

Society Publishers' Coalition: leading the way for open scholarship

As the cultural shift towards open scholarship continues to gather pace, members of the Society Publishers' Coalition (SocPC) are leading the way with practical initiatives to foster openness, transparency and collaboration. SocPC members are on the road to open scholarship, and various paths to transition are taking shape in 2020.

Transformative publishing models

SocPC members have been at the forefront of piloting transformative publishing models for a more sustainable open access (OA) future, with hundreds of institutions from across the globe signed up to a variety of agreements.

The benefits of these models are many, ranging from easier compliance with funders' mandates and increased visibility for published work to full online read access. A standout feature, however, is unlimited, charge-free OA publishing offered under the deals. This unique and 'all inclusive' type of transformative offering combines fees for reading paywalled content and unlimited OA publishing.

It is a model that is being piloted in 2020 by the Biochemical Society, the European Respiratory Society, IWA Publishing, the Microbiology Society and the Company of Biologists, all of which have signed consortia-level agreements. Two of these societies have, in addition, offered the transformative option to existing journal subscribers, making the transformative pilots available to individual institutions. This translated into publishing 9% of 2020 content OA on an article publishing charge (APC)-free basis (see [Figure 1](#)).

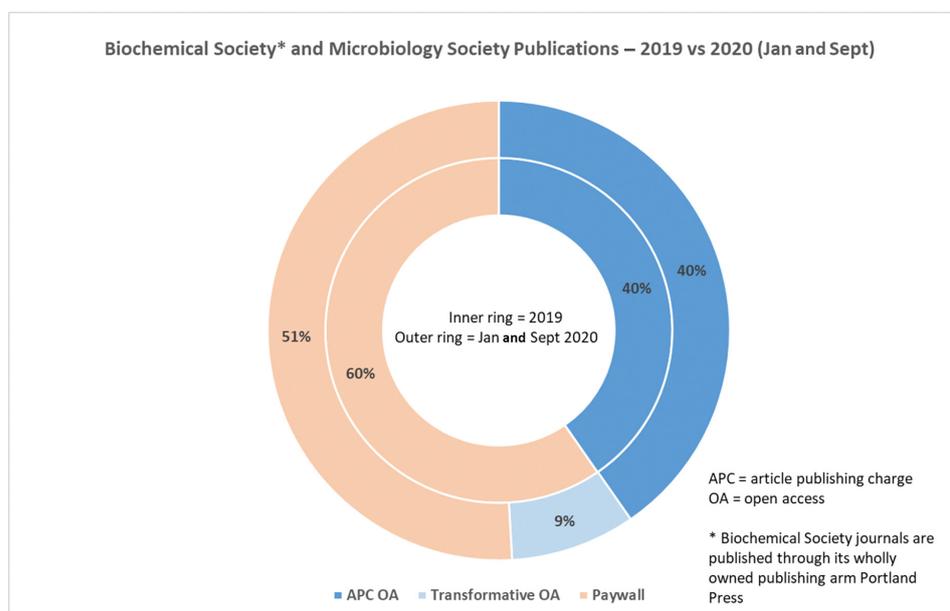


Figure 1. Transformative deals are helping to increase the proportion of articles published OA across the Microbiology Society and Biochemical Society's journals

The Geological Society of London and the Royal College of General Practitioners will be piloting transformative models for 2021 with Jisc. The Royal Society, meanwhile, has signed 'all inclusive' transformative agreements for 2021 with Jisc, SANLiC, Max Planck Digital Library, as well as individual universities. They are also one of the founders of the Initiative for Open Abstracts (I4OA), which promotes the unrestricted availability of abstracts across the world's scholarly publications.

Transformative deals are also being offered by SocPC's partner-published members, including the Association for Art History, the British Ecological Society, the Federation of European Biochemical Societies (FEBS) and the International Union of Crystallography, each of which have agreements, via their publishing partners, with consortia, including Projekt DEAL, Jisc, Unit, Bibsam and more.

The Company of Biologists' three hybrid journals – *Development*, *Journal of Cell Science* and *Journal of Experimental Biology* – are the first to be listed by cOAlition S as being Plan S-compliant 'Transformative Journals'.



