

# Please address these concerns before we can accept your #OA proposal

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Published March 22, 2017

## Citation

Brembs, B. (2017, March 22). Please address these concerns before we can accept your #OA proposal. *Bjoern.brembs.blog*. <https://doi.org/10.59350/zcp38-6je29>

## Keywords

Science Politics, Flipping, Infrastructure, Publishing

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*Below, I've taken the liberty to "peer-review" recent proposals to 'flip' subscription journals to open access*

The applicants have provided an [interesting proposal](#) of how to 'flip' the current subscription journals to an article processing charges (APC)-based 'gold' open access (OA) [model](#). The authors propose to transition library subscription funds to reimburse author-paid APCs. This should be done by each institution first analyzing their current subscription portfolio and then introducing open access (OA) funds to cover article expenses instead. Importantly, maximum APC limits ("caps") are suggested as a central measure to limit future APC increases. The proposal, while interesting and potentially ground-breaking, cannot be accepted in its current form. In particular, it seems the authors have overlooked an alternative route, which is cheaper and nevertheless holds several additional benefits not provided by the current proposal. In fact, there is a risk that the current proposal may come with some unintended consequences that could [deteriorate](#) the already sub-optimal *status quo*. Before I can recommend accepting this proposal, the authors at least need to address the following major concerns (no particular order):

1. Given that [high-ranking journals publish the least reliable science](#), how does maintaining this pernicious hierarchy address the replication crisis? How is more public access to less reliable science benefiting the public?
2. Why, in 2020, would anyone even think 17th century "journals" are even a technologically useful concept worth spending billions every year to subsidize? Why, in 2020, would selection and publishing still be bundled up as if to pretend printing presses were still a thing?
3. As scholars are already evaluated according to the amount of tax funds (grants) they spend on experiments – with more (not less!) tax funds spent indicating a more competitive scientist – would it not be inconsequential if they were not also evaluated on the amount of tax funds they spent on publications? Especially if APCs [scale](#) with prestige, such that more money being spent indicated more prestige? What would keep evaluation committees from treating APC \$\$\$ analogously to grant \$\$\$? Why should the current impact factor not simply be replaced by the APC amount paid?
4. If the prestige universities sell is analogous to the prestige journals sell, has competition among universities significantly reduced tuition fees? If tuition has not decreased recently, why is the prestige universities sell not analogous to the prestige journals sell?
5. With the vast majority of all OA journals charging no APC at all competing with the few that do charge, APCs are nevertheless increasing at [above inflation](#) rates (up to [70% year-over-year](#)). Additionally, some publishers already today charge APCs [above](#) the current average subscription price. In the light of this evidence, how can more journals that charge APCs be more of a competition than those that do not charge at all?
6. If institutions choose/have to cap the amount of funds they reimburse their members for APCs, how does this not amount to a disadvantage of the scholarly poor? If they do not cap the amount, how can APC increases be controlled? In other words, why should a [high-ranking journal](#) not be able to charge an APC of US\$50k for a paper that virtually guarantees tenure or [funding](#), when [Harvard](#) can charge US\$250k for a degree that virtually guarantees employment?

7. Given that even the most [optimistic estimates](#) only project a meager 20-30% short-term cost reduction without being able to guarantee sustained reductions in the future (indeed, there is [evidence](#) already now, when most OA journals do not charge any APC at all, of above-inflation APC increases!), why would one not instead champion a scenario with an already existing business model and market, where sustained reductions on the order of 90% were virtually guaranteed? (I am referring to the alternative route: migrating to a service-based market, with companies like Scholastica or Ubiquity – if their services became too expensive, institutions are free to choose to switch or run the infrastructure themselves)
8. Why would anyone want to pay billions in excess of actual costs merely to protect the balkanization of our literature into >30k journals, effectively preventing content mining and hampering the implementation of an efficient recommendation system for our literature?
9. With the abysmal track records of publishers first hogging our copyright and then putting APC-enabled articles back behind paywalls, why should we continue to trust these for-profit entities with our most valuable assets, our literature, instead of merely allowing them to compete with other companies for being allowed to polish our crown jewels?
10. How will flipping to a different business model address our need for a sustainable infrastructure covering our data and code, at the same time as it is addressing this (non-exhaustive) list of missing/lacking functionalities in our scholarly literature?
  - Link-rot
  - No scientific impact analysis
  - Lousy peer-review
  - No global search
  - No functional hyperlinks
  - Useless data visualization
  - No submission standards
  - (Almost) no statistics
  - No content-mining
  - No effective way to sort, filter and discover
  - No semantic enrichment
  - No networking feature

The point of these questions is, of course, that *all* of them would be addressed if libraries and institutions kept our publications in-house, according to [modern infrastructure](#) standards, with a flourishing service market to constantly develop and improve their functionality and usefulness for the scientific community and the public. Initiatives spearheading such a business model (still in the deprecated, legacy journal format, though) are the [Open Library of the Humanities](#), [lingOA](#), [mathOA](#), [psyOA](#) and other nascent [fairOA](#) organizations. The authors should discuss why their more expensive option is so superior to the less expensive alternative route that does address every one of the points made above, in particular taking into account that public institutions are commonly required to choose the lowest responsible bidder.

Failing to adequately address these reviewer concerns should result in a rejection of the proposal.

**UPDATE:** and as if right on cue, a [leaked document](#) evinces how publishers will try and subvert any 'flipping' negotiations.