



Comment

Plan S and publishing: reply to Lehtomäki et al. 2019

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We thank Lehtomäki et al. (2019) for widening the discussion of the Plan-S open-access initiative (<https://www.coalition-s.org>) in their response to Burgman et al. (2018). They provide useful links to Plan-S documentation. They are disappointed by the focus of our position, which we took to clarify a point central to the discussion of open access that we believe has received too little attention, namely, equity of access to publication.

The revised Plan-S implementation guidance mandates that from 2021, scientific publications that result from research funded by public grants must be published in compliant open-access journals. We agree with many points they make, including the aspiration for ready access to scientific results produced with public funding, a desire for more affordable publication, greater transparency in publication costs, and the use of the moniker, *subscription model*, rather than *reader pays*. We are fully aware of and share their concerns about the restrictions that arise from the subscription model. But we disagree about

the merits of alternative approaches to achieving a better system.

Lehtomäki et al. believe the current subscription model, including the hybrid option, is expensive and unfair. They claim that Plan S “partly addresses the equity issue,” that “Plan S can act as a catalyst for a transformation toward a more equal and inclusive publication system,” and that, “if implemented with care, it can also precipitate a more fundamental transformation in scientific publishing” Their claims raise 3 issues: the high cost of publication, access to the literature, and equity of access to publication. These 3 issues are clearly related.

When the cost of publication is borne by readers, all 3 issues are problematic. Lehtomäki et al. suggest that under Plan S, regulation of author publication charges (APCs) may address the high cost of publication if the regulation of fees is effective. Exactly how such regulation would work is an open question. The approach in Plan S is to consider capping open-access author fees.