

“The whole model for science publishing should be rethought” – researchers share their views on open access publishing

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Abstract

What do the University of Helsinki researchers think about article-processing charges, self-archiving, or open access (OA) publishing? Six researchers answered a short questionnaire and shared their views on open science, both at a general level and by answering several specific questions. In principle, open access (OA) is thought of as important and useful; however, from a practical perspective, there are still some challenges relating to expensive APCs (article processing charges), OA platform statistics, and the complex regulations in publishers' policies.

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The benefits of openness for researchers are better visibility of publications, increased citations, and fulfilling the requirements of the university and funding bodies.

Open access (OA) publishing in its various forms has been in development for a long time. Over the last three years, the percentage of University of Helsinki publications that are OA has increased; [in 2021 it was 74 per cent](#). Open publications include self-archived publications in institutional or subject repositories (green OA), publications in publishers' OA platforms (gold OA), and publications in subscription journals that require an additional OA fee (hybrid OA).

Here, in the fifth and last section of Think Open blog's APC series, six researchers from the University of Helsinki share their views on OA publishing and the related services.

Library agreements and APC services – a great help to researchers

While the majority of the OA journals do not charge fees (diamond OA), the major publishers often collect an article processing charge (APC). The Helsinki University Library

coordinates the university's [APC support services for researchers](#).

All of the researchers who answered the questionnaire had either published OA articles themselves or had taken part in the process as a contributing author. Several researchers had also utilised the library's [OA publishing agreements](#) and the APC advisory service (hulib-apc@helsinki.fi).

“Yes, I use both – always if possible. The library agreements are a great help! Otherwise we would have to pay for the open publications with project money, but this would mean that it had to be included in the budget. Now, for the last few years, I have been on basic funding; in other words, I rely on the support of the library and the faculty. The library's guide for APC charges is excellent because I can get all the information on one page. Also, the payment processes have always gone smoothly.”

Salla-Maaria Laaksonen (university researcher, Centre for Consumer Society Research)

“I have been involved in publishing with an APC, and I have found good instructions for managing APC charges on the library's guide.”

Mari Niva (professor, Centre for Consumer Society Research)

"I have published OA in the last few years when I have been a corresponding author; the university has had a suitable agreement or project money has been available for this purpose. I have used the library's services to find out the APC prices."

Helena Korpelainen (professor, agricultural sciences)

"I have paid APC charges for several of my own articles and projects. I have asked the library, for example, when a particular paper required confirmation of the APC discount at the submission stage. In this case, I received quick help from the library."

Nelli Hankonen (assistant professor, social psychology)

A few of the researchers were not sure if they had used the library's services – in addition, the feedback showed that the [acronym APC](#) was not always understood.

"I have published in open access journals and have paid for open access. I do not know what APC is, let alone if I have utilised the support or advice from the library in regard to it."

Jarno Vanhatalo (assistant professor, statistics)

There are many reasons to self-archive publications

The [self-archiving of research publications](#) in the university's research information system (Tuhata) is one option that achieves openness – and it is free. From the Tuhata system, the file moves to the [open repository, Helda](#), and is assigned a persistent identifier – the resource can now be easily found by search engines. Most publishers allow the self-archiving of the accepted version of a manuscript. The library also offers self-archiving as a service: all the researcher has to do is send the appropriate version of the publication to the service email address of the library (openaccess@helsinki.fi).

The reasons for self-archiving are diverse:

- fundamentally supports and promotes **openness of science**
- increases the **number of downloads** of a publication
- increases a publication's **visibility, availability, and effectiveness**
- fulfills the requirements of the **funding body**
- complies with the aims of the **employer**
- the university receives **extra funding** on the basis of open publications.

The justifications for self-archiving also apply to the other open publishing methods. However, one response highlighted the convenience of accessing one's own self-archived files when other versions of the publication are not readily available.

"For the researcher, the self-archived version is sometimes extremely helpful if a journal (or sometimes a compilation) is not available through Helsinki University."

Salla-Maaria Laaksonen (university researcher, Centre for Consumer Society Research)

The main reasons for self-archiving were generally emphasised in the answers to the questionnaire; furthermore, one answer highlighted the problems with the current publishing model and noted the need for change.

"In my opinion, the information produced with public funds should be accessible to everyone. The current publishing system is very poor: the researchers complete the writing, editing, and peer review. The publisher mainly organises the basic infrastructure and the fonts, even if I am caricaturing this a little. The whole work and even the access to the outputs of the work are paid for with tax revenue."

