

# The Diamond Discovery Hub criteria for diamond open access journals<sup>1</sup>

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Libellarium 16 (1) 2025: 27–38

Professional Paper / Stručni rad

UDC: 655.411-028.8:050

Received / Primljeno: 7. 11. 2024.

Accepted / Prihvaćeno: 19. 10. 2025.

doi: <https://doi.org/10.15291/libellarium.4569>

## Abstract

**Purpose.** This article outlines the operational criteria developed to assess the Diamond Open Access (Diamond OA) status of scholarly journals for inclusion in the Diamond Discovery Hub (DDH). It provides a pragmatic framework for identifying journals that operate without charging fees to authors or readers, thereby supporting the integration of these journals into the European Diamond Capacity Hub (EDCH).

**Approach.** The criteria were developed by a collaborative task force consisting of members from the EU-funded DIAMAS and CRAFT-OA projects. The methodology included drafting initial requirements, conducting community consultations, including feedback from the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), and refining the standards into six operational criteria.

<sup>1</sup> This paper is peer-reviewed and revised version of the preprint of <https://ddh.diamas.org/docs/diamond-open-access-journal-verification-guidelines/>. The operational criteria have first been published as Armengou, C. et al. 2024. Operational diamond OA criteria for journals. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.12721408>. The paper was originally presented at the OPERAS conference that was held in Zadar in April 2024.

**Findings.** The task force identified six operational criteria for Diamond OA: 1. Persistent identification, 2. Status as a scholarly journal, 3. Open access with open licences, 4. No fees, 5. Open to all authors, and 6. Community owned.

**Practical implications.** Meeting these criteria enables Diamond Publishers and Service Providers (DPSP) to register their journals as Diamond OA journals in the DDH, thereby increasing the visibility and recognition of their journals within the European Research Area (ERA).

**Originality/Value.** This paper presents the six operational Diamond OA criteria, their verification guidelines and highlights opportunities for further application and discussion.

**KEYWORDS:** community-led publishing, Diamond Discovery Hub, diamond open access, scholarly publishing

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Scope

This article presents a set of operational criteria assessing the Diamond Open Access (Diamond OA) status of a scholarly journal. For this purpose, the paper discusses six operational criteria that were developed collaboratively by members of the EU-funded DIAMAS<sup>2</sup> and CRAFT-OA<sup>3</sup> projects. These six criteria support the binary classification of journals: determining which journals can or cannot be included in the Diamond Discovery Hub<sup>4</sup> (DDH) that was developed in the CRAFT-OA project. The Diamond Discovery Hub includes Diamond OA journals from the European Research Area<sup>5</sup> (ERA) and has been integrated into the European Diamond Capacity Hub<sup>6</sup> (EDCH) as one of the services provided to Diamond OA publishers and service providers (DPSP) that are members of its Registry. By serving as an authoritative list for Diamond OA journals in Europe, the DDH thereby addresses a crucial vacuum in the Diamond OA landscape that lacked a comprehensive index of Diamond OA journals. (Simard, Butler, Alperin, Haustein 2024)

It is important to emphasize that the six criteria are not meant to universally define what Diamond OA is or should be. The scope of their application is strictly pragmatic: the criteria should not be used beyond the specific context of inclusion in the DDH, nor do they confer any quality label on the journals that meet the criteria.

Nevertheless, these criteria may acquire a potentially broader scope of application and significance. This paper therefore not only presents the six criteria and their verification guidelines,<sup>7</sup> but also provides background on Diamond OA and explains the methodology

<sup>2</sup> DIAMAS project. <https://diamasproject.eu/>

<sup>3</sup> CRAFT-OA project. <https://www.craft-oa.eu/>

<sup>4</sup> Diamond Discovery Hub. <https://www.craft-oa.eu/ddh/>

<sup>5</sup> European Research Area. <https://european-research-area.ec.europa.eu/>

<sup>6</sup> European Diamond Capacity Hub. <https://diamas.org/>

<sup>7</sup> The six operational criteria are being used here to guide selection of Diamond OA journals for the DDH: <https://ddh.diamas.org/docs/diamond-open-access-journal-verification-guidelines/>

and rationale behind the six operational criteria. The authors of this paper were members of the task force that developed and discussed the six operational criteria for Diamond OA. The paper highlights opportunities for further application and opens the floor for discussion with the global Diamond OA community, which may help to further refine and update these criteria in response to local and regional contexts.

