

Transformative Agreements

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Introduction

The term 'transformative agreement' has gained a high profile from inclusion in Plan S where they are envisioned as a mechanism to constrain the spiralling cost of Open Access publishing in hybrid journals.

At the most basic level transformative agreements are between libraries/consortia and publishers and include both open access (OA) publishing services and reading services (if any content is paywalled). They remove the need for authors to pay Article Processing Charges (APCs) or other transactional charges for their OA publishing.

The label 'transformative agreement' is a little unhelpful because it is ambiguous about who and what will transform. In practice what is changing is library purchasing practice. Academic libraries and library consortia provide the lion's share¹ of funding to journal publishers, so if library expenditure transforms to support OA publishing then this is a powerful driver for change in publishers. The library changes create an environment in which fully OA journals can thrive, and hybrid OA journals can transform to be fully OA.

Types of transformative agreements

At least twelve types of transformative agreement operate in the market today:

Association for Computing and Machinery model

This is the most recent model to appear in the market and was developed by society publisher ACM in consultation with large, influential customer groups in the US. The model aims to choreograph a full transition for all ACM's hybrid journals. The entire customer base for these journals was analysed by the publisher and its large, influential customers. 2,700 universities subscribe and provide global revenue of \$20-21M each year. 80% of articles published come from the top 1,000 subscribers, but this group contributes only 32% of subscription revenue. The long tail of 1,700 subscribers only publish about 20% of ACM articles while contributing 68% of revenue. Consensus has been built around the plan that it is equitable for 400 subscribers to pay more overall, 600 to pay roughly the

¹ Journal revenues are estimated as subscriptions by academic libraries (68-75% of the total), corporate subscriptions (15-17%), advertising (4%), membership fees and personal subscriptions (3%) and various author side payments (3%) on page 22 of *The STM Report An overview of scientific and scholarly publishing* by R Johnson, A Watkinson and M Mabe. Retrieved from https://www.stm-assoc.org/2018_10_04_STM_Report_2018.pdf.

same as they do now, and for the long tail of 1700 subscribers to pay less over time. There will be a transition period after which all articles will be published Open Access and no APCs will be charged.

California Digital Library pilot transformative agreement

This model engages authors as well as libraries. The library or consortium contributes money in the form of a direct payment to the publisher to lower or subsidise transactional publishing payments by authors who can afford to contribute something toward the cost of APCs. This approach is designed to reflect the fact that researchers in the US can use their research grants to pay for publication costs if they choose but are usually under no obligation or mandate to do so.

Knowledge Unlatched journal flipping program

This might be described as a choreographed transition model. In this case [Knowledge Unlatched acts as the choreographer](#). Librarians pledge continued funding for titles that publishers then pivot to publish OA. No APCs are charged, and all funding comes from participating libraries.

Libraria

This [approach](#), which is being piloted in anthropology, archaeology, and neighbouring fields, involves pooled money from funders and libraries being used to fund Open Access publishing. The journals are long established and will transition fully to OA when this funding is secured.

National Open Science Partnership

In the Netherlands, the Association of Universities in the Netherlands (VSNU), the Netherlands Federation of University Medical Centres (NFU), the Dutch Research Council (NWO) and Elsevier have reached an agreement that includes a capped read and publish agreement along with a commitment to jointly develop open science services to support Dutch research and public engagement with science. Metadata of publicly funded research outputs will be reused and enriched by Elsevier and potentially other organisations.

OA agreements with born OA publishers

Libraries are also redirecting their subscription expenditure from traditional publishing partners to support OA publishing with born OA publishers. These are publishing companies that only publish open access, and do not have hybrid journals in transition from subscriptions to open access. Examples include the agreement between the University of California and PLOS², and agreements between a variety of institutions in Norway and Frontiers³.

Publish-and-read agreements

A consortium pays a pre-agreed amount for papers published by affiliated authors, and everyone in the library/consortium gets access to the subscription content for no extra cost. The agreement between [Wiley and Projekt DEAL](#) in Germany provides one example.

