

Will there be any transformation or are we stuck with the transformative agreements?

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In Sweden there is a government directive to reach 100% immediate Open Access during 2021. We won't reach it this year - but we have come far as we today can count approximately 75% immediate Open Access among corresponding authors affiliated to a Swedish university. As early adoptors of transformative agreements we are quite experienced having negotiated them for roughly five years. This has been a bumpy road along which we have cancelled agreements, made mistakes, gained knowledge and also have had some success in our negotiations. Today, through the Bibsam consortia, there are 21 transformative agreements and a handful of agreements with pure Open Access publishers in place. Many Swedish universities also have local agreements with smaller publishers and societies. During these years we have seen a cultural shift from the authors – some were initially somewhat skeptical to Open Access but are now able to embrace that their research results should be openly published. Through our different agreements we are near the goal of 100% immediate Open Access - but to reach this far has led to a high increase of costs. Another subject of discussion is how we divide the costs within the consortia when we move from paying for reading to paying for publishing - and as we calculate the cost based on publishing the research-intensive institutions have seen a substantial rise.

The Swedish universities are committed to reach the goal but we don't find the transformative agreements sustainable for the future. When Plan S came up it stated that they should be temporary, and the recommendations were for a short transitional period in order for the publishers to find new ways and models to provide Open Access. According to the funders that have signed Plan S they will cease funding publishing within such agreements on the 31st of December 2024. As an early adoptor we also believe that the transition period should be over at the end of 2024. We have discussions about the sustainability of these

agreements in different stakeholder groups: the steering group of Bibsam, the **Open Science group of the Rectors conference** and the party-composed group between the Rectors conference and the Swedish funders. In all these different groupings the conclusion is that we have to act to make a change aligned with how the scholarly communication system works. The Open Science group decided through discussions with the steering group of Bibsam to form a new strategic grouping with the name “Beyond the Transformative agreements”. The aim of the assignment is to work out a strategy for the consortia when negotiating new agreements after 2024 and that the new strategy will be mandated from the managements of the universities. In order to not become completely dependent on the deals with the publishers the group will also investigate alternative routes and give suggestions on such alternatives. The timeframe is between March 2021 until December 2022 as the Bibsam consortia has to start negotiating new deals during 2023 to have them in place for 2024. It is a high-level group chaired by the President of Stockholm University, also the Chair of the Rectors conference, **Astrid Söderbergh Widding**. It is composed by members from all important stakeholders for scholarly communication within higher education in Sweden: researchers from four different disciplines, funders and librarians/negotiators from the consortia.

During 2021 the group has performed six different workshops to understand the task, create a platform to start the discussions from and also to form a realistic view over what problems we intend to solve with a new strategy. At the two first workshops we had the goal to reach a common understanding and to find a scope for our future work. We started with a discussion about the scholarly publishing systems different functions: communication of research results, quality control and the merit system. On basis of these functions we elaborated on: How do we pay? Who does the payment? and What are we paying for? The major discussion obviously concerned what we are paying for. The conclusion was that the expense of scholarly publishing is not the same as the cost. Why should research funders or readers and libraries maintain the profit levels of large commercial organisations? This is an essential question for our work. Everyone understands that we have to pay for the publishing services, but the profit margins for the publishers stick out – this is mostly tax money that rather should stay within the research system. The members of the group most likely have different drivers to why they want to change the publishing system. Stephen Pinfield has described three main drivers for people engaged in the Open Access movement:

- To reduce the costs of scholarly publishing for the universities
- To reach Open Access fast
- To completely change the publishing system

People can be driven of all these motives but usually they have a main one – a fact that we can confirm within the group. I think that this is both a weakness and a strength in our upcoming work on a new strategy. We also had to find out what we thought were the biggest challenges for the future. The main one is the cost and the cost distribution within the consortia. Aligned with that is the question about who should own and run the publishing infrastructure. To make it possible to change the publishing system there is an urgent need to change the award and merit system. It all boils down to a big challenge with a cultural shift for the researchers, funders and libraries.

The rest of the workshops have been more practical. The third workshop was about alternative publishing routes with examples of open platforms and open publishing infrastructures. We invited some representatives and discussed the necessity for alternative possibilities to get your article published Open Access. The fourth workshop was called “Playing chess with the publishers – negotiation position in an oligopoly market”. Here we invited three different publishing houses (**Elsevier**, **Cambridge University Press** and **Frontiers**) to discuss their future strategies for Open Access. Finally, we had a workshop called “International power collection and exchange of experience”. To this meeting representatives from Norway, Netherlands and Germany were invited to discuss our different strategies to reach Open Access.

“Beyond transformative agreements” has during this year gathered the information we need in order to start working on a strategy on how Sweden can be part of the transition to a fully Open Access publishing system. But there are some challenges with the transition. Most of the publishers aren’t ready yet - they most likely would like to keep the business model from the transformative agreements for the future. When Sweden wants to move beyond the transformative agreements many countries are signing their first licenses of this kind. I hope for the truly needed international discussion about the future transformation to Open Access!

These views are the authors’ own and do not necessarily reflect the views of UKSG.



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