

The LERU Roadmap Towards Open Access

EOS response

Enabling Open Scholarship is an organisation of universities (not only in Europe) that promote the principles and practice of open scholarship and Open Access. We provide advisory services to university managers who ask for information and guidance on Open Access and on developing a policy to ensure their institution provides it.

EOS welcomes this Roadmap Towards Open Access and is pleased that LERU has undertaken to develop it. While it will be of great significance to the universities that are in the LERU grouping, it will also be of use to universities outside LERU, thus increasing its value and making all the effort that went into it even more worthwhile.

It is a document that can act as a guide to universities whatever the size of their research programme.

The overall perspective is especially welcome. EOS sets its work in the context of open scholarship, the effort that creates open knowledge. In a time when universities around the world, including in Europe, are faced with perhaps unprecedented financial challenges in an uncertain global economic environment, the extent to which they contribute to society in terms of knowledge creation and transfer of that knowledge is paramount.

In all parts of the world where our universities operate there is an ambition to create knowledge-based societies where innovation can flourish. This is the time for opening up and showing the world what they can do.

The LERU Roadmap gives universities many pointers. In particular, the notion of an 'Open Access Champion' in each university is excellent guidance on good practice. Where Open Access has already become embedded in daily life in universities, there we see such a Champion in place. That individual does not need to spend all their time promoting Open Access but, as the Roadmap says, top-level support for, and management of, the Open Access agenda ensures that the new principles and practices of open scholarship become integral to institutional strategy, impinging upon research, teaching, learning, intellectual property and knowledge dissemination to all constituencies.

EOS's aim is to help universities use their knowledge resources to best effect, maximise their impact, increase the return on investment in research and ensure their research efforts have a measurable societal payoff. In this context, EOS notes a number of things that the Roadmap addresses.

We have noted the conclusions, now confirmed by multiple studies, that an Open Access system of scholarly communication will be cheaper overall than the one we have lived with to date. Universities will welcome that, of course, as will their funders.

The Roadmap also points out the increased visibility, usage and impact from work openly shared. These things are primary drivers for our EOS universities in their quest to hold their own in what, for better or worse, in an increasingly competitive global higher education environment. Importantly, as the Roadmap indicates, at last knowledge can be properly shared between North and South, South and North, and South and South, rather than the North-North pattern that has predominated until now. The disadvantages can at last begin to be ironed out for the world's knowledge-poor.

There is a criticality with regard to return on investment for universities. The Roadmap acknowledges the issue of copyright barriers to and embargoes on open content. We urge boldness here. It is absolutely in universities' interests, as well as of those that fund them, for knowledge to be available sooner rather than later, and without restrictions on how it is then used by different constituencies. We note the studies that demonstrate early uptake of knowledge, where it is made immediately available, and the early and persisting impact that it enjoys. Maximising universities' return on investment means maximising the impact of the knowledge they create. Embargoes and other devices that counter this, solely to help publishers maintain a business model based on subscriptions, work against the interests of universities in their own quest to build a sustainable and accountable future. EOS hopes that the Roadmap will prompt new and bold thinking in this area rather than preserve the current state of play.

Finally, EOS is especially pleased that the Roadmap addresses the interests of the wider society. Out there, beyond the protective walls of academe, are the rest of us: the family doctors, the legal practices, the engineers, the agriculturalists, the patients, the consultants. All knowledge-users yet with little or no access to the findings from research we funded.

The Roadmap is absolutely correct to place the solution to this problem in the laps of universities, especially with respect to the development of mandatory policies on Open Access. The ball is indisputably in their court.

We look forward to seeing the LERU universities setting the pace. EOS commits to continue its efforts to encourage others to run alongside.

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