## 1.2 Background

When Open Access (OA) emerged in the early 2000s, the discussion focused on access to research articles and books. In Europe, questions about business models for making these research outputs available did not yet receive the same attention<sup>8</sup>. The primary route to OA largely focused on enabling access to articles published behind paywalls by making parallel versions (self-archiving); or preprints available on publicly funded infrastructures such as repositories. Authors were encouraged or required to self-archive their articles and provide free access to them. It did not take long for immediate OA publication to emerge as a strong competitor to self-archiving, especially as it clarified copyright and usage rights at submission and publication. The commercial publishing sector was successful in developing business models for primary OA services around journals, via Article Processing Charges (APCs) which required authors to seek funding for their publications (Butler et al. 2023). In recent years APC-based models have increasingly been complemented by transformative agreements (TAs).<sup>9</sup> TAs offer publishers risk-free periods that allow them to transition journals from toll access to OA. In addition, publishers are able to bundle journals into a small set of contracts, offering libraries and readers access to large amounts of content.

These models – where author face charges such as APCs and TAs – currently dominate stakeholder processes and financial flows for journals that are largely restricted to the English language and STEM disciplines. Nevertheless, a significant share of OA publishing continues to take place on publicly funded infrastructures that are based on institutional and community commitments rather than on APCs and TAs. This variant of OA is called Diamond Open Access (Diamond OA) (Farge 2012), a publication model that does not charge fees to either authors or readers, with all content-related elements are owned and managed by scholarly communities. The Diamond OA model is highly prevalent in the social sciences, arts and humanities (SSH), but it is also represented in science, technology and medicine in languages other than English or with specific regional and local aspects (Bosman et al. 2021, Becerril et al. 2021). As such, Diamond OA has the potential to provide an equitable infrastructure for scholarly publishing. Although some Diamond OA services enjoy continuous support and funding, many if not most existing Diamond OA publishing services continue to lack adequate funding, support, and shared infrastructure (Brun et al. 2024). Even though individual Diamond OA journals may have a venerable history, in aggregate Diamond OA has not been able to establish itself as a sustainable and recognised publishing alternative for researchers. Bosman et al.

<sup>8</sup> See for example the Budapest Open Access Initiative (2002). <https://www.budapestopenaccessinitiative.org/read/>, Bethesda Statement on Open Access Publishing (2003). <https://jlis.it/index.php/jlis/article/view/294> or The Berlin Declaration on Open Access to Knowledge in the Sciences and Humanities (2003). <https://openaccess.mpg.de/Berlin-Declaration> who all focus on the content aspect.

<sup>9</sup> cOAlition S. “What is a transformative agreement?” <https://www.coalition-s.org/faq/what-is-a-transformative-agreement/>.

(2021) have shown that the current landscape of Diamond OA is very fragmented and diverse. It involves a large number of small publishers and service providers that are quite heterogeneous in terms of organisation and revenue streams.

In recent years, a broad consensus has emerged that the Diamond OA model should be strengthened and made more sustainable. There is a growing recognition that Diamond OA can serve as an alternative to publishing models that are inherently inequitable, (Hopf et al. 2024, 17–19) and increasingly unaffordable and unsustainable for the research community. The UNESCO Recommendation on Open Science (2021), the G7 Science and Technology Ministers' Declaration (2023), the Council of the European Union Conclusions (2023), the Diamond Action Plan (Ancion et al. 2022), and the call for a German national Diamond OA service centre (2024) all call for a scholarly publishing ecosystem that is high-quality, transparent, open, trustworthy, and equitable.

