

Final statement

Delegations of research performing and research funding organizations from 40 nations and six continents, including researchers, university and research leadership, libraries and national library consortia, ministries and funders, gathered at the 18th Berlin Open Access Conference (B18), held 15–18 September 2026 at the Max Planck Society Harnack House in Berlin. Their aim was to define a common set of conditions across transparency, sustainability, rights, and integrity to ground open access negotiations with scholarly publishers and investment decisions across institutions and regions. The statement that follows represents the strong consensus of the delegations present.

Agreements that provide for open access publishing, whether described as transformative, open access or open publishing agreements, have one defining function: to increase the sovereignty and autonomy of the research community and to better serve its interests. They are not an end in themselves, nor a means of sustaining existing arrangements with scholarly publishers. The expectations set out in this statement follow from this principle and apply to every such agreement; terms secured in one should be available to all.

Delegates reaffirmed their full commitment to the Expression of Interest in the Large-scale Implementation of Open Access to Scholarly Journals, which recognizes many routes to open access, including new publishing platforms, archives and repositories, and sees the redirection of subscription budgets to open access as one step in a wider evolution of scholarly communication. They also reaffirmed the values of openness, equity, author rights and academic self-governance expressed in previous Berlin Open Access conference statements (B14, B15, B16 and B17).

The negotiations that followed the Expression of Interest, moving investment away from paywalls and opaque legacy pricing toward open access, have given the academy both a clearer view of the issues addressed here and the standing to influence them. That standing matters all the more at a time of profound change in scholarly communication, driven not only by the rapid integration of AI into research and publishing but also by changes in research funding and policy around the world.

Because open access is not yet the default across publishers, the academy is still left to secure it term by term in each negotiation, a considerable and avoidable burden. Negotiators, representing the authors, institutions and funders who invest in and depend on publishing services, have not only a legitimate role but a responsibility to shape those services in the interest of research. These expectations reflect what research genuinely needs from publishing. Publishers should apply them as a matter of course in all their partnerships with the global research community, embedding them in their organizational cultures, infrastructures, and editorial and business processes rather than treating them as exceptions to be negotiated.

FINITE RESOURCES AND ACADEMIC LABOR

Publishers' revenue expectations must not be premised on continued growth in institutional spending or on the availability of unacknowledged academic labor.

The growth trends of scholarly publishing place untenable demands on the finite financial and human resources of the research community. This pressure is likely to further intensify as AI accelerates the production of research and submissions. The growth may originate in research capacity itself, but the investment that expands research does not necessarily reach the budgets that pay for open access publishing. With prices per article rising across both hybrid and fully open access journals, publishers' revenues are growing faster than article volumes. The academy has made significant progress in shifting investment from subscription paywalls toward the open dissemination of research, but open access cannot be pursued at any cost. Publishing volume may be one factor in how publishers price their services, but they cannot assume that authors, libraries, institutions and funders, all drawing on the same research investment, will keep paying more for ever more articles at rising prices.

Scholarly publishing also depends on the capacity of researchers, whose peer review and editorial service are essential to the very services publishers sell. That capacity is already stretched: submissions are growing faster than the pool of researchers able to review them, leaving editors, themselves researchers, to spend ever more time recruiting reviewers. Researchers' contributions must be made fully transparent, with publishers reporting, as standard data, the peer review and editorial service provided by each institution's researchers. They must also be accounted for when publishing services are valued and the costs of agreements are negotiated.

EQUITABLE PARTICIPATION

Publishers that present their journals as inclusive must enable authors without institutional agreements or publication funding to publish under an open license without having to apply individually for fee relief.

The B16 statement established that inequity is incompatible with scholarly publishing and that pricing must be globally fair and transparent. No author should have to apply for relief or justify their circumstances to publish openly in the journals most relevant to their research. Publishers cite waivers and discounts as evidence of equity while reporting them in ways that cannot be verified. Where regional pricing has been introduced, it often applies only to fully open access journals. Publishers also do not offer the same terms or attention across countries. In some limited-resource contexts, where the barriers to publishing openly are highest, publishers sell reading access without open access publishing, bypassing, and at times refusing to work with, the library consortia best placed to secure it on terms that reflect current benchmarks.

Publishers' messaging on inclusion must make clear who can publish openly without charge, and submission workflows must apply that eligibility automatically. Publishers must report, in absolute terms and with the basis for each, how many authors publish free of charge or at reduced cost, with article-level metadata showing who paid and on what terms. Regional pricing must extend to all of a publisher's open access publishing. We expect publishers to engage all relevant stakeholders in every country, including library consortia, and to offer open access publishing wherever they sell reading access, as part of the agreement rather than a cost added to it. Equity also requires consistency: improvements to services and terms must be extended to all institutions and regions, rather than offered to some and withheld from others.

AUTHOR RIGHTS

Progress toward openness must not be undermined; work published openly must remain open, and authors must be told the full effect of what they grant.

Agreements negotiated by the academy have made a growing share of research openly available at publication, yet some publishers are expanding paywalled content, including through new subscription journal launches in which authors transfer their rights entirely to publishers. Even when authors publish openly, publishers often promote more restrictive Creative Commons licenses over CC BY, and license-to-publish agreements, which authors must sign, often reserve exclusive commercial rights for the publisher. Authors who believe they have protected their work through an NC (non-commercial) Creative Commons license may in fact have enabled the publisher to monetize it exclusively, including by licensing it for AI training.

