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Swiss National Open Access Strategy

Results of the Consultation

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Legal notice

Commissioned by Delegation Open Science of swissuniversities
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Abbreviations

APCs	Article Processing Charges
ERI	Education, Research and Innovation
HEI	Higher Education Institution
NICT	Network ICT Services for Swiss Higher Education
OA	Open Access
SERI	State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation
SLiNER	Swiss Library Network for Education and Research
SNSF	Swiss National Science Foundation
PgB	Federal project contributions

Results of the Consultation

This report summarises the results of the consultation and indicates how they were incorporated into the revised Swiss National Open Access Strategy. The consultation procedure was conducted from 15 December 2023 to 31 January 2024.

1. Context

In 2015, the State Secretariat for Education, Research, and Innovation (SERI) commissioned swissuniversities to prepare, in collaboration with the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF), a strategy for implementing open access (OA) to scholarly publications. The [Swiss National Strategy on Open Access](#) was adopted by both partners in 2017. The 2017 OA Strategy envisioned that “by 2024, all scholarly publication activity in Switzerland should be OA, all scholarly publications funded by public money must be freely accessible on the internet.” In 2018, an [Action Plan](#) was adopted by swissuniversities.

On behalf of swissuniversities, the Delegation Open Science was responsible for leading the implementation of the 2017 OA Strategy. The Delegation Open Science has driven forward the implementation of the 2017 OA Strategy and Action Plan through the federal project contributions (PgB) programmes Scientific Information 2017–2020 and Open Science I Phase A – Open Access 2021–2024. The SNSF has introduced various policies and funding instruments to advance the OA transformation.

In June 2023, the Delegation Open Science, composed of representatives from the universities, universities of applied sciences and arts, universities of teacher education, the SNSF, the Swiss Academies of Arts and Sciences, the Swiss Library Network for Education and Research (SLiNER), and the Network ICT Services for Swiss Higher Education (NICT), resolved to conduct a review of the 2017 OA Strategy. To this end, the Delegation Open Science appointed an Advisory Committee that conducted the review for the attention of the Delegation.

In the interest of evaluating and adapting the strategic parameters, the review of the Strategy addresses current developments as of 2023/2024 as well as experiences made thus far, with the overarching aim of ensuring the sustainable, long-term development of the OA landscape, as set out in the 2017 OA Strategy.

In a first step, a [Background Report](#) that includes an analysis of the open access landscape was developed to prepare the review. In a second step, a revised version of the Swiss National Open Access Strategy was developed. A first draft of the Strategy was submitted for an internal consultation to the bodies of swissuniversities in November 2023, namely the Chamber of universities, the Chamber of universities of applied sciences and arts, the Chamber of universities of teacher education, the Delegation Research, SLiNER, and the Sounding Board on Open Access of the Delegation Open Science, the Open Access Alliance. In a third step, an external consultation was launched on a second draft of the Strategy.

2. Consultation procedure

The external consultation on the second draft of the revised Swiss National Open Access Strategy was launched on 15 December 2023. swissuniversities invited its members, the higher education institutions (HEIs), the SNSF as partner of the strategy, the national partners in education, research, and innovation (ERI) and further stakeholders to take position on the document by 31 January 2024. International experts in the field of OA also provided feedback on an earlier draft (see Section 5).

Once the consultation was completed, the feedback was evaluated, and the text of the draft was adapted by the Delegation Open Science and the Advisory Committee.

3. Statements received

A total of 38 statements were received. 10 institutions decided not to submit a statement.

	Statements received	Waiver of statement	Total
swissuniversities members	30	8	38
ERI partner organisations ¹	4	0	4
Further stakeholders ²	4	2	6
Total	38	10	48

4. Overall comments

Most institutions explicitly welcome the general approach of the strategy: 25 Higher Education Institutions, 4 ERI partner organisations and 3 further stakeholders. None of the institutions formulated a comprehensive rejection of the document.

From the consultation responses, areas can be identified that are questioned critically by several institutions or where there is a need for clarification. This chapter summarizes this feedback and sets forth how it has been processed for the development of the final text of the revised OA Strategy.