This model shifts the cost basis of publishing to align *exclusively* with the volume of articles published by an institution. For this reason, it may be particularly challenging for research-intensive institutions and countries and library consortia within them. A more gradual approach to rebalancing or a broader basis on which to calculate and apportion costs could be helpful in research intensive places.

² <https://osc.universityofcalifornia.edu/uc-publisher-relationships/plos-oa-agreement/>

³ <https://blog.frontiersin.org/tag/norwegian-open-access-framework-agreement-2/>

Read-and-publish agreements

The amount of money currently paid to the publisher (for subscriptions and for a two- or three-year average of APCs) is paid, and in exchange authors can publish OA without paying an APC. In some instances – for example where a country publishes many articles with a specific publisher, or an increasing number of articles are being submitted to the publisher from authors in that country – additional money is made available by libraries or consortia. Consortia and their members are price sensitive and will sometimes cap the total number of articles for which they will pay to control costs.

Examples include consortial arrangements in the Netherlands, Sweden, the UK, and at MIT, with publishers such as IOPP, OUP, the Royal Society of Chemistry, and Springer Nature via [Springer Compact](#).

Read, Publish, and Join

The American Physiological Society first piloted this approach during 2019. In addition to offer reading and publishing services, faculty who serve as corresponding authors are offered a one-year free membership in the society.

SCOAP³

This is another example of a choreographed transition model, with CERN serving as the choreographer with diverse dancers to align. Participants include libraries, consortia, governments, publishers, societies, and researchers.

The basic idea is that libraries direct current subscription expenditure to CERN rather than the publisher. CERN calculates the proportion of high-energy physics articles in participating titles that come from each country and assesses whether current library spend covers that country's participation or needs to be topped up in some way. If necessary, it liaises with national funders and policymakers about top-up funding. CERN then uses the funding pool to pay the APCs of all authors in participating titles. Publishers flip these titles to be fully OA rather than published on a subscription or hybrid basis.

The complexity of this approach means that it has been used on a modest number of journals, but it has made a real impact as all the journals are concentrated in high-energy physics. All the key journals in this field have fully flipped to Open Access in a sustained way. Stakeholders continue to collaborate to make the initiative work in a sustainable way.

Subscribe to Open

This approach was developed by the publishing team at non-profit publisher [Annual Reviews](#). It is designed to motivate collective action by libraries, which are asked to continue to subscribe even though the content will be published OA. A 5% discount off the regular subscription price is offered to existing customers. If all current customers continue to subscribe, then that year's content is made available OA, as are all the backfiles. None of this content is opened if the number of subscribers decline, which discourages free riding. The subscriber base will be expanded to offset attrition, which is currently 1–2% per year. There is no library lock-in, as the publisher repeats this offer each year and customers again decide whether they wish to continue subscribing. If participation levels are insufficient to open the content in any given year, the 5% discount is still extended to customers, but for that year the journal content would be behind a paywall and would not be Plan S-compliant. Any institutions that do not renew and that later return do so at the list subscription price and do not receive the 5% discount.

This model positions the publisher as choreographer of change. It leverages the conventional subscription process and existing library budgets, avoids the need to invest in transactional payment

infrastructure, minimises customer disruption by using routine library accounts-payable processes, and avoids the prohibition some libraries face in paying for things that would otherwise be free.

Transitional Agreements

During 2019, with an increase in negotiations between the Jisc consortium and small society publishers funded by Wellcome Trust and UKRI to help accelerate open access and Plan S, a new term for transformative agreements emerged: transitional agreements. These are transformative agreements in which the parties have agreed to recognise that a small number of such agreements is not enough to enable a journal to transform to fully open access but is a solid step toward an eventual transition. The distinct label is designed to signal to cOAlition S that if a minority of customers enter into transformative agreements then a full journal title transformation to open access is not going to be possible within the Plan S timescale of 2024 despite the good will of all parties to the transformative agreement.