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*Open access deals, driven by institutions, funders, and sometimes entire countries, are an indicator of the fundamental realignment underway in the entire scholarly communication ecosystem. Initiatives such as Plan S and Projekt DEAL are the current battlegrounds, symptoms of the transformation that must happen across the entire scholarly communication ecosystem.*

## Important Details

Advancing Open Scholarly Communications, an event organized by [Copyright Clearance Center](#) and co-produced with [Outsell Inc.](#), took place in central London on March 14, coinciding with the annual [London Book Fair](#). The objective of the event was to connect key stakeholders across the globe — publishers, institutions, funders, policymakers, authors/researchers, and service providers — to have a strategic conversation about emerging models and what’s needed to advance scholarly communications in an environment fraught with friction.

The event featured panel and workshop sessions designed to foster transparency and collaboration and to build a common understanding of the challenges and opportunities currently facing the scholarly communications ecosystem. The spirit of the day was established in the opening remarks, which called for open, cross-party collaboration and communication to “break out of the noise,” make progress, and help move the sector forward in light of shared challenges.

David Worlock, co-chair of the Outsell Leadership Community and a widely recognized digital expert, opened the day, urging participants to keep the big picture in mind. Against the backdrop of Brexit — which has amounted to no agreed-upon or actionable solution after two years of preparation — and the 30th anniversary of the World Wide Web, he challenged an illusion of adaptability and accommodation. David offered that the scholarly communication ecosystem continues to deny the importance of network communication by carrying forward a format-driven approach in a connected world.

## Everything is on the table for change.

He posits that open access, for example, cannot be addressed as a single subject divorced from the structure in which research is funded, processed, recorded, assessed, and shared — and how brand value is shifting from journals to individuals within that. A multidimensional view has to be maintained while also taking into account the volume of outputs being dealt with, the data being created, the fact that machines are increasingly core users of that data, and that every region and discipline has a different starting point.

Within that broad context, our panelists — Olivier Dumon of [Elsevier](#), Michael Forster from the [IEEE](#), Danny Kingsley from [Cambridge University Library](#), Salvatore Mele of [CERN](#), and Annette Thomas of Web of Science Group at [Clarivate Analytics](#) — shared their views on the keys to success in an open future. Focusing on their greatest hopes and worst fears, the panelists acknowledged both the scale of the problem being faced and the need to think big around the scale of the change that needs to happen.

Calling for a source-neutral, transparent, and interoperable ecosystem that places the researcher at the center of the process, they described the information system supporting research as broken — from search and discovery, across certification and access, to evaluation. They highlighted the importance of finding a way to achieve redistribution of resourcing within the current system to allow readers to read and authors to publish as freely and as widely as possible. They expressed concern that the current direction of travel — regarding [Plan S](#), for example — would simply serve to underline an ongoing system of haves and have-nots unless it develops in a way that does not impact quality and exclude participants.

While encouraged that Plan S has enhanced attention to the issues at stake, one panelist urged participants to leverage that attention to work together to solve shared problems and avoid the risk of the views of different stakeholders becoming ever more entrenched.

They agreed that fundamental change was needed, as scholarly publishing is at the end of a long research process, and they spoke of thinking big and embracing transformation. The scale of the challenge requires stakeholders to work together, with a key area of focus being the need to find different ways to define value and contribution across the ecosystem.

It also requires that we bring in stakeholders — such as government leaders who control funding and university leaders who control university budgets and reward systems — who are not typically present in these conversations. It requires an acceptance that sacrifices will need to be made now to remain relevant in the future and that enormous opportunities will be available for those who embrace the change that must occur.

The event moved into an active discussion with smaller working groups, representing members from all stakeholders at each table, addressing questions designed to create debate, surface a range of perspectives, and identify key insights and potential follow-up actions. In thinking about how to overcome the perceived inertia present across the research ecosystem, participants made the following observations:

- Stakeholders felt trapped by a narrative that had become too restricted around open access publishing. Future developments need to take the broader open research narrative into account and place both the quality of research and the needs of the researcher at their center.
- The research ecosystem must be founded on trust, with the quality imperative a key part of that. The ability to share outputs is a factor, but stakeholders want to be confident that those outputs are accurate, reproducible, validated, and of high quality.
- Researchers need to operate in a fully open network, working digitally and globally, with a quality filter applied to ensure that the research being shared for the public good is “open science and not open nonsense.”
- Nuance is key, and it must be recognized that one size does not fit all: In a system of nuanced markets, geographies, disciplines, organizational approaches, and business models, no single solution is the answer.
- Mapping the ecosystem and using a shared vocabulary to describe the total value each stakeholder makes today was one key idea posited for beginning the journey to build trust and identify areas ripe for evolution and efficiencies.

The group also discussed how scholarly Societies can survive and thrive in the era of Plan S, where hybrid and mirror journals are considered noncompliant with emerging funding mandates. Key themes emerged around the right to survive, the need to define value, and again, the importance of distinctions, as participants shared their views.

Stakeholders cannot assume that any of them has a right to survive in a time of change. For Societies, it therefore becomes critical to define what value they offer and how that may need to change. By what are their researcher communities motivated? What do they want their Societies to offer? These are critical answers to understand and address for long-term success.

While no two Societies are the same, participants felt that they typically have a shared desire to be trusted brokers for their research communities. Their ability to provide open solutions, however, is contingent on their starting positions, with every organization having a different relationship in terms of incomes versus costs.

