

Date
15 July 2014

Our reference
VSNU 14/267 U

Direct-dial no.
+31 (0) 70 302 14 00

Subject
Open access to publications

Your reference

E-Mail
post@vsnu.nl

To all member of the Dutch academic community

Dear members of the Dutch academic community,

The rise of the Internet has radically changed scholarly communication. New opportunities in ICT mean that everyone with access to the Internet can, in principle, benefit from the latest scientific insights. Open Access wants to ensure that the results of scientific research, particularly publicly funded research, are freely available. The Dutch universities actively support this development and have advocated it in various ways in the past few years.

Recently the subject of Open Access has also received the full attention of the Dutch government. Significant steps are expected to be taken in the short term. These will have consequences for your work as a researcher. This letter is intended to provide you with further details. We are also appealing to you to continue to advocate free access to your own scientific publications.

Green and gold

The international debate about Open Access distinguishes two main routes: the green and the golden route. The green route is based on self-archiving. In this model, authors make their work publicly accessible by depositing their manuscripts in an institutional repository. All Dutch universities offer this possibility. Occasionally, publishers require embargo periods to be observed. By means of this route, all researchers working in the Netherlands can contribute to making their publications freely available online. We call on you to (continue to) use this possibility.

The golden route is more complex. However, many believe that in the end it is a more sustainable route to Open Access. Publications are directly made available online via the platforms of publishers. This move therefore requires a change in the business models of publishers: from a subscription based model to a model where the author (or more accurately the author's employer or research funder) pays a fee upon acceptance of an article. An increasing number of publishers are working according to this golden business model. Notable examples include PlosOne and BioMed Central.

Other major publishers are still working mostly on the basis of the traditional subscription model. These publishers only occasionally offer the possibility to make articles Open Access in subscription based journals (the so-called hybrid model) by payment of a publication fee. Dutch universities consider this to be a temporary

solution and expect publishers to make the transition to a pure golden business model for all their journals.

Recent developments

The Open Access debate recently received a strong impetus as a result of a letter to the Parliament written by State Secretary Sander Dekker of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science.¹ In that letter, he takes the position that, in principle, publicly funded research should be freely available. This position is based on the conviction that Open Access is beneficial to science but also to society at large and the economy. In an increasingly digital world, Open Access publications can be found quicker and more easily, are cited more often and have a larger reach, not only within but also beyond the scientific community. All professions (from school teachers to GPs and starters of spin-offs) should be able to benefit from the latest scientific insights. Least of all Open Access publishing provides advantages to developing countries where few can afford expensive subscriptions to scientific journals.

State Secretary Sander Dekker aims to have Open Access to 60% of Dutch scientific publications in 5 years time and 100% in 10 years time (2024). He makes a well-considered choice for the golden route.

The period ahead

The Dutch universities are pleased with the recent support of the Dutch Government and are keen to working together in order to bring about the transition needed. The negotiations with publishers about the renewal of subscriptions provide an important opportunity to take steps forward.

For the past ten years, publishers have been offering journals in package deals referred to as Big Deals. Shortly negotiations with the major publishers about these Big Deals will take place, including Elsevier, Springer and Wiley. The Dutch universities have expressed their firm wish to make agreements with these publishers about the transition to Open Access as part of those Big Deals. Universities expect publishers to take serious steps to facilitate that transition.

What can you do?

As a researcher, you can play a vital role in the transition to Open Access. We have mentioned the possibility of depositing articles in the repository of your own university. But there is more. It's important to consider that researchers play a key role in the publishing process: as providers of the scientific content, as reviewers and as members of editorial and advisory boards. We hope that where ever possible, you will ask publishers to convert to an Open Access model.

¹ <http://www.government.nl/documents-and-publications/parliamentary-documents/2014/01/21/open-access-to-publications.html>.

The next six months will be very interesting. We expect to make serious advances in the move towards Open Access. We hope we can rely on your support.

More information about developments will be available in the coming months at www.vsnu.nl/openaccess. If you have any questions or require further information, do not hesitate to contact your university library.

On behalf of the executive boards of all Dutch universities,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of several overlapping loops and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Karl Dittrich,
Chair of the Association of Universities in the Netherlands (VSNU)