

# Open Access is here to stay. But who will pay?

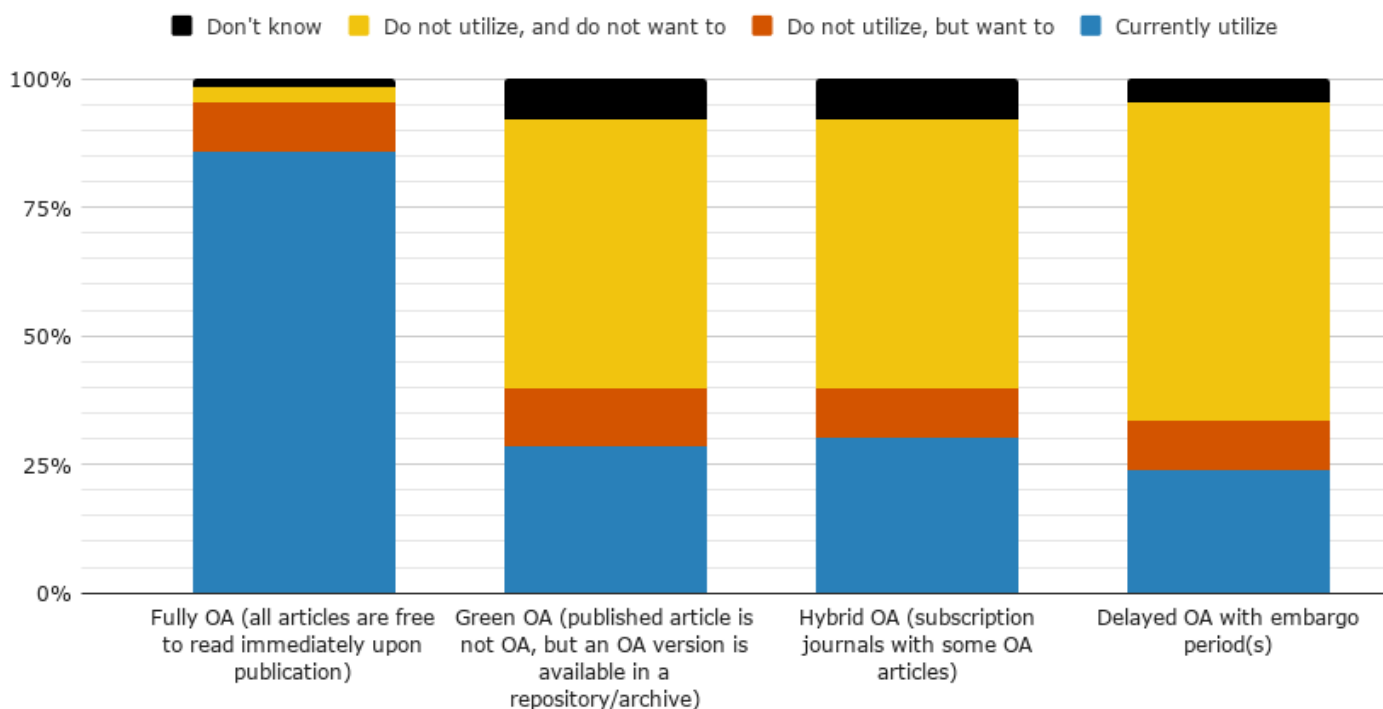
The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the already steady transition towards Open Access publishing. However, precisely what this future looks like and how it will be paid for by smaller, independent publishers is less clear. In this post, **Danielle Padula** outlines key findings from a report into the current state of Open Access among scholarly society and universities publishing independently. The post details the current state of Open Access publishing and what funding options are currently being explored by publishers.

With Plan S a few months away and mounting pressures to make research freely available, spurred by the COVID-19 pandemic among other recent global crises, academia appears to be on the precipice of an accelerated transition to Open Access publishing. The question that remains is what the future of OA publishing will look like, or, more specifically, what OA publishing models will be most sustainable.

Identifying viable funding options for OA journals has been an ongoing quest, especially for scholarly societies and university presses operating independently of corporate publishers. In early Plan S feedback, both [OASPA](#) and [ALPSP](#) expressed support for the aims of the initiative to make research fully OA, but concerns about how small publishers with limited funding options would be able to navigate such rapid change. In response, initiatives such as [SPA-OPS](#) have been launched to help scholarly organizations identify sustainable OA models, and many publishers across disciplines are now experimenting with a range of OA approaches.