## 1.2. Methodology

The DIAMAS and CRAFT-OA projects have focused on developing practical tools and services to address the fragmentation and lack of alignment among Diamond OA publishers and service providers. The Diamond OA Standard (DOAS) (2024) and Self-assessment tool<sup>10</sup> provide a technical guide and a practical benchmarking resource to align high-quality standards in scholarly publishing. The DDH functions as a comprehensive registry of Diamond OA journals in the European Research Area (ERA). Aggregators can reuse the registry to retrieve Diamond journals data compliant with their requirements. The DDH serves as a trusted observatory of journals produced by Diamond OA publishers and service providers (DPSP) for policymaking and further improvement of the Diamond OA publishing sector. Both, the DOAS and the DDH, are essential services maintained by the European Diamond Capacity Hub (EDCH).

Such services require an unambiguous and practical description of what it means to serve Diamond OA, as well as observable data points and criteria to assess whether a journal falls within the target group of specific services and can be labelled Diamond OA. Determining whether a journal is Diamond OA requires transparent and accountable criteria. While such criteria may seem disheartening for those unable to comply, they also represent clear targets for improvement and minimal standards of professionalisation and accountability, contributing to a resilient and healthy Diamond OA ecosystem.

With this purpose in mind, a Task Force comprising members from both the CRAFT-OA and DIAMAS projects developed six practical criteria that must be jointly fulfilled for a journal to be included in the DDH. An initial draft of the criteria was first presented at the OPERAS Conference 2024<sup>11</sup>. This draft was subsequently subject to a community consultation facilitated by DIAMAS and CRAFT-OA. The Task Force received various comments and feedback from the presentations and community consultations, which were considered and implemented in subsequent versions of the criteria. Many essential and constructive comments and feedback came from the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ)<sup>12</sup>. The collected feedback was discussed and implemented, and the final version was released in July 2024,

<sup>10</sup> Self-assessment tool. <https://diamas.fecyt.es/instructions>

<sup>11</sup> OPERAS 2024 Conference. <https://operas-eu.org/news-and-events/calendar-2/operas-conference-2024/>

<sup>12</sup> Directory of Open Access Journals. <https://doaj.org/>

as reported in Armengou et al. (2024). The final version was presented alongside a draft of onboarding guidelines for the DDH at the OA Tage 2024 in Cologne, Germany on the 11th of September 2024<sup>13</sup> and at several subsequent relevant events and conferences.

The DDH does not operate as an independent gatekeeper checking each journal for adherence to the six criteria. Instead, the DDH relies on Diamond OA publishers and service providers (DPSP) who are members of the DPSP Registry<sup>14</sup> of the EDCH and act as trusted partners vouching for the Diamond OA journals they serve. The DPSP in the Registry is provided with verification guidelines to help them make decisions on the Diamond OA status of their journals. The DDH occasionally checks a sample of Diamond OA journals to determine whether they comply with the six criteria, but by default, journal evaluation should be conducted independently of the DDH. DPSPs also provide the DDH with feedback about the criteria to further improve them in subsequent versions.

## 2. Operational criteria for Diamond OA journals

As mentioned previously, the Diamond OA status of a journal is determined by a set of six operational criteria that must all be jointly fulfilled. Journals meeting these criteria are labelled as Diamond OA journals and are intended to be listed in the DDH. Journals that do not meet all six criteria are not eligible to be listed as full Diamond OA in the DDH. The six criteria listed and explained below serve as a guideline to help DPSPs verify the criteria, and to address ambiguous cases, before submitting their Diamond OA journals to the DDH. Diamond OA journal titles may be submitted to the DDH by DPSPs registered in the EDCH Registry and endorsed by the DDH as Trusted Sources. To become a Trusted Sources, DPSPs must demonstrate that they have checked the six operational criteria for all journals they wish to submit to the DDH. Verification of these criteria can also largely be achieved via the DOAJ inclusion criteria. The current version of the guidelines continues to be improved and refined based on the experience of the DPSP after they perform verification.

