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Special Issue
Diamond Open Access

Edited by
Dr. Niels Taubert

MDPI

https://doi.org/10.3390/publications13040053

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No Fees, No Barriers—But What Standards? Considerations on the DIAMAS Diamond OA Standard Applied to a Public Health Journal

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Abstract

The Diamond Open Access (OA) model—characterized by the absence of fees for both authors and readers—has gained increasing attention in recent years. A wide range of scholarly journals are using this model, as emerged while mapping the Diamond OA landscape worldwide; however, some still depend on hybrid revenue streams such as print sales, subscriptions, and marginal APCs. A number of recent initiatives underlined the need to increase quality assurance, sustainability, and cooperation within the Diamond OA ecosystem. Among them, the Diamond OA Standard (DOAS), a framework comprising detailed guidelines and a self-assessment tool to facilitate Diamond OA publishing practices, was created by the DIAMAS project, sponsored by the European Commission. *Annali dell'Istituto Superiore di Sanità*, the official journal of the Italian leading public health research institution, is a Diamond OA journal. To improve transparency and quality, the editorial team used the DOAS self-assessment tool to evaluate its compliance with the standards proposed by DIAMAS and to identify potential areas for improvement. This article presents the process and findings of the DOAS self-assessment tool conducted on *Annali ISS*, with the aim of sharing insights and support with other journals seeking to align with the DOAS framework.

Keywords: open access publishing; diamond open access; diamond open access journals; publishing models; access to information

Academic Editor: Andrew Kirby

Received: 18 July 2025
Revised: 15 September 2025
Accepted: 15 October 2025
Published: 21 October 2025

Citation: Barbaro, A., Barbaro, M. C., & Napolitani, F. (2025). No Fees, No Barriers—But What Standards? Considerations on the DIAMAS Diamond OA Standard Applied to a Public Health Journal. *Publications*, *13*(4), 53. https://doi.org/10.3390/publications13040053

1. Introduction

In recent years, the Diamond Open Access (OA) publishing model has emerged as an alternative to previously adopted OA models, which have proven insufficient in ensuring open access to the entirety of publicly funded scientific output (cOAlitionS, 2024; Mounier & Rooryck, 2024). There is a growing consensus that the Article Processing Charge (APC) model, applied by a substantial number of OA publishers, undermines the Open Science movement by potentially creating financial barriers for researchers and institutions, particularly those in lower- and middle-income countries and by benefiting commercial publishers (Klebel & Ross-Hellauer, 2023; Fontúrbel & Vizentin-Bugoni, 2021; Sanderson, 2023). Moreover, this publishing model has contributed also to the proliferation of the so-called predatory journals, together with the "publish or perish" culture and a research evaluation system that favors quantitative over qualitative metrics (Perera, 2025; Öztürk & Taşkın, 2024).

Reports analyzing the landscape of Diamond OA journal publishing reveal a rich and diverse ecosystem that nevertheless, overall, requires support to ensure its long-term sustainability and its role within the broader Open Science framework (Napolitani et al.,

2025). According to the *OA Diamond Journals Study* (Bosman et al., 2021), these journals account for 8–9% of the total article output and 45% of OA publications. However, this publishing model often struggles to meet high quality standards due to multiple challenges related to technical capabilities, management, visibility, and sustainability of the journals and platforms.

One fundamental limitation of the Diamond OA model lies in one of its defining characteristics: the absence of revenue from either subscriptions or APCs. All stages of scholarly publishing—manuscript submission, peer review, editing, production, and digital infrastructure maintenance—entail costs. There are currently several proposed funding models none of which has been developed to a definitive solution (Bosman et al., 2021; Ancion et al., 2022). The European project DIAMAS (https://diamasproject.eu/, accessed on 15 September 2025) has further contributed to this discussion through a study identifying three core sustainability challenges: limited financial resources, lack of staff stability, and dependency on parent organizations (Armengou et al., 2023), and through a report on the sustainability of Diamond OA publishing practices (Brun et al., 2024). Based on these overviews, DIAMAS has developed various tools and resources to support Diamond OA publishing, including The Diamond OA Standard (DOAS, https://zenodo.org/records/13820036, accessed on 15 September 2025), which defines a set of quality criteria that Diamond OA publishing initiatives should follow, combined with the Diamond OA Sustainability Check (https://diamas.fecyt.es/, accessed on 15 September 2025)—a self-assessment tool helping journals evaluate their sustainability.

