Communiqués de presse

Neelie Kroes Vice-President of the European Commission responsible for the Digital Agenda Making Open Access a reality for Science Publishing and the Ecology of European Research (PEER) Project Conference Brussels, 29 May 2012

SPEECH/12/392

Neelie Kroes

Vice-President of the European Commission responsible for the Digital Agenda

Making Open Access a reality for Science

Check Against Delivery
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort

Publishing and the Ecology of European Research (PEER) Project Conference

Brussels, 29 May 2012

Ladies and gentlemen

First, a big thank you to the STM Association and the PEER project for inviting me today.

These days, we live in a knowledge-based society. And knowledge prospers when it is shared. Sharing benefits scientists, it benefits science, and it benefits our economy.So today, I want to talk to you about how your work is helping make a reality of open access to scientific information. And how I want to support that, too.

For me, science is all about challenging accepted wisdom, testing out multiple new scenarios to get a sound evidence base, and collaborating with others to do so. Whether it's scientists from different disciplines working together in a team, or peer reviewers objectively adding value to others' work: working together is key.

With the PEER project, you've shown that such practices don't have to just be done by scientists – they can also be done FOR science.

Because you have looked at and tested different aspects of open access. And you have worked together to do so: publishers, researchers, libraries and universities all getting together. Challenging, testing, and pulling down barriers – all in the cause of better, faster scientific practice.

These days, more than ever, efficient access to scientific information is a must, for all kinds of research and innovation. In particular, researchers, engineers, and small businesses need to access scientific results quickly and easily.

If they can't, it's bad for business: for small businesses, for example, it can mean two years' extra delay before getting new products to market. So if we want to complete globally, that kind of access cannot be a luxury for Europe — it's a must-have.

That means we need more timely access to scientific articles in Europe. We need Open Access to scientific information.

And indeed that is exactly what, last December, the Commission set out in its comprehensive Open Data Strategy. Reinforcing earlier statements in the EU's flagship policies, the Digital Agenda and the Innovation Union.

Of course, that transformation also needs to take place in the real world, based on real economics.

Publishing 1.5 million articles per year doesn't happen for free. Nor does organising peer review, a process which remains - and needs to remain - the hallmark of quality science. As everywhere, service providers in this space, whether private or public, can only keep on providing services if their business models are sustainable. We can expect investments only where returns are likely: that is normal.

But that doesn't mean doing things as they've always been done. Where the Internet enables us to do things better, we should take advantage.

Many scientific publishers have already endorsed Open Access. Most now offer some sort of open access option; while some are working closely with funders, universities and governments to make it easier.

Meanwhile, Open Access is growing: today representing well over 7 500 Journals, and 20% of scientific articles. But that is slow growth. It is not enough. We can't accept that, by and large, the results of publicly supported research are not yet available to the public.

Why are we still at 20% instead of 100%? Because even though scientists accept the principle of free online access, there are barriers to putting it into practice.

Still today many public funding bodies and research institutes do not do enough to ensure open access to their results.

Still today, some publishers continue to impose restrictive conditions on researchers.

Still today, only 60% of publishers allow for self-archiving.

And still, today, only a fraction of researchers put their research papers in an open repository — unless asked by their funders or employers to do so. And I fear that this won't change much if we don't act – despite increased activity and advocacy in the scientific community, despite the 'academic spring'.

So I am happy to see the PEER project conclude. For, I'm convinced, its results will be an important ingredient in tackling all of these challenges.

But we should not limit ourselves to journal articles and the like. Open access to research data, too, would open a new field of opportunity. Meaning you can re-analyse experiments; boost the impact of research; and provide a precious fuel for new collaborations and new knowledge-based industries. Those open data benefits, direct and indirect, can't be ignored.

Open scientific data of course raises a whole other set of challenges.

Not just because of costs and technical complexity. But also because of the diversity of formats and types for data, and the diversity of people and communities who generate it.

Interoperability is the key. It's the key to global, multi-disciplinary science, supported by reliable and high-performance data infrastructure. We need datasets and software to work with each other, right from the moment they're created.

And we'll need to work globally on how to encourage data producers to do that. Because, ultimately, without coordination, interoperability or shareable data, we'll just create unnecessary work for researchers, and higher costs for funders.

I want us in the Commission to support all these measures. We are doing that in three key ways.

First, when research is funded by the EU, we will require open access to the results. Whether by "green" or "gold" routes. And we're working to enlarge those measures to include scientific data as well.

Second, we will shortly present a Recommendation to Member States. A joint initiative of my colleague Máire Geoghegan-Quinn and myself, this will spell out what is needed to improve access, management and preservation of scientific publications and data.

And third, we are currently negotiating the next research and innovation framework programme, Horizon 2020. Our proposed €80 billion would be a wake-up call for European innovation, making it easier to seek funding — and easier to invest in our future.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In every sector of our economy, every corner of our society, the Internet is bringing huge changes, and huge benefits for end users.

In so many sectors, we are seeing costs cut, value chains disrupted, and business models totally rethought.

In spite of the importance of science – indeed because of it — this sector should be no different.

One by one, different sectors are waking up to these possibilities, waking up to the potential for innovation, openness and flexibility.

Let's show them that this sector, too, can respond positively.

Let's not ask others to do our job: but let's show them that we can take this seriously – find the right policy response - and deploy it on the ground.

With that in mind, I wish you a most successful conference.