### 1. Persistent identification

*The journal must have a valid and confirmed ISSN (<https://www.issn.org/>).*

**Practical recommendation for verifying persistent identification at the journal level:**

***This criterion must be checked at the journal level.***

***Why should DPSPs check this?***

Registration and confirmation of an ISSN is an essential element in defining a professional journal operation. Journals must be easily found and referenced unambiguously.

***How should DPSPs check this?***

Go to <https://portal.issn.org/> and enter the ISSN number in the search field, to check

<sup>13</sup> Open Access Days. <https://open-access-days.de/open-access-days-2024-cologne>

<sup>14</sup> The Registry. <https://registry.diamas.org/>

whether it exists and corresponds to the journals you are verifying. Note that local ISSN authorities, such as national libraries, confirm the registered ISSN as soon as it is linked to published content. Usually, different ISSNs exist for print and electronic versions. You should verify the ISSN for the Open Access version of the journal, i.e. the electronic eISSN.

***If a journal is already listed in DOAJ consider this criterion fulfilled.***

## 2. Scholarly journal

*The journal should be a scholarly publication that selects papers through an explicitly described evaluation process before and/or after publication, in accordance with accepted practices in the relevant discipline (see also DOAS section 4.2).*

**Practical recommendation for verifying the status of a scholarly journal**

***This criterion must be checked at the journal level.***

***Why should DPSPs check this?***

The publication model of Diamond OA must address to the scholarly and scientific content of its journals to achieve adequate visibility and recognition within the scholarly community in the broadest sense. The journals' scholarly scope, and the rigorous evaluation process for the published content, should therefore be explicitly described on the journal's website.

***How should DPSPs check this?***

DPSPs should state publicly at the journal level that all submitted manuscripts undergo a rigorous evaluation process before or after publication, in accordance accepted practices in the relevant discipline. This process may involve peer review or another form of evaluation by more than one individual with scholarly competence in the relevant discipline who has no conflict of interest with the author(s). Crucial aspects of the review or evaluation process must not be left to first-level publication support staff, such as editorial assistants or AI.

Check the DPSP's website as well as individual journals websites. Roles and responsibilities related to the review or evaluation process should be comprehensively described on both the DPSP and journal websites.

***If a journal is already listed in DOAJ consider this criterion to be fulfilled.***

## 3. Open Access with open licences

*All outputs of the journal should be open access and carry an open licence, which must be included in the article-level metadata.*

**Practical recommendations for verifying open access with open licences**

***This criterion must be checked at the journal and article level.***

***Why should DPSPs check this?***

In all forms of OA, transparency regarding accessibility and reuse rights is essential.

The same should apply to Diamond OA.

**How should DPSPs check this?**

Page access restrictions such as institutional log-in or website registration are not compatible with open access. Look for a clear statement on the journal's website confirming that its content is published as open access. General statements on a publisher's website about open access, or phrases like "gratis download" or "free to read", are insufficient, as are partial or embargoed open access. If an open access statement is missing or unclear, take extra care to check the open access licences at the article level for several issues, at least from the last two years.

All current content in the journal's issues must include explicit licence information indicating how the journal's content may be used. Ideally, the journal should use established open access licences such as Creative Commons. Different licences for different content types (for example CC-BY and CC-BY-NC within one journal) are acceptable, provided licencing scheme clearly states open access reuse rights for readers.

Be strict on this issue even if the journal appears to be moving in the right direction and shares the Diamond OA values. Publishers or journals can usually improve on issues related OA licences, even if this does not apply to their backlist (which DDH does not require) but it should certainly be implemented for their current content and frontlist.

