

Note – Towards an open access policy for academic books in the Netherlands

To : NPOS steering committee
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Introduction

Progress to open access is lagging behind when it comes to books. This note aims to look at the process through which academic books are published, especially (though not only) for academic monographs. We try to provide some information about the numbers of books published in the Dutch academic context: how many titles are we actually talking about? And we also offer recommendations with regards to developing a policy for promoting an increase in the number of open access books.

This note includes an outline of the issues surrounding academic books, the main features of the book publishing process (as compared to journals), and advice on how to arrive at a plan and an accompanying policy for open access for books.

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1. The Problem

The national ambition is to achieve 100% open access in 2020. The Dutch authorities have been working towards this target for several years, making it an important aim of the National Plan Open Science (NPOS) signed by a broad coalition of knowledge organisations (including VSNU, NWO, KNAW, Zonmw, FNU, PNN and UKB) in 2017.

Measures and steps to fulfil these ambitions have so far mostly been focused on peer-reviewed academic journals, including international ones. Although open access for books is listed in the National Plan Open Science, there are as yet no concrete measures or an implementation plan. The same is true for Plan S, launched in September 2018 and to which NWO has signed up. This means there is a risk that the stated ambition with regards to books will be delayed or perhaps never fulfilled.

It is worth pointing out that the transition to open access for books began more slowly; the situation for books is more complicated, as the transition from print to digital media has also been slow for books. Part of the reason for this is that there is still a demand for print books and because, in contrast to journal publishing, the market for books is less dominated by a few large publishers. There are some international publishers but there are also small, domestic publishers which focus on publishing in their own language and are often associated with a particular field. The picture is also unclear because there are considerable differences between books.

To date, a lot of effort is spent to make peer-reviewed articles and journals available in open access. There are a number of scientific disciplines in which the academic books are an important (or even preferred) type of communication. This is particularly true – but certainly not exclusively so – in the case of the social sciences and humanities. The figure below is from a recent study into the publishing culture in the Netherlands by Kramer & Bosman (2019) and shows that, while academic articles are important, in the humanities less than half of the scientific output is in the form of articles. Books, chapters and *edited collections* are also an important form of scholarly communication in the social sciences.

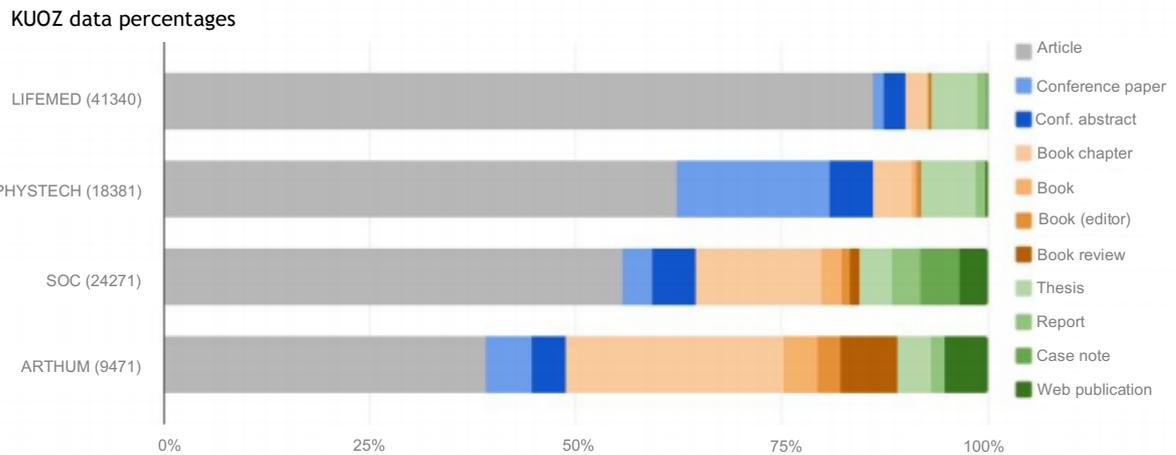


Figure 1. Publication types in the four main academic fields. 2017. Source: VSNU, KUOZ data 2017.

