

Academic publishing in Europe must be sustainable, equitable, and driven toward research excellence and integrity

The Guild is alarmed at the financial unsustainability of the academic publishing system in Europe. The Council must support non-APC-based open-access models and their underlying infrastructures and ensure that academic publishing remains aimed at research excellence and integrity.

The Swedish presidency of the Council of the European Union gives a necessary renewed impetus to open science. It will invite the Ministers of Research to adopt in June 2023 conclusions on “high-quality, transparent, open, trustworthy and equitable scholarly publishing.” These will complement the conclusions of June 2022 on research assessment and implementation of open science, in which the Council already highlighted the need to promote and enable, where needed, more accurate measurement of excellence in research (beyond the sole use of journal-based indicators) and better recognition of research excellence enablers including open science. The Member States must maintain their commitment to removing obstacles, if any, which may hinder the implementation of such a reform.

The Guild hereby [reiterates its strong concerns](#) about the present academic publishing system. The rapid development of open-access models requiring authors to pay article-processing charges (APCs) has severely worsened its financial sustainability. Similarly, transformative agreements have not systematically enabled the signing universities to contain the rise in their publication expenditures, since the costs induced by these agreements add to the paid APCs and the fees to access journals behind paywalls and/or not covered by these agreements. Moreover, these costs depend on the individual or collective bargaining power of research-performing organisations and contribute to inequalities in academic publishing.

Therefore, we fully endorse the Council’s recognition “that the increasing costs of paywalls for access to scientific publications and for scholarly publishing cause inequalities and are becoming unsustainable for public research funders and institutions accountable for the spending of public funds, decreasing funding available for research”. The present problem should nevertheless not be seen as a financial problem only. These high costs may indeed dissuade researchers from publishing and disseminating their research results through journals, repositories or platforms that are too costly for them and for their employing institutions. This severely affects academic freedom and moves the academic publishing system away from what must be its core mission: to support research excellence, research integrity and academic freedom.

It is therefore crucial that the Member States call for APCs that are transparent and commensurate with the publication services, and that they support the development of alternative models that do not charge fees either to the authors or to the readers, such as diamond open-access journals and repositories. How this support will be implemented concretely will nevertheless be key for the

emergence of high-quality and financially sustainable alternatives able to compete with the present incumbent publishers and their dominant model. We also encourage the Council to stress the importance of promoting and facilitating, where relevant, EU-level coordination of research-performing organisations in their negotiations with academic publishers, in order to increase their bargaining power and obtain better deals in terms of price and open access.

The academic publishing system must be first and foremost driven by the objective of disseminating excellent research in full compliance with the principles of research integrity and academic freedom. The Member States must ensure that researchers retain their authors' rights and can claim secondary publication rights. They need to coordinate at the EU level, e.g. through the ERA Forum, to harmonise the implementation of these rights across borders.

Likewise, we fully support the Council's recognition that researchers play a crucial role in academic publishing systems through their participation in peer review exercises and in editorial boards. Both these contributions to the good functioning of the research communities should be better recognised in research assessment. Peer review should be similarly geared towards research excellence and research quality. This requires support for initiatives aimed at improving the quality, transparency and efficiency of peer review mechanisms. The mutual learning exercises put forward in the draft Council conclusions should not be limited to Member States, but closely involve research stakeholders to maximise their impacts.

The Guild's publications on academic publishing:

[Diversity, sustainability and quality must be the hallmarks of academic publishing in Europe](#): Statement | 17 May 2022