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OPEN SCHOLARSHIP POLICY OBSERVATORY



Review of Canada's Tri-Agency Open Access Policy on Publications (2015)

by Britt Amell | 14 June 2024 | English, Observations, Observations and Responses



French version forthcoming

This observation was written by Caroline Winter and revised by Brittany Amell. With thanks to Elizabeth Kalbfleisch, Jessica Clark and Suzanne Beth for their feedback and contributions.

At a glance:

Title	Review of Canada's Tri-Agency Open Access Policy on Publications (2015)
Creator	Tri-Agency (CIHR, NSERC, SSHRC)
Publication Date	July 4 2023
Keywords	open access, Tri-Agency, Canada, scholarly communication

On July 4, 2023, [the presidents of Canada's three national research funding agencies](#)—the [Canadian](#)

Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC), and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) announced their plan to review the [Tri-Agency Open Access Policy on Publications](#) (2015). A revised version of the policy is anticipated to be released in 2025.

“The policy was ahead of its time in 2015, but now it’s a bit dated. They need to start thinking about a new policy that is more in line with some of the international policies that have come out in the past few years,” says Michael Donaldson, director of strategic initiatives at Canadian Science Publishing (as quoted in [Owens 2023](#)). The 2015 version of the Tri-Agency Open Access Policy allows an embargo of up to 12 months.

The announcement emphasized the agencies’ commitment “to increasing the dissemination of research results and accelerating knowledge mobilization by ensuring peer-reviewed articles resulting from agency-funded research are freely and immediately available.” It contextualizes the policy review alongside several recent policy developments. One of these is [Canada’s Roadmap for Open Science](#), released by Canada’s Chief Science Advisor in February 2020, which called for federal sciences publications to be OA by January 2023, with the aim of achieving “Open Access by default without an embargo period” (Government of Canada 2020).

Another is the [G7 Science and Technology Ministers’ Communique](#) from May 2023, which touches on various issues ranging from the Russian invasion of Ukraine, to outer space research. Throughout, the Communique emphasizes the importance of openness alongside sustainability and security: “We believe that openness is fundamental, security is essential, and freedom and integrity are crucial” (G7 Science and Technology Ministers 2023, 3; see “[Research Security and Open Scholarship](#)”).

Additionally, in 2021 the Fonds de recherche du Québec (FRQ) announced that by joining forces with other funding agencies as well as cOAlition S they will make access to their scientific papers immediately available (see [The Fonds de Recherche du Québec Join cOAlition S](#)).

The announcement also draws on UNESCO’s OA policy, citing its [definition of immediate OA](#) and noting the best practices outlined in the [UNESCO Recommendation on Open Science](#) (see “[Open Science and the UNESCO Initiative](#)” and “[UNESCO’s Recommendation on Open Science](#)”).

The first step in the review was an online survey that closed in September 2023 (results available [here](#)). Next steps include consultation sessions with stakeholder groups on the key themes that emerged from the survey.

The Tri-Agency OA Policy Review in the Press

Although the policy review has not been covered widely in the press, a piece by [Brian Owens](#) published in *University Affairs* in April 2023 anticipates the Tri-Agency’s move towards immediate OA.

Owens notes that, although Canada’s 2015 OA policy demonstrated leadership in this area, national policy has failed to keep pace with international developments, referring to the [Nelson Memo](#) released by the US Office of Science and Technology Policy in August 2022 and the European Plan S released in 2018, both of which call for immediate OA (see “[The Nelson Memo: Ensuring Free, Immediate, and Equitable Access to Federally Funded Research in the US](#)” and the [series of Observations about Plan S](#)).

Owens attributes the need for a policy update in part to the COVID-19 pandemic, quoting Stefanie Haustein as saying that, due to the pandemic, “The idea that science should slow down so that companies can make a profit has now shifted in people’s heads” (Owens 2023).