Thus, for the social sciences and humanities alone it is crucial to expand open access to books. Scholarly work in this area is often publicly funded and so should be accessible to a wide audience. Just as with journals, freely and digitally accessible books greatly increase visibility, reach, and potential scientific impact of the research.

2. Definitions/demarcation

Academics books come in all sorts of shapes and sizes. The term “long-form way of communicating the findings of research” is often used in the English-speaking world – an expression that can cover all manner of publications. The most important of these are academic monographs, which are long peer-reviewed academic works about a single scientific subject, generally written by one or a few authors (Crossick 2015). *Edited collections* are books which bring together *chapters* by different authors (often on the same subject). Textbooks represent another category and focus on making a (scientific) subject accessible for study purposes. Sometimes the line between academic monographs (peer-reviewed in accordance with academic standards) and a “trade book” are blurred. Dissertations can also be monographs, though they are not considered further in this note. All Dutch universities have a long-standing policy of making dissertations available through their institution’s open access repository (under embargo or otherwise).

3. Books & Journals: Different Publishing Cultures

The publishing landscapes and cultures regarding books and journals are fundamentally different. This section summarises some of the most important differences.

Revenue Model/Transition to Digital

Academic journals underwent a large-scale digital transition in the 1990s, above all within the Sciences, Technology, Engineering and Medicine (STEM). *E-journals* are the main product of this transition, contributing to the creation of and subscription to ‘big deals’ to access digital packages of journals from the large academic publishers. Subscriptions to packages are usually bought by university libraries, though researchers, private companies and non-academic institutions also make up a small share of the market. It is often asserted that the transition from a subscription to a pay-to-publish open access model in which users pay to publish an open access article can and should be attained budget neutral.

The transition to digital publication has not happened to the same extent in the case of book publishers. For most publishers, e-books are still a by-product of printed books and some books are only published in print. University libraries (and, less often, individuals) still buy physical copies of academic monographs. For open access publishing – which is still often a by-product – publishers ask for additional payment. So far, there has been no evidence that there is less demand for print copies if digital books are published in open access (Snijders, 2019). This information is relevant when creating funding guidelines.

Open access book publishers operate under different business models, with the sale of print books playing a smaller role and with an emphasis on *book processing charges (BPCs)*, *open access publication funds* and *collaborative funding*.

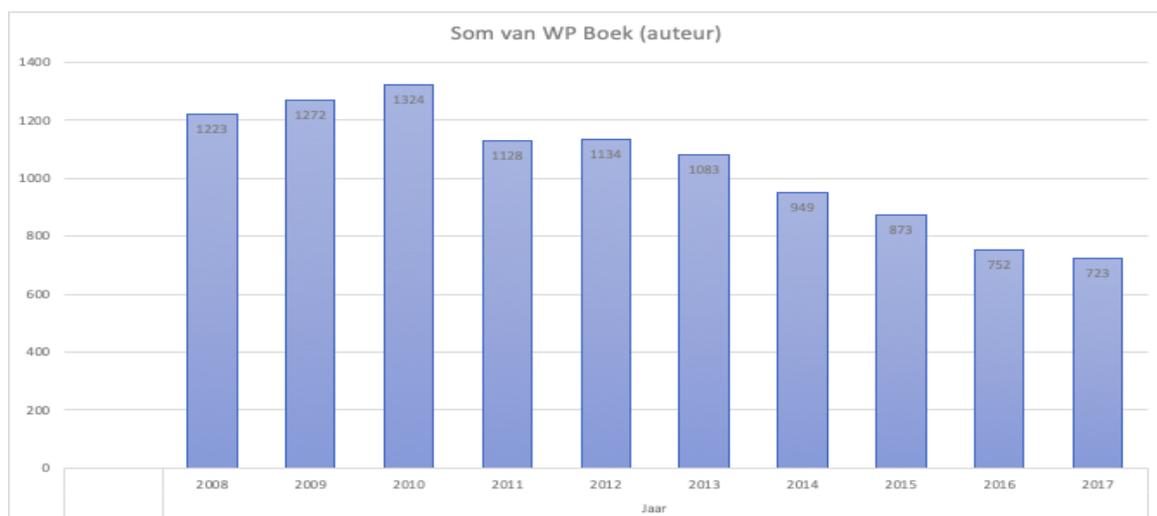
Sources of funding

Books are an important type of publication, especially in the humanities and social science (HSS). Because there are fewer second and third sources of funding (e.g. from companies) available to these fields than there is for STEM research, there are fewer financial resources available for creating open access versions. Book publishing (currently) depends heavily on the primary source of funding (universities), meaning they are relatively more dependent on faculty budgets.

