



Worthy Goals

“The Obama Administration is committed to the proposition that citizens deserve easy access to the results of scientific research their tax dollars have paid for.” Posted by the Office of Science and Technology Policy on February 22, 2013.

On February 22, 2013, a Memorandum was issued by John P. Holdren, Assistant to the President for Science and Technology and Director of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP),

directing “each Federal agency with over \$100 million in annual conduct of research and development expenditures to develop a plan to support increased public access to the results of research funded by the Federal Government.” This action by the OSTP took place a week after a bill, entitled “Fair access to science and technology research” or FASTR, was introduced to the U.S. Congress, and supported in an open letter signed by 52 Nobel Laureates requiring public access to papers just six months after publication.

This initiative echoes a similar policy put in place by the U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH) back in 2008, demanding that research supported by the agency be publicly accessible after twelve months following publication. This “delay” stands in marked contrast with policies instituted by government-funded science agencies in the United Kingdom, which ask authors to pay publishers to make their work freely available to the public immediately. In an interview with *Nature*, Subra Suresh then Director of NSF, argued that he could not justify taking money out of basic research to pay for open access at a time when demand for the agency’s funding was high.

Also emphasized in Holdren’s memo was an acknowledgment from the U.S. government administration “that publishers provide valuable services, including the coordination of peer review, that are essential for ensuring the high quality and integrity of many scholarly publications” and that “it is critical that these services continue to be made available.” These comments appear to be in response to a document signed about a year earlier by the Association of American Publishers who, while supporting any and all sustainable models of access that ensure the integrity and permanence of the scholarly record, expressed opposition to FASTR on behalf of 81 scholarly publishing organizations—both nonprofit and commercial companies, including the American Chemical Society, the American Institute of Physics, Elsevier, and Springer Publishing Company—alleging in part that “the bill would force a change in publishers’ business models, and will create a cost burden on federal agencies.” This document further argued that Gold Open Access provides one such approach whereby publication is funded by an article publishing charge paid by the author or another sponsor, a subscription-based journal, or other options, thereby fulfilling the shared goal of expanding access to peer-reviewed scientific works and maximizing the value and reuse of the results of scientific research.

The same analysis was made more recently by Lord Krebs, Chair of the UK House of Lords Science and Technology Committee who, while criticizing the actions of the Research Councils UK (RCUK) for failing to communicate in a clear and timely fashion its open access policy, stated that “open access is an inexorable trend. The Government must ensure that in further developing our capabilities to share research they do not inadvertently damage the ‘complex ecosystem’ of research communication in the UK.”

Other countries have also instituted Open Access (OA) policies. For example, the Australian National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) has mandated that any publication arising from NHMRC-supported research must be deposited into an OA institutional repository and/or made available in another OA format within a twelve-month period from the date of publication. The German Research Foundation (DFG), on the other hand, has tied OA to its funding policy in that recipients of DFG funding are expected to make their research results to be published and to be made available, where possible, digitally and on the Internet via

OA. More recently, the Mexican Congress enacted OA legislation allowing free access to scientific and academic works made possible by public funding.

More general information regarding Open Access (OA) around the world can be found in the Global Open Access Portal (GOAP: <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/portals-and-platforms/goap/>), an organization funded by the governments of Colombia, Denmark, Norway, and the United States Department of State, whose primary target audience includes policy-makers and delegates from national, regional, and non-governmental organizations.

Keenly aware of this rapidly changing environment, the ECS Board of Directors at its annual meeting in San Francisco in October 2013 boldly committed to a plan dubbed Platinum Open Access that “*would enable the dissemination of content from the ECS Digital Library at no cost to authors, readers, libraries, or funding agencies.*” A committee was then established by then-President Tetsuya Osaka, called the Committee on Free Dissemination of Research (CFDR). Led by Larry Faulkner, it included distinguished members of our community, including university presidents and ECS past presidents, who were charged with evaluating the future of Open Access for ECS and its impact on scientific advancements in our field; and for making recommendations concerning ECS’ organizational structure, funding options, and advocacy requirements necessary for an Open Access model that will lead to successful and uninhibited scientific advancement. In its final report the CFDR concluded that indeed the ECS journals are under critical pressure, and supported Platinum Open Access as the operational goal for ECS publications which could be fully implemented before 2030, should it succeed in raising the required funds. In addition, it recommended that a prominent Society committee be charged with carefully monitoring the implementation and progress of the plan. Such committee, called CFDR2 led by Roque Calvo, was recently constituted and has been hard at work fulfilling its challenging responsibilities.

In response to the CFDR financial recommendations, ECS retained (in February 2015) Campbell & Company, a fundraising consulting firm with more than 38 years of experience, to conduct a campaign planning study testing the feasibility of a capital campaign that would help bring about a new chapter in the Society’s history. Its final report delivered to the Board of Directors at the last ECS meeting in Chicago (spring 2015) concluded that this is the right time for ECS to move forward with a major campaign effort and proposed a plan to achieve ECS’ aspirational goals. Among the salient points of that plan are cultivating a strong and strategic focus on donor-centered and long-term relationships.

In addition to recommending the Society’s Platinum Open Access plan, the CFDR report emphasized that the Society must look at innovative publishing practices to meet the expectations of future authors and readers, whose needs are very different than those of the past. Both these initiatives will help to ultimately bring our journals to the prominence they deserve. Thanks to the dedication and hard work of the members of our Board of Editors, and the staff at Pennington, a series of innovative strategies has been developed and implemented over the past few years, which has raised the impact factor of the *Journal of The Electrochemical Society*, our flagship publication, by more than 25% in just two years. In closing this, my first *Interface* column as President of ECS, I would appeal to our constituency to reflect on the issues I have herein raised and join the efforts of our leadership in accomplishing our worthy goals.

Daniel Scherson
ECS President