

Statement of the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, German Research Foundation) on European Council Conclusions on “High-quality, transparent, open, trustworthy and equitable scholarly publishing”

On 23 May 2023, the Council of the European Union adopted Council Conclusions on “High quality, transparent, open, trustworthy and equitable scholarly publishing”.

The Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, German Research Foundation) welcomes the Council Conclusions and supports the landmark recommendations they put forward for the academic publication system.

In particular, the DFG underpins the propositions that scholarly publication channels

- ▶ should continue to evolve as high-quality, openly accessible, sustainably funded digital infrastructures for research;
- ▶ should be organised in such a way that they protect the principles of the freedom of research, contribute to research integrity and quality, and ensure the highest possible accessibility and re-usability of research results;
- ▶ must apply the highest standards to the quality assurance of publications, the trustworthiness of processes and the reliability and reproducibility of content;
- ▶ should make even more effective use of the innovative possibilities of digital publishing.

The varying practices in terms of publication formats and the multilingualism of communication in science and the humanities should be preserved. From the DFG’s point of view and against the background of the differing publication practices in individual disciplines, it may make sense to support different open access policies and open science practices geared towards the various (international) research communities.

According to the Council Conclusions, the financing of publication infrastructures should be commensurate with the costs of the services they provide, it should be transparent and sustainable, and ideally not be provided by individual authors or readers, since this leads to inequalities in terms of access to publication and reception opportunities. The DFG currently supports open access by providing a limited subsidy for open access fees, attempting to avoid

cost increases in open access similar to those in the subscription system. Its funding programme “Open Access Publication Funding” aims to improve cost transparency and the availability of data related to publishing. In the DFG’s view, the data situation needs to be improved at the international level. This alone will not prevent further cost increases, however. Such increases are not sustainable in view of shrinking budgets, even with open access. Under no circumstances should a situation arise in which the availability of funds determines participation in academic discourse.

For this reason, the DFG welcomes the fact that the Council Conclusions focus on the support of open access infrastructures located at research organisations that operate without publication fees payable by authors and are not operated for profit. The DFG signed the international “Action Plan on Diamond Open Access” in 2022. The DFG funds non-profit publication infrastructures at research institutions through its funding programme “Infrastructures for Scholarly Publishing”, providing an impetus for the establishment and expansion of such infrastructures. New solutions are needed here for cooperative and sustainable funding in the long term, e.g. with the participation of research institutions and scholarly societies.

The Council Conclusions also recommend participation in Open Research Europe as a publication platform supported by research institutions. The DFG is currently involved in the EOSC through its membership in the EOSC Association. It is important to strengthen the acceptance of these pan-European infrastructures within the academic community, thereby increasing their use. The only way this can be achieved is by involving researchers and their institutions. The establishment of the National Research Data Infrastructure in Germany has already proven successful in establishing infrastructures based on science-led governance.

The central function of scholarly publishing is the exchange of scientific and scholarly knowledge. The DFG supports strengthening of the debate on aspects of peer review and the recognition of reviewer activities in the publication sector in accordance with the Council Conclusions and is also in favour of improving guidance for institutions, not least with a view to avoiding unethical publication behaviour. From the DFG’s point of view¹, the concept of quality assessment should be defined more broadly so as to include practices such as post-publication peer review and open peer review. Quality assurance remains the task of the research communities.

¹ www.dfg.de/en/service/press/press_releases/2022/press_release_no_15

Furthermore, the Council Conclusions call for a cultural shift in the assessment of research performance. The DFG is actively involved in the international Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA) and, based on its open science positioning², is committed to the creation of framework conditions for open publishing appropriate to science and scholarship, with the inclusion of research data and software. From the DFG's point of view, the central benchmark for research assessment remains the quality of a research endeavour. Since March 2023, the DFG has included in its assessments an even greater variety of personal backgrounds, career paths, publication formats and results. The DFG regards it as a priority to ensure that subject-specific procedures are appropriately represented.

Finally, research information systems should also be employed based on open infrastructures and in a way that preserves the sovereignty of research institutions, since sensitive data links can arise here, too, and dependencies on commercial providers are to be avoided.³ In addition, researchers, policymakers and the private sector must engage in dialogue to address both the opportunities and challenges for academic publishing in dealing with artificial intelligence and large language models, and ethical guidelines must be defined.

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² www.dfg.de/en/research_funding/announcements_proposals/2022/info_wissenschaft_22_79

³ www.dfg.de/download/pdf/foerderung/programme/lis/datentracking_papier_en.pdf