Similarly, in an [open letter recently published online in a Canadian legal magazine](#), founder of the Public

Knowledge Project and Royal Society of Canada member John Willinsky (2024) notes how “it’s a different story for open access” today, “following the pandemic and in the face of devastating climate change.”

“Amid fake news and talk of post-truth, open access is currently held by publishers, researchers, and universities alike to be the future of scholarly publishing. This consensus around open access’ value is taking a variety of publishing forms, from shifting publishing costs to authors from subscriptions to asking libraries to support open access journals,” says Willinsky (2024).

Reflecting further, Willinsky (2024) writes: “The question today is not about embargo lengths nor about who funded this or that study. It is about how to ensure that all of the science is open at a fair price. It is about how to bring about open access in a timely way, without the big publishers’ open-access profiteering. . . . The question today, then, is far more about finding financially sustainable ways of making open access the operating principle for research because it is a better way to do science.”

Responses from the Broader Community

The announcement of the review was republished widely by universities across the country, but since the policy review is ongoing, responses from the INKE and broader communities will likely develop over time.

[Queen’s University Library](#) has released a statement expressing concern that the policy review will further entrench publishing business models founded on article processing charges (APCs), which aggravate existing inequities in the global research system and are financially unsustainable (Queen’s University Library 2023).

[Coalition Publica \(2023\)](#) released a statement expressing their ‘enthusiastic support’ for the review, “particularly in light of a changing global landscape for open access publishing,” noting further the need to develop a national strategy that both addresses “the differing realities of academic communities” and allows “Canadian journals to ensure that research is available in open access at the time of publication.”

“The details of the new immediate open access policy will be important and should be established in consultation with the many stakeholders in this space, including digital scholarly publishing infrastructure providers and Canadian scholarly journals,” says Jessica Clark, Senior Coordinator (Open Access Development) at Érudit. “Specifically, the new policy needs to be adapted to the broad spectrum of research disciplines in Canada and provide equitable and sustainable pathways to immediate open access, including Diamond Open Access, the prevalent model among Canada’s humanities and social sciences journals, where no fees are charged to either readers or authors.” Note: Scroll down to read Jessica Clark’s comment in full.

Elizabeth Kalbfleisch, Project Officer at the Canadian Association of Research Libraries (CARL), adds “The [results of the community survey issued by the Tri-Agencies](#), released in December, confirm widespread support from the library community for open access, more than any other profession represented. Accordingly, 93% of librarian respondents indicated support for Open Access, with Diamond OA as the preferred model. This confirms what we are hearing from our members, though open access is just one part of the shift to open scholarship to which we are committed.”

Kalbfleisch points out that, in order to be truly viable, “policy changes need to be accompanied by a cultural shift and a rethink of the research assessment process [which] has only just begun.” Note: Scroll down to read Elizabeth Kalbfleisch’s comment in full.

Around this time last year, CARL released an action plan in partnership with the Canadian Research Knowledge Network (CKRN) to develop a joint roadmap to open scholarship. The roadmap, entitled ‘Towards Open Scholarship: A Canadian Research and Academic Library Action Plan to 2025,’ can be accessed [here](#).

The Tri-Agency OA Policy Review and Secondary Publishing Rights

The move to immediate OA suggested by the Tri-Agency announcement of the review would align Canadian OA policy with other national and international policies. As some members of the research community have argued, it also offers an opportunity to examine and potentially revise the *Copyright Act* to improve access to publicly funded research through secondary publishing rights.

Secondary publishing rights, which allow publicly funded research to be republished in OA repositories or in other venues, are one route to open access, often understood as green OA. Although some publishers allow this kind of republication, they often call for embargoes, stipulate that only author-accepted (post-peer review but pre-copyedit) manuscripts may be republished, or impose other restrictions.

In a [position paper](#) from July 2023, the Canadian Federation of Library Associations (CFLA) calls for the Canadian government “to introduce an amendment to the Copyright Act recognizing the academic authors’ Secondary Publishing Rights in support of immediate access to publicly funded research published in research periodicals.” It notes that [similar legislative changes](#) are underway in Europe, driven in part by the Association of European Research Libraries (Liber).