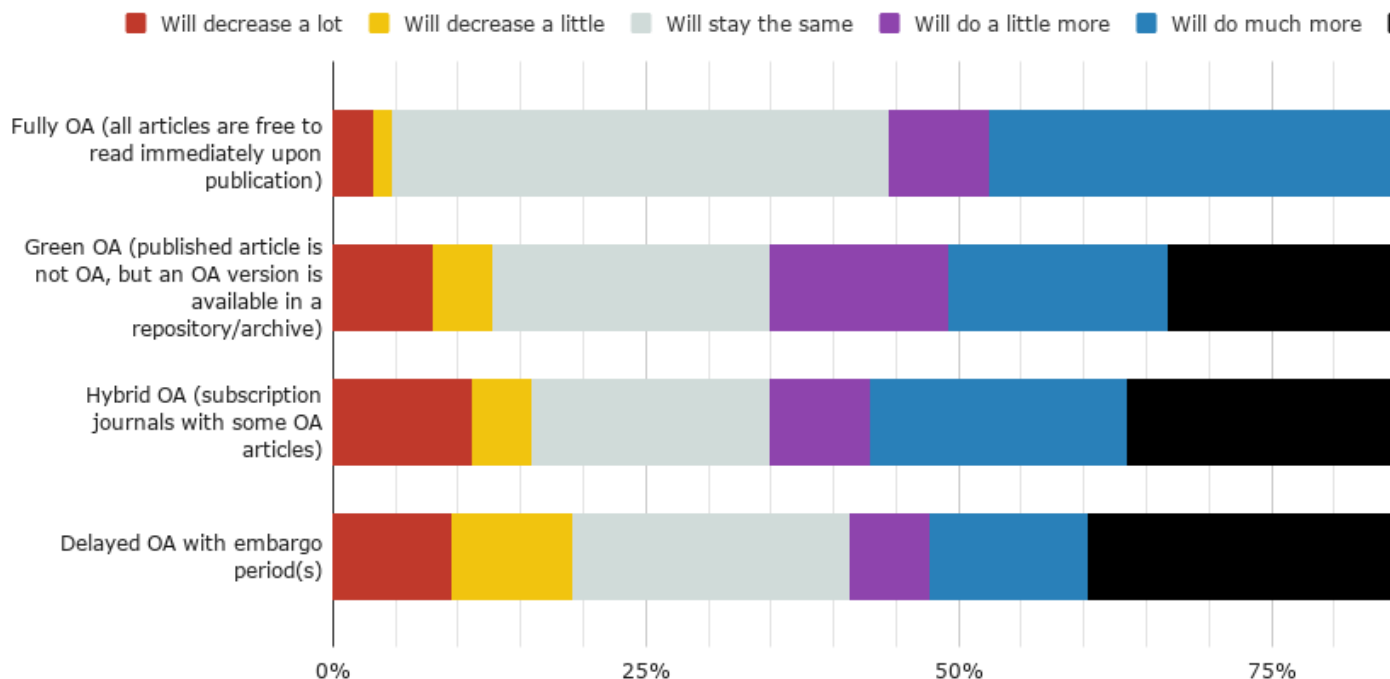
What is the current state of OA among scholarly societies and universities publishing independently? And, as these organizations experiment with different access models, which have the most promise for the future?

Scholastica explores these questions among others in our [“State of Journal Production and Access 2020”](#) report, which details the results of a global survey of 63 individuals working with scholarly society and university publishers about their current journal production and access approaches and future priorities.



