



## Plan S

Kihong Kim

Department of Physics, Ajou University, Suwon, Korea

### Introduction

Recently, Plan S has been mentioned frequently in the news reports about journal publishing [1]. Those who are new to this may be puzzled by what it means. This plan, if implemented in earnest, will provoke a significant change worldwide in the field of journal publishing. Although it is being led by European funding agencies, it can have a big impact on researchers and journals around the world, including Korea. This article aims to provide an overview of what Plan S is and a brief description of the changes and problems that will arise when this plan is implemented.

### Overview of Plan S

Plan S is an innovative open access publication initiative under the direction of Science Europe, an alliance of funding agencies and research institutes across Europe. The initial plan was announced in September 2018 by Coalition S, an organization involving several institutions in Science Europe and some external institutions. The essence of the plan is that all the results of the researches funded by the agencies participating in Coalition S should be published in open access journals or platforms with no embargo period or posted to open access repositories. According to the plan revised last year, it will be implemented starting from January 2021. Coalition S currently includes national funding agencies from various countries in Europe, including France, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Sweden, Norway, Finland, Austria, Poland, Ireland, Luxembourg, and Slovenia, and private organizations such as the Gates Foundation and the Wellcome Trust. Plan S is also supported by the European Commission and the European Research Council. Participation is expanding to other continents and a wide range of research projects are expected to be covered by the plan, especially since all studies to be funded by Horizon Europe, the European Union's large-scale funding program, will be targeted.

Coalition S initially decided to develop a Plan S implementation plan based on the following ten principles: 1) Authors should retain copyright on their publications, which must be published under an open license; 2) Criteria should be established for the level and requirements of acceptable open access journals, platforms, and repositories; 3) If there is not yet a high level of open access journals, platforms, and repositories, appropriate support measures should be taken; 4) Publication fees should be covered by the funders or institutions, not individual researchers; 5) Publication fees should be transparent and have an upper limit; 6) Participating

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**Correspondence to** Kihong Kim  
khkim@ajou.ac.kr

#### ORCID

Kihong Kim

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9965-3535>

agencies should endeavor to ensure that all relevant agencies affected by this plan have a consistent policy; 7) In the case of book publishing, a specific action plan should be prepared separately; 8) Hybrid open access journals are unacceptable, but if they commit to switch to full open access in the short term, they are conditionally and temporarily allowed; 9) Compliance with the plan should be always monitored; and 10) When reviewing research results, only the merits of the research are considered and factors such as journal reputation or impact factor are not considered.

When Plan S was initially announced in 2018, it received strong opposition, especially from commercial publishers. A revised version, which reflected some criticism, was released in May 2019. The initial plan was to put an upper limit on the author publication fee, but the revised plan removed the upper limit because of concerns that it could stimulate the publication of a large number of low-quality papers to compensate low publication fees. Some journals that operate on subscription fees have adopted a hybrid model in which authors can choose to publish their papers with open access if they pay a publication fee. In principle, these journals are not allowed by Plan S, but will be allowed on a temporary basis if they commit to transition to full open access journals by 2024.

If Plan S is implemented, researchers supported by Coalition S will not be able to submit papers to journals that operate on subscription fees. This will of course be a major blow to those journals, which include numerous journals published by commercial publishers and non-profit academic societies. If a paper is published in a subscription journal, but its version of record or author accepted manuscript is immediately deposited in a green repository upon publication, it is considered to be compliant with Plan S. However, if a journal does not allow immediate green and impose an embargo period, it is not acceptable for Plan S.

Open access journals and platforms where researchers are allowed to publish through Plan S must meet the following additional criteria: 1) They should have policies and practices that meet the criteria of the Committee on Publication Ethics; 2) They should be listed in the Directory of Open Access Journals; 3) Considerations such as exemptions or discounts of author fees should be given to the authors from low-income countries and the author publication fee should be made transparent on the journal homepage. In addition, they are required to have a high level of transparency and quality.

If Plan S is fully implemented and more funding agencies

in more countries participate, many subscription-based journals will inevitably have to switch to open access. Those who disagree with Plan S point to the problems of poor-quality open access journals published for commercial purposes. Publishers of gold open access journals can increase their income simply by publishing more papers, so there is always the possibility of a moral hazard. The proponents of Plan S seem to believe that this issue can be controlled through a rigorous selection of acceptable journals. Without an upper limit on the author publication fee, it is likely that highly reputable journals will impose very high author publication fees. However, it seems to be believed that this can also be curbed through the control of research screening criteria. Some critics of Plan S point out the danger of breaking the tradition of subscription-based journals published by academic societies with a long history [2]. But this problem may be solved simply by allowing depositing in green open access repositories.

## Conclusion

The background for the appearance of Plan S may be that there are many people who think the current journal publishing environment is not satisfactory and needs to be changed substantially. The recent trend in evaluating journals based only on the impact factor and the problems caused by the rapid growth and dominance of commercial publishers in journal publishing are also the source of serious complaints. Although open access publishing has its own problems, it looks inevitable that it will continue to expand.

## Conflict of Interest

Kihong Kim is the editor-in-chief of *Science Editing*; however, he was not involved in the peer reviewer selection, evaluation, or decision process of this article. No other potential conflicts of interest relevant to this article were reported.

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