COAR's Feedback on the Guidance on the Implementation of Plan S

December 13, 2018

The Confederation of Open Access Repositories (COAR) reiterates our support for the goal of Plan S to achieve "immediate Open Access to all scholarly publications from research" and we appreciate the opportunity to provide feedback on the guidance on the implementation of the Plan.

COAR is an international association with members from over 140 organizations on 5 continents. COAR promotes global interoperability of repositories, helps to build capacity across regions, and offers an international perspective related to repositories, open access and open science with the aim of creating a global ecosystem for research dissemination.

There are close to 4000 repositories around the world that provide open access to articles, research data and other valuable products of research, and at least 1500 repositories in Europe. The distributed nature of repositories allows them to be responsive to local needs and priorities, while also ensuring some financial sustainability because they are, in most cases, services provided directly by research institutions (universities and other). Interoperability of repositories at the regional and international levels is crucial to support the development of cross-repository services.

We recognize and agree with the aim of transforming the publishing industry, however to truly improve and transform the system there needs to be a multipronged approach, with a number of actions undertaken concurrently. We would like to stress the importance of repositories as complementary mechanisms for advancing innovation in research communications, as outlined in the COAR Next Generation Repositories report and ensure that their role is adequately reflected in Plan S.

In general, COAR supports the implementation guidelines outlined in Plan S and therefore we will focus our comments on the requirements for repositories. COAR and others in the repository community have significant concerns related to several of the requirements for repositories, a number of which we argue are not necessary and will create artificial barriers to the participation of universities and other research organizations in the scholarly communication system. While some of these recommendations may be 'nice to have', they are not prerequisites for robust and interoperable repository services. Instead they could result in driving repository functionality in the wrong direction, create too high of a bar for less resourced institutions, and further centralize research infrastructures and services because they cannot be adopted, leading to a replication of the existing inequalities in the scholarly communication system.

We strongly urge Plan S to remove or reword some of the requirements, and move others into a "Recommended additional criteria" section, such as the section that has been included in the Open Access Journals and Platforms section.

Below you will find COAR's detailed feedback related to the "Requirements for Plan S compliant Open Access repositories". These recommendations are based on widespread expertise of the COAR community and input from the COAR Next Generation Repositories Editorial Group, representing some of the foremost experts in repository technologies. We would be happy to explain these comments further and would be pleased to work with cOAlition S to finalize the recommendations. This will ensure that the implementation of Plan S for repositories is achievable and supports our common goal of accelerating open access.

Automated manuscript ingest facility
Apart from the SWORD protocol and a few regional router services, very few repositories currently have an automated ingest process for manuscripts. Indeed, most repositories employ a human-mediated deposit approach which involves librarians and/or repository managers recruiting and depositing content into the repository on behalf of researchers. This approach ensures there is some quality control of metadata and that the appropriate version of the article is being deposited. We do not believe that an automated manuscript ingest functionality is needed for repositories to comply with the intent of Plan S, which is to provide immediate access to the Author's Accepted Manuscript. Furthermore, there are numerous different ways which "automated ingest" could be interpreted and implemented by different repositories. Unless there is a common, standardized mechanism required by all repositories, this requirement will not be effective in aiding with automated population of repositories. With further explanation and specificity, this functionality could be included in a "recommended additional criteria" section.

Full text stored in XML in JATS standard (or equivalent)
The adoption of XML is extremely resource intensive. While we agree that full text articles need to be available for TDM, this does not equate to full text needing to be pre-processed through XML-JATS. This requirement supposes that text mining is part of the repository system, but the preferred approach to TDM for repository content is that external services aggregate and convert resources into text-minable format. It is sufficient to require that the content in repositories are available/open for automated discovery of full text (e.g. pdf or word). To that end, Plan S should recommend the Signposting protocol as the standard convention for making full text easily discoverable and retrievable by external services and processes.

Quality assured metadata in standard interoperable format, including information on the DOI of the original publication, on the version deposited (AAM/VoR), on the open access status and the license of the deposited version.
We agree with this requirement and have nothing to add.

Open API to allow others (including machines) to access the content

We agree that repositories should have an open API, however with hundreds of different open APIs, it is important to specify which APIs should be adopted in order to ensure machine interoperability and that service providers can develop cross-repository services. Plan S should recommend and eventually require the adoption of [Resource Sync](#) as an API. ResourceSync is a modern successor to OAI-PMH. It is a specification based on Sitemaps that can be used by repository managers to provide information that allows third-party systems to remain in sync with the resources in their repository as they evolve, i.e. are created, updated, deleted. ResourceSync has been found to improve aggregation services, is scalable and is being adopted by service providers.

QA process to integrate full text with core abstract and indexing services

European repositories are connected and indexed through OpenAIRE services funded by the European Commission. OpenAIRE ensures that European content is visible and part of the scholarly ecosystem. Therefore, this point should be replaced with a requirement that repositories are harvested by OpenAIRE.

Continuous availability

We agree with this requirement and have nothing to add.

Helpdesk

The aim of this requirement is to ensure that the repository service is contactable and will respond to issues or queries from users. However, this seems unnecessarily onerous for the repositories. Many complex websites and services do not have helpdesks. We recommend that instead of a helpdesk, Plan S require a mechanism for users to get help or support for using the repository, which could be as simple as an email address or a simple online form. This is in line with existing practice for mainstream web services.

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