

Open Access: good intentions and harsh realities

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OA, huh, good god

What is it good for?

[with apologies to Edwin Starr & Motown Record]

In comparison with other STM research fields, chemistry has been somewhat wary about the Open Access movement (in some cases even downright hostile to it). OA was sometimes perceived as a utopian fad filled with good intentions but out of touch with the Real World. Some other chemists were simply unaware of its existence.

As long as publishing in OA remained a personal commitment to the underlying principles, or a recommendation based on vague statements of intent by universities or funding agencies, chemists were free to ignore it, perhaps use a few more or less pragmatic arguments to brush it aside, and stick with their time-tested traditions. As a result, they are sometimes unprepared to deal with the harsh realities of an evolving institutional landscape: OA (and more generally Open Science) is becoming a binding policy for many countries, including Switzerland. We will discuss a few competing, sometimes conflicting, requirements and interests that authors need to consider, and explore some possible alternatives to the aforementioned traditions.