

# Independent society publishers and the path to open scholarship

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The scholarly publishing landscape is undergoing rapid change owing to global events such as the coronavirus pandemic, political statements such as the OSTP Nelson memo in the USA<sup>1</sup> and funder moves such as Plan S in Europe<sup>2</sup>. These combined factors have triggered unprecedented moves towards open access and the broader establishment of open scholarship agendas among publishers, with a view to supporting global scientific research.

As an independent society publisher navigating a path to open scholarship, here's everything you need to know about the Biochemical Society's future publishing vision and the steps we're taking to safeguard our support for the molecular bioscience community.

## Where we are

Despite a history of curating 'science' by creating many of the most impactful journals, independent society publishers are an increasingly rare phenomenon in scholarly publishing. As we navigate new research agendas, the Biochemical Society is choosing to stand behind an equitable and inclusive funding model to cover publishing costs, challenging the more commercial imperatives of open access publishing, which seek to commodify the process of sharing research in pursuit of greater market share.

By choosing sustainable business models, we plan to remain independent so that we can continue to make choices in line with our strategy and mission, decide our own priorities and remain at a scale that enables publishing to be an important and integral part of what we bring to the research endeavour – rather than an end in itself. We trust our key communities – researchers, librarians and other stakeholders worldwide – align with these principles and will support us in our on-going journey towards more open research practices.

The first choice we've made is to remain in control of our own destiny and follow self-determined priorities. The second is to find as many routes as possible to achieve fee-free open access publishing options for all our authors. Ensuring researchers have the chance to be published based on scientific merit has been at the heart of the Society's publishing ethos and will continue in our open science future.

The Society's governance structure, which sees scientists guiding decisions about our sustainability, sits in contrast to more commercial shareholder interests. Our publishing surpluses are there to support scholars throughout their careers as they pursue interconnected research endeavours, providing forums for researchers to communicate and discuss their discoveries with peers, and to exercise their talents and creativity to advance their discipline.

## What changes are planned

The Society plans to scale up open scholarship ambitions over the next two years. Many of the publishing services we offer authors and customers are 'bundled in' to increasingly outdated licence agreements. In future, we will work with our communities to identify and deliver more services and better define service levels so that they may be formalized in new agreements.

Increasingly, we will move away from generating publishing income by licensing access to content. Measuring usage as we do currently will need rethinking as gated access points become redundant; however, we do expect to continue to provide evidenced measures of usage to our customers and to provide a high-quality reading experience and full suite of reader-based services. Industries, government bodies and commercial interests who rely on published research (though may not fund the publishing side of it) will be forefront in defining requirements for paid-for services, which enable them to consume and manage scientific outputs.

Moving towards a fully open access future, where every author has a fee-free and compliant route, will offer more choices for both authors and their institutions and funders. Maintaining the tradition of fully inclusive, wholly equitable access to our publishing venues, our ambition is to publish top-tier journals of choice for all

molecular bioscientists. Alongside our partner societies, we offer our authors the following reasons for choosing to publish in a society journal:

1. the quality and impact of what we publish;
2. the service levels we offer authors;
3. our track record and embedded organizational structure ensuring ethics and integrity; and
4. the desire of authors, reviewers and editors to pay back into their scientific community.

