

Knowing what's missing, identifying how to overcome barriers: a workshop report¹

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Introduction

Diamond Open Access (OA) journals, which do not charge publication or access fees, offer a more equitable approach to scholarly publishing. However, they face significant challenges. The EU-funded DIAMAS² and CRAFT-OA³ projects aim to address these gaps and challenges, especially those around *community standards*, the application of *technical standards* and *long-term sustainability*. This workshop explored the current state of Diamond OA journals and discussed possible strategies to overcome the challenges identified across three areas.

¹ The paper was originally presented at the OPERAS conference that was held in Zadar in April 2024.

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

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

1. Gaps and challenges: community standards

The working session on community standards highlighted the problems emerging when the Diamond OA community tries to develop and establish community-wide standards. A key challenge identified is that communities must have the capacity to work on a standard in several areas: the definition of use cases, application profiles, and the actual content of the standard to be established. Additionally, the development, and, more particularly, the maintenance of a standard needs comprehensive workflows to organise the standard-setting processes. Considering this analysis, the working group discussed the Diamond Open Access Standard (DOAS) (2024) that has been developed in the DIAMAS project. The DOAS addresses the seven core aspects of scholarly publishing as outlined in the Action Plan for Diamond Open Access (Ancion et al. 2022): 1) Funding, 2) legal ownership, mission and governance, 3) Open Science, 4) editorial management, editorial quality and research integrity, 5) technical service efficiency, 6) visibility, communication, marketing, and impact, 7) equity, diversity, inclusion and belonging (EDIB), multilingualism, and gender equity.

The working group agreed that DOAS is a useful tool but pointed to the need to sustain such a standard by updates. National libraries, libraries and library associations are not only the target audience for standards such as DOAS but can also serve as key actors to sustain them and facilitate and align community engagement. The potential participation of OPERAS SIGs⁴ participation in this endeavour to align community engagement was also considered.

2. Technical gaps and challenges

The second working group of the workshop discussed technical gaps and challenges arising when establishing technical standards (Laakso et al. 2024; Varachkina et al., 2024). The workshop also explored whether flipping journals to the Diamond OA model could present difficulties in terms of evaluation and visibility.

Many existing technical standards provide a robust framework for Diamond OA publishing. However, the main challenge lies in encouraging the scholarly communities to adopt and apply them. Platforms like Open Journal Systems (OJS)⁵ can lead users through the publishing process while ensuring adherence to standards. Raising awareness and demonstrating the value of these standards are key strategies for ensuring widespread adoption. National libraries can serve as a link between the organisations developing technical tools and standards and the scholarly community whose needs they tend to. Another challenge connected to a general lack of awareness is the difficulty of securing financial sustainability. A fundamental economic transformation of the scholarly publishing system is necessary to address the financial challenges associated with developing open-source and open-data solutions.

⁴ OPERAS Special Interest Groups (SIG). <https://operas-eu.org/special-interest-groups/>

⁵ Open Journal System (OJS). <https://pkp.sfu.ca/software/ojs/>

3. Sustainability gaps and challenges

Sustainability is a major concern for Diamond OA journals. The third working group of the workshop explored gaps and challenges around sustainability. Discussing the most pressing problem in terms of the sustainability of Diamond OA journals, the matter of financial sustainability, the working group tried to identify possible solutions.

The most significant challenge is to acquire the necessary funding because of the perceived lack of prestige of Diamond OA journals. Combining efforts to enhance the prestige of Diamond OA journals is a possible solution. Prestige, often linked to recognised and well-established standards, can attract both researchers and readers, helping journals gain credibility and visibility. The issue gains complexity as the current culture of research assessment puts Diamond OA journals at a disadvantage due to mechanisms such as journal impact factors that also reward the quantitative output of journals.

The first suggested, potential solution is that Diamond OA journals adhere to a standard such as DOAS, that reflects the scientific quality and integrity of a Diamond OA journal. The second conclusion the group came to is that a specific communication and advocacy toolkit dedicated to communicating the value of Diamond OA to different stakeholders, including policymakers, funders, and researchers is crucial to clear up misperceptions about Diamond OA.

4. Conclusion

The workshop approached the gaps and challenges regarding Diamond OA journals from three angles: 1) community standards, 2) technical standards, and 3) sustainability. While the technical infrastructure needed for Diamond OA largely exists, the lack of awareness for it is still an issue to tackle. Efforts should be put into raising awareness and ensuring community-wide adoption of a community-wide standard for Diamond OA journals. (Financial) sustainability remains a key challenge for Diamond OA journals. Through projects like DIAMAS and CRAFT-OA much-needed infrastructure, tools, standards (e.g. DOAS), and advocacy frameworks for the Diamond OA community are being developed that help overcome the identified challenges and gaps.

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