

EDITORIAL

Author choices on Development: how ‘open’ are we to Open Access?

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The past decade has seen a proliferation of publishing models from both commercial and not-for-profit organisations, and authors now have a multitude of choices to make when deciding where to submit their paper. One aspect of this is Open Access. As a ‘hybrid’ journal – a primarily subscription journal in which authors can choose to pay a fee to make their articles Gold Open Access (OA) – we’re often asked what our authors think about OA and which publishing options they’re choosing. Of course, the answer is that it depends on the author.

For some of our authors, OA is very important or even essential. This could be because their funder or institution mandates some form of OA or it could be their personal preference. For others, it’s much less of an issue. We do know that OA articles generally have higher usage and a wider readership, so authors choosing OA benefit from more visibility for their research.

The Company of Biologists believes that OA is the direction of travel and that the proportion of authors selecting (and funders mandating) OA publication will grow over the coming years. We also recognise the value of OA for our readers. For these reasons, this year has seen an increased focus on OA for the Company and its journals. In addition, a coalition of 20+ (largely European) funders will be implementing new OA mandates from January 2021 under an initiative called Plan S (<https://www.coalition-s.org/>). Briefly, the aim of Plan S is to make all research funded by ‘cOAlition S’ members publicly available in a high-quality journal or platform under an open (CC-BY) license. We know that this will apply to a proportion of our authors so it’s important that we provide Plan S-compliant publishing options while ensuring that any changes we make don’t adversely affect non-Plan S authors.

Development as a ‘Transformative Journal’

Plan S offers a number of routes by which a journal can be compliant with its policies, one of which is to become a ‘Transformative Journal’. The Company of Biologists has decided to take this option, and its three hybrid journals (Development, Journal of Cell Science and Journal of Experimental Biology) will move to Transformative Journal status from January 2021. Indeed, we are the first journals to be granted Transformative Journals status by cOAlition S. So what does this involve? As defined by Plan S, a Transformative Journal must commit to transitioning to full OA by gradually increasing its proportion of OA content and by offsetting income from OA fees against subscription income (something we have been doing for several years already). Importantly, Plan S recognises that high-quality publishing comes at a cost and requires that any fees charged must be commensurate with the services provided. To be Plan S compliant, a journal must also provide

transparent metrics on both its pricing model and its editorial process (more on this below).

Clearly, this decision is important for those authors whose funders are part of Plan S, but we are committed to supporting all our authors and it’s therefore important to reiterate that, as a Transformative Journal, we will continue to offer the same three routes to publication that we do now (outlined below). This means that, whatever your funder or financial status, you will still be able to publish your research in Development.

Free publication (not OA)

With this option, the author pays nothing at all. The article is available to our subscribers for 6 months and is then freely available to everyone after this time.

This option might appeal to authors whose funders and institutions do not mandate OA, and to authors who do not want (or are not able) to choose OA or pay an OA fee. This option could be important given the financial challenges expected in the research sector due to COVID-19.

Gold OA (author pays)

The author will pay an article processing charge (APC) to publish their article as Gold OA. Articles will be published under a CC-BY licence, meaning they will be available to everyone immediately upon publication.

This option will appeal to authors whose funders or institutions mandate OA or to authors who prefer to publish as OA.

Read & Publish deals


As one of our subscription options for 2020, we were able to include a Read & Publish (<https://www.biologists.com/read-publish/>) option for librarians – and were one of the first not-for-profit publishers to do so. These cost-neutral Read & Publish agreements give institutions the usual subscription access for their readers to all our journal content but also allow any corresponding authors from those institutions free and unlimited OA publication for all articles accepted for publication in Development and its sister journals Journal of Experimental Biology and Journal of Cell Science. As a completely new offering coming rather late in ‘renewal season’, most of our subscribers had already renewed their subscriptions, but three library consortia opted for the new model: Jisc for the UK, MALMAD for Israel and IReL for the Republic of Ireland. Having removed a financial barrier for these authors, we are already seeing more OA publications from these three countries. As we increase the number of institutions and library consortia opting for these deals, we expect to see an increase in the proportion of OA research content in our journals (see Fig. 1).

