Rt. Hon. Norman Lamb MP
Chair of the Science and Technology Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

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Thank you for your letter of 27th February regarding UKRI’s open access policy review and Plan S, in which you asked me a number of questions. Please find my response below to each of these.

What are the specific aims of adopting Plan S? Do they include cutting costs or curbing excessive publisher profits?

Plan S aims for full and immediate open access (OA) to peer reviewed research articles that arise from publicly funded research. It calls for transparency about the costs associated with scholarly publishing and then for fair and transparent charges for scholarly publishing. The objective is to achieve a transparent and effective market.

The Plan S coalition is commissioning an independent analysis of scholarly publication costs to inform their approach. The related costs need to be managed as they have been escalating. For example, APCs rose by 16% between 2012 and 2016 and at the same time subscription expenditure increased. Plan S is addressing this by supporting ways to achieve more effective off-setting between subscriptions and OA fees in a similar way to Germany and the University of California, neither of who are members of Plan S.

UKRI shares these aspirations and international alignment will help achieve our open access goals as part of the global research system. As you know we are currently reviewing our open access policy and the UKRI OA Review will determine the adoption of Plan S by UKRI.

How would researchers without a grant (including early career researchers) be supported to publish their work through a ‘Gold’ open access route?

Researchers without a grant are often undertaking research supported by their institution, including their salary support, and related publication costs should be part of this support, in the same way that universities fund subscriptions for all of their staff to read. For non-affiliated researchers and those from lower income countries it is anticipated that fair waivers
will be in place to cover any publication fees and costs, in the same way as currently offered by many publishers.

The Plan S coalition and UKRI are concerned that early career researchers have opportunities to advance in their careers, and the Plan S coalition has been consulting with Young Academy Europe and The European Council of Doctoral Candidates and Junior Researchers to take account of their perspectives. UKRI councils and Plan S support the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA), which aims to move research evaluation away from simply relying on publication metrics and journal impact factors and to evaluate research on its own merit, including a variety of impacts and outputs.

How should the impact of Plan S on learned societies be managed?

Learned societies are important publishers of academic research and many already support open access, but we acknowledge concerns have been raised about their ability to comply with Plan S. UKRI, the Wellcome Trust and Association for Learned Society and Professional Association Publishers have commissioned work to help learned societies explore Plan S compliant business models. This will help inform feasible models for learned societies and is due to report in July. [https://wellcome.ac.uk/sites/default/files/learnedsocieties-consultancy-request-for-proposals.pdf]

As part of the UKRI OA Review we have held discussions with learned societies and have invited further information from them on the funding of their publication activities and how they support other activities for research. If there is evidence for a case to directly support other society activities this may be considered by UKRI.

How would the implementation take account of international collaborations between researchers in the UK and other countries that are not signed up to Plan S?

The Plan S coalition is considering issues such as this in their current feedback exercise. The Plan S partners, and UKRI, seek and fully expect international collaborations to continue. UKRI will consider how best to take account of international collaborations in our OA Review.

Does Plan S take account of existing free-to-access dissemination routes, including repositories such as arXiv?

Plan S supports the use of repositories and pre-print services such as arXiv as there are benefits to early dissemination of research. Plan S is, however, primarily concerned with ensuring there is open access to peer reviewed research, recognising the value added by a strong peer review process.

How does UKRI intend to consult with the community on the implementation of Plan S, and on what timescale?

Many UK stakeholders have responded to the consultation on the draft Plan S guidance that opened in November 2018 and ran until February. This feedback will be considered by the Plan S coalition and UKRI will also be able to consider this feedback in our OA Review.

Final decisions on how Plan S is taken forward by UKRI will be made as part of the OA Review which includes a range of stakeholder engagement and evidence gathering, and there will be a 3-month consultation on UKRI’s draft OA policy later this year.
When will the operational details of implementing Plan S in the UK be known?

The UKRI OA Review will determine implementation of Plan S for UKRI funded research and it will report by the end of the year. However, we appreciate stakeholders have important time considerations and will aim to communicate and engage in the interim, as appropriate. We will also ensure sufficient time to allow transition to any new arrangements.

I am aware that the Plan S partners are considering the feedback they have received on a range of issues and they are undertaking implementation projects and assessments. We anticipate that further guidance and implementation clarifications will be made available on Plan S before the summer.

I hope this is helpful. Please do not hesitate to get in touch should you or your committee have further questions.

Yours sincerely,

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