Teemu Kemppainen (lecturer, urban studies)

Self-archiving is easy – and the library's services are important

What about the self-archiving process? What are the potential challenges? Most of the people who answered the questionnaire had self-archived at least some of their publications and regarded the process as easy. Only one researcher described the experience as difficult.

"For every article, I am totally lost as to whether or not it is allowed to be self-archived. I am only sure that the licence will allow me to self-archive the articles for which I have paid an APC."

Jarno Vanhatalo (assistant professor, statistics)

One answer pointed out the limitations of a self-archived article in comparison to the version on a publisher's OA platform.

"If a publication is not published OA, the version distributed by the author is often missing the publisher's final layout, in which case, for example, the page numbers do not correspond to the final version. Therefore, a full open access publication is an even better option."

Salla-Maaria Laaksonen (university researcher, Centre for Consumer Society Research)

Getting started in self-archiving can be difficult, but it soon gets easier.

"It will get easier once you have got started. I thought it would be more difficult."

Helena Korpelainen (professor, agricultural sciences)

Half of the researchers that answered the questionnaire said that they had actively used the self-archiving service of the library. They regarded the service as useful, and one answer even described it as necessary.

"I have used it, and in my case it's totally necessary. I would not dare to self-archive a single publication without the self-archiving service of the library."

Jarno Vanhatalo (assistant professor, statistics)

"This current system is really great. Easy enough to use. Better this way than to self-archive myself using Tuhat."

Teemu Kempainen (lecturer, urban studies)

Many researchers are fed up with the big publishers' greed for money

At the end of the questionnaire, the researchers were asked to discuss their general views on open publishing. The answers revealed many important issues, both general and practical. For example, following up and downloading statistics is more difficult when a publication is available in both a publisher's service and the Helda repository.

"I keep thinking about how to get the statistics that are downloaded from the repository connected to the publisher's statistics. First of all, this is difficult for the small publishers, such as the Finnish scholarly journals that report this information to TSV. Therefore, I would prefer to have a link to them rather than a pdf. On the other hand, as a researcher, if I want to track the download statistics of my own publications, the downloads of my self-archived versions are not linked to the publisher's web site. So this produces a double set of statistics."

Salla-Maaria Laaksonen (university researcher, Centre for Consumer Society Research)

Although OA publishing is regarded as important in principle, legal issues, such as contracts, can present challenges. This situation was described in the following response:

"I strongly support OA publishing. However, I have not found the enthusiasm and energy to clarify the complex regulations myself. I try as often as possible to publish in OA journals or make the articles open using APC's. In practice, the only articles that I have worked on that are not OA publications have a corresponding author who is not from my research group."

Jarno Vanhatalo (assistant professor, statistics)

Several answers highlighted how OA publications can be more widely used; however, they also described the high costs that are often associated with publishing an OA article. In addition, the respondents noted how the model for scholarly publication appears to be changing because many researchers no longer agree with the present situation.

"This is the direction in which it is going, and I consider it justified from the point of view of the openness of science. When we are in privileged positions as university staff with access to nearly all scientific knowledge, we don't always remember that we are a small minority."

Mari Niva (professor, Centre for Consumer Society Research)

"OA is useful because other researchers and the general public have better access to the publications. OA publications are cited more often. However, OA can be very expensive. Scholarly publishing is certainly going through a significant transition because many of the researchers are fed up with the big publishers' greed for money. I hope that the preprint culture will become more common, and the APCs will be brought down – or that publishing activities are moved to publication platforms that are controlled by the universities, thereby lowering the APCs."

Nelli Hankonen (assistant professor, social psychology)

One response strongly criticised science publishing and the current model of associated costs; they described the current system as basically unsustainable and unfair in a number of ways.

"The whole model of scholarly publishing should be rethought: subscription payments plus [golden OA](#) is not a sustainable combination. I think that the APCs + full-OA [= OA journals] is already a much better model, although it's unfair globally and also within Finland if there are no valid OA agreements. I hope that more researchers will be able to put their original manuscript versions on their

own home pages so that the publications will be more widely available.”

Salla-Maaria Laaksonen (university researcher, Centre for Consumer Society Research)

One researcher also noted that it was positive that the research funders were demanding OA publishing.

”In my opinion, it’s great that, for example, the funders have begun to require openness. I would hope that in the long term the present publishing model will collapse because of its own impossible structure, and a totally open publication culture will be created that is no longer based on business.”

Teemu Kemppainen (lecturer, urban studies)