ASSAf
ACADEMY OF SCIENCE OF SOUTH AFRICA

From Open Access to Open Science

Open Access

The Open Access movement officially started around 30 years ago with librarians at research institutions experiencing a “serials crisis”. Subscription costs for publications were rising much faster than inflation, and to today libraries are still in negotiations with publishers, also through transformative agreements as were discussed during the recent National Scholarly Editor’s Forum (NSEF) meeting on 10 and 11 November 2021.

Funded by the Department of Science and Innovation (DSI), ASSAf supports Open Access (OA) through its many OA initiatives such as the SciELO SA journal aggregator platform, Khulisa Journals publishing platform, the *Quest* Science for South Africa popular magazine, and the ASSAf Institutional Research Repository, making all evidence-based studies by the Academy and its Members available without any access barriers, for society to benefit and to inform policy and decision makers.

ASSAf participated in international Open Access Week from 25 to 31 October through presenting on the topic at various higher education institutions.

During the past 10+ years, Open Access became part of a much bigger movement, namely the push to make science open on all levels towards increased collaboration and sharing. Open Science is used as an umbrella term for Open Access, Open Data, Open Standards and Open Source.

Open Science

The COVID-19 pandemic brought the critical need for Open Science for the benefit of the public even more to the foreground. Very early following the announcement of the pandemic, scientists – along with prominent organisations such as UNESCO, the World Health Organization (WHO), CERN (The European Organization for Nuclear Research) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights - called for the fully open sharing of the coronavirus genome data (Van Noorden, 2021). Publishers, libraries, research, and funding institutions overnight opened 90% of available scientific data and information on the coronavirus. While high quality peer-reviewed information and data were shared, so were fake news which led to an information pandemic or infodemic. Scientists however continued to collaborate and share data, which led to faster-than-ever outbreak research and the development of vaccines (Le Guillo, 2020). This is something we are all reaping the benefits of today, demonstrating that Open Access and Open Science can indeed accelerate discovery if supported by an enabling infrastructure.

A South African Open Science policy is currently in the making, while the UNESCO Science Commission recently adopted the UNESCO recommendation on Open Science, promoting and boosting openness, collaboration, and quality of science. More than 50 governments voiced their unconditional support for the set of recommendations, of which the draft can be accessed here.

Also see: UNESCO Science Commission adopts Open Science Recommendation

If it was possible to open access to scientific data and information on the coronavirus, imagine what scientists can accomplish if all data and information of benefit to society, regardless of discipline, can be opened … “as open possible, as closed necessary”.