4. Numbers – Outline of Current Situation

How many books are we talking about per annum? We have used data from the *Current Research Information Systems* (CRIS) of Dutch institutions to try to estimate how many books are produced in the Netherlands, with a focus on academic monographs. We estimate that the total national output of monographs in 2019 was around 700. There are far more book chapters, with numbers running into the thousands. It is impossible at this point to say how many of these titles are available through open access. There are no centralised databases containing this information. We assume that it is a small minority of titles. Data from the years 2008 - 2017 shows that the total number of academic books is decreasing year-on-year (figure 1). It is not clear how this can be explained.

This decrease may be the result of what the literature shows is a shift in publishing culture in HSS: less and less of a focus on international *peer-reviewed* articles (and *edited volumes*) and fewer and fewer books.



1: Total 'scientific books'. Source: VSNU / KUOZ (key figures for university research)

There are differences between fields. The majority of published academic books are in the field of Law (HERP: LAW), Social Sciences (HERP: B&S) and Humanities (HERP: L&C). They stem therefore (figure 2) from universities that have medium- to large-sized faculties in these fields. The KNAW institutes publish a total of around 45 academic monographs annually. The disciplinary characteristics of NWO institutes mean that publishing takes place almost exclusively in (peer-reviewed) journals.

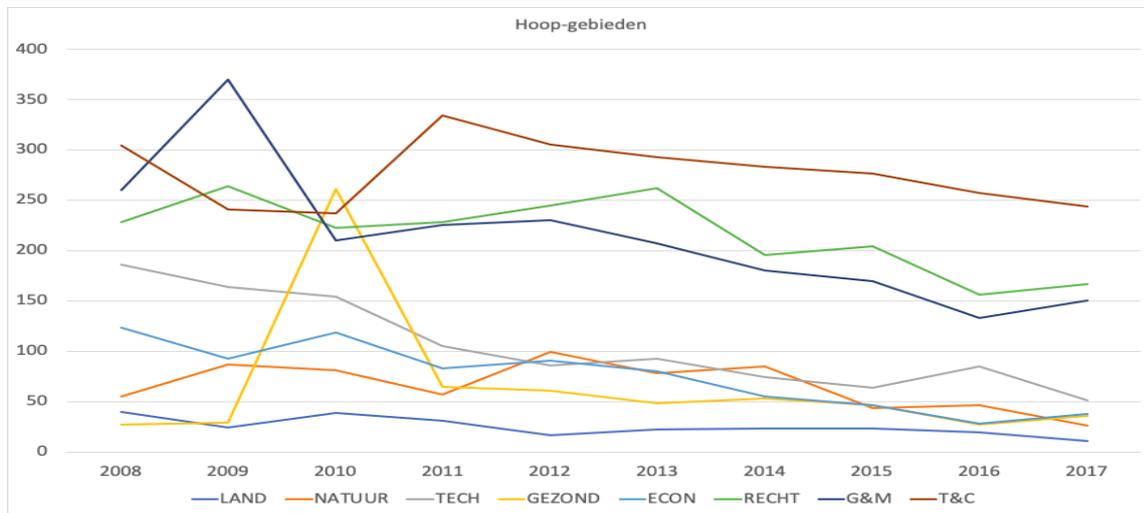


Figure 2 Breakdown/Number per institution. Source: VSNU/KUOZ (key figures for university research)

5. The landscape: the Publishers¹

The Netherlands is home to publishers, such as Elsevier, Brill, and Wolter-Kluwer, meaning it has a considerable and strong, internationally developed tradition of publishing. Apart from these big globally operating publishing companies, the landscape of academic book publishers is smaller. Most academic books are published in English and are aimed at an international audience. The largest publisher, with an international market, is Brill, which produces around 1200 books each year. Other publishers include John Benjamins, Amsterdam University Press, Leiden University Press, Wageningen Academic Publishing and VU University Press. Publishers Boom and Verloren have a somewhat special position, as they publish in both Dutch and English, and publish academic and non-academic books.

