



## ***Important NEWS Briefing: European ministers united on making immediate access to scientific publications the default by 2020***

The Competitiveness Council, a gathering of ministers of science, innovation, trade and industry, met to discuss Open Science amongst other issues on 26-27 May 2016. This meeting saw a set of Council conclusions towards a transition towards an Open Science system adopted by all of Europe's 28 member states. This means that together, Europe's governments have agreed to common ambitious political Open Science goals for the first time.

If governments were to then in fact strive to take concerted action to meet these goals, this could mean that we have far more free access to Europe's publicly funded research by 2020. This could consequently see accelerated change in the way that publishers do business and how we purchase our scientific resources. In addition, we will see further changes in the way that scholars share their research results: where open becomes the default rather than the exception and, underpinning that, we may well see a more rapid evolution in the way that research evaluation is conducted with new reward systems in place.

The goals outlined are ambitious, and each European member state has committed to taking the responsibility to make a smooth transition to an Open Science system across Europe, and to accelerate progress to it. This political alignment between European countries towards an Open Science system is a very promising step towards accelerated change.

SPARC Europe has pulled out some of the highlights of these goals from the Council Conclusions that were adopted on 27 May 2016:

1. **There is a need for concerted action by** the European Commission, the Member States, civil society and stakeholders including researchers, funding organisations, publishers and service organisations.
2. The European Commission will need to **mobilise the knowledge from Open Science** actions. It will also need to **address ICT and data skill gaps** to help provide citizens with improved access to research results.

3. **Remove unnecessary legal, organisational and financial barriers** that prevent access to publicly funded results as far as possible to enable the exchange of knowledge.
4. **Cooperate with third / non-EU countries** for a global working Open Science system.
5. **Scientific quality assessment** should consider the individual work more, and should not be based on impact factors and citation counts alone. We need to consider **research impact on society**. Incentive mechanisms can help reward researchers for sharing their research for re-use. The Council calls on the EC, the Open Science Policy Platform, the Member States, and stakeholders to explore training and advocacy activities in this area.
6. The Council supports the EC Communication in Dec 2015 “Towards an modern, more European copyright framework”, and in this context stresses that **mining the results of publicly funded research** should be allowed to those who already have legal access to such content. This includes all bodies and organisations, including citizens, scientists and businesses and SMEs.
7. The Council invites member states to see to it that researchers and their employers **retain their copyrights to scientific output**. They also wish to promote the use of licensing models such as Creative Commons for scientific publications and data sets.
8. **Open Access to scientific publications should be the default option** for publicly funded research results by 2020. Member States, the Commission and stakeholder need to **remove financial and legal barriers** to allow this. Embargoes should not impede on this: i.e. striving for as few embargoes as possible. They need to pay specific attention to **addressing diverse research systems and disciplines** where obstacles might delay progress.
9. **Scientific publishing agreements** need to be clearer.
10. **Building expertise and sharing information** on Open Access is important.
11. Member States need to make efforts to work with stakeholders to **implement national OA policy for publicly funded research**.
12. Member states will also seek to **make the best possible re-use of research data first and foremost** although one will need to consider different access regimes / conditions, e.g. in areas of IPR, data protection and confidentiality or security. With the underlying principle “as open as possible, as closed as necessary.”
13. Member States are encouraged to make **data management plans** part of standard research scientific practice of national research programmes.

14. **Data management practice** should **follow FAIR principles** (findable, accessible, interoperable and re-usable) and Member States, the Commission and stakeholders are encouraged to follow these in research programmes and funding mechanisms.

See the detailed [Council Conclusions on the Transition towards an Open Science System](#) here.

These conclusions will feed into the European Commission and the newly formed [Open Science Policy Platform](#). This new platform will advise the European Commission on how to develop and implement Open Science policies. The academic library community is represented by LIBER's Ms Kristiina Hormia Poutanen.

To conclude, the Council made it clear that each country will follow its own course when implementing these conclusions or goals. It pointed out that both **members states and their researcher stakeholders** are **key** for the **successful implementation** of Open Science goals. These goals can help us to achieve much more in practice and we will see how realistic they are by taking concrete action. After all, the proof of the pudding is in the eating. How can you in your research institution help engage with the research stakeholders to make it happen? What Open Science plan of action do you have?

**Comment by Lars Bjørnshauge, Consultant to SPARC Europe**

SPARC Europe has advocated for Open Access since the beginning in 2002, and with your support. And we won the argument, after having been laughed at by some. We could hardly have imagined 14 years ago that EU ministers would actually have discussed the issues of Open to such an extent. This is a huge step forward. What is interesting is that the call now is for IMMEDIATE Open Access. It is also encouraging that ministers are finally at least considering changes to reward systems. However, the devil is – as always – in the detail. Next comes the implementation. It will be interesting to see whether it is ultimately the needs of research, education, innovation, industry and society that will determine the rules of the game, rather than the publishers. SPARC Europe has, among others, played an important role in the past in this process. But the work is far from done. We will definitely be there in the future to safeguard that the research community will use this opportunity to create an Open Scholarship System that serves society!

## References

- *Preparation of the Competitiveness Council on 26-27 May 2016* Draft Council conclusions on the transition towards an Open Science system - Policy debate. [Note 8507/16](#), Brussels, 4 May 2016
- *Preparation of the Competitiveness Council on 26-27 May 2016* Draft Council conclusions on the transition towards an Open Science system – Adoption. [Note 8791/16](#), Brussels, 17 May 2016
- Competitiveness (Internal Market, Industry, Research, and Space) Council, [Video of the Public session](#)