4.1 Strengthen Green OA

Comments

By stating in the vision that a “publication is considered open access if it is made immediately accessible [...] with no embargo, and with a clear licence”, the draft is in the perspective of many institutions insufficiently compatible with the specific characteristics of Green OA (e.g. no embargo or clear licences are often not practicable for Green OA). The green road is a cost-effective solution to advance the transformation and is essential for the implementation of OA, for example in the Social Sciences and Humanities, Applied Sciences and the Arts. The draft of the revised OA Strategy is therefore unclear on the status of Green OA and its prioritisation versus Gold or Diamond OA.

1 SNSF, ETH Board (and a separate joint statement by the ETH Domain’s four research institutes), Academies of Arts and Sciences, Innosuisse.

2 This category includes further partner organisations (Consortium of Swiss Academic Libraries, Schweizer Buchhandels- und Verlags-Verband SBVV, Swiss National CoARA Chapter, Dachverband der Urheber- und Nachbarschaftsnutzer DUN) that were invited to participate in the consultation process. Additionally, two other organisations (SSPH+, CHIMIA) submitted statements.

Implementation in the text

The vision describes a long-term view of OA publications that is compatible with Green OA, depending on which version of the publication is made available through the green road. A strong commitment to the vision of “no embargo” is maintained. The formulation regarding licences was specified in the vision to “open licences”.

2. Vision

[...] A publication is considered open access if it is made immediately accessible in a machine-readable format at no charge, with no embargo, and with an open licence [...]

The revised Strategy remains therefore open to all OA models. Green OA is one of the cost-effective models to realise the transformation. Following the consultation procedure, this aspect has been emphasised more strongly in the following sections. Moreover, definitions for the different OA models, including Green OA, have been added in an appendix of the Strategy.

1.2 Context

[...]

The revised OA Strategy introduces the next phase in the transformation process and underpins the paradigm shift by focusing on the frameworks for OA scholarly publishing and on a broader set of publication formats. The landscape currently encompasses a variety of OA models, namely Diamond, Gold, Green, and Hybrid OA, and may evolve further (see Appendix III). [...]

4.1 Pathway A: Develop, coordinate, and connect infrastructures and services

[...]

Infrastructure and services such as repositories that are necessary for Green OA are well established at the institutional level. However, continued coordination at the national level is needed to further strengthen this OA model and ensure interoperability.

[...]

4.2 Definition of financial sustainability

Comments

Costs for scholarly publishing must remain stable. In that sense, many institutions consider the draft’s definition of financial sustainability as not specific enough. Defining principle as an overall cost-neutral transformation to OA across all models would be welcome.

Furthermore, the challenge of implementing cost transparency across the different OA models is highlighted. The implementation of cost transparency should not lead to disproportionate expenditures.

Implementation in the text

The 2017 OA Strategy set the principle of cost neutrality, while also allowing for additional costs in the transition phase. However, cost neutrality has become a difficult concept over time and a more specific definition of financial sustainability should allow for the possibility of avoiding lock-in situations and historically high price levels – which has been further developed in the text following to the consultation process. Finally, the principle must be applicable across a variety of settings and therefore must be specified in concrete cases.

3.3 Ensuring financial sustainability in scholarly publishing

[...] Financial sustainability is understood as practising fiduciary responsibility for public funds: public funding for scholarly publishing must be cost-efficient, sustainable, transparent, and make provisions for adequate funding sources for researchers to publish in OA. In this context, the revised OA Strategy underlines the importance to

avoid lock-in situations as well as the accompanying historically high price levels and long-term price spirals. Regarding implementation, the principle of financial sustainability in scholarly publishing must be formulated in specific terms by the partners, in, for example, a common framework for negotiations with service providers. This allows the principle to be applicable in a variety of contexts. [...]

Cost transparency is of utmost importance and has been further developed in the text:

3.3 Ensuring financial sustainability in scholarly publishing

[...]

Moreover, cost transparency across the entire scholarly publishing landscape must be ensured to facilitate decision-making capacities, for example in the case of decentralised APCs (“costs in the wild”). This calls for institutional monitoring procedures and, as necessary, interinstitutional transparency. When cooperating with service providers, cost transparency is to be considered in particular. [...]

4.3 Role of service providers in scholarly publishing

Comments

Most institutions welcome the more explicit recognition of the heterogeneous landscape, including publication formats such as long-form publications, practice publications and publications in the arts. However, the distinction between major international and medium or small service providers in scholarly publishing should be more pronounced. This is especially relevant to further advance OA in long-form publications, practice publications and publications in the arts.

