Response by the Royal Geographical Society (with IBG)

Royal Geographical Society
with IBG
Advancing geography
and geographical learning

● Society Publishers Accelerating Open Access & Plan S (SPA-OPS)

1. How many titles do you have?
5-10

2. Do you self-publish?
No – We partner with Wiley to publish our journals and books

3. In which subject areas do you publish?
STEM and HSS

4. Please tell us about the transition status of your portfolio of journals
All our journals are OA or Hybrid OA

5. Please tell us in which country your Society has its headquarters
England, UK

6. We list five transformative models:
- **Choreographed shift models**
- **Read and publish models**
- **Publish and read models**
- **California Digital Library pilot transformative agreement.**

We are interested in your experience of these models and if you would consider them. Please tell us how feasible Transformative models would be for your society, the support you would need from other stakeholders to try them and how would you assess and mitigate the risks.

We have direct experience of one of these models

We are committed to a transition towards a sustainable open science/research ecosystem and appreciate that transformative deals will play, and are already playing, an important part in the publishing landscape.

Overall, the RGS-IBG would look to models that:
- Provide access to all researchers to publish and read high-quality research;
- Recognise value both in reading and in publishing;
- Facilitate high-quality peer review;
- Enable investment in publishing technologies and the wider publishing ecosystem in order to meet (future) author, reviewer, editor, and reader expectations ;

- Travel effectively across – or can be adapted for - different international contexts, cultures, legal, funding, and regulatory regimes. The government/funder/institutional support for open access is uneven globally; publishing models must account for that complexity. One national-level solution is unlikely to be universally applicable;
- Minimise administrative complexity and burden for all stakeholders; and
- Ensure that the Society's journals portfolio is financially sustainable over the long-term, noting shifting global changes in the production and consumption of knowledge.

Below we reflect on the opportunities and challenges presented by each of the transformative models described in the consultation paper. It is, however, difficult to offer a detailed response about the feasibility of each option without careful costing and financial modelling. Moreover, while we are a publisher and hold copyright for our journals, we (like many Learned Societies) work with a commercial publisher (Wiley) to publish our journals and books.

Choreographed shift models:
We would be interested in exploring whether the choreographed shift model could be appropriate for our book series. However, we are not yet convinced that this model is scalable for our journal portfolio – article caps are not attractive for researchers or publications seeking to be more inclusive - and we are wary about what seem to be high-levels of administrative burden.

Read and publish deals:
Read and publish deals have served as a useful, but limited, mechanism in a transition towards open access. In the UK we have observed that (even comparatively well-resourced) institutions have prematurely exhausted funds designated for open access publishing under a read and publish model. As the consultation document details, "consortia sometimes cap the total number of articles for which they will pay in order to control costs". In this context, some institutions have adopted processes where researchers must apply for funds to pay APCs. Such systems may not be equitable. The question of who can publish what, where, and in what volume is important. This system has resulted in additional administrative burden for the researcher and their institution, and has also introduced obstacles for some researchers to obtain access to open accessing publishing (e.g. in the UK, those who are not in receipt of research council funding, or are affiliated to universities where designated APC funds have been spent).

Some of the 'publish and read models' that have been recently agreed appear to address elements of these challenges.

Publish and read models:
We consider the 'publish and read' model to be the most feasible of the options presented. We publish our journals with Wiley and, therefore, benefit from the 'publish and read' agreements Wiley have recently made – for example, with Projekt Deal. We appreciate that both publishing and reading have value in this model.

It is important to emphasise that it is extremely unlikely that the Society – or other similar sized, or smaller, Learned Societies – would have been in a position to make these deals independently. The consultation paper notes that: "At present it appears very challenging for small and medium sized publishers to attract the attention of libraries/consortia for these sorts of arrangements, and innovative ways for handling this many-to-many-challenge may be needed." However, "lack of attention" is not the only barrier to negotiation with libraries and consortia; we do not have the in-house capacity to engage in negotiations with a range of institutions and national consortia.

It is likely that the Society would need to draw on external expert input if we were to cease publishing with a commercial partner. The consultation document makes reference to "potential roles for new sorts of intermediaries who can handle both data modelling and financial transactions", but these are not the only skills that would be necessary to facilitate new publishing arrangements with an array of national and international partners and consortia. The (substantial) potential costs of these services must be factored in to discussions about the viability of different

publishing models, especially for Societies that are relatively low-volume publishers. Libraries and consortia also benefit from streamlined administration and the negotiation of publishing agreements, there will substantial costs associated with dealing with an increased number of organisations.

