

EWI-focus on Open Access

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Speech by Jan Adriaenssens,

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Ladies and gentlemen,

Science is changing. To be more precise, the way the global scientific endeavour operates, is changing. It is not the first time this is happening, and it most likely will not be the last.

The goal of science has during the ages been fairly constant, in its quest for “knowledge” and “truth”, and for “applications” or “valorisation” as we now call it. One way or another every society has always benefitted from the scientific insights in technical and social issues. And the way the scientific world has pursued these goals has also been quite constant: by sharing

scientific results – or as they say it, by “standing on the shoulders of giants”.

This has also never been a purely altruistic effort – there has always been a very *human* side to science, and this includes a lot of competition between researchers. This is certainly not a recent phenomenon – as was demonstrated to us just a couple of days ago by Gerald Guralnik, Carl Richard Hagen and Tom Kibble. Who are they again? – *Exactly*.

Anyway, the most efficient ways of **disseminating scientific results** have been by talking and writing. *Talking* to colleagues at conferences and meetings, and *writing* articles and books. The scientific world, and society as a whole, benefit the most if these results have a **maximal potential impact**. Impact on new science, and impact on our daily lives. So we need science to be **open**. “Open” as a principle, yes, but also “open” as purely common sense and a very rational thing to do.

In most developed countries, governments have taken it to themselves to be the main funder of scientific basic research. They see it as their duty. And while the scientists should get the credit for their results (the occasional Nobel prize does lift the spirits), the main funder can and should stipulate some basic rules. One of these rules, is *openness*.

Before this audience, I'm preaching before the "open choir", so I will keep this brief. But let me clearly state **that minister Lieten holds to the principles of open data, open access and more in general open science**. She signed the *Brussels Declaration on Open Access* last year holding this clear vision.

This declaration focusses on informing researchers about open access, on stimulating them to make their publications freely accessible, and it looks at the costs of open access and how to deal with that. This declaration was a political statement last year, and a signal that the responsible governments in Belgium will do their part.

At the risk of repeating what has been said earlier here today – the **Flemish government already is quite active on the open science front** – I will list some recent actions or recommendations:

- At the FWO for example, our funding agency for basic research, all beneficiaries of mandates or projects, are *required* to submit their publications to open access. Not a request, but a requirement (art. 2 of their regulations), and no later than one year after publication. That's a firm commitment.
- Informing the scientific community is also important. This session today is also part of the outcome of the Brussels Declaration. For my part, I regret that I could not have been here for the entire day, because it definitely is a very interesting programme. I want to thank the department EWI for organising this Focus-session. The big turnout shows that open access is a subject on the minds of many people. As it should be. I look forward to the conclusions of this meeting, and the policy advice for the Flemish

Government. Let me formulate a reply to what has been said just now by the rapporteurs of the parallel workings sessions:

(1) Regarding “Money”: And then specifically the

question: *“Who pays for what, and why?”*

I’ve heard ‘sustainability’, I’ve heard ‘fees’, I’ve heard

“What do we get for the things we pay for?”

I want to stress again that **the main part of the research itself is funded by the government, and that therefore societal benefits should remain central in every model**. An exception should be just that: an exception.

And regarding open access fees that are, or should be, included in the grants: if a coherent proposal comes forward, I don’t see why FWO or IWT shouldn’t try to consider it – even after the project ended – as an eligible cost.

(2) Regarding “Repositories”: Linked open data: the importance of open data for open science cannot be

underestimated. It is for me an integral part of doing science, in a bigger scientific community, that is **interlinked, digital and open**. The minister is very clear on open data as a priority – also in science. Different projects have been funded, on which I will talk later on as well.

- Since 2011, minister Lieten installed yearly funding for the Flemish doctoral schools. One of the main activities, is providing joint courses and training. If it has not yet been taken up by the doctoral schools, I would suggest they dedicate some of their courses to open science, open access and open data.
- The government itself, the department and the agencies, also have a responsibility. Providing information on all publicly funded research, in an open and transparent way, is key. With the **Flanders Research Information Space, in short FRIS**, the links are being made between the research and the researchers, the output and the funding. This is linked to a broader vision on output monitoring on

which the Flemish Government will decide later this year. FRIS is a spearhead project that EWI pioneered. A new agreement between EWI and the universities, with a significant budget of more than 1 mio Euro will be decided in the coming weeks by the Flemish Government. The interface of FRIS towards the universities and the researchers could even evolve into an equivalent of the pre-filled tax-form, where you only have to correct or ammend the information the government already has. This should dramatically lower the administrative burden on the research communicty.

Indeed, ladies and gentlemen, science is changing, and the way the global scientific endeavour operates, is changing. We still stand on the shoulders of giants. We still work on a global scale. We still talk about scientific results, we still write about them. We still need the opinions of fellow scientists to evaluate, criticise and work with our own results. That hasn't changed.

What *has* changed, is that we have a rising number of researchers, globally. The number of PhD's every year is rising, especially the last ten years. So the *scale* on which we operate, is changing. But even more fundamentally, the *injection of the internet in our scientific community* over the last twenty years, impacted us enormously. Preprints and papers spread almost instantaneously over the globe, and the interconnectedness of science can only benefit of this evolution.

But, as the rising number of researchers and the growing impact of digitisation are changing our scientific world, we must be cautious. We must make the right calls now. We must adhere to the principles of openness, firmly.

Open access – open data – open science. These are not just buzzwords, but fundamental concepts that should remain or become an integral part of our scientific endeavour.

Thank you.