***If a journal is already listed in DOAJ, consider this criterion fulfilled unless the DOAJ journal record has not been updated for several years and the licence situation appears unclear.***

## 4. No fees

*Publication in the journal is not contingent on the payment of any fees (e.g. article processing charges or membership dues). The journal should state this clearly on its webpage. Voluntary author contributions and donations are permitted, provided they are not a condition for publication.*

**Practical recommendations for verifying the absence of fees.**

***This criterion must be checked at the journal level or on the DPSP website.***

**Why should DPSPs check this?**

Operating Diamond OA journals usually involves an implicit or explicit institutional commitment to provide alternatives to commercial OA models based on APCs or TAs. In contrast, Diamond OA journals ensure equity for authors and readers, as well as diversity of languages and participants in scholarly discussion. The absence of fees for participation in scholarly debate sets Diamond OA journals apart and deserves recognition.

**How should DPSPs check this?**

Note that in some cases Diamond OA publishing options are available only if authors purchase a specific article template or become members of a learned society or scientific association. Such costs are considered 'hidden author-facing fees' and thus incompatible with Diamond OA. Similarly, submission fees that are refundable

upon acceptance conflict with the values of Diamond OA. By contrast, Diamond OA journals may accept donations or voluntary author contributions to fund their operations, provided authors do not feel obliged to donate or pay.

***If a journal is already listed in the DOAJ and its entry states that no APCs or 'Other charges' apply, consider this criterion fulfilled. If the DOAJ entry has not been updated for several years, check the journal's website for information on fees.***

## 5. Open to all authors

*Authorship in the journal should not be restricted by affiliation. Any author can submit an article that aligns with the aims and scope of the journal.*

**Practical recommendation for verifying whether the journal is open to all authors  
*This criterion must be checked at the journal level.***

***Why should DPSPs check this?***

One of the most essential values of scholarly discussion is that it should be open to contributions from all qualified individuals and respect the diversity and pluralism of authors and readers in terms of their linguistic, cultural, gender, academic, geographical, institutional, and economic backgrounds, as well as accessibility<sup>15</sup>. Therefore, Diamond OA journals should be open to all authors whose articles align with the journal's aims and scope.

***How should DPSPs check this?***

Look for a self-declaration on the journal's website. Also, check for information about membership in a scholarly society or affiliation with a specific research institution. Journals open to all authors should not restrict publication to members of a learned society or a specific institution.

***Being listed in DOAJ is already a strong indicator that the journal controls for problematic endogeneity of authors (vanity publishing). For DOAJ-listed journals, limit your analysis to checking affiliation requirements as a prerequisite for authorship.***

## 6. Community-owned

The journal must be owned by public or not-for-profit organisations (or their parts) whose mission includes performing or promoting research and scholarship. These include but are not limited to Research Performing Organisations (RPOs), Research Funding Organisations (RFOs), organisations connected to RPOs (such as university libraries, university presses, faculties, and departments), research institutes, and scholarly societies. The journal should explain its ownership status on its webpage.

**Practical recommendations for community-ownership**

***This criterion must be checked at the journal level or at the DPSP website.***

<sup>15</sup> See also: Diamond OA Standard (DOAS) Chapter 7 on Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging (EDIB), Gender, and Multilingualism. DOI: <https://zenodo.org/records/13820036>.

#### **Why should DPSPs check this?**

This criterion assesses whether a research community has sufficient control over the content-related elements, editorial processes, and accountability of a journal, and whether the journal supports a publishing system based on equity, diversity, and inclusion.

