

# Open Access Transformation for Books: The Role of Institutional Presses and Publishing Services

## Why a position paper on open access books?

Open Access as a guiding principle of scientific communication<sup>1</sup> has to be implementable for all disciplines and media types in order to thrive to full benefit for science<sup>2</sup> and society. In the journal sector, there are now robust business and publication models, which are primarily contested by the commercial sector. Corresponding models in the book sector, on the other hand, are only just beginning to establish themselves. Linked to this is the development of comprehensive funding strategies, recognised criteria and established processes for a broad anchoring of the open access transformation for books.

This results in scope for institutional publication offerings that tie in with already existing non-commercial infrastructures:

1. The public sector should retain leeway in the dissemination of research results in the form of books by further professionalising its own infrastructures. This creates an alternative to the realisation of open access books via commercial production and dissemination channels that rely on being financed through publication funds, fed by public resources.
2. Accordingly, the public sector must play a complementary role that shapes and impacts the publication landscape to allow research performing institutions and their members sufficient influence on publication infrastructures and their programme selection. Such an influence enables a variety (bibliodiversity) of published content and its respective publication channels that is beneficial to science and counteracts the distortions due to problematic research assessment.

In this position paper, we outline how science-governed presses and institutional publication services, together with repositories and preprint servers, provide holistic publication options that meet the requirements of professional publishing and are consistently developed further along the needs of science. In addition to a science-oriented programme selection and the science-friendly copyright situation, this also includes openness to new communication formats. These new and more science-friendly publication channels will achieve broader acceptance if they finally find their way into common practices of research assessment.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. the Open Access Strategy of the German Ministry for Education and Research (BMBF), <https://www.bildung-forschung.digital/digitalezukunft/de/wissen/open-access/open-access-initiativen/open-access-initiativen>. Accessed 15 March 2022.

<sup>2</sup> We consider science as the entire range of research activities, from life sciences, empirically based research to Humanities and Social Sciences as well as other disciplines.

## Research institutions as infrastructure providers for open access books

Over the past 20 years, many research institutions with their libraries have developed and established institutional and, in many cases, Diamond Open Access publication services as a complementary offer to conventional publication channels. These up-to-date services include various repository types as well as publication platforms to publish research reports, books, innovative book formats, digital editions as well as journals. These services have been geared to the needs of researchers and are accordingly an integral part of the research cycle. In the area of open access books, the electronic publication of dissertations via institutional repositories, often including the underlying research data, has become a standard part of the basic services offered at research institutions. Expanded publishing services, such as those offered by university presses, are already closing the gap to commercial publishing services at some locations and paving the way for a scholar-led infrastructure for open access books. Internationally networked repositories in combination with complementary publishing services for disciplinary communities on campus are important building blocks of a transparent, sustainable and non-profit institutional infrastructure. In this perspective, the open access transformation for books isn't reduced to the monetarily profitable business model of external providers, over which the scientific community can exert only limited influence. Rather, the institutional infrastructure providers are thus implementing one of their core tasks to reliably support their researchers: They operate self-governing and sustainably designed publication services, oriented towards the needs of science (governance from within).

## Publishing open access books in self-governed infrastructures serves high quality demands

Institutional publishing has to safeguard Open Access according to established standards. This is the only way to achieve the greatest possible benefit for science and society. As early as 2018, the "AG Universitätsverlage"<sup>3</sup> issued its quality standards<sup>4</sup> for open access monographs and anthologies, which are now regarded as guiding principles<sup>5</sup>. Both the publicly funded member publishers of the AG Universitätsverlage and commercial book publishers that enable Open Access publications with public funding adopt these quality criteria. The quality criteria correspond to a joint commitment to maintain high standards that go beyond content quality assurance. Central points here are accessibility (also in the sense accessibility for the visually

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<sup>3</sup> Transl. working group of German-speaking university presses, see web presence <https://www.ag-univerlage.de>. Accessed 25 March 2022.