Referring to the visibility problem, a huge barrier to the wider recognition of Diamond OA journals is their limited presence in prominent bibliographic databases like Scopus, PubMed or Web of Science. This lack of indexing undermines their perceived prestige, a critical factor in current research evaluation systems, which tend to emphasize metrics such as Impact Factors and H-indices (Simard et al., 2024a). Moreover, in 2021, approximately two-third of Diamond OA journals were not even indexed in the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ, https://doaj.org/, accessed on 15 July 2025), a comprehensive online index that provides free access to high-quality, peer-reviewed open access journals from around the world (Bosman et al., 2021). Yet, despite these limitations, many of these journals publish content of high scientific quality.

The DIAMAS project, in collaboration with another Horizon Europe-funded initiative CRAFT-OA (Creating a Robust Accessible Federated Technology for Open Access, https://www.craft-oa.eu/, accessed on 15 September 2025), is currently working on the Diamond Discovery Hub (DDH, https://ddh.diamas.org/en, accessed on 15 September 2025), an authoritative list of European Diamond Open Access journals, with the aim of helping Diamond OA journals increase their visibility in the academic community.

The journals intending to be included in the DDH should fulfil six operational criteria: have a valid and confirmed ISSN, select papers via an explicitly described evaluation process before and/or after publication, their outputs should be Open Access and carry an open license included in the article-level metadata, the publication is not conditional on the payment of fees of any kind, authorship in the journal should not be limited to any type of affiliation, and the journal title must be owned by public or not-for-profit organizations. Establishing an authoritative list of Diamond OA journals can represent a significant step toward the full recognition of this publishing model. Until now, most studies (Simard et al., 2024b) have identified Diamond OA journals simply as a subset of Gold OA that does not impose Article Processing Charges (APCs). While this practical classification is understandable, it risks overlooking the deeper meaning of Diamond OA—typically associated with small, locally rooted, community-driven, nonprofit journals that are publicly funded and supported by volunteer contributions from the academic

community (Simard et al., 2024b). DIAMAS and CRAFT-OA have also launched a platform, the European Diamond Capacity Hub (EDCH), offering a set of tools and resources to support the development and sustainability of Diamond OA publishing across Europe (EDCH services, https://diamas.org/services, accessed on 15 September 2025).

Recently, there have been a considerable number of different initiatives intended to deal with the visibility and sustainability of Diamond OA. As an example, to enhance the visibility and impact of Diamond OA journals, DOAJ has announced that it will highlight these journals among those listed in its index throughout 2025 (Directory of Open Access Journals, 2025). DOAJ is also participating in the new Horizon Europe ALMASI (Aligning and Mutualizing Nonprofit Open Access Publishing Services Internationally) project, which aims to strengthen non-profit OA publishing across Africa, Europe, and Latin America offering free publishing services for authors and readers (European Commission, 2025). ALMASI project will be carried out in the context of the Global Diamond Open Access Alliance, a network of organizations committed to promoting Diamond OA and create a more equitable and sustainable scholarly communication ecosystem supported by UNESCO (UNESCO, 2025).

2. Journal Context and DOAS Overview

Many OA journals are currently trying to adjust to this diversified and complex panorama seeking to adhere to the most recent DOAS recommendations. A 2023 study on non-profit academic publishing in Italy highlighted a diverse and complex landscape of Diamond OA journals. These journals typically operate outside the commercial publishing sphere and rely mainly on support from academic institutions and public funding (Pavone & Galimberti, 2023). Among them, the institutional journal of the Italian National Institute of Health (Istituto Superiore di Sanità, ISS) whose experience and reflections in compiling the DOAS self-assessment module are reported in this article.

