



ASSAf's Presidential roundtable discussion: 24 October 2019

The Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf) has initiated a series of ASSAf Presidential Roundtables on Science, Scholarship and Society, which are moderated by ASSAf's President, Prof Jonathan Jansen. These roundtables bring together experts in a particular field to address a critical issue percolating in society (and of interest to a broad audience) that requires an evidence-based dialogue by the best minds on the topic.

Themes covered at past events include '*University Rankings: Helpful or Harmful?*' and '*Changing Campus Cultures and the Future of South African Universities*'. Most recently, the controversial legalisation of cannabis for personal use came under the spotlight. In support of international Open Access Week that runs from 21 to 27 October 2019, the next of these high-level discussions will be on a theme around open knowledge, in particular around Plan S.

In brief, [Plan S](#) is a funder-led initiative by [Science Europe](#), subscribed to by Open Access supporters of the [Budapest Open Access Initiative](#) 2002, which is: To provide free, unrestricted online access to all research output funded by public and private grants. "Plan S" was launched in September 2018 and revised in May 2019, the plan supported the so-called cOAlition S group of institutions, and has a set of [10 principles](#), directed to achieve scholarly publishing in "Open Access journals, Open Access Platforms or made immediately available through open access repositories".

Plan S has received many and tough critiques of their implementation guidelines that has resulted in revisions to the plan. Its global impact has also not been explored adequately. For those committed to open access to scholarly work, it highlights the slow uneven pace of change and the limitations of the existing model of scholarly publishing and communication, nationally and globally.

The Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf) as an active advocate of open access in the research and publishing enterprise supports the principles of Plan S of achieving immediate and fully Open Access of scholarly publishing. However, considering the economic implications of Plan S for research communities, there is concern about the transition to this model both by commercial publishers and a range of learned society journal publishers, in terms of new business models and the cost of APCs.



Since South African researchers also publish in journals owned by leading commercial publishers and receive funding from signatories to Plan S, it is expected that Plan S will have an impact on local budgets and policies. In simple terms, it calls for journal subscription costs – which is a barrier to the reader – to be transferred to the author/s of articles when funded through these sources of funding.

Considering that South Africa is not part of the European Union and that Plan S will have some bearing on our publishing ecosystem, the question that arises is what plans do we have to address the principles of Plan S and protect local scholarly journals?

The roundtable will be one of many efforts to understand the following:

1. How should South African institutions address the implications of Plan S?
2. What exactly will the potential impact be on researchers and institutional budgets?
3. Will Plan S not just be replacing the barrier to read with a barrier to authorship?
4. Should there be a shift to Gold OA and how should the associated APCs be managed equitably to protect authors in emergent research regions, especially given the collaborative nature of academia?
5. Could the Research Output funding (DHET) supporting local journals through payment of APCs?
6. Should SA journal article processing charges be capped, and how?
7. Will 'transformative deals' with commercial publishers be a in the interest of SA researchers and their institutions?
8. How difficult will it be for existing small journals to make the transition to OA, and why?
9. What will be the implications for institutions and the government, for changes to the way in which information is accessed and published in terms of the current funding regimes?

At least four experts in various fields will be invited to offer their views on this subject. Each panelist will be given 5 to 7 minutes to make an opening statement. This will be followed by a round of questions that will be moderated by the President, followed by an opportunity for questions from the audience (an audience of between 60 and 80 attendees is anticipated). Media representatives will be invited and will be given a dedicated time of about 15 minutes to ask questions.