In a piece for *The Conversation*, [Brienne Selman and Mark Swartz](#) (2023) similarly argue that the Canadian Copyright Act should be revised to allow secondary publication even when not allowed by publishers, pointing out that, “if Canada were to adopt a similar law in conjunction with revising the Tri-Agency policy, we could become a worldwide leader in open access scholarly publications.”

Whether Canadian policymakers will answer these calls to advance open scholarship through open access will be determined as the review process unfolds.

Further Comments

Jessica Clark, Senior Coordinator, Open Access Development, Érudit

“The Tri-Agency announcement is positive news for the Canadian research and scholarly communications ecosystem, especially given that the agencies have been specific that the revised policy will support immediate open access,” says Jessica Clark, Senior Coordinator, Open Access Development, of the Canadian research dissemination platform Érudit ([erudit.org](#)). “This will make Canada’s federally funded research outputs widely available and bring Canadian federal policy in line with what is already happening in Québec, following the Fonds de recherche du Québec’s adoption of Plan S, as well as align with more advanced open access policies around the world. The details of the new immediate open access policy will be important and should be established in consultation with the many stakeholders in this space, including digital scholarly publishing infrastructure providers and Canadian scholarly journals. Specifically, the new policy needs to be adapted to the broad spectrum of research disciplines in Canada and provide equitable and sustainable pathways to immediate open access, including Diamond Open Access, the prevalent model among Canada’s humanities and social sciences journals, where no fees are charged to either readers or authors. Érudit’s scholarly publishing community is ready and willing to collaborate with the Tri-Agency in the policy consultation process.”

Elizabeth Kalbfleisch, Project Officer, Canadian Association of Research Libraries

Last summer’s announcement of a review of the Tri-Agency Open Access Policy on Publications was received with interest from the research library community that we represent, 29 of which are university-

based and two of which are federal institutions. From a policy standpoint, Canada has some catching up to do to keep up with the state of play internationally; even domestically, the tri-agencies lag in relation to commitments to open made in Quebec by the FRQ. Doing away with the 1-year embargo the policy currently allows in favour of immediate open access raises Canada to the terms of the OSTP Memo in the United States, Plan S across the globe, and UNESCO's own open access policy in place since 2013.

The [results of a community survey issued by the Tri-Agencies](#), released in December, confirm widespread support from the library community for open access, more than any other profession represented. Accordingly, 93% of librarian respondents indicated support for Open Access, with Diamond OA as the preferred model. This confirms what we are hearing from our members, though open access is just one part of the shift to open scholarship to which we are committed.

Last year, CARL partnered with CRKN to develop our own joint roadmap to open, "[Towards Open Scholarship: A Canadian Research and Academic Library Action Plan to 2025](#)". We are making strides in multiple areas identified in the action plan, not least among them: piloting a Canadian shared institutional repositories DSpace platform in partnership with OCUL and University of Toronto's Scholars Portal; supporting a new community engagement team in library publishing; hosting and supporting two persistent identifier consortia; continuing support for open access journals through Coalition Publica; via read & publish agreements, repurposing libraries' subscription investments towards waiving Canadian authors' Article Processing Charges (APCs) resulting in thousands of open access articles each year; and mobilizing a task group to develop best practices for enhancing global visibility of Canadian content. Our multi-pronged approach extends beyond policy to address the technical, the administrative and the cultural aspects attendant to open scholarship.

The Tri-Agency Policy change will mark a significant step forward for open access, but a suite of other advances is necessary to ensure Canadian researchers and their institutions have the capacity and readiness to comply; new commitments must be implementable and sustainable to affect real change. This requires good faith from all corners of the Canadian research ecosystem – the funders, publishers, research administrators, libraries, and researchers – but it also requires shared responsibility and shared investment. Furthermore, for true viability, policy changes need to be accompanied by a cultural shift and a rethink of the research assessment process that has only just begun.