The ISS, the main center for research, control and technical-scientific advice of public health in Italy, was officially established in Rome in 1934. The Institute is actively involved in all areas of public health and, in addition to publishing the journal *Annali dell'Istituto Superiore di Sanità (Annali ISS)*, produces a wide range of other publications, including technical reports and other scientific editorial products, freely available online (https://www.iss.it/en/publ, accessed on 15 September 2025). The ISS is among the signatories of several international and national documents supporting OA, among them the Berlin declaration (https://openaccess.mpg.de/Berlin-Declaration, accessed on 15 September 2025) in 2006, and the Messina Open Access Road Map 2014–2018 (https://decennale.unime.it/?page_id=1766, accessed on 15 September 2025), signed in 2014 together with Italian universities and research institutions for the implementation of institutional policies in support of OA to scientific research.

Annali ISS has a long publication history. Its first issue was published in 1938. At the time the journal was named *Rendiconti dell'Istituto di Sanità Pubblica*. Following the change in the Institute's name (1941), the journal was renamed *Rendiconti dell'Istituto Superiore di Sanità*. In 1965, the journal acquired its present title.

The entire collection of *Rendiconti* is in the process of being digitized, and many volumes are already accessible online in the *Annali ISS* webpage, on the ISS website (https://www.iss.it/en/annali, accessed on 15 September 2025), by choosing the publication year in the available dropdown menu.

Annali ISS (https://annali.iss.it, accessed on 15 September 2025) is a peer reviewed quarterly science journal which publishes nearly 40 research articles per year in biomedicine, translational research and in many other disciplines of the health sciences, and follows the Recommendations for the Conduct, Reporting, Editing, and Publications of Scholarly Work in Medical Journals (International Committee of Medical Journal Editors, 2025).

The journal is indexed in major bibliographic databases, such as Web of Science, PubMed, and Scopus. It is a fully Diamond OA journal, listed in the DOAJ since 2008.

Annali ISS has been managed through the Open Journal Systems (OJS), an open-source and free software for academic journals, since 2014.

The journal is guided by a Responsible Director, an Editor-in-Chief and an Assistant Editor supported by an Editorial Committee, a Scientific Committee and an international Editorial Advisory Board. Each member of the Editorial Committee is entrusted with the oversight of a specific section of the editorial process, encompassing manuscript submission, peer review, and preparation of the final version. The editorial activity does not represent a full-time commitment, as all members concurrently perform additional institutional responsibilities.

As the official publication of the ISS, the journal is well embedded in the institution and benefits entirely from its economic support.

In addition, the journal can count on a number of skilled employees that, often throughout their entire career, dedicate themselves to its regular publication and receive continuous professional training. It also benefits from the presence of many researchers within the Institute who are expert in the areas of interest of *Annali ISS* and dedicate their time and expertise to collaborate with the journal. Many journals would struggle to survive without this precious workforce (Davidson & Franczak, 2025).

The authors decided to assess *Annali ISS*'s compliance with the DOAS for several reasons. First, the tool offers a structured framework to verify compliance with standards of openness, accessibility, and sustainability. Compliance with these standards demonstrates a commitment to responsible publishing, strengthening the trust of authors, readers, and funders, even more important in a journal devoted to public health. In addition, DOAS serves as a roadmap for improvement, helping to identify gaps and guide progress towards best practices.

Completing the assessment also allows journals to indicate their alignment with international standards, enhancing their visibility, credibility, and indexing opportunities. Finally, by engaging with DOAS, journals contribute valuable data to the global Diamond OA community, supporting the advancement of sustainable, community-driven publishing models. In this sense, the authors think that completing the self-assessment is both a means of quality assurance and a sign of long-term commitment.

The DOAS self-assessment tool was accessed and completed by the authors of this paper in mid-June 2025.

The tool is freely accessible online, upon registration, at https://diamas.fecyt.es/ (accessed on 15 September 2025). The platform proposes two different modules: the DOAS self-assessment tool, considered in this paper, and the Diamond open access sustainability check. The latter is designed for Diamond OA publishers or service providers to gain insights into their financial health, and to aid them in planning for a more sustainable future. Users can take and retake the self-assessment tool at any time, previous sessions remain accessible.

The DOAS self-assessment content is organized into seven sections, each comprising a defined set of items (statements to be assessed). Every section identifies the areas considered relevant to assess compliