

Suggested changes in the A&A publication policies and the contributions of the Sponsoring Bodies

November 12, 2024

1. As we had already discussed at the Board's meeting in Vilnius, during the past year, the publication of the Journal became significantly more expensive. This was caused by:

- (a) a huge increase in the number of pages/papers published in A&A from October 2023 onwards;
- (b) gradual attrition of subscriptions to A&A.

The rise in the number of published pages was largely due to the decision of MNRAS to move to Gold Open Access (Gold OA) from January 1, 2024. Because this implied that the authors will have to pay the Article Processing Charges (APCs), a large number of authors from A&A-sponsoring countries migrated to A&A to continue publishing in Open Access (OA) free of charge in A&A. Because of this, MNRAS-related migration, we will have about 30% more papers/pages published in 2024 than we had in 2023 – all this on top of the usual increase of ~10% per year; thus, 40% more year on year. Therefore, we expect the A&A to grow in size by a factor of ~1.4 by the end of 2024 with respect to 2023. Because, under the agreement with EDPS, we have to pay for extra pages, this leads to a huge increase in publication costs.

Regarding the attrition of subscriptions, A&A moved to Open Access in 2021 under the Subscribe to Open model (S2O). The model presumes that the Journal's publication expenses are [partly] covered by subscriptions, with the libraries and other entities continuing to subscribe even if the contents are in OA and thus, readily accessible for everyone. Several major journals exploit the S2O OA model, for example, Annual Reviews.

The problem with the subscriptions is that they decrease every year. This decrease has been constant (~3% or ~14 subscriptions per year) during the past 10 years and, therefore, was not caused by our decision to move to OA. When moving to OA, we agreed with our publisher, EDPS, that we would switch back to the paywall if the number of subscriptions drops below 95% that we had in 2021. We already crossed this number, but the Board agreed in Vilnius to continue with S2O, nevertheless.

This said, subscriptions constitute the largest part of income for EDPS, and thus also for A&A, via the share-over from the publisher. While the loss of 14 per year subscriptions translates to a loss of ~50 kEUR/year, it is important to remember that this amount accumulates each year and thus, after several years, the losses become substantial. Until 2024, it was agreed that EDPS will not charge us for the lost subscriptions. However, this year, the total amount lost will reach ~160 kEUR, and we will have to compensate for that. After further negotiations with EDPS, it was agreed that these additional expenses will be split between EDPS and A&A, so we have to pay 80 kEUR. In 2025, the total amount lost is projected to reach ~240 kEUR, with our compensation to be capped at 120 kEUR.

2. At the same time, our net income will become negative this year, due to the following reasons:

- (a) Decreasing share-over from the publisher (due to the larger number of published pages that we have to pay for and to the compensation for the lost subscriptions)
- (b) Increased expenses for running the Editorial Office (EO) and Editor's office (extra personpower is needed to handle the 40% higher publication rates!)

As a consequence, we foresee that the A&A net outcome will be negative at the level of -430 kEUR in 2024, -370 kEUR in 2025, and -460 kEUR in 2026. While A&A has accumulated a reserve of

~1.24 MEUR by the end of 2023, it will be exhausted already in 2026 in case no measures are taken to drastically decrease the expenses and increase the income.

3. Given the above, during the meeting in Vilnius this June, the Board has decided to launch the A&A Strategy Initiative and tasked the EC/Editors to propose the first steps aimed at reducing the expenses and increasing the income of A&A. Already at the meeting in Vilnius, the Board has identified several potential measures worthwhile further investigation:

- (a) Introduction of page caps for papers published in A&A
- (b) Raise in the page charges for the authors from non-A&A sponsoring countries
- (c) Raise in the contributions of the A&A Sponsoring Bodies

The measures above were proposed based on the following considerations:

- (a) The page charge that is currently applied by A&A to authors from non-A&A sponsoring countries is 100 EUR/page, with a further 10% discount to authors whose institutions subscribe to A&A. This is significantly cheaper than the publication cost in other major astronomy journals, which is in the range of 200-250 EUR/page;
- (b) The tendency during the past decades is that scientific papers are becoming unnecessarily longer and longer. This not only makes the papers less focused and more difficult to read but also leads to higher publication costs. This has been discussed extensively at the Board meeting in Vilnius, and it has been deemed necessary to explore the possibility of introducing a page cap for the papers published in A&A;
- (c) As has been indicated above, due to a sudden Journal's growth during 2023-2024, the associated expenses have increased significantly while the income has decreased. While the EC, together with the Editors, focused their efforts on reducing expenses related to the publication of the Journal, the net outcome of A&A will remain negative in 2024 and beyond. The EC and the Editors, therefore, believe that the only remaining way to balance the budget is to increase the contributions of the Sponsoring Bodies.

Based on this, the EC therefore proposes to:

- (a) Increase the page charges as follows:
 - 150 EUR/page: for the authors from non-A&A sponsoring countries located in institutions that do not subscribe to A&A
 - 100 EUR/page: for the authors from non-A&A sponsoring countries located in institutions that do subscribe to A&A
- (b) Introduce a page charge for papers longer than 12 main body pages plus 8 appendices pages, with every page beyond this limit to be charged at 150 EUR/page to all authors of A&A
- (c) investigate the possibility of increasing the contributions of the Sponsoring Bodies from 2026.

The EC and the Editors believe that the steps above can serve as the first measures aimed at decreasing our budget deficit and further improving the high standards of A&A. We, therefore, propose to discuss their implementation at the A&A Board meeting on November 18, 2024. A more detailed justification for the proposed changes will be provided at the Board meeting.