<sup>4</sup> Arbeitsgemeinschaft Universitätsverlage (2018). Qualitätsstandards für Open-Access-Monografien und -Sammelbände. DOI [10.5281/zenodo.3562239](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3562239). Transl. Arbeitsgemeinschaft Universitätsverlage (2021). Quality Standards for Open Access Books. DOI [10.5281/zenodo.4622135](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4622135).

<sup>5</sup> See e.g. the mandatory nature of the standards for funding by the DFG, the self-governing organisation for science and research in Germany: "Compliance with the quality standards for open access monographs defined by the university publishers working group (AG Universitätsverlage) is mandatory." DFG form 12.21 – 01/22: Guidelines and Supplementary Instructions: Open Access Publication Funding, p. 12, [https://www.dfg.de/formulare/12\\_21/12\\_21\\_en.pdf](https://www.dfg.de/formulare/12_21/12_21_en.pdf). Accessed 15 March 2022.

impaired), discoverability and clarification of rights (e.g. CC BY 4.0) for the complete work and for other third-party works. The storage of research data for publication and the need for long-term archiving are also addressed. These quality criteria are currently being updated and will soon be published.

The quality criteria described correspond with the membership criteria<sup>6</sup> of the AG Universitätsverlage from 2020, which additionally address the orientation and business model of the publication services: The members of the AG Universitätsverlage thus once again emphasise their commitment to Open Access and Open Science. Instead of profit maximisation, the focus is on partnership-based cooperation with academic authors and editors as well as collegial cooperation among each other.

## A strong commitment from research institutions for open access books is needed

The five authors from the “AG Universitätsverlage” state that research institutions have an explicit responsibility for a sustainable and affordable open access transformation of books. Overall, they should adopt a more active role for institutional publishing and publication services:

1. We recommend that research institutions establish and sustain publication services in the sense of Open Access and Open Science and embed them in cross-departmental strategies to expand the transformation of scientific publishing as such.
2. We recommend that scientific institutions network and collaborate with each other in development and operation of publication infrastructures and actively exchange knowledge in order to jointly align the publication system with community needs.
3. We recommend to establish possible cooperations between that academic institutions and commercial service providers such as publishers, service providers and software companies always on equal footing and to implement appropriate exit strategies enabling uninterrupted operation of the institutional publication service in the event of provider change.
4. We recommend that research institutions take an active role in their higher-level bodies and at the science policy level to establish publication infrastructures that are self-governed by science to serve as high-quality alternatives to commercial publication channels and to shape the incentive and evaluation systems of science accordingly.

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<sup>6</sup> Ursula Arning, Margo Bargheer, Isabella Meinecke, Dagmar Schobert, Regine Tobias (2020). Mitgliedschaftskriterien der Arbeitsgemeinschaft der deutschsprachigen Universitätsverlage. DOI [10.5281/zenodo.3954902](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3954902).

## Who we are

We, the five authors, all serve as managers of complex publication infrastructures at our institutions and are long-standing members of the working group of German-speaking university presses (AG Universitätsverlage). Our working group unites institutional presses and publication services of research institutions and universities in German-speaking countries in Europe since 2002. All presses admit to Open Access as being fundamental for the future-oriented Open Science and actively promote it. The AG Universitätsverlage serves as an organisational framework for the cooperative collaboration of its members, characterised by the growing demand for professionalisation in times of digitisation. The close cooperation enables both the members and institutions outside of the working group to participate in knowledge transfer on publishing processes, technical aspects of publication infrastructures, and to identify current trends in publishing. This also includes contributions to formulate industry standards. Beyond these internal activities, the AG Universitätsverlage acts as an important authority in the Open Access publishing environment: its ambitious membership criteria and practical quality standards for Open Access books are regularly taken into account in funding policy discussions and strategy processes.

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Ursula Arning, Margo Bargheer, Isabella Meinecke, Dagmar Schobert, Regine Tobias  
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