

Enhancing the Debate on Open Access

A joint statement by the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions
and the International Publishers Association

The debate about open access in scholarly communication is an important opportunity for the international library and publishing communities to explore how technology and new business models can resolve the challenge of growing scholarly publishing output which puts pressure on publisher prices and library resources. IFLA and IPA welcome the widespread attention this extremely important issue has received. The debate has, however, occasionally been harmed by unnecessary polarisations and sweeping generalised statements.

IFLA and IPA believe that the time is right for the debate to develop, as hypotheses and speculation can gradually be enhanced by case-by-case experience and empirical data. The debate should be conducted in an open-minded way, encouraging experimentation and arguments based on empirical facts and following the principles of a academic discourse.

IFLA and IPA share a common set of basic understandings and believe that the observance of the shared ground as set out below would enhance the overall debate.

1. IFLA and IPA value the contribution to scholarly communication that publishers and libraries have made and believe that mutual respect is important to enhance the quality of the public discourse on open access.
2. IFLA and IPA recognise that the concerns of academic authors must be at the heart of this debate - their scientific freedom, and their needs as researchers, teachers, authors, reviewers and users are paramount.
3. IFLA and IPA acknowledge that the broadest possible access to scholarly communications is an important shared objective and that potential access to all research by all researchers, irrespective of geographical location or institutional affiliation is a shared aspiration of libraries and publishers.
4. All assumptions surrounding open access and scholarly communications should be open to scientific scrutiny and academic debate. All stakeholders are encouraged to innovate, experiment and explore the new opportunities that technology brings.
5. IFLA and IPA recognise that access must be sustainable, i.e. that economic long-term viability and long-term archiving are important elements of this debate.
6. IFLA and IPA agree that the debate is most effective if it recognises the potential diversity of scholarly communication in different academic disciplines and different types of publications, e.g. research journals, review journals, monographs, text books, etc. IFLA and IPA support a debate that avoids general conclusions for all scholarly communication but gives a closer, differentiated focus on the potentially very different framework in various academic disciplines and types of publications.
7. Equally, scholarly publishers and their specific roles and functions can vary greatly. Scholarly publishing includes publishers with a variety of commercial and non-commercial affiliations and interests, outside and within the research community.
8. IFLA and IPA believe publishers, librarians, government and funding agencies should at this stage support innovation, experimentation and pilot schemes on access to scholarly publications. Pilot schemes should be accompanied by rigorous research and analysis that enables evaluation against measurable targets, that reflect the chief concerns of academic authors (as set out in Point 2), as the basis for an enriched, fact-oriented debate. As part of investigating the feasibility of open access, studies should also explore such matters as impact, transparency and economic models. Data should be shared openly among stakeholders or disclosed to allow open scrutiny. The results from these studies should provide better insight into the processes surrounding open access.