

Negotiating Transformative Agreements as an Individual Institution: KAUST Library's Context, Challenges, and Prospects

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Abstract:

The scholarly publishing environment is witnessing a dynamic shift brought in by the advent of Transformative Agreements (TAs) geared toward Open Access publishing. Collective negotiating has been noted to be yielding success for the industry and national consortia that have managed to secure deals with big publishers; however, the same cannot be said for individual institutions. This paper examines the KAUST library's journey, the challenges, and forecast on Transformative Agreements.

Keywords: Open Access Publishing, Transformative Agreements, KAUST.

Introduction

Since Plan S's initial launch in 2018, there has been an increase in TA-related conversations and announcements. As a result, several models and applications in the context of Open Access Publishing (OAP) have been developed. Plan S's introduction of TAs has resulted in a profusion of OAP agreements negotiated between institutions and publishers (libraries, national and regional consortia). People's understanding and conceptions of TAs may differ. The [ESAC Community](#) states that TAs between institutions and publishers are geared toward repurposing subscription expenditures to support open access publishing of the negotiating institutions' authors. Ideally, this ultimately alters the business model that is the basis of scholarly journal publishing, shifting from subscription to one in which publishers are compensated relatively over time. Since then, several OAP deals have been announced, the most recent being the [Elsevier-UK Institutions Agreement](#).

Subsequently, with the rise of open access in scholarly publications in recent years, the traditional subscription model has sparked questions over its suitability for use by research organizations (Schimmer et al., 2015). The premise was that existing journal subscription expenditures in libraries could be used to convert the current collection of scientific subscription journals to an open-access business model. Since the launch of the OA 2020 Initiative in 2015, which brought together leaders in the worldwide Open Access movement to speed up the transition to open access, library organizations and consortia have refined their requirements when negotiating new license deals with publishers.

According to the number of TAs in the ESAC Registry, the KAUST library leads OAP adoption in the Kingdom and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region. The publishing output of Saudi universities ranks first in the Arab world and 25th globally¹. However, open access publishing is still a new development, and there are no registered deals in ESAC Registry from other Saudi universities.

While this paper provides an insight into the KAUST library's TAs, it is necessary to review the institution's overview. The King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST) University Library has achieved significant progress and signed several TAs with Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) publishers from 2019 to 2022. KAUST, a Saudi Arabian university on the Red Sea coast, performs curiosity-driven and goal-oriented research to address global concerns in food, water, energy, and the environment. Through innovative, collaborative research and graduate education, KAUST advances science and technology. KAUST is an extensive research institution with a relatively high number of published papers every year. KAUST wants to be a global center for scientific and technical research and education and seeks to serve as a beacon of knowledge that unites people and cultures for the betterment of humanity through encouraging discoveries to address global concerns. In support of the extensive research activities of the university, 99% of the KAUST library's resources are available online. KAUST library's massive investments in collection development (subscriptions) were the foundation for the OAP strategies implemented. In the

¹ "Saudi Arabia Ranks First in Scientific Publishing in the Gulf: Scimago Index," Al Arabiya English, April 19, 2022, <https://english.alarabiya.net/News/gulf/2022/04/19/Saudi-Arabia-ranks-first-in-scientific-publishing-in-the-Gulf-Scimago-index>.

beginning, the OAP initiative at the KAUST library was driven by a desire to assist researchers with publishing and a commitment to avoid double-dipping wherever possible.

KAUST Library OAP Strategy

As a signatory to OA 2020, KAUST Library set the goal of reaching 100 percent open access and devised an initial strategy based on three principles: the repository (green open access) route, the shift from subscription to publishing model (hybrid journals), and open access only publishing journals (gold only journals or similar platforms).

Route 1: The repository route

The first route in the strategy was the green (repository) route, which entailed submitting an Accepted Authors Manuscript with delayed embargo periods (0 to 24 months) with copyright and re-use considerations. In 2012, KAUST Research Repository was launched. The Library was the first in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region to implement an Open Access policy in 2014. This was useful since it allowed for integration with other platforms and the creation of value-added services that improved OAP. The repository has been a spectacular success, with 77 percent of faculty submissions in 2021. The figure below provides a record of submissions through the green repository route.

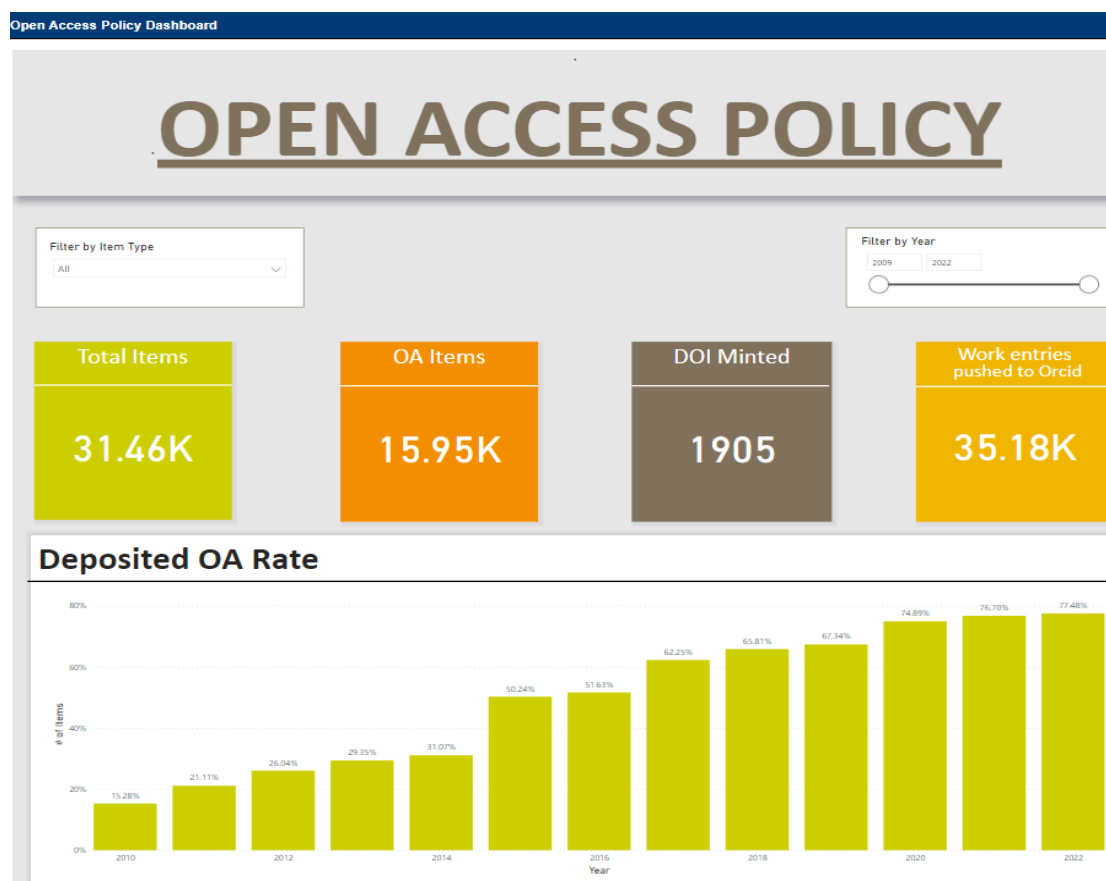


Figure 1: Repository article submission records. Source: KAUST Open Access Policy Dashboard, extracted June 8, 2022

Route 2: Shift from subscription to publishing model

This route was centered on TAs by converting from a subscription model to an open access publishing model. This was for hybrid journals that required no additional payment compared to the subscription price or with an additional cost to contain more free articles published as open access. The strategy's results were instant open access and a shift from subscription agreements to read & publish/offset agreements with chosen publishers. The authors who took part in this had to license their articles under the CC BY licenses. The number of TAs at KAUST has increased with the implementation of this strategy. The Library announced three TA deals with publishers for hybrid journals in 2019, permitting KAUST authors to publish for free (unlimited or limited number of tokens - article processing charges). The TAs increased to seven in 2020, and four more agreements were added in 2021. The total number of KAUST Read and Publish TAs is 12.

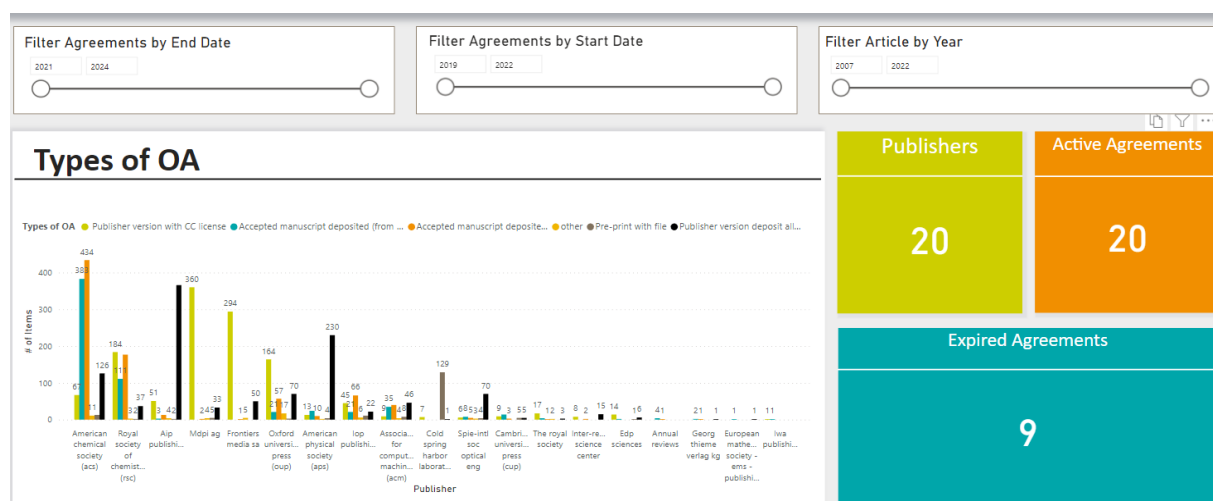


Figure 2: TAs by publisher. Source: KAUST Dashboard, extracted on June 8, 2022

Route 3: Open Access publishing journals only

The third approach offered KAUST authors APC reductions to publish in completely open access (gold) journals. The plan provided authors immediate open access with publishers who supported this approach. The Library agreement offers a discount, and the authors need to make sure that the discount has been applied to their APC invoice. KAUST Library has APC discount agreements with publishers such as Frontiers, MDPI, Thieme, and Trans Tech.

With these three strategic routes, KAUST Library supports new emerging models, such as Subscribe to Open (S2O), where libraries pay a subscription as usual, and the publisher commits to open the whole portfolio of journals or selected titles. To support this model, KAUST transferred the subscriptions from the agents and started direct negotiations with several publishers. In this way, KAUST supports S2O with Annual Reviews, IWA Publishing, EDP Sciences, and EMS Press.

Challenges

The open-access publishing landscape is complex; KAUST faced its fair share of challenges discussed in this section.

a) BIG Publishers

As TAs are gaining more traction in the scholarly community, it is becoming difficult for individual libraries to engage with big publishers regarding these deals. The big publishers have strategies and priorities in negotiating open access publishing deals and are primarily focused on consortia and the national government level. They also use diverse techniques in different geographical areas. This is a huge challenge for a research-intensive university, as our authors tend to publish in high-impact journals issued by big publishers.

b) Workflows, tracking published articles

One of the challenges that emerged was the complexity of this service's workflows. Some publishers established their dashboards to manage workflows from the perspective of the publisher administration, the institution fund administration/approval, and the author. Others are still not using dashboards, and the communication goes exclusively via emails. The other problem is lack of reporting or not frequent enough reporting about submitted/accepted/published articles. Usually, publishers send monthly, or quarterly article reports. Some of the publishers are still new in the open-access publishing area, so they are not aware of the importance of the reports – in these cases, Library needs to send reminders constantly.

KAUST Library has built an internal tracking and reporting system to meet some of these challenges. The internal library IT department created a Transformative Agreements Dashboard. Reporting and having trustworthy numbers timely is crucial for assessing the existing deals. As the number of deals increases, KAUST would have to invest in a commercial dashboard available in the market.

c) Open Access Publishing Fund

The cornerstone of the KAUST library's negotiation of the deals has been to use subscription funds to convert the OAP. However, there have been instances where these deals would imply stretching a little to get more in terms of discounts or unrestricted publishing opportunities. The lack of an APC fund was a hurdle to this, and most institutions have these funds in place, but KAUST did not, and the Library would occasionally receive a funding boost from the Office of Sponsored Research.

d) Central Payment System

With existing agreements, the Library was not involved in the payment process. The deals provide free or discounted APC, and if there is a payment, it's the author's responsibility. With a dedicated Open Access Publishing Fund, it would be beneficial to have a central payment system to better track spending and the publishing output. Also, such a system would facilitate the author's workflow, with submissions to the same system and no need to check all different workflows when submitting to a specific publisher's journal.

e) KAUST Researchers

It takes time to raise awareness among researchers about the necessity of open access publishing. KAUST Library promotes signed agreements in various ways (University-wide announcements, library guide with author workflows, awareness sessions, Open Access week, etc.). Still, it happens when sometimes an author is uninformed about the agreement, pays for the APC that should be free, or publishes in paywalled mode. In such a case, the Library will attempt to obtain a refund or modify the status of an article from paywalled to open access.

f) Dedicated personnel

Managing open access arrangements becomes more complex when additional agreements and workflows are added. The KAUST Library does not have a Scholarly Communication Librarian position, and currently, this role is primarily serviced by a Subject Specialist.

Steps in the Open Access Publishing Journey²

This section provides a structured step approach that the KAUST library adopted in its OAP journey.

Data analysis; the initial data analysis explored the institution's needs in the OA publishing area, the trends in OA publishing, KAUST authors' spending on APCs, the projected budget for OA publishing deals, etc. Publishers' offerings of different OA business models were analyzed at this stage. Inquiries were made to the publishers (if the publisher had any OA publishing model, offset, read&publish, APC discount, S2O, D2O, etc.). A review of the feedback from the publishers regarding OAP offerings was done to ascertain if these fit in KAUST Library's OA strategy and if there were any additional costs compared to the subscription budget from the last three years, usage, and citation analysis.

Negotiating the deal; the foundation of the first meeting with the publisher included a short presentation on KAUST Library OAP Strategy to reach 100% OA. The KAUST Library approach is based on ESAC Guidelines for Transformative Agreements,³ LIBER Principles⁴, and University of California Guidelines for Evaluating Transformative Agreements.⁵

KAUST approach favors **cost-neutral, sustainable and transformational agreements.**⁶ The KAUST library OA publishing negotiating encompasses these elements, cost; (reading fee/publishing fee); the number of articles (limited/unlimited); article and author eligibility/verification; author's workflow; creative commons licenses; reporting (frequency of the reports; metadata included); and rollover of unused free credits/tokens/APCs.

² J. K. Vijayakumar and Nevena Tomic, "Managing Institutional Open Access Publishing Deals: Experiences of KAUST, Saudi Arabia," Presentation, March 10, 2021, <http://eprints.rclis.org/41857/>

³ "ESAC REFERENCE GUIDE TO TRANSFORMATIVE AGREEMENTS – ESAC Initiative," accessed June 6, 2022, <https://esac-initiative.org/about/transformative-agreements/reference-guide/>.

⁴ "Open Access: Five Principles for Negotiations with Publishers," LIBER Europe, accessed June 5, 2022, <https://libereurope.eu/article/open-access-five-principles-for-negotiations-with-publishers/>

⁵ "Guidelines for Evaluating Transformative Open Access Agreements," Office of Scholarly Communication (blog), accessed June 6, 2022, <https://osc.universityofcalifornia.edu/uc-publisher-relationships/resources-for-negotiating-with-publishers/guidelines-for-evaluating-transformative-open-access-agreements/>.

⁶ J. K. Vijayakumar and Nevena Tomic, "Managing Institutional Open Access Publishing Deals: Experiences of KAUST, Saudi Arabia," Presentation, March 10, 2021, <http://eprints.rclis.org/41857/>

Promoting signed deals; the Library's promotional strategies include putting out a university-wide announcement of available OAP deals for researchers at the commencement of each year. This announcement is critical since there is usually a limit to the number of free or discounted APCs with these agreements, particularly high-impact journals. We have observed an increase in the number of open access published articles (2000 projected annual articles) with yearly increases of (10-15%, 70-80%) articles published as open access.

Every semester, we organize university-wide awareness sessions about available OA publishing options and one-to-one sessions on request for interested researchers. In October, KAUST Library organizes Open Access Week with different activities to raise awareness about different types of OA and the Library efforts in this area.

The libguide Open Access Publishing Options at KAUST⁷ details all open access publishing deals, workflows for authors (by publisher), eligibility criteria for authors, and lists of eligible journals (by publisher). Every year, this guide is updated with new deals, updated lists of eligible journals, etc.

KAUST Open Access Publishing Program

KAUST's University Library is happy to support research publishing at KAUST by offering many open access publishing agreements in 2022. These transformative agreements will allow KAUST's corresponding authors to publish their accepted articles in open access mode (in selected journals of publishers listed below) and thus be made openly available at no cost to the author. The open access publishing fee is covered via library subscriptions in "Read and Publish" deals.

We also support the below publishers' "subscribe to open" S2O program and KAUST authors can publish open access in their journals (selection of journals or complete portfolio) without any publishing cost. The open access publishing fee is supported by library subscriptions in S2O deals.

We are a signatory of the [OA2020 initiative](#) and closely monitor the recent trends and discussions about changes in scholarly communication and research publishing ecosystems.

We acknowledge financial support from the KAUST Office of Sponsored Research in supporting some of these open access deals.

If you need further details, or a meeting, or presentation to your team - please email us at library@kaust.edu.sa or nevena.tomic@kaust.edu.sa

Figure 3 Open Access Publishing Options at KAUST libguide, extracted on June 6, 2022

⁷ Nevena Tomic, "Library Website & LibGuides: Open Access Publishing Options at KAUST: Home," accessed June 6, 2022, <https://library.kaust.edu.sa/OApublishing/Options>.

Managing deals and tracking published articles; the OA publishing administrator is responsible for continual communication with publishers on one side, the KAUST authors on the other side, and monitoring available data (number of used APCs by the publisher, month by month). As KAUST does not have a central payment system, there is no need to manage APC invoicing. The Library keeps track of every article eligible to be published as part of our OA publishing agreements to best use signed agreements. In cases where an eligible KAUST author did not publish OA, and there is an available free option, we contact our author and the publisher to see if we could change the article's status. In cases where an author paid to publish OA when the free option was available, we try to get a refund.

Assessing deals; OA Publishing is still a new development for the KAUST Library, and we are continuously shaping our approach in this area. Success and impact in this area are measured by the percentage of OA articles published under our deals, the number of used APCs vs. the number of available free APCs, the number of OA articles supported by the Library budget, etc.

Emerging consensus and prospects of OAP at KAUST

The heart of intellectual endeavor is research publishing, and improving research access is critical for supporting the activity of knowledge generation. This section presents a new consensus on the KAUST library's future.

A Revised KAUST Open Access Policy to incorporate open access publication as one emerging subject. This policy should specify that authors publish results of KAUST-funded research as open access. The university funds the research undertaken at KAUST. As a result, to achieve 100 percent open access, KAUST should assume the role of a research funder. The majority of major research funders have mandated that research results be made open access. Accepting a research grant obligates the grantee to give open access to publications resulting from the funded research. The current KAUST Open Access Policy only addresses green open access (the necessity to submit theses/dissertations/papers).

A new/revised open access publication strategy linked with wider-university aims in the open research and open access arena is required. Negotiations with large STEM publishers necessitate university-wide cooperation; thus, a fully representative negotiating team of higher-level administration and KAUST academics who serve on editorial boards with publishers is required.

Establishing a central budget to cover publication costs and a central payment system to track all published papers and streamline workflows for KAUST authors is necessary. Commercial suppliers such as ChronosHub and Oable offer automated central payment and tracking solutions.

Conclusion

This paper discussed the KAUST Library's path in negotiating TAs, highlighting the approaches, challenges, and accomplishments. The report also offers prospects based on the established concepts of this journey.

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