

Speech for the Netherlands house for Education and Research (Neth-ER) and the VSNU Steering Committee on Research and Education.

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Open access calls for daring

President of the Executive Board Koen Becking is currently negotiating the terms and conditions for new open access contracts with major publishers, on behalf of the Association of Universities in the Netherlands (VSNU). What is the significance of open access and whom does it concern? In Brussels on November 14, Becking gave a speech on this issue for the Netherlands House for Education and Research (Neth-ER) and the VSNU Steering Committee on Research and Education.

‘Science is not a goal in itself. Just as art is only art once it is seen, knowledge only becomes knowledge once it is shared.’ *Sander Dekker, Dutch State Secretary for Education, speaking at the opening of the academic year in Leiden, 2014.* In 2003, the Berlin Declaration on Open Access to Knowledge in the Sciences and Humanities was signed. In ratifying this landmark document, every university in the Netherlands, along with the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW) and the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO), underlined the importance of open access to research results. Ten years after the signing of the declaration, State Secretary for Education Sander Dekker gave an inspired speech at the same historic location in Berlin. Citing examples from his own youth, the State Secretary made it clear that the Dutch government is serious about realizing the ambitions of open access publishing. Since then, he has seized every opportunity to encourage stakeholders to make genuine advances in transitioning from a closed system of publishing scientific articles to open access publishing. As I see it, this transition is comparable to developments in many other sectors, which are making great strides by tapping into the opportunities that the internet has brought us: the newspaper industry and public broadcasting to name but two.

Legislation if necessary

In the period following Sander Dekker’s speech, several meetings have been held for the Dutch stakeholders in this issue: the publishers, the National Library of the Netherlands, the universities, NWO, KNAW, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, the Ministry of Economic Affairs and the Dutch Publishers Association. All of the parties involved endorse the view that the world is entitled to information that has been paid for by the taxpayer and recorded by our mostly excellent scientists. This represents the first meaningful steps towards a new era of publishing in the fascinating world of academia. The matter of who is going to pay for this development is proving to be a thornier issue, along with the equally important question of how to achieve the necessary technological solutions in the relatively short term. Sander Dekker has set two open access targets: 40 percent of scientific publications should be made available through open access by 2016, and 100 percent by 2024. The Dutch universities have rallied

unanimously behind these objectives. Meanwhile, in a letter to parliament, the State Secretary has made it clear that if the parties involved are unable to achieve these objectives on their own initiative, he will resort to legislation to enforce open access if necessary. Open access can best be defined as follows: 'Open access literature is digital, online, free of charge, and free of most copyright and licensing restrictions. What makes it possible is the internet and the consent of the author or copyright holder.' These are the words of Peter Suber, a philosophy professor who has decided to devote himself full-time to achieving open access to science.

In this context, I am only concerned with open access to scientific journals. The present discussion does not encompass Open Science as a collective term, nor does it take in Open Data or Open Books. Open access journals take various forms. The ultimate ambition is Gold Open Access, that is to say an open article in an open journal. For convenience, we at Tilburg are using the journals included in the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ). A better alternative is simply not available as yet. The term hybrid access refers to an open article in a closed journal: in other words one that is not included in the DOAJ but which has been earmarked by its author as open access. Toll access is the opposite of open access: a closed article in a closed journal. We are now working to develop a system to quantify the exact amount of OA publications that come from the Netherlands, one reason being to evaluate whether or not we achieve the targets set for 2016 and 2024.

Recruiting new generations

Why is the Dutch academic sector so keen to achieve these goals? There are many reasons. Let me start with a three-pronged argument presented by Robbert Dijkgraaf in a column for Dutch national newspaper *NRC Handelsblad* in 2012. Dijkgraaf writes: 'First, the recruitment of new generations. The wider we open the door to the academic world, the easier it will be for young people to step through it. Tapping into new talent, beyond geographical and social boundaries, has been the biggest driver of growth. Second, the quality of research. The internet dynamic behind research can only benefit from the sharing of ideas, results and data. Transparency is essential for quality control. Nothing sharpens the mind like the critical eye of a colleague. Many heads are better than one. Third, science cannot expect public support if the fruits of research are not visible in the public domain. Openness goes back to the very beginnings of modern science. In addition, there are benefits to society at large: from start-ups and SMEs to patient organizations, NGOs, the professional amateur and many others, in the poor countries of Africa, for example, where people simply cannot afford the current cost of reading articles. A famous example of a professional amateur is Jack Andraka, who developed a revolutionary test for pancreatic cancer. At the time he was 15 years old. It makes you wonder what other innovations might be forthcoming once everyone has free and direct access to scientific information.

Gold Open Access

Studies by Professor John Houghton from 2008-2009 have already shown that the benefit to a relatively small society like the Netherlands can be estimated at 85 million euros a year with the introduction of Gold OA for Dutch universities, rising to 211 million euros a year if Gold OA is introduced worldwide. Since we as universities and researchers will no longer be dependent on paper and magazines for the distribution of our work, there is a world to be won. At present that world is dominated by publishers who sometimes make very high profits from scientific work. Hence, the Board of the Association of Universities in the Netherlands (VSNU) has decided to seriously step up its negotiations with the publishers. With a mandate from the Board, my colleague from Nijmegen, Gerard Meijer, and myself are negotiating new contracts with the major publishers for the years ahead. In doing so, we can count on the support of the directors

of every Dutch university and university hospital, the State Secretary, the NWO and the KNAW. The NWO is keen to make publications resulting from NWO research directly accessible to the public. The KNAW wants to make all scientific publications available through its own electronic archive.

Fair financial contribution

In a sense, open access turns the publishers' earning model on its head. Publishers will no longer earn money through subscriptions, but by asking for a contribution from the author in order to publish: a fee known as Article Processing Costs (APCs). It's not the reader who pays, but the author. Our objective in the negotiations is to achieve a fair and sustainable financial contribution for authors, within the context of a 'Big Deal'. It is highly questionable whether the current APCs meet these criteria. At present, it can easily cost 2500 euros to publish an article. Such amounts are no longer affordable. Large sections of the scientific community in the Netherlands and abroad are outraged by the amount publishers charge. And why should we pay repeatedly for the material that we have written ourselves and which has already been paid for by the taxpayer?

The publishers need the scientists. If scientists support open access, they need to let their actions speak for them. In October, Guy Geltner, Professor of Medieval History at the University of Amsterdam, wrote a column in Dutch national daily *Trouw*, in which he said 'Like many academics, I am regularly asked to peer review a scientific article. Unlike many colleagues I have recently begun basing my response to such a request on whether the publisher makes the text available to a wider audience.' His frustration is understandable. The Big Deal negotiations in which we are currently engaged provide the perfect opportunity to make genuine advances. European Commissioner Neelie Kroes has this to say on the subject: 'I want this continent to be the most open, secure and competitive internet space in the world. For this we indeed need to be much more daring and even rebellious.'