In addition, the framework for negotiations with major international service providers should make it possible to reduce systemic dependencies. With the aim of reducing systemic dependencies, many institutions see it as essential to further strengthen the support for non-profit service providers in order to advance the OA transformation.

Implementation in the text

Collaboration and cooperation with the heterogeneous landscape of service providers in line with the guiding principles of this Strategy is essential to meet the publishing needs of researchers, research communities and institutions. Distinctions between different types of service providers are only made where necessary, as the collaboration and cooperation with the whole landscape is necessary to advance OA. The principles of the revised Strategy must be respected regardless of the type of service provider (i.e. for-profit or non-profit, major or minor, international or domestic). For this reason, the diversity of service providers has been described:

3.1 Reducing systemic dependencies and fostering diversity in scholarly publishing

To reduce systemic dependencies and avoid lock-in situations, the Swiss scholarly publishing system must be able to rely on a coordinated and diverse ecosystem of for-profit and non-profit, major and minor, as well as international and domestic service providers. [...]

With regard to the joint negotiation mandate, the text has been clarified by emphasising that the collaboration with major international service providers must respect the principles of the Strategy:

4.2 Pathway B: Negotiate with service providers for a sustainable transformation

[...]

The revised OA Strategy calls for continued negotiations with service providers to conclude agreements that align with the vision of this Strategy to support a stable transition

of scholarly publishing towards OA. It is necessary to engage with service providers in a way that is congruent with the guiding principles of this Strategy, particularly regarding financial sustainability, the reduction of systemic dependencies, international connectivity, and academic quality in scholarly publishing. Negotiations with service providers are moved forward through a common negotiation framework; they also require adequate systemic conditions that are advanced through implementing pathways A and C in particular. [...]

The support of non-profit service providers, which is addressed in the revised Strategy, has been further specified:

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*4.1 Pathway A: Develop, coordinate, and connect infrastructures and services
[...] A coordinated and collaborative institutional publishing initiative on the national level that considers existing initiatives is to be evaluated. [...]*

4.4 Strategy duration, intermediary evaluation(s) and indicators

Comments

In the context of the dynamic environment of the OA transformation, the duration of the Strategy until 2032 without an explanation and/or the explicit mention of intermediate steps is seen critically by some institutions. An evaluation of the attainment of the objectives is necessary to adapt the implementation to the dynamic environment.

The definition of indicators is welcomed by the institutions, as it makes the implementation of the Strategy and the evaluation of the achievement of objectives more tangible. Some indicators can only be measured at high costs, as they require the adaptation of organisational processes.

Implementation in the text

The implementation of the revised Strategy requires a long-term perspective, in particular with regard to the required cooperation and collaboration between HEIs, Strategy partners, close national partner organisations and stakeholders, as well as the adaptation of organisational processes and practices within institutions. Given the dynamic environment, it is essential to evaluate the attainment of the objectives at regular intervals. Measurable indicators can be used to steer the implementation strategically and to adapt implementation instruments where necessary. These aspects have been addressed more explicitly:

1.1. Mandate

[...]

The revised OA Strategy advances the transformation process and underpins the ongoing paradigm shift towards open access. The stabilisation of the cultural and systemic transformation in cooperation and collaboration with the Strategy partners, additional partner organisations, and stakeholders as well as the subsequent adaptation of internal organisational processes and practices require a long-term time frame. For this reason, the time frame for realising the revised Strategy has been set to 2032 at the latest. The partners conduct an evaluation of the Strategy's objective attainment at regular intervals within the stated time frame, depending on the actual state of the OA landscape and the individual institutional circumstances. [...]

In addition, considering the feedback that some indicators are costly to monitor, the Strategy has been adapted to take more explicit account of the information needs of decision-makers:

*4.6 Pathway F: Monitor the OA transformation in terms of publications and costs
[...] Monitoring activities must be tailored to the information needs of decision-makers and data will be collected and aggregated at the national level only if the information needs of decision-makers so require. [...]*

Appendix

I Measurable indicators for the implementation

[...]

