

Q&A's for the agreement with Elsevier

Q: Why is there an agreement?

A: This means we have reached an agreement, and will now work on drafting the detailed contract to be signed. Universities view this agreement with Elsevier as a major step in the right direction. Both parties have endorsed the principle of open access and have reached an agreement on that ground.

Q: What does the agreement entail?

A: The Dutch universities aim to make 30% of their researchers' publications Open Access by 2018. The coming three years will see substantial progress made towards Open Access. This is a transition to Open Access in a sustainable way. The agreement continues to provide academics at Dutch universities access to all Elsevier journals and allows them to publish through Gold Open Access in a selection of Elsevier journals at no additional cost to the individual researcher.

Q: Why did it take so long?

A: Both sides have major interests at stake and neither side was prepared to act rashly, which can cause negotiations to take some time.

Q: Where was the greatest disagreement?

A: The principles of open access have been embraced by both parties. However, the parties did hold intense discussions on the financing. For the universities, the tenability of the scientific system and, hence, the publication of science are of fundamental importance. The elements of availability and affordability play a role as well.

Q: What happens after 2018? Why was a three-year contract chosen?

A: This agreement makes it possible to reach 30% gold open access articles by authors with a Dutch affiliation by 2018. We expect that the open access landscape for academic articles and their publishers will have changed to such an extent that we will need to re-examine in 2018 how to proceed in the future. The guiding principle for universities is that 100% open access should ultimately be achieved.

Q: What about the costs?

A: Due to this agreement, individual researchers with a Dutch affiliation face no additional costs if choosing to publish Open Access in the journals within the scheme. The agreement is also cost-efficient for the universities. Under the old situation academic themselves had to pay an additional sum of money for the open access publication of an article they had written, over and above the subscription costs that the universities were already paying for access to Elsevier journals.

Q: Can you give us an indication of the size of the Big Deal contract in euros?

A: No, we do not comment specifically on the financial agreements that are involved in this agreement because it is, of course, sensitive competitive information.

Q: Does this agreement with Elsevier go far enough towards meeting Dekker's ambition of 100% OA in 2024?

A: The VSNU sees this agreement as a substantial step towards achieving the aim in 2024. The steps that are being taken also show that Elsevier is actively supporting Open Access both in the Netherlands and internationally. The agreement facilitates Open Access publishing in a managed way. We will then reassess the situation together in 2018. Dutch universities expect to see an explosion in Open Access growth, and we encourage others to follow our lead to support gold Open Access publishing.

Q: How do you arrive at the selection of journals?

A: The negotiators agreed to achieve a stepped growth to 30% open access articles from 2016 to 2018. This is done by making a selection of journals available to publish articles open access.

Q: If academics do not have to pay APCs for articles in the designated OA journals, who does?

A: The costs for the APCs (a sum that an academic pays for the open access publication of his/her article) for authors with a Dutch affiliation have been bought off in this agreement with Elsevier. For the next three years the costs fall under the big deal, provided that publication is in a selected journal.

Q: Is there an option for open access publication if my intended journal is not on that list?

A: Open access publication in the selected journals is free of charge for the full year. If a journal is not on the list, but you still want to use open access publication, Elsevier continues to offer the option for open access publication after payment of the APC costs. These APC costs will not be reimbursed automatically though. In cases like this, the academic can choose a different journal or he/she must seek their own funding for those APC costs.

Q: Do you think that academics will find that this step towards open access goes far enough?

A: The VSNU sees this agreement as a substantial step towards achieving the aim in 2024. We expect that academics will take the same view for the time being, especially as they will not have to incur additional costs for open access publication in the selected journals. The steps that are being taken also show that Elsevier would like to see proof that open access is catching on both in the Netherlands and internationally. The steps evidence controlled growth and we hope to show that the Netherlands is ready for explosive growth.