CC BY must be the default license offered to authors, and the license-to-publish agreements they sign for CC-licensed articles must not require them to assign exclusive rights to the publisher. Publishers must state plainly, at the point of license choice, the combined effect of the license and the license-to-publish agreement, including any rights retained to sell or license content to third parties, such as for AI training. Where publishers decline to offer CC BY or retain rights beyond what publication requires, we expect them to state their reasons openly and to be transparent about the revenue they derive from those rights. Such revenue must not take precedence over authors' interests or the public good that open access serves.

OPEN RESEARCH INFORMATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Complete, high-quality open metadata must be a baseline expectation of all publishers, delivered through existing community infrastructure at no additional cost.

The academy needs complete, open metadata to assess whether its partnerships with publishers are advancing toward the open scholarly communication system it envisions, and much of that metadata remains missing or incomplete. There can be no open content on closed infrastructure: articles openly licensed for reuse cannot be separated from the metadata and infrastructure that describe them, and they cannot be fully discovered, connected or reused if that information is closed, incomplete or confined to proprietary systems.

Publishers must deliver complete, standardized, persistent and interoperable open metadata for all publications. For every article, this must include whether it was published under an open access agreement, the cost attributed to it, any discount applied and who paid, as well as information on the research and publishing processes. This metadata must flow through existing community infrastructure rather than parallel proprietary systems, and must not be treated as a premium service for which the academy pays more. Publishers must also engage on open research information beyond the negotiation room, in the community bodies that set metadata standards and govern shared infrastructure, in line with the Barcelona Declaration. Both publishers and the academy must invest in shared infrastructure and the expertise to sustain it.

TRUST AND INTEGRITY

Openness is the strongest safeguard of integrity in scholarly communication, and trust in research must rest on validation that is visible to all rather than on proprietary gatekeeping.

Research integrity concerns how research is conducted; publishing integrity concerns how it is screened, reviewed, published and corrected. Publishing integrity is part of the services the academy pays for, yet it is increasingly safeguarded through proprietary systems and signaled through trust markers tied to publisher brands. Screening criteria and outcomes are not disclosed, flags on authors and manuscripts are shared among publishers without the research community's knowledge, and detection capabilities are presented as a market differentiator. The academy's judgment of quality thus depends on systems it can neither examine nor govern. Quality, however, is a public good, not a scarce resource to be owned. It is built throughout the research process, through open science practices that make research verifiable at every stage.

We expect publishers to support the open science practices that make research verifiable, from linking publications to their data, code and identifiers to supporting transparent peer review, and open peer review where editorial boards choose it. From the screening of submissions to the correction of the record, integrity checks and the standards behind them cannot be driven by publishers alone, whether individually or collectively. We expect transparent workflows in which the checks applied, the data shared among publishers and the resolution of concerns are visible to the research community. Emerging multi-stakeholder initiatives toward shared standards are an important step, but the research community must retain the decisive voice in how trust is defined and signaled. Publishers must apply the resulting open, machine-readable standards consistently across their journals and report against them publicly, so that their practices can be compared. Because publishing integrity is part of the services the academy pays for, it can use its agreements to require this reporting and to hold publishers to account where they fall short. The academy, for its part, must agree on what quality and integrity mean, strengthen them through its own practices, and share this responsibility rather than delegate it.

COMPUTATIONAL RESEARCH AND AI

Researchers' access to the research record for AI must be at least equal to that of the companies to which publishers license it, and publishers' own AI tools must be fully transparent.

The B17 statement affirmed that scholars, not publishers, determine which computational methods best advance their research. Publishers now license the research record to commercial AI developers, yet institution and consortium agreements still restrict researchers' own use of licensed content with AI, often through blanket clauses that do not distinguish long-established machine learning from generative AI. Agreements must secure, consistently across publishers, researchers' right to apply text and data mining and AI to all content, open and licensed, including training models for non-commercial research within institutions. We share concerns about generative AI, and where they arise, we expect specific safeguards, such as use within secure institutional environments, rather than prohibitions covering all AI.

Publishers are also embedding their own AI tools across the research process, from searching and writing to submission, creating closed loops in which research is discovered, written and published within a single publisher's system. These tools risk being designed to increase submissions rather than to serve research, adding to the strain on the community's finite resources, and bringing AI into writing and peer review before their effects on trust and integrity have been assessed. Publishers must fully disclose the terms, data use and development of the AI tools they offer researchers or use in editorial work and peer review, and tools offered to researchers must not tie discovery, writing and submission to a single publisher. The academy itself must decide deliberately how AI enters research workflows, including which publisher tools it adopts and pays for.



The research community welcomes as partners those publishers that embrace these expectations and work with it to realize them. Publishers that commit to completing the transition to open access, through models that are sustainable, transparent and equitable, will find the research community ready to support them and to invest in that shared future.

Delegates call on all institutions, consortia and funders to carry these expectations into every negotiation and investment decision, together and with confidence in what has already been achieved, so that what is secured by one becomes the standard for all. The research community's own commitments, and how it will put them into practice, will be set out in a companion text on community commitment and implementation.

How this text was prepared: This consensus statement synthesizes four days of discussion at B18, held under the Chatham House Rule. Throughout the conference, the OA Forward Steering Committee tracked the key themes as they emerged. These themes were then discussed in a community-wide session and developed further in a dedicated workshop on the final day. B18 participants delegated the drafting and publication of the final statement to the OA Forward team. The team used an AI assistant (Claude, by Anthropic) with the provider's model-training option disabled, to organize ideas from the session transcripts, presentations and workshop outputs into a narrative text. The team then selected, checked and edited all content against the source material, and the OA Forward Steering Committee reviewed the draft before publication. No statements are attributed to individuals or institutions. Responsibility for the final statement rests with OA Forward. If you think a contribution has been misrepresented or left out, please tell us at contact@oaforward.org.



The B18 Final statement is available online
oaforward.org/b18-conference/final-statement/