Collective action and 'complete flips'

There have been major developments in collective action-inspired models such as Subscribe to Open (S2O). The European Mathematical Society's EMS Press has recently signed an agreement with Jisc that supports S2O, a 3-year deal giving institutions access to journal packages at special rates whilst supporting OA. This follows the launch of S2O for 10 journals (out of 20) across their portfolio, including their flagship journal, *Journal of the European Mathematical Society*, with a view to potentially flipping these titles in January 2021.

IWA Publishing has recently announced its partnership with Knowledge Unlatched to transition their remaining 10 hybrid journals to OA in January 2021 through a S2O model, the success of which will result in a fully OA journal portfolio.

Other societies have partnered with an external publisher to achieve a transition, with the Institution of Engineering and Technology having announced a publishing partnership with Wiley, transitioning its hybrid journals to gold OA from January 2021.



Peer review

As part of the group's commitment to open scholarship, and in a bid to promote transparency and accountability in vetting and evaluating research, some of its members' journals are embracing more open peer review workflows. This includes communicating the process and comments behind editorial decision-making, recognizing the work of editors and reviewers and expediting publication.

The Company of Biologists publishes peer review reports and is also part of Review Commons, a platform for high-quality, journal-independent peer review in the life sciences, which enriches the value of preprints and accelerates the publishing process. They have also launched preLights, a community initiative highlighting preprints of interest to the biological community.

The Geological Society of London has mandated transparent peer review for its forthcoming fully OA journal, *Earth Science, Systems and Society*. Open peer review is mandatory on three Royal Society journals and offered as an option on the fourth. Both of these approaches ensure the editorial process is transparent for all accepted papers and further support the move towards a more open model in scientific publishing.

Partner-published SocPC members are also making strides in this area, with journals from FEBS – *The FEBS Journal* and *Molecular Oncology* – and the British Ecological Society – *Journal of Ecology* and *Methods in Ecology and Evolution* – participating in Wiley's transparent peer review pilot, a collaborative initiative with Publons and ScholarOne. Similarly, the new OA journal *FEMS Microbes*, published by the Federation of European Microbiological Societies (FEMS) with partner Oxford University Press, offers the option of transparent peer review, whereby authors have the possibility to publish the peer review reports and their answers as Supplementary Material and reviewers can disclose their name on the article.

In addition to this, the Royal Society's journals are pioneering new article types including Registered Reports (in an attempt to improve reproducibility and reduce publication bias) and Evidence Synthesis articles (which provide a non-technical summary of existing evidence relevant to an identified scientific issue for policymakers).



Moving forward together

Society publishers have adopted a proactive approach to transitioning to open scholarship. This has been directed by their strategic goals in support of the research communities that each society serves. SocPC members published over 70,000 articles in 2018 and spent £600m on charitable activities supporting and nurturing their respective scholarly communities. COVID-19 has brought its own challenges and an uncertain year ahead faces everyone. Continually moving goalposts and variable funder requirements (such as the latest rights-retention and pricing-framework requirements) add hurdles to society publishers' transition journeys at a time when many are facing fragile futures. Over the course of 2020, however, the delivery of new initiatives by SocPC members has demonstrated the kind of forward-thinking attitudes that unite the coalition and point to a progressive and sustainable OA future. They are inviting funders and institutions to come with them.

The Biochemical Society and Portland Press are proud members of the Society Publishers' Coalition (SocPC), a group of likeminded, not-for-profit learned societies, community publishers and charities, which publish as part of their charitable objectives and re-invest the surplus from their publishing into the disciplinary communities they serve.

SocPC members share the common ambition to see an orderly and sustainable transition to open scholarship and to improve the efficiency of the scholarly communication ecosystem for the benefit of researchers, and society at large, in a fair and sustainable way. They are working with researchers, funders, institutions and other stakeholders in order to achieve this.

This article is a reproduction of the group's blog post, originally published on their website: www.socpc.org/post/socpc-leading-the-way-for-open-scholarship