#### **How should DPSPs check this?**

Note that this aspect is challenging and it may sometimes be difficult to reach a definitive decision. For example, some not-for-profit scholarly societies may operate scholarly journals for the public good but be run as private companies with APCs. Many university presses or society publishers in some fields hold large market shares and maximise their profits wherever possible. In many cases, ownership of Diamond OA journals is unclear, and their editorial team and board may need to adopt a legal body that can own the journal title. In many cases, the status of the parent institution on which the journal depends indicates that the publishing endeavour is mission driven, not-for-profit or publicly owned. Consulting specific lists of DPSPs, including regional associations of university publishers, will also help you. Mission statements, preambles and self-declarations on a journal or publisher website may inform your decision on community ownership. If the masthead mentions a company or an association, check the company's or association's website to understand its nature. Checking the composition of the editorial board and the editors' affiliations on the journal website may also help. If it is still difficult to decide, look at the published content to assess whether the reason for publishing seems to be of genuinely scholarly – meaning the legal body for publishing was probably created to enable publishing – or rather seems to serve a commercial or political purpose. This allows you to verify whether the journal's publishing policy serves other goals of the legal body that owns it.

***Being listed in the DOAJ is already a strong indicator that the journal's information about its publishing entity or parent institution can be trusted. Nevertheless, checking this criterion requires particular care.***

### **3. Conclusion: the beginning of a discussion on criteria for Diamond OA journals**

The specific type of OA these criteria includes – equitable, diverse, and inclusive models, granting sovereignty over content-related elements and infrastructures, publishing policies and financing models. This approach appears in several nuanced forms with different names. The term Diamond OA distinguishes it from the corporately dominated sector of commercial OA, which is based on author-facing charges or unit-based library agreements. Scholarly communities need to keep their discussions of terms and definitions open and flexible. At the same time, they must be firm and pragmatic in distinguishing Diamond OA from other OA publishing models. For Diamond OA to fulfil its promise as a more open, inclusive, and participatory model of OA, it must be based on distinctive features and outlines defined by the scholarly community. We believe this paper initiates a conversation around a set of criteria that set Diamond OA journals apart in the interest of the public good and an inclusive perspective on scholarship.

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## Sažetak

### **Kriteriji za uključivanje časopisa u dijamantnom otvorenom pristupu u Diamond Discovery Hub**

**Cilj.** Ovaj rad donosi operativne kriterije razvijene za procjenu statusa dijamantnog otvorenog pristupa (Diamond OA) znanstvenih časopisa za uključivanje u Diamond Discovery Hub (DDH). Pruža pragmatičan okvir za identificiranje časopisa koji ne naplaćuju naknade autorima ni čitateljima, čime se podržava uključivanje tih časopisa u European Diamond Capacity Hub (EDCH).

**Pristup.** Kriterije je razvila suradnička radna skupina sastavljena od članova projekata DIAMAS i CRAFT-OA financiranih od strane EU. Metodologija je uključivala izradu početnih zahtjeva, provođenje konzultacija s zajednicom – uključujući povratne informacije iz Direktorija časopisa otvorenog pristupa (DOAJ) – i usavršavanje standarda u šest operativnih kriterija.

**Rezultati.** Radna skupina identificirala je šest operativnih kriterija za dijamantni otvoreni pristup: 1. trajna identifikacija, 2. status znanstvenog časopisa, 3. otvoreni pristup s otvorenim licencijama, 4. bez naknada, 5. otvoren za sve autore i 6. u vlasništvu zajednice.

**Praktična primjena.** Ispunjavanje ovih kriterija omogućuje izdavačima časopisa u dijamantnom otvorenom pristupu i pružateljima usluga (DPSP) da registriraju svoje časopisa kao časopise s dijamantnim otvorenim pristupom u DDH-u, čime se povećava vidljivost i prepoznatljivost njihovih časopisa unutar Europskog istraživačkog prostora (ERA).

**Originalnost/vrijednost.** Ovaj rad predstavlja šest operativnih kriterija za dijamantni otvoreni pristup, njihove smjernice za verifikaciju i ističe mogućnosti za daljnju primjenu i raspravu.

**KLJUČNE RIJEČI:** Diamond Discovery Hub, dijamantni otvoreni pristup, izdavaštvo kojim upravlja zajednica, znanstveno izdavaštvo