The Delegation Open Science monitors system-level indicators during implementation for the purpose of coordinating and steering the transformation, in line with the governance structures described in Section 5.35 Data on the indicators are collected and aggregated at the national level only if the information needs of decision-makers so require (see also Pathway F). Consequently, the Delegation Open Science considers the resources needed to monitor the indicators at the national and institutional levels. [...]

The list of indicators has also been revised to incorporate this feedback.

4.5 Action plan and implementation

Comments

Comments received diverge on the decision not to develop an action plan as well as on the self-commitment of the HEIs and the Strategy partners to implement the revised Strategy. Some institutions consider that the revised Strategy should be concretised in an action plan. In an action plan the HEIs and partners could commit themselves to more specific action lines and thus coordinate implementation more effectively.

Other institutions welcome the self-commitment as it leaves institutions the necessary room for manoeuvre to implement the revised Strategy according to their designated remit, their institutional context, and the current developments in the OA landscape. In the context of a self-commitment, the coordination of the implementation through the Delegation Open Science is seen as appropriate and effective.

Implementation in the text

Considering the diverging comments, the principle that no action plan will be developed and that the HEIs and Strategy partners will self-commit to implementing the revised Strategy is maintained; the institutions themselves will develop the necessary instruments (i.e. implementation plans, institutional policies, best practices, etc.). The connection to parallel implementation planning activities has been specified:

1.1 Mandate

[...]

No overarching action plan will be developed based on the revised OA Strategy; implementation activities are being, or will be, planned by the various actors individually. For example, the revised OA Strategy is instrumental for swissuniversities' planning of implementation activities in the scope of the federal project contributions (PgB) Programme Open Science II for the 2025–2028 period. Implementation steps are coordinated by the Strategy partners through the governance principles set out in Section 5. It is to be noted that implementation of the transformation process requires efforts and resources on the part of the Strategy partners, ERI partner organisations, and stakeholders. [...]

The role of the Delegation Open Science in coordinating between the Strategy partners, close partner organisations and stakeholders has been underlined:

5. Governance

[...] As the designated body, the Delegation Open Science coordinates the OA transformation among the Strategy partners, close partner organisations, and stakeholders while also respecting the autonomy of the institutions; this means that the Delegation has no overriding competences over institutions. [...]

5. Assessments by international experts

An earlier draft of the revised OA Strategy was commented on by four international experts³ to ensure the relevance of the draft text in the international context. A summary of the assessments is provided below.

The experts underlined the timely relevance of the revised OA Strategy. Its focus on a scholar-led publishing system, infrastructures and services, bibliodiversity and research assessment are highlighted as essential commitments towards making open access the norm.

The experts reflected critically on the role of for-profit publishers, in particular with a view to achieving financial sustainability and reducing systemic dependencies. The international connectivity of Swiss efforts in open infrastructures and services (in particular for Diamond OA) could be key to achieving these objectives, and support for such initiatives could therefore be further strengthened and specified for implementation. The role of Green OA and of rights retention is also highlighted by the experts as important dimensions that could be further strengthened.

6. Conclusion

The consultation process has been instrumental in revising the Swiss National Open Access Strategy. The broad engagement of stakeholders in the process, including HEIs, ERI partner organisations, and further stakeholders, demonstrates the collective commitment to advancing the OA transformation in Switzerland.

The institutions consulted supported the general approach of the strategy and no fundamental objections were raised. Institutions highlighted areas for improvement and clarification. Issues raised during the consultation process included the strengthening of Green OA, clarity on the definition of financial sustainability and on the role of service providers, the timeframe of the Strategy and its implementation. The main comments received have been considered and processed as summarised in section 4 of this report. Feedback from international experts further underlined the international relevance of the Strategy.

On 10 April 2024, the Delegation Open Science approved the revised Swiss National Open Access Strategy. On 18 April 2024 the revised OA Strategy was approved by the Board of swissuniversities and on 22 May 2024 it was adopted by the Plenary Assembly of swissuniversities. The SNSF's Presiding Board of the National Research Council adopted the revised Swiss National Open Access Strategy on 8 May 2024.

The revised Swiss National Open Access Strategy provides a common strategic framework to advance the transformative process and to steady the paradigm shift towards open access to scholarly publications.

³ Vinciane Gaillard (European University Association), Ashley Farley (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation), Niels Stern (OAPEN Foundation), and one anonymous international expert.