

## The Finch Report illustrates the new strategy wars of open access

by Blog Admin

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*Commercial publishers appear to have conceded defeat but [Bjoern Brembs](#) wonders if their new strategy is to delay the inevitable transition to Open Access publishing for as long as possible, and to charge as much as possible when OA publishing does become the norm.*



The recent “[Finch Report](#)” on Open Access has generated a [shower](#) of [online commentary](#) both from the [mainstream media](#) and from [activists](#). I've only linked to a few recent one's to outline the current discussion on how to best move towards universal Open Access to taxpayer-funded research results. The most important (and maybe also most predictable) piece of information is a change in strategy by the commercial publishers. After the recent RWA debacle, the ensuing [Cost of Knowledge](#) coverage and the successful petition to the US White House for open access, it appears as if the commercial publishers have conceded defeat and now accept that their subscription model is not supported anymore. That's a clear win for the Open Access movement and should be celebrated.

The Finch report, however, as pointed out by [early commenters](#), shows clear signs of publishing industry lobbying in emphasizing that the main strategy towards OA should be via journals (read: published by commercial publishers). The way I read it, the new strategy of the commercial publishers is to delay the transition towards OA for as long as possible and charge as much as possible for it, complemented by [threats of job loss](#) (see [response](#)). Given the utter defeat in their previous tactics, this stalling and harassment strategy is a reasonable fall-back position for the publishing industry and, given their deep pockets, one that could, in principle, work for at least another decade or two.

I've [pointed out before](#) that I have yet to hear any convincing arguments for why we should outsource scholarly communication to commercial entities to begin with. [\(University\) libraries are perfectly capable](#) of providing better services to the scholarly community, at a lower cost, than corporate publishers. Apparently, [as recently pointed out](#), the commercial publishers also agree that they provide little added value, or they would not lobby so hard for their commercial journals to provide these services, instead of libraries – this is the ‘green’ vs. ‘gold’ debate in the struggle for the best way to universal Open Access. Now, publishers push for ‘Gold OA’, i.e. to secure their market via lobbying for industry-friendly legislation/policy, while the OA movement is still divided and debates the respective values of gold vs. green. To me, the [data](#) that is starting to come in that a hierarchy of journals in general is bad for science, together with the unreasonable profits by commercial publishers off of taxpayer funds (i.e. subsidies), I see a library-based, modern, hi-tech, IT-assisted scholarly communication system as a win/win/win strategy: less counter-productive incentives due to a article-based assessment system, less costly and benefiting science.

The question thus arises, how to convince politicians and administrators at funding agencies that corporate publishers do not have science, but profit at their core interest? [Stevan Harnad](#) has been arguing for the longest time for green OA (I agree in principle, but disagree quite strongly on some significant specifics). If these Tweets are any indication, the way Steven argues, may not be very effective:



Due to the brevity of Twitter, it wasn't reasonable to ask or argue with Stephen Curry what exactly he meant, but I can only guess that he felt politicians won't be persuaded by Steven's arguments, at least not the way he put them. So how do we best convey the message that commercial publishing of scientific papers is the dinosaur in scholarly communication? How do we effectively communicate that around four billion (EUR, USD) could be saved annually if libraries were instead hosting our communications in a modern, effective and technically savvy way? How do we let them know that peer-review is not an issue and that jobs most likely will be created rather than lost? How can we most effectively communicate that further subsidy of a dead industry is not in the interest of the taxpayer?

*Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of the Impact of Social Sciences blog, nor of the London School of Economics.*

*This blog was originally published on Bjoern Brembs' personal blog, which you can read [here](#).*

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