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Trying to make the best out of it

Posted on April 9, 2018 by Wilma van Wezenbeek

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Three months have passed in 2018, three hectic months, where I combined two roles. Besides being Library Director at TU Delft, I also started as Program Manager Open Access at the VSNU.
In the past weeks we launched the 3rd E-zine, concluded some negotiations, and are preparing for the renegotiations with Elsevier. It is a lot of (extra) work, which I of course expected and accepted, because this is a nice time to be heavily involved in the transition to a world where open access is the default.

I cannot agree more with Richard Poynder, who in his latest blog describes the necessity to have not only accessibility and affordability, but also transparency in the open access deals. And as one of his "well-intentioned people" I must admit that our Dutch approach is bringing us (a lot of) open access, but is not yet solving all these parameters, and surely not at once.

After my "100 days" period, I would like to make some observations. The first is one I also made last year when I was main author of the National Plan Open Science in the Netherlands. I wrote about the compromise we had to make, given the time constraint, by making the writing process open in a limited way. Not exactly the "open" I normally have in mind when talking about transparency.

Another observation relates to the issues VSNU brings up in its E-zine. "..the road to open access may require a number of different routes.." or "VSNU will develop an application of the right to open access as referred to in the Copyright Act (Taverne Amendment, clause included in 2015)", and "An open infrastructure for open access appears to offer a suitable solution in this regard..". The examples of research(ers) in charge that are given, are also indicative. ScholarlyHub, SciPost and the upcoming EU publishing platform (here is the tender that was recently published) are put in the spotlight.

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The VSNU roadmap to open access was launched on 7 March 2018.

Finally, in the article my colleague Library Director of the University of Amsterdam (Maria Heijne) and I wrote we forecast next steps and conclusions: “Even so, the results should be seen not as the end point, but as part of a full trajectory, because eventually we want to unlock the ‘library license budgets’ and use them for new promising initiatives, such as LingOA, OLH and Knowledge Unlatched .. Other elements of this trajectory are discussions with the smaller publishing houses, and attention to disciplines with output other than mainly journal articles or that face problems in the transition period.”

So all-in-all we can and will only continue in what we have been doing so far, and that is collaborating with colleagues from abroad (e.g. in the EUA working groups) or teaming up with the current Spring “Compact” clients and keeping our principles on top of the table. In our road the coming years we intend to get in negotiations with open access publishers, to arrange “green” open access for disciplines which the current publication deals fail to cover, and we will investigate what the publication platforms bring “into the equation”.

The coming weeks (months, if necessary) we will be opening up as much information as possible of the recently closed deals on openaccess.nl, hopefully providing a lot of answers the community has about the Springer and OUP ones. The news about these deals was spread very quickly after we agreed that there is mutual ground (because it is essential our research community is informed).

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However, contract details still need to be settled. In every contract settlement we add lessons learned. That can be issues related to text and data mining, the upcoming GDPR, workflow improvement, reporting requirements and obviously disclosure of the financial paragraph (and that is in fact a negotiation in itself). To give an idea, our first Springer “Compact” contract was signed almost 10 months after reaching our outline agreement.

Concluding with something I also took with me from the writing process of last year. “Beware of that demon called ‘Changing The World’” (a quote by Marty Rubin). We are no heroes, we are no villains, we try to make the best of it.

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national plan open science, open access, TU Delft Library, VSNU