



Towards transparent, equitable and open access to scholarly publications: IREL's approach to the negotiation of transformative agreements

IREL Steering Group, June 2023

In light of the recent *Council of the European Union Conclusion on high quality, transparent, open, trustworthy and equitable scholarly publishing*¹ IREL would like to re-emphasise its commitment to achieving a cost neutral and equitable transition to full open access (OA).

Since 2020 IREL has worked successfully to accelerate the level of OA publication in Ireland. In 2021, transformative agreements supported by IREL resulted in 2,813 journal articles being published OA, which accounts for an estimated 42% of the articles published annually by corresponding authors from IREL's members. For 2022 our interim data shows an increase in this number, to an estimated 3,164 articles published OA.

IREL has replaced most of its traditional journal subscription licenses with transformative OA agreements. As of May 2023 IREL has signed 22 such agreements, which continue to provide journal subscription read access, while allowing corresponding authors from participating institutions to publish their works open access without author-facing charges.

IREL has pledged to support the realisation of the objectives outlined in the National Open Research Forum Action Plan for Open Research². In particular IREL is working towards the target of implementing a sustainable and inclusive course to achieving 100% OA by 2030. This is reflected in our priorities in the negotiation of future agreements (outlined below), and in our commitment to ensuring that transformative agreements are ultimately phased out in favour of more sustainable OA business models.

At the end of 2023 10 of IREL's current transformative agreements will end³. IREL is negotiating new agreements on similar terms with these publishers. We are seeking:

- To reduce or control the total cost of OA publishing and subscription access per publisher.
- Uncapped open access to cover 100% of our members' research articles in all of a publishers' journals.
- Simplification and improvement of the processes of OA publishing for authors and institutions.
- Transparency manifested in a fair and transparent basis for the charges for OA publishing services provided, and the public availability of the full terms of agreements.

¹ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2023/05/23/council-calls-for-transparent-equitable-and-open-access-to-scholarly-publications/>

² <https://repository.dri.ie/catalog/ff36jz222>

³ RIA, T&F, BMJ, ECS, Emerald, IEEE, Microbiology Society, OUP, Royal Society, Sage.

- Commitments to an OA paradigm. In line with Ireland's National Action Plan for Open Research, support for payment of OA publishing services in hybrid journals under transformative agreements must be treated as a transitional driver to allow both the consortium and publisher to move from closed to open models. IReL will prioritise agreements with publishers who demonstrate a strategic commitment to a complete OA transition with defined targets.
- Equity to be reflected in the publisher's approach to global pricing and reducing barriers to publishing in low and middle income countries.
- To protect author rights by removing unnecessary requirements for authors' assignment of copyright or exclusive licences to publish.

IReL's long term intention is that transformative agreements will be phased out as the availability of OA content continues to grow and is mirrored by a decline in subscription content's volume, usage and value. IReL will actively monitor these trends and evaluate the continuing value of TAs on a publisher-by-publisher basis.

Up to 2020, 100% of IReL's spend on journals was on subscriptions. Since 2021, IReL has repurposed a growing percentage of this to support OA publishing (54% in 2022). As TAs are phased out IReL will be well positioned to reallocate these funds to best support Irish research and Ireland's open research agenda. Our goals are to support researcher choice, ensure value for money, and foster diversity, equity and sustainability in scholarly communications. To this end, IReL supports and will continue to support OA models and initiatives beyond TAs⁴.

⁴ IReL has agreements supporting alternative models of OA funding (Annual Review's Subscribe to Open model, and CERN's SCOAP3 initiative).