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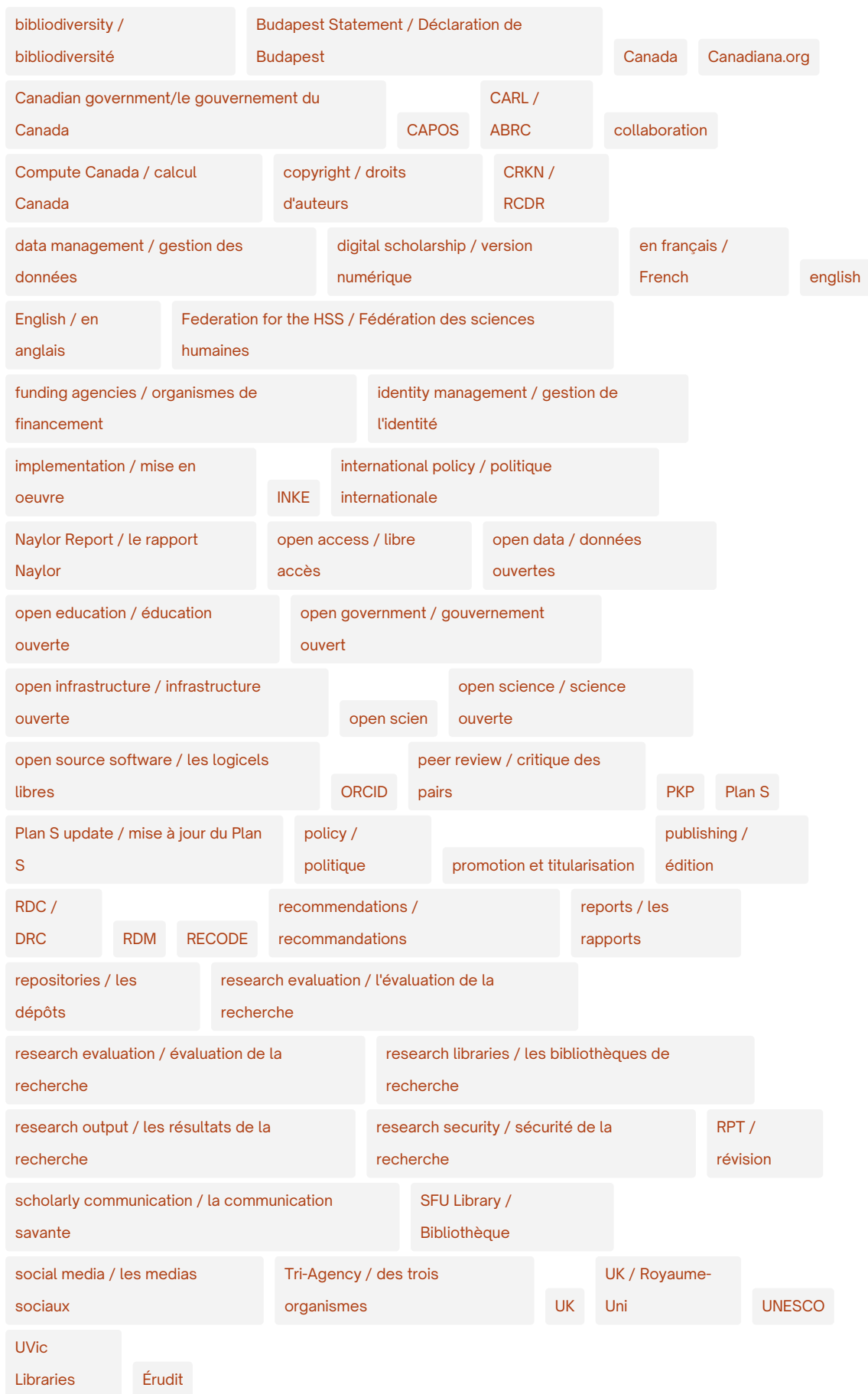
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