Almost all of these publishers now offer options for open-access book publishing. The same can be said of international publishers, researchers affiliated with Dutch academic institutions use: Cambridge and Oxford University Press, Springer Nature, Palgrave Macmillan, De Gruyter, Routledge, etc. Often the open access book is a by-product of print publishing, which still has a strong market. In the UK, in particular, there is a growing range of *born-digital* open access publishers whose main product is e-books, and of which some do not longer produce paper editions at all. Examples of such publishers include Open Book Publishers and UCL Press.

Most publishers providing an open access offer do so subject to a BPC (Book Processing Charge). Prices vary wildly, from €1,000 to €18,500 (Brill) when applying the CC BY licence. Only a few publishers allow the green route (self-archiving) for monographs through institutional repositories. The green route seems to be more easily to implement for

¹ Based on Ferwerda, E., Pinter, F & Stern, N, (2017) pp. 67-72

chapters. There is not a good summary of publishers' varying access policies similar to the one Sherpa/Romeo offers for journals. There are often restrictions in place, in terms of embargo (usually 12 but up to 36 months), version (not the publisher version but an *author accepted manuscript* (AMM)) or scope (sometimes only one or a few chapters from a book are allowed to be archived).

6. Towards an Open Access Plan for Books – What Do We Need?

In the transition towards open access, books are lagging behind. An extensive study by Springer Nature recently showed there is wide support among researchers for open access to books. When asked whether all academic books (monographs, *edited collections*) should be available as open access in the future, 55% of respondents to the Springer Nature survey answered that they agreed (n = 1933). The percentage was even higher among researchers who had already published books as open access, at 81% (n=398).² All academic publishers relevant to the Dutch academic context now have an option of publishing books as open access. This option is, however, often not taken up.

We have the impression that three factors are at play here:

- a) A lack of policy
- b) A lack of funding
- c) Researchers' perception of open access publications

a. A lack of policy

Policies on open access books lag behind those for journals. 314 organisations (universities, research institutions and funders) globally have a policy on making books available through open access, while 660 have a corresponding policy for peer-reviewed articles.³ *Funder mandates* play an important role in promoting open access. These have been common across the globe for making articles available through open access for the last 15 years. In the Netherlands, the grant conditions of NWO, ZonMW and the European Commission (H2020) stipulate that articles resulting from project financing must be published in open access. These policy frameworks do not apply to books or it is less clear to researchers whether the general obligation regarding open access also applies in the case of a book. In principle, for example, NWO rules do extend to books, but researchers do not appear to be aware of this. Researchers are unlikely to publish books as open access if there is no clear policy. More support from institutions, and from libraries in particular, is also needed.⁴

² Pyne, R., Emery, C., et al. (2019) 'THE FUTURE OF OPEN ACCESS BOOKS: FINDINGS FROM A GLOBAL SURVEY OF ACADEMIC BOOK AUTHORS White paper'

³ Based on ROARMAP, the international register of open access policies: <http://roarmap.eprints.org/>

⁴ See: Féret, Romain, & Cros, Marie. (2019). Including open science to research projects since their submission: a library perspective. Zenodo. <http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.2547489>

- *Our **first advice** is, therefore, for the various parties in the Netherlands (VSNU, NWO, KNAW) to make their policy in relation to books more explicit and make it clear what they expect of researchers. This can be an “obligation” (mandate) or, less strongly, an “expectation” that researchers publish books in open access. For NWO it would be obvious to align its policy with cOAlition S. Universities (VSNU) and KNAW should also make their policies more explicit. Preferably these policies are aligned between the different institutions in the Netherlands. For book chapters specifically, the Taverne amendment appears to be a route to open access. Article 25fa of the Dutch Copyright Act gives authors the option of making “short works” publicly available through a repository after a specified period. Under the ‘You share, we take care!’ pilot currently being led by VSNU and NPOS, this will include chapters of books. This scheme should continue if it proves successful.*

b. A lack of funding

Making monographs available as open access almost always incurs (additional) costs for researchers due to the BPC. If the ambition is to make more books available through open access, researchers must be able to access funds to cover these additional costs. A number of universities (TU Delft and Utrecht University, for example), have an open access fund for this purpose. NWO offers the option of including open access fees in project budgets. The issue here is that books are often published a long time after the NWO project has concluded, meaning researchers are de facto unable to use their budget anymore.

