

'when the proportion of hybrid articles grows, the licence cost is reduced'

Another type of offsetting agreement was reached with the Institute of Physics (IOP) in 2017. The IOP model balances local and global offsetting. The participating organizations' total amount spent for APCs in year one is offset against the same organizations' licence fees the following year. The model is based on a sliding scale, meaning that when the proportion of hybrid articles grows, the licence cost is reduced.

Three new agreements with OA components are in place for 2018. The agreements with the Royal Society of Chemistry and De Gruyter for 2018–2020 are all read and publish models. The agreement with Taylor & Francis is a read and publish model during 2018, but with the objective of changing to a model based solely on paying for publishing output for 2019–2020.

The renegotiation for a deal with Elsevier for 2018 and onwards started in 2017 and is still ongoing. A high-level meeting with key national stakeholders and Elsevier representatives was held in the autumn of 2017, presenting the views of both parties. The basis of any agreement from the Swedish viewpoint is that it should contain a substantial OA element without increasing the overall spend.

Table 2 below summarizes the current deals made by the Bibsam Consortium containing OA components.

Publisher agreements	Time period	Business model	Capped no. of articles	Expected publication output 2018	No. of titles for publication	No. of titles with reading access	Gold OA journals included
Springer Compact	2016–2018	read and publish	1,853	1,665	1,600	2,156	No
Institute of Physics	2017–2019	offsetting	uncapped*	30	41	91	No
De Gruyter	2018–2020	read and publish	uncapped	30	381	381	Yes
Royal Society of Chemistry	2018–2020	read and publish	uncapped	200	40	40	No
Taylor & Francis	2018–2020	read and publish	1,450	2,040	2295	167–2,391**	No

Table 2. List of current OA agreements negotiated by the Bibsam Consortium

*APCs refunded to a maximum of the yearly licence fee

**Different packages available

There is currently no satisfying OA business model on the market. Prepaid read and publish models with large publishers, containing a licence to read the content and an option to publish a set number of projected articles, are only to be regarded as pilots or transitional models since there is a risk of such agreements becoming permanent, which in turn would threaten to replicate the current lock-in with bundled journal collections tying up a substantial part of library budgets.

'we are ... exploring the possibility of entering into agreements with gold OA publishers'

Negotiations with gold OA publishers

5 Even though negotiations with traditional publishers who offer hybrid OA journals have hitherto been the focus of the Bibsam Consortium, we are also exploring the possibility of entering into agreements with gold OA publishers. An overview of the total Swedish article output with gold OA publishers has therefore been compiled in preparation for forthcoming negotiations by Stockholm University, which was one of the first HEIs signing agreements with gold OA publishers (see Table 3 below).

Publishers	No. of OA Journals	No. of institutional memberships	Number of publications		
			2014	2015	2016
BioMed Central (Springer Nature)	304	7	401	339	361
Copernicus	38	0	67	38	46
EDP Open (EDP Science)	23	0	48	57	63
Frontiers	59	0	66	78	101
Hindawi	400	0	76	69	51
MDPI	185	3	52	78	122
PLOS	8	1	274	256	234
Scientific Research Publishing (SCIRP)	200	N/A	45	17	16
Total			1029	932	994

Table 3. Overview of the estimated article output for corresponding authors affiliated with Swedish HEIs with gold OA publishers

The NLS supports OA initiatives

Apart from journal negotiations, the NLS also supports initiatives for both OA infrastructure services and OA content services. The former consists of the Confederation of Open Access Repositories (COAR), COUNTER, Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) [a project originally started in 2003 funded by the NLS], the Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition (SPARC) and Sherpa/RoMEO. The latter consists of Kriterium, Knowledge Unlatched, Open Book Publishers and the Open Library of Humanities.

Redirection of funding streams

In 2017 the NLS received an appropriation directive from the government to co-ordinate open access to research publications in Sweden.¹¹ As part of this assignment the NLS has initiated five studies on how to overcome obstacles for a transition to OA to take place. The studies cover the following topic areas:

- the current merit and resource allocation system versus incentives for open access
- funding for a transition from a subscription-based to an open access publishing system
- open access to scholarly monographs
- financial and technical support for converting peer-reviewed and scholarly journals from toll access to open access
- monitoring of compliance with open access policies and mandates.

The second study, 'Funding for a transition from a subscription-based to an open access publishing system', is of particular interest in this context and will be finalized at the end of 2018. Although the matter needs to be further explored in the study and new workflow processes to be developed, a need for institutional redirection of funding streams in Sweden among national stakeholders has already become clear. Swedish HEIs and the Bibsam Consortium also need to be backed by funding from national stakeholders during a transitional period. The European University Association succinctly phrases it as follows in their recommendation: 'Governments and research funders should further their support in the transition towards OA by contributing to costs incurred by institutions and researchers with OA, such as those related to infrastructures and APCs.'¹²

'A complete redesign of current cost reallocation models is a necessary next step'

- 6 As some organizations are research intensive and some are not, a fair and transparent model for a required cost reallocation must also be developed. A complete redesign of current cost reallocation models is a necessary next step to take, both in negotiations with publishers and within the consortium.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that there is enough money in the current subscription system and that an OA publishing system is no longer only a mirage on the horizon, but is in fact currently under way in Sweden through:

- national OA co-ordination
- ongoing OA studies
- new evidence-based ways of collecting publication data to support high-level negotiations with publishers for agreements combining both OA components and subscriptions
- monitoring of funding streams and compliance with funder mandates
- national and international co-operation on these issues.

'an OA publishing system is no longer only a mirage on the horizon'

In order to reach the target of immediate OA on publication of publicly funded research outputs by 2026 set by the Swedish Government, there is a strong need for institutional reallocation of funds. The main stakeholders in Sweden must not lose momentum in this process but make a concerted push forward in negotiations with publishers to achieve a sustainable scholarly publishing system in unison with its international counterparts.

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 'Abbreviations and Acronyms' link at the top of the page it directs you to: <http://www.uksg.org/publications#aa>

Competing interests

The authors have declared no competing interests.

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