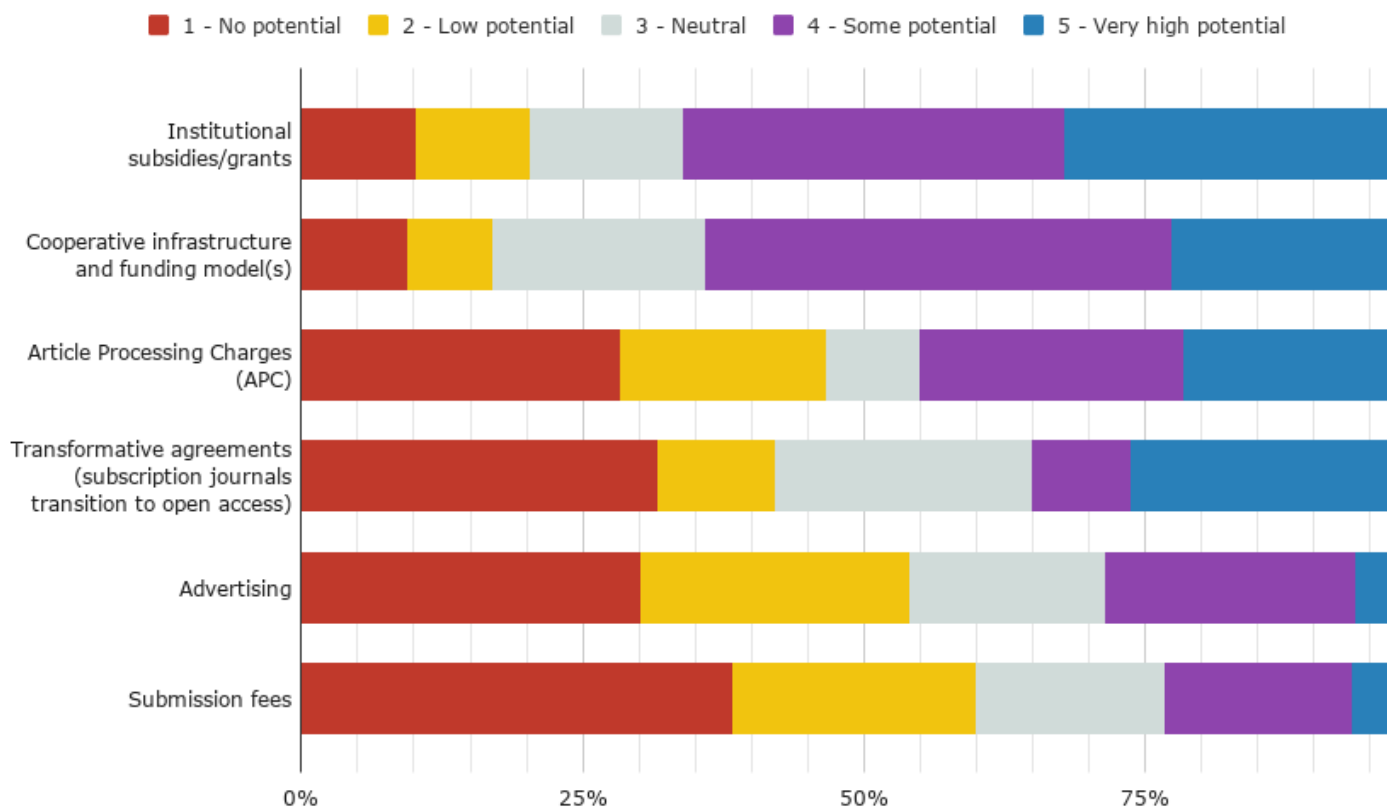
Graph 1: Open Access models

In the area of research access, “The State of Journal Production and Access” survey results show that the majority of publishers represented are prioritizing OA journal publishing now and in the future, with an apparent focus on fully-OA journal models. When asked which access models they are currently using, 80% of publishers surveyed said they are doing fully-OA publishing. These responses echo the findings of other recent reports, including the [2018 STM Report](#) and Delta Think’s [2019 Open Access Market Sizing Update](#). Interestingly, while Hybrid OA publishing has been a hot button issue in Plan S discussions, only 30% of survey respondents reported that they currently utilize Hybrid OA models. Green OA was also less commonly implemented, with only 30% of respondents saying they currently use that model.



Graph 2: Open Access model usage next 3 years

When asked about their future journal access plans, survey respondents also appeared to be focused on developing fully-OA publishing models, with 86% of publishers saying they planned to sustain their current rate of fully-OA publishing or “do much more.” Only 30% of respondents reported they planned to do “a little more” or “much more” Hybrid or Green OA, and only 19% of respondents indicated they would do “a little more” or “much more” Delayed OA.



Graph 3: Potential for Open Access options

As noted in the introduction of this post, a key question on the minds of many scholarly publishing stakeholders is which funding options will be most sustainable for fully-OA journal journals. When asked to rate which funding options would have the most potential for publishing fully-OA journals at their organizations in the next three years, the majority of respondents saw promise in institutional subsidies/grants, with 62% selecting “some” or “very high” potential for that option. Cooperative infrastructure and funding model(s) was also highly rated, with 54% of respondents saying that option has “some” or “very high” potential.

Opinions on the potential of article processing charges (APCs) were fairly evenly split, with 45% of respondents rating APCs as having “low” or “no” potential and 45% rating APCs as having “some” or “high” potential. While we can’t know for sure, this could be due to variations in publishers’ journal disciplines, since APC funding is generally more available in some disciplines than others. It is interesting to note that when asked to rate the importance of “finding an APC management and collection solution,” the average response among publishers surveyed was three out of five.

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Overall, the survey responses suggest publishers are interested in working directly with funders and academic institutions to develop OA publishing models. The higher perceived potential of institutional subsidies/grants and cooperative infrastructure and funding model(s) also appears to reflect current fully-OA journal funding norms. The [2018 STM Report](#) finds that fully-OA journals without APCs “most commonly rely on sponsorships from institutions (research performing organisations, research funders, libraries, learned societies, museums, hospitals, for-profit or non-profit organisations, foundations, government agencies and so forth).”

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## Questions to consider in the future

Looking to the future, there are still many questions to be answered around how scholarly society and university publishers are approaching journal access decisions and planning. For example, will the publishers surveyed be able to generate sustainable fully-OA journal funding from institutional subsidies/grants for both existing and new journals? And how will institutional subsidy/grant funding models scale as more journals transition to OA?

The survey report also overviews findings on publishers' current and future journal production priorities. Scholastica chose to look at production and access in tandem in an effort to provide stakeholders with generative insights around these discrete but increasingly related aspects of publishing. Many new OA initiatives, including Plan S, signal the likelihood of greater production requirements in the future to expand both the reach and utility of OA scholarship.

As the first initiative of this kind with a limited respondent pool, Scholastica recognizes that this survey may not be representative of the scholarly society and university publishing community. However, we hope the results will be a valuable contribution to publishers and stakeholders working to navigate the changing research landscape. It is also worth noting that all survey questions were designed prior to early announcements about the COVID-19 pandemic and, as such, do not factor in coronavirus-related production or access decisions. The myriad publishing experiments and learnings born from the global pandemic will certainly have far-reaching implications to be uncovered in future industry reports of a larger scale.

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*Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of the LSE Impact Blog, nor of the London School of Economics. Please review our [comments policy](#) if you have any concerns on posting a comment below.*

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