- *Our **second piece of advice** is that universities, NWO and KNAW set up funds for open access book publishing fees. This could be done jointly, by setting up a joint national fund (possibly to be managed by NWO) or separately on an institutional basis where all organisations take responsibility for the books resulting from their own funding to the best of their ability. The appendix includes an estimate of how much would have to be available for the Netherlands’ output each year and a guideline (with reasoning) of the amount to be paid for each open access publication.*

c. Researchers’ Perception of Open Access

Lack of policy and funding aside, a number of perceptions and persistent misunderstandings about open access are also a barrier to researchers publishing open access books.

Researchers are concerned about quality or lack thereof, just as they were for a long time when it came to publishing in open access journals. An earlier study by Springer-Nature showed, for instance, that 46% (n=937) of those surveyed were concerned that their peers would perceive open access books to be of lower quality.⁵ This is despite the fact that the

⁵ While 27% of the respondents who had experience with OA publishing said they were concerned about the perceived quality of OA books, the vast majority (46%) disagreed. See: Pyne, R., Emery, C., et al. (2019).

vast majority of publishers follow the same peer-review and quality control processes for open access and non-open access books.

The same research also shows that the benefits of open access for books are not yet evident to many researchers. Open access books have a wider (digital) reach, as is the case with journal articles. Improved visibility in turn leads to more citations, according to that same research. There is also a group of researchers who are simply not aware of the possibility of also publishing monographs in open access. In the Springer Nature survey referred to above, this comprised 15% of the respondents.

- Our **third piece of advice** is, therefore, that when the policy is drafted more attention should be given to communication with researchers: clearly set out the advantages of open access publishing for monographs; try to mitigate concerns about quality by, for example, only offering funding for open access publications which have been peer-reviewed. Institutes (and, in particular, libraries) should put far more emphasis on supporting researchers and providing them with information on open access to monographs.

7. Finally – Summary

We recommend that the key stakeholders (KNAW, NWO and VSNU) consider the following action:

1. (VSNU, KNAW, NWO): ensure that the open access policy explicitly includes policy for open access to books, and monographs in particular. This would best be done jointly, so that the same frameworks apply to researchers in the Netherlands regardless of their affiliation or which organisation funds their research. Where policy is already in place (as is the case for NWO): communicate more clearly what the expectations are.
2. (VSNU, KNAW, NWO): consider making funds available for making books available through open access and consider creating a joint fund to this end.
3. (VSNU, KNAW, NWO): give more attention to communication with researchers, clearly set out the benefits of open access publishing including for monographs; try to alleviate concerns about quality.

Context and References

- [NPOS](#)
- [Plan S](#)
- [NWO open access policy](#)
- [VSNU open access policy](#)
- [Letter to Parliament February 2019](#)

8. Executive summary

Introduction

The transition to open access is lagging behind when it comes to books. The purpose of this policy brief is to shed light on the publishing process of academic books, in particular (but not exclusively) the academic monograph. We try to provide insight into the numbers: how many titles are we talking about? We also make recommendations for policy development to promote the growth in the number of open access books.

This brief covers: a problem sketch, the characteristics of the publishing process of books (as compared to those of journals) and advice to arrive at a plan and accompanying policy for open access for books.

Problem

The national ambition is to achieve 100% open access in 2020. This has been the aim of the Dutch government for a number of years and is therefore an important objective in the National Open Science Plan (NPOS) that, in 2017, was endorsed by a broad coalition of knowledge organizations (including VSNU, NWO, KNAW, Zonmw, NFU, PNN, UKB).

Measures and interventions to achieve the ambitions mainly relate to (international) peer-reviewed academic journals. Open access for books is mentioned, but there is a lack of concrete measures and an implementation plan. This also applies to Plan S, which was launched in September and which NWO has joined. As a result, there is a risk that the stated ambition for this form of publication will be delayed, or not achieved at all.

However, the transition to open access for books is starting more slowly. One reason is that the situation with regard to this form of publication is more complex due to a slower transition to digital. This is partly because the demand for printed books continues to exist and because there is less dominance of a few large publishers (as is the case with journals). Above all the situation is also more diffuse because there are large differences between books.

So far, much of the effort has been focusing on open access to articles published in (international) peer-reviewed journals. For a number of disciplines in academia, the academic book is at least as important or even a more important form of communication. This applies in particular - but certainly not exclusively - to the social sciences and humanities.

Definitions

Academic books come in various shapes and sizes. In the Anglo-Saxon world, the term "long-form way of communicating the findings of research" is often used. All kinds of manifestations can be distinguished within this definition. The most important is the academic monograph: a long academic and peer-reviewed work on one academic topic that

is usually written by one or a few authors (Crossick 2015). Edited collections are books in which chapters from different authors (often touching on the same subject) are bundled. Textbooks represent another category and focus on making a (scholarly) subject accessible for study purposes. Sometimes the boundary between academic monographs (peer reviewed according to academic standards) and a book for the broader public (trade book) is not always easy to specify.

Dissertations can also take the form of a monograph. We do not take this into account in this policy brief. All Dutch universities have a policy for some time that dissertations are made available in open access via the institutional repository (whether or not under embargo).

Current status

How many books are we talking about on an annual basis? Based on data from the Current Research Information Systems (CRIS) of the Dutch institutions, we have made an attempt to estimate how many books are produced in the Netherlands. We have focused on the academic monograph. The estimate is that the total national output of monographs in 2019 will be around 700. The number of book chapters is much larger, and runs into the thousands. Of these titles it is currently impossible to say how many of them are available as open access. There is no reliable data to draw on, but it is suspected that book chapters represent only a small minority.

Towards open access for books: what is needed?

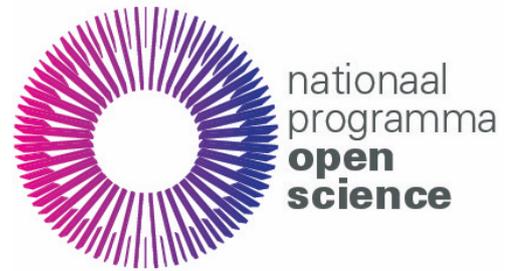
The transition to open access for books is lagging behind. All publishers relevant to the Dutch academic context now have the option to publish books open access. However, the use of those options is lagging behind. Our impression is that three factors influence this:

- a) A lack of policy
- b) A lack of financing
- c) Perceptions of researchers about open access publications

We therefore make the following recommendations:

Lack of policy

The various parties in the Netherlands (VSNU, NWO, KNAW) make their policy explicit and make clear what they expect from researchers. This is possible in terms of an "obligation" (mandate) or softer, in terms of "expectation" to publish open access. For NWO, alignment with the planning of cOAlition S is the obvious choice. Universities (VSNU) and KNAW should also make their policy explicit. Preferably these policies are aligned between the different institutions in the Netherlands. Specifically, with regard to book chapters, the Taverne amendment appears to be a route to open access. Article 25fa of the Copyright Act offers authors the opportunity to make a "short work" publicly available through a repository



after a certain period. Under the '[You share, we take care](#)' pilot, under supervision by VSNU and NPOS, book chapters are included. This scheme should continue if it proves successful.

Lack of financing

Universities, NWO and KNAW should set up funds for financing open access book publication costs. This can be done jointly, by setting up a joint national fund (possibly to be managed by NWO) or separately on an institutional basis where all organisations take responsibility for the books resulting from their own funding to the best of their ability.