For more on these three publishing options, watch our short YouTube video (https://youtu.be/YqR_ejrMSkg) and, for further details about Transformative Journals, check out our FAQ for authors (<https://www.biologists.com/transformative-journals/faq/>).

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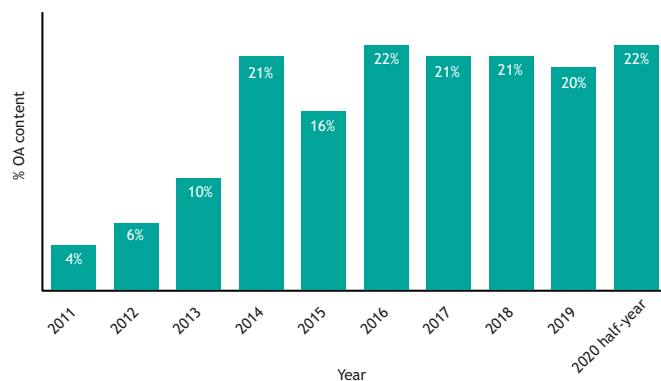


Fig. 1. Open Access (OA) content as a percentage of total research content in Development by year. Development saw a significant growth in OA content in the early 2010s, but this has now plateaued, and currently stands at around 20%. We expect this figure to grow as more institutes take up our Read & Publish deals, and as Plan S comes into effect.

Becoming more transparent

As noted above, one of the requirements for Transformative Journals is an increase in transparency. We already provide article-specific metrics on usage, citations and online attention (altmetrics) for published articles. In future, we will also report on how these metrics compare for OA articles versus subscription content so that authors can make informed decisions over which publishing route to choose.

We are now also providing more transparent metrics about what authors should expect when they submit to our journals, such as decision times, acceptance rates and speed to publication: these can be found at <https://dev.biologists.org/content/transparent-metrics>. Some of these metrics are required by Plan S but we will, in time, add additional metrics that we think will be of interest to our journal communities.

Community is at the heart of Development

At Development, we have always put the interests of our community at the heart of our publishing decisions – both in terms of providing valuable services to authors and in ensuring that income generated from their articles benefits the community through our charitable activities (for more details, see Box 1). Our provision of OA options is no different. It will be essential for some authors, of interest to others (especially if the financial barriers are removed by Read & Publish agreements) and of no concern whatsoever for others still. In line with our principles of transparency, we will keep you

Box 1. Added value: supporting biologists, inspiring biology

One of the principles of Plan S is that any Open Access fees charged 'must be commensurate with the publication services delivered'. What does this mean in the context of The Company of Biologists' journals? By far the biggest costs for the journal are in our people: our academic editors and in-house teams of administrators, editors and production staff. Between them, they manage our editorial and peer-review workflows, provide support to authors and reviewers, commission and edit news/review-type articles, copy-edit and proofread accepted papers (and process their associated figures, movies and supplementary data), and check every accepted manuscript for both plagiarism and image manipulation. All these processes, alongside the platforms, partners and technologies needed to support them, help to ensure that the papers we publish conform to the high standards you should expect from a journal like Development.

The Company of Biologists is a not-for-profit publisher and a registered UK charity, so while our revenues do currently exceed our publishing costs, those profits are used to support the biological community worldwide. Each year, we provide hundreds of meeting grants and travelling fellowships to conference organisers and early-career researchers, respectively, as well as financial support to several academic societies. We organise workshops and meetings designed to share the latest research, bridge fields and foster collaborations, and we help to build networks of researchers across the world through our online community sites: the Node, preLights and FocalPlane.

Useful links

Price transparency framework – <https://dev.biologists.org/content/transparent-metrics>

Meeting grants – <https://www.biologists.com/grants/>

Travelling Fellowships – <https://www.biologists.com/travelling-fellowships/>

Workshops and Journal Meetings – <https://www.biologists.com/workshops/> and <https://www.biologists.com/meetings/>

the Node – <https://thenode.biologists.com>

preLights – <https://prelights.biologists.com>

FocalPlane – <https://focalplane.biologists.com>

informed as our 'transformative' journey progresses; whatever the future of publishing may hold, you can rest assured that The Company of Biologists and its journals will remain committed to supporting its authors, reviewers and readers.

Footnote

Note that near-identical Editorials have been published in Development, Journal of Cell Science and Journal of Experimental Biology.