How do APCs contribute to the openness of science?

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Abstract

Open access fees (or article processing charges, APCs) are part of a diverse set of options in open access publishing, a sector that aims to make open access to research publications the leading approach. This strategy in scholarly publishing is supported by the different methods that deliver open content. However, in the transition phase, research-intensive universities are particularly affected by open access fees.

The article was originally published on the Think Open blog: https://blogs.helsinki.fi/thinkopen/apc-series-4/

This blog series has previously explained what article processing charges (APC) are and outlined the services that are available to researchers. This section provides an overview of why APCs are paid to open access (OA) publishers.

APCs are part of OA packages that aim to make the results of scientific research openly available. The promotion of openness is based on the changing research environment (digitalisation), which offers new opportunities for the development and effective communication of science. Additionally, OA options offer alternatives to paying the high subscription costs of scientific publications (serials crisis).

The goal of the scientific community is to facilitate OA scientific information in an economically sustainable way. There are many ways to do this, including:

- transformative agreements, which are a combination of traditional subscriptions and OA publishing (see FinELib agreements)
- APCs in OA journals (gold OA)
- publishing in OA journals and publishing platforms that are free of charge for authors (diamond OA)
- OA publishing that is based on collaborative and consortium models (e.g., Helsinki University Library's collaboration with Language Science Press)

- self-archiving (green OA)

These options are all focused on increasing the amount of scientific research that is openly available. In 2020, for the first time in Finland, the share of peer-reviewed articles in OA publications exceeded 70 per cent. OA is also an important international direction for scientific publishing.

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Scientific publishing is currently in a phase of change: although traditional payment walls are still firmly in place, OA is now actively promoted. As well as funding OA publishing, commercial science publishers use APCs to maintain their revenue levels as customers seek alternatives to subscription fees.

In this transition phase, research-intensive universities, such as the University of Helsinki, will maintain a balance between subscription fees and OA fees.

"The Helsinki University Library aims to make openness as easy as possible for researchers. By acting as the university's open publishing service centre, the library wants to support the researcher's ability to focus on their core tasks and give him or her all the help our resources allow. Of course, the researcher has to sign the publication agreements himself

or herself", says **Kimmo Tuominen**, University Librarian, Helsinki University Library.

Tuominen is also a member of the steering group in the FinELib consortium, which negotiates national agreements with international publishers. Tuominen emphasises versatility in open publishing.

"We are not content with only one way of implementing openness, such as transformative agreements, but we want to take advantage of all the routes to openness. We see different routes as complementary, not competing, alternatives. The library is particularly concerned that the cost of open access publishing will remain under control throughout the university. In co-operation with UH's chief financial officer, we have also developed cost monitoring for open access publishing", says Tuominen.