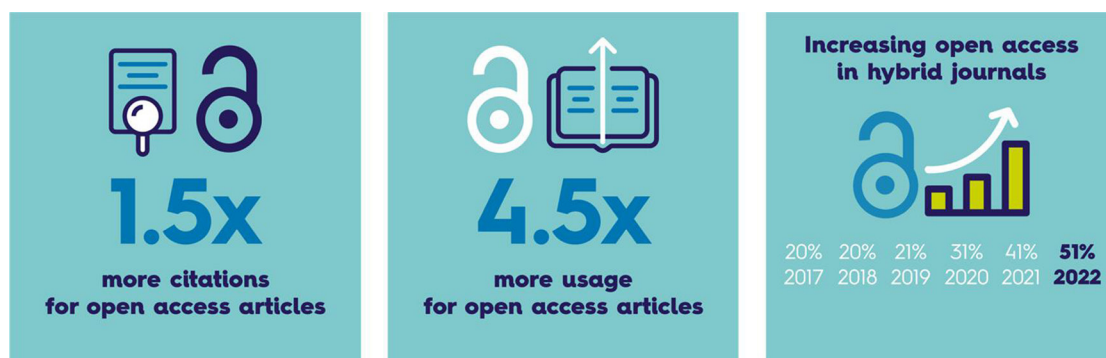
## Why changes are needed

While recent events have triggered the urgency of open access in scientific research, determined but piecemeal open access initiatives over the past two decades had already laid the groundwork for such change, and we are not alone in forming scaled-up transition plans in response.

There are three key influences on why transition to full open access has had such acute scrutiny at the Biochemical Society:

1. While introducing open access publishing initiatives for over a decade, the wholesale move to an author-pays model didn't stand up to the Society's stated principle that the 'ability to publish should not be linked with an individual researcher's ability to pay', as set out in our Open Scholarship position statement of 2019. Article publishing charge-based open access models that removed the barrier to reading replaced it with a new barrier to publishing and therefore ran contrary to prevailing views.
2. Publishing income has helped to fund many of the Society's activities, such as scientific meetings and training events, grants and awards, educational resources, policy work, public engagement and many other community-focused initiatives.
3. Institutions that financially support research publishing had all their funds tied up in serial collections (subscriptions) and have only just started to tackle how this might be repurposed to support upstream publishing services.

Authors benefit from their work being open access. It is easier for them to share the results of their work with colleagues and peers and it is easier for us to market and promote. We have started to analyse our own datasets and the results show a 1.5-fold citation advantage and 4.5-fold increase in usage of open access over paywalled articles<sup>3</sup>.



## Where we're going

The Biochemical Society publishes seven journals via our publishing arm, Portland Press. All profits earned through this business model are gifted straight back to the Society and this funds a range of activities that give back to and support the molecular bioscience community, in turn helping to advance the careers of researchers across the

bioscience sector. Through careful management of budgets and reserves, we expect to maintain our level of activity and initiate more funded projects, products and services in the delivery of our core mission.

## RESEARCH JOURNALS



Molecular mechanisms in biology



Linking basic science to disease mechanisms



A home for sound scientific research



From cell to brain in health and disease



## REVIEW JOURNALS



The reviews journal of the Biochemical Society



Highlighting key topics in the molecular biosciences



Co-owned by the Royal Society of Biology

Biochemical Society Journals: a home for every paper across the molecular biosciences

We are excited about the changes ahead. By adapting and taking a forward-thinking approach to the mechanisms of sharing research and knowledge, we aim to hold fast to principles that remain as relevant today, in an open access world, as they did when the Society was first formed over 100 years ago. We will continue to promote research without sacrificing quality and integrity, remaining a trusted player putting all surpluses back into our community for the advancement of molecular bioscience.

The landscape ahead will undoubtedly bring many changes and we look forward to working alongside the varied stakeholders within our community to support our mutual interests for the benefit of wider society. In the meantime, visit our open scholarship page for more on our work in this area and stay tuned for further developments as we take steps towards a more open scientific output. ■

### Notes

1. Public access mandate for US funders issued by the Office of Science and Technology Policy (Nelson) memo, August 2022.
2. A coalition of European funding body mandates in a published announcement called Plan S that all research funded by them must be published open access by 2025.
3. Citation advantage represents increased average in the two years following publication for articles published between 2017 and 2020. Increased average usage relates to articles published between 2019 and 2022. Both statistics taken from content published across all Biochemical Society hybrid journals, including the Biochemical Journal, Clinical Science, Biochemical Society Transactions, Essays in Biochemistry and Emerging Topics in Life Sciences.