

Response from the Academy of Social Sciences to the CoAlitionS consultation on the draft framework for transformative journals

I The draft framework specifies that a Transformative Journal must demonstrate an annual increase in the OA penetration rate of at least eight percentage points year-on-year, measured on a three year rolling period. To what extent do you agree this is fair and achievable?

The Academy of Social Sciences strongly disagrees with this statement

This target is neither fair nor reasonable. It is unrealistically high for the humanities and social sciences (others are better placed to comment on science journals). If implemented it runs a strong risk of being counterproductive to the move to OA. We have no evidence that hybrid journals in the humanities and social sciences (HSS) can achieve this annual growth rate in OA uptake, or even close to it. The majority of publishing in HSS is in hybrid journals.

While OA penetration has taken place in many HSS fields, the percentage change based on publication data is on average 4% pa (over 2016 to 2018). However, the data is highly variable across fields and journals, and it remains to be seen if even this rate can be sustained annually into the future, given that:

1. Funding for OA publications in HSS remains relatively limited; most authors do not have ready access to it and the majority of research in HSS is not grant funded. Moreover, the fact this applies in a country (UK) where social science research in all the major disciplines ranks either first or second in the world is telling; and at a time when social science and its insights into changing societies, economies, behaviours and human/environment interactions are more important than ever.
2. Much of the growth in OA in general derives from authors in European institutions, while much of the overall growth in article output is from authors elsewhere, including in India, China and Brazil.

Thus, in a dynamic, global publishing system, and a setting where OA article numbers are driven by (a) author, institution and funder mandates and (b) available funding for APCs, it is very difficult to see how 8% growth in OA per year in HSS can be achieved. While hybrid journals in HSS often do encourage OA, it is clear from above that the journals neither drive nor control uptake. Yet, under the proposals, they are being asked to bear much of the risk.

In summary, the learned societies in social science are a long way from being able to guarantee compliance with an 8% figure in such a setting; and thus strongly disagree with the proposals. Furthermore, on grounds of ethics, equity and the facilitation of research knowledge exchange, learned societies are unwilling and unable to discriminate against unfunded authors in the pursuit of unrealistic OA targets.

We recommend that the concept of an annual target increase in penetration rate is dropped given the number of variables that affect OA uptake now and in the future and the disparities between sectors, disciplines and journals. Instead we recommend that you focus efforts on a realistic content % to flip hybrid journals to full OA. We have recommendations relating to that in section 3 below.

2. In addition to the 8% increase on OA penetration, year-on-year, the publishers of Transformative Journals must agree to either flip them to OA either when 50% of the content is OA, or by 31st December 2024. To what extent do you agree that these are fair and achievable?

The Academy of Social Sciences strongly disagrees with this statement

The ability to flip a hybrid journal to full (Gold) OA depends on many factors. These include the global OA policy landscape and OA growth rates, funding availability, subject area, authorship geo-demographics, among others. It will vary greatly between journals, sectors and disciplines.

Funding to meet the needs of Gold OA in HSS is limited, and in all probability will continue to be limited, for many years. Green OA with zero embargo is, in our view, unsustainable in the medium term.

The % threshold approach is sensible in principle, **but not at the proposed level of 50%**. Financial sustainability of journals, and the ability to sustain their quality of provision with peer review, editorial services etc, is very unlikely if they are forced to flip when just 50% of the content is OA. This is especially the case where a minority of research is grant funded, such as in HSS.

The proposed threshold is far too low as a one-size fits all threshold. Determining exactly what that percentage should be is difficult as the threshold will depend on the journal, sector and discipline. If the insistence is on a one-size fits all, a precautionary approach is therefore recommended.

There is also the matter of equity of access to publishing in named journals, recognising that many of the hybrid journals are long-established, international leaders in their fields. Authors will continue to want to publish in such journals. Flipping in a fair way depends on funding being available for all authors, not just those funded by signatories to Plan S, or those working in fields where a majority of research is grant funded. In much of HSS, and in cases where most submissions are from authors whose institutions (or countries) do not have OA funding available, flipping a journal at 50% would exclude the majority of authors.

The fact that hybrid journals are increasing their OA uptake at very different rates, also mitigates against having a fixed date by which all journals must have flipped. So, too does the fact that at present there is no long term commitment by universities and library staff around the world to the funding of non-subscription models. Both of these factors mean that the fixed date requirement, either in general as a principle or the particular proposed date of December 2024, is simply not realistic at the present time in terms of SS. It is both impractical and too risky.

See Final Comments section for our recommendations with respect to % and timing.

3 If you have any further comments on the proposed framework for Transformative Journals, please add them here. [2000 character limit]

We appreciate the spirit behind setting out the proposals for transformative journals is intended to help mitigate risk for journals that are outside of transformative agreements, however the proposals do not effectively reduce the risks to quality publications in the social sciences as there is no evidence that:

- (1) the annual growth rate targets of 8% for OA are achievable under current scenarios;
- (2) the growth in funds available and the approach towards funding HSS will be put in place globally in order to achieve the targets; or
- (3) the publication of high quality peer reviewed journals would be sustainable under the 50% flip proposals.

We are strongly of the view that the current proposals are unworkable.

The Academy of Social sciences makes the following **recommendations** for changes in the proposals.

- 1. To recognise that the desired mind and paradigm shift towards OA has been effected; and to allow the system time and space to reach the desired end points. Much is to be gained by continuing to encourage and facilitate, rather than seeking to enforce a one size fits all approach to transformative journals in terms of annual growth, % content or timing. Sectors, disciplines and journals differ in their resourcing and the speed with which they can adapt.**
- 2. To drop the concept of an annual target increase in OA penetration as unfair, unreasonable and unworkable for the reasons given above.**
- 3. To adopt a more inclusive set of proposals that require a flip to full OA only when 90% content is OA resourced (whether through transformative agreements or as an individual transformative journal). This recognises that a requirement for transparent pricing will control 'double dipping' in the meantime.**
- 4. To undertake to review progress after 5 years - in early 2025 - and to adjust requirements accordingly at that stage, rather than seek to enforce an unrealistic end point by then.**

The **Academy of Social Sciences** has a Fellowship of 1400 leading social scientists drawn from academia and other professional sectors. It also has 45 Member Learned Societies, which include the leading societies for all the major social science disciplines in the UK. This submission has been approved by the OA Working Group drawn from Member Learned Societies.

The Academy is keen to see a global and, above all, sustainable transition to OA for all parties, including the learned societies and individual scholars. Hybrid journals represent much that is good in high quality scholarly publishing, and global scholarship, and this should not be lost. It is vital that the transition is carefully considered and inclusively planned, taking note of funding availability, market dynamics, learned society sustainability, and author equity.

Submitted 06 January 2020

Dr Rita Gardner CBE, Chief Executive, Academy of Social Sciences