Equally, Societies operate at different speeds, have differing abilities around reaction to change and different regional perspectives. Given this, some participants were keen for Societies not to be viewed as acceptable casualties of change but as valued stakeholders needing certain levels of support — in terms of additional investment, perhaps, or through extended timescales to support their transitions. Ultimately, they too must adapt and, to do so, put value to researchers and their communities at the center of what they offer.

The final session of the day was an informal panel discussion again involving stakeholders from across the ecosystem: Diego Baptista from the [Wellcome Trust](#), William Bowes from the [Publishers Association](#), information professional Petra Labriga, Tasha Mellins-Cohen of [The Microbiology Society](#), Brandon Nordin from [American Chemical Society](#), and Paul Peters of [Hindawi](#).

The panelists each shared their views on their key takeaways from the day, after which the floor was opened up and all participants invited to contribute. Key themes from across the discussion included the following:

- The need for more researcher involvement in discussions around challenges and potential solutions that directly impact them. Scholar choice remains a fundamental tenet.
- The necessity of having policy makers engaged, and perhaps even better educated, about the impact and unintended consequences that changes in the research sector may cause, given research's impact on economic success and innovation and on educational institutions.
- The importance of full attention to addressing challenges at a more detailed, specific level.

Toward the end of the day, the 800-pound gorilla in the room surfaced: Fundamental change will not occur without changes to both individual stakeholder motivations to hold onto current money flows in the value chain and the researcher reward system which has long been built around “publish or perish”.

The group posited that if the value chain in the scholarly ecosystem wasn't understood, and the monetary and reward systems along that chain addressed, then the heart of the issue may never change. In the words of one participant: “the incentives for different stakeholders in the system are misaligned.”

## Why This Matters

The natural question following the event is: What next? From the outset, one of the event's goals was to bring together a wide group of stakeholders to establish a balanced set of views and voices. The intent was to begin a healthy dialog toward a shared goal of creating a healthy system for scholarly communications and the discovery and innovation it fosters.

There were good levels of engagement, and we agreed that more "voice of the researcher" was necessary. Societies, in particular, must understand and represent that voice, and policymakers need to be part of the conversation to understand the implications of decisions and to enable necessary discussion that must occur without fear of anti-trust or "bashing" of publishers who offer value in the system. At the same time, it is essential to posit new models. What if the peer-review process is reversed, with crowd-sourced peer review from within the network, with a lighter touch of editorial oversight and curation?

The importance of better data was emphasized, both in terms reproducibility and in informing the business and operations of scholarly publishing. There was general recognition that data is siloed across the industry and that without better actionable data, business insights would be hard to come by and decisions hard to properly inform.

We also see Plan S as a tactical item in a much broader strategic imperative:

- The need to transform the scholarly research ecosystem is endemic, stretching from one end of the research value chain to the other, expanding far beyond the narrow focus on OA.
- Nuance is key: A one-size-fits-all approach is not going to work given the regional, disciplinary, and resource-level differences that occur across the system. This is not stakeholders trying to deny the inevitable change that needs to occur but a fundamental challenge that needs to be accounted for and addressed within future developments.
- No stakeholder has an inherent right to survive in a changing world. Sacrifices are likely to be needed — in terms of scale, revenues, and/or profitability — to remain relevant in the future.
- The ecosystem is at an "incentive impasse." The concept of value and how the money and incentive flow within the system have to be tackled as part of the same problem for fundamental transformation to occur: At the moment, the system is misaligned at both the macro- and micro-economic levels.

Plan S is a lightning rod for discussion and debate across the scholarly research ecosystem. The massive response to Coalition S's call for feedback highlights the level of support within the ecosystem for the underlying aims of Plans S and how seriously it is being taken by all stakeholders. At the same time, it can be seen as a blunt instrument removing choice from the market and without the necessary nuance of approach that will unite stakeholders around it.

In Outsell's opinion, frustration with the system is at a breaking point, and Plan S remains a symptom of this. Scholarly communications are at a tipping point and its moment has come. Other sectors within the information industry have experienced structural change when market frustration peaked. Rental models for textbooks emerged as a response to perceived publisher greed. The music industry faced wholesale change through regulation, new entrants, and rogue players breaking copyright — in response to frustration about forced bundling or because the needs of musicians were fundamentally not being met. Structural change has been simmering since the late 1990s, and technology, an abundance of choice, and pressures on budgets are coalescing to create a reckoning.

Markets reach a breaking point, and it is often new players from the outside who envision new solutions because they have no legacy to protect. Indeed, within the scholarly ecosystem, it is time to reimagine the future or face a future where some new entrant does it for us. SciHub is Napster; what remains to be seen is who will be Spotify, Pandora, or Apple iTunes. We'd like to see change come from within. And we believe that an open ecosystem in science can offer better rewards longer term, both economic ones for those who enable it, and more importantly, for open science and the innovation it offers.

There are clear signs that stakeholders across the ecosystem are keen to move beyond high-level, theoretical discussions to addressing the complex, detail-driven specifics at the heart of the challenges we discussed. Plan S is a funder-driven example of that imperative.

Cohesive, collaborative, cross-party initiatives remain relatively rare and are needed. CCC and Outsell heard and will heed the call for more such dialog. Indeed, a journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step, and last week's Key to Advancing Scholarly Communications began that journey — aptly in the Royal Society of Arts, where so much innovation history has been made.

## About Insights

CCC hosted *Advancing Openly Scholarly Communications*, co-produced with Outsell, on March 14, 2019. Outsell produced this analysis to memorialize the day; publication rights for this Insight have been granted to CCC for distribution to attendees and stakeholders in the marketplace. Outsell maintained final analytical control of this Insight, which was not a fee-for-hire whitepaper.

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