Partnering with a commercial publisher enables the Society to benefit from the Publisher's expertise and participate in business model innovations, such as publish and read, which would otherwise be extremely challenging to pursue.

The publish and read models are, though, not without limitations. We have concerns about the future accessibility of publishing for researchers who do not either have an institutional affiliation (e.g. unemployed, retired, or employed by an institution other than a Higher Education Institution) or are based at an institution that is not covered by a publish and read agreement. Such contexts vary globally. It is also important to note that there is no a universal publish and read model; individual publish and read deals are likely to have a differentiated impact on the Society, according to the specificity of the agreements and the proportion of corresponding authors who are affiliated to the country or consortia in question. One of the unintended consequences of these deals might be that publishers adopt more explicit country-level publication, submission, and marketing strategies. Such approaches would appear to be in tension with the collaborative nature of the international research environment.

California digital library pilot transformative agreement:
We are not familiar with this model. It is not clear from the information provided whether researchers without grant funding would be able to publish OA. We would also be concerned about what appears to be administrative burden for the researcher and the Society. An organisation of our size (or smaller) would likely find managing a high volume of "central and transactional" payments challenging. It is not clear why this particular model has been selected for pilot.

Subscribe to open
This model creates the possibility that research that was previously freely available is placed behind a paywall due to declining subscription rates. This is not in keeping with the principles of open access and it is not clear how accepted licensing norms would operate in this context.

7. Cooperative infrastructure and funding models:

We are not convinced that infrastructure currently available through existing cooperative models will be sufficient to meet future author expectations, for example, around integrated multimedia, data, and code. It is not clear whether there is appetite in this model from UK funding bodies, nor is it clear whether these models, which rely on national or institutional funding and/or subscriptions, are scalable, or appropriate for publications whose authors are based in diverse international contexts. It should be recognised that while there is scope for greater coordination, cooperation, and interoperability, the existing scholarly publication infrastructure does involve cross-publisher, institutional, and other third-party collaboration.

8. Evolving Traditional models:

We are interested in the zero-month embargo model and we would like to understand better how this model might impact on the long term sustainability of publishing in different disciplines, particularly in the arts, humanities, and the social sciences where the article half-life tends to be longer. However, this is a challenging model to pilot because it would be very difficult to reverse a decision to offer a zero-month embargo. It is also important to recognise that the final pre-typeset text has benefitted from some services that have either been provided or facilitated by the publisher and the wider scholarly publication ecosystem. If subscription revenue declines, these services will be un-costed and not sustainable.

We are not interested in the reverse paywall model. The prospect of placing previously openly available research behind a paywall appears to be in tension with open access principles. It is also likely that new entrants will make this option unsustainable in the long run.

9. Article Transaction models:

We are not interested in the article transaction models. These models will likely create additional administrative burden for researchers, their institutions, and also for publishers. We appreciate that the model for 'submission payments' acknowledges that publishers incur costs beyond those associated with accepted articles. However, this system would not be accessible to a range of researchers who do not have access to funds for article transactions and would result in administrative burden.

10. Open platforms

Open platforms will likely play an important role in the future scholarly publishing ecosystem. We would be grateful for assurances and commitments surrounding:

- Whether these platforms can or will offer equivalent or better levels of service (to authors, reviewers, editors, readers, and institutions) compared to existing/more traditional publishers.
- Access to publishing: It is not clear how new platforms intend to support researchers who are without access to funds for APCs. E.g. those without access to grant funding, those without an institutional affiliation, in an institution not part of a particular publishing arrangement, and researchers based in Research4Life countries to whom APC waivers and discounts are commonly offered (although we recognise that F1000 supports the HINARI/AGORA Access to Research in Health Programme). The APC for publishing longer form articles on the F1000 platform (e.g. US $1000 long article base rate + $1000 surcharge for papers longer than 8,000 words [ca. 10,000 word papers are common in the social sciences] + potential data hosting charges) is broadly consistent with some already existing fully OA titles (e.g. RGS-IBG and Wiley journal Geo: Geography and Environment- US $1,800 [discounts are available for those whose institutions Wiley Open Access Accounts, for papers referred via a Manuscript Transfer Program (20%), for Society members (10%), and there are automatic waivers and discounts for countries based in Research4Life countries). We would like to see open platforms (and other publishers) provide further detail about how they would meet these challenges. Recent calls for all publishers to be more transparent about the costs associated with publishing and supporting the wider scholarly communication ecosystem are also welcomed.
- Clarity around opportunities for researchers to publish articles/outputs other than original research papers and editorials: It is not clear whether APCs funding and/or waivers will be available for a wide range of research outputs that are considered integral to scholarly communication, but are not original research papers and editorials e.g. commentaries, review articles, data papers. There are diverse ways of communicating research and itls important that new outlets do inadvertently limit the options available to researchers. This observation also applies to some already-existing open models provided by traditional publishing houses.
- The long-term sustainability of new open platforms and the long-term availability of the articles they publish. Particularly around long term archiving and legacy.

11. Other revenue models:

It is unlikely that these models (advertising, crowd funding, bequests/donations, freemium, syndication) will generate enough revenue to ensure the sustainability of our publishing portfolio.

12. Strategies for change and cost reduction:

We recognise that change is needed in the scholarly communication ecosystem and we welcome a transition towards sustainable open access.

<u>Strategies we already do or have tried:</u>

<u>Launch a journal</u>: With Wiley, we launched a fully OA, online only journal – Geo: Geography and Environment – in 2014. One of the key motivations for doing so was to help ensure that our portfolio of journals offers geographers a wide range of quality publishing opens.

<u>Online publishing</u>: One of our journals is only online and we offered digital subscriptions to the three hybrid titles. This was not primarily about saving costs; instead, we were seeking to be responsive to how members wish to read the publications. Digital publishing has costs – for example, VAT implications for Learned Societies. More generally, while there is still demand for print publishing, the wider trend is to moving towards online access.

<u>Outsourcing</u>: Working with a commercial helps ensure that the Society's journal portfolio is financially sustainable. Partnership enables us access to infrastructure, expertise, and resources, and also to provide a level of services to authors, reviewers, editors, readers that would be challenging to match if we were to self-publish. Outsourcing in this context is also a way of pooling risk, which enables us to participate in business model experiments that would otherwise be challenging.

<u>Simplify</u>: We are already seeing efforts – largely led by our publishing partner – to simplify, particularly within the production process. This is in part about delivering cost efficiencies, but change is also required in order to meet author expectations around the speed of publication. It is vital that efforts to simplify do not degrade the publication experience for researchers and do not – from the author or reader perspective - devalue the finished output.

<u>Strategies we would likely try:</u>

<u>Flipping journals:</u> It is possible that we may consider flipping one or more of our hybrid journals in the future. That decision depends on wider changes in the scholarly communication environment e.g. changing mandates or funding requirements, the impact this change would have on researchers' access to publishing, and the implications for the long-term viability of the publications.

<u>Close or combine journals:</u> Like other Learned Societies, our publications have a long history and were formed in particular contexts and according to the communication demands of researchers at the time. We are not actively looking to close or combine journals at present, but we are clear that our journals must be responsive to changes in the way in which academic research is communicated. Changes to the portfolio may be appropriate in the future.

<u>Cooperative infrastructure:</u> As indicated above. This is not a model that we are actively pursuing and we have reservations about the current scale of operation. However, we remain open to considering this as the scholarly communication system evolves.
Increasing article numbers: It is a common editorial goal for publications to be more inclusive. This, in part, involves implementing strategies to attract and publish articles from a wider range of scholars, from a diverse range of countries and institutions, and that represent the full spectrum of a discipline. We are aware that some are groups of people, places, language cultures, and topics are overrepresented in our publishing portfolio. We are supportive of editorial objectives to enhance the diversity of voices represented in our journals. These strategies are likely to lead to increasing article numbers, especially as shifts towards digital publishing means that we are less-constrained by page-budgets.

Strategies we are unlikely to try:

Splitting journals: It is unlikely that we would consider creating mirror journals, especially if there are other, more inclusive, transformative models available that facilitate a shift to sustainable open access publishing. We are concerned that splitting journals will ultimately create a tiered publication system and unintentionally encourage readers to make value judgements about the relative quality of a research paper based on which part of the journal it has been published in.