Perceptions of researchers about open access publications

Devote more attention to communication with researchers when formulating policies: clearly state the benefits of open access publishing monographs; try to mitigate concerns about quality by, for example, only providing funding for open access publications that have undergone a rigorous peer review process. From the institutes (in particular libraries), pay much more attention to guidance and information to researchers

Context and references

- [NPOS](#)
- [Plan S](#)
- [NWO open access policy](#)
- [VSNU open access policy](#)
- [Letter to Parliament February 2019](#)

Annexe 1

Explanatory Note on Costs and €8,000 Target Amount

To calculate the total costs for open access monographs (hereinafter also referred to as open access books), we must estimate the average cost for an open access publication. A number of studies have been carried out looking at the cost for open access monographs (see bibliography). These have shown that costs for scientific books can vary greatly depending on the country, the type of publisher and on the publication itself:

- The costs for scientific books are on average higher for *university presses* in the United States, and for publishers in wealthy countries with smaller markets, such as Switzerland and Austria;
- Commercial publishers tend to apply higher fees (BPCs: *Book Processing Charges*) than non-profit publishers, such as *university presses* and OA publishers;
- The fees applied also vary significantly due to differences in publishing models (what sorts of services authors are offered, whether the publisher is partly or primarily focused on sales income), due to the specific features of a book (size, number and kind of illustrations, costs of publishing rights for third party work) and, in some countries, due to specific regulations or customs (e.g. publishing a dissertation being a springboard to a scientific career).

Assumptions when determining costs

Despite the varying costs and fees, we are able to come up with a reasoned estimate of the average cost for open access books. Our estimates are based on the following principles and assumptions:

- Though sales of monographs have been gradually falling for decades, there is still a need for print versions of monographs. A number of studies show that the print editions still sell, even when monographs are available online as open access and free of charge. No fall in sales was recorded in the OAPEN-NL pilot funded by NWO, but more recent research by Brill found that on average there was a (slight) drop in sales, though the outcome per publication varied significantly.
- The extent to which monograph costs can be recovered from sales of print copies depends on the publishing model. Existing publishers often focus mainly on sales, while new publishers focus more on funding the OA publication from fees which can be collected in advance. Existing publishers can cover a considerable proportion of their costs from sales proceeds. New publishers, in comparison, generally have lower fixed costs and are generally able to produce more cheaply.
- When determining the cost of open access books, we assumed that publishers' remuneration must be enough to cover the production costs of the digital edition (*first copy costs*) on average.
- When determining the cost of open access books, the prices applied by Dutch publishers are not enough as a considerable share of monographs by Dutch researchers is published by foreign publishers. This estimate is based on information on prices in the Netherlands and in the United Kingdom.

- The estimate of costs for open access books is an average and does not take into account the different price setting of different publishers and the variation in individual publications. The average is also not weighted: the share that various publishers have in the production of monographs is not considered.
- For the purposes of this estimate, we did not look into the policy for the ways in which available resources are deployed: we asked whether a uniform amount is available for all open access books, whether the fees charged by publishers can be refunded, and whether there is a cap on the amount to be refunded for each publication.
- Costs for open access publication of individual chapters of books were not considered.

Summary of fees

This summary focuses on available data on the fees of selected publishers in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom.

In the Netherlands, the biggest open access book publishers are Brill and AUP. 'From' prices are often linked to a manuscript's size.

- Brill: from €8,500 (for CC BY-NC, for CC BY on request)
- AUP: from €4,995

There are many monograph publishers with an OA programme for books in the UK. The following are a selection.

- Open Book Publishers: approximately £5,000 (OBP does not charge authors a BPC but does ask for a contribution if authors have access to funding)
- UCL: £5,000 - £7,000 (for authors not associated with UCL)
- Manchester University Press: from £9,850
- Taylor & Francis: £10,000 - £13,000
- Palgrave Macmillan: £11,000 (fee for whole Springer Nature)
- Cambridge University Press: £13,000

Estimate of average and total costs for OA books

Average UK costs are based on the study by the UUK working group for OA books (see Eve et al) and the publishers selected by them (OBP, Manchester UP, Cambridge UP and Palgrave MacMillan). The working group calculated the average fee of these publishers (£6,725) and increased this amount by around 10% to £7,500 – currently equivalent to €8,474. If we apply the same method to the Netherlands, the average is €6,748. We also increase this amount by around 10% to the round figure of €7,500. This increase goes some way to taking into account higher prices for specific publications.

This means the average for both countries works out at around €8,000. For an expected output of 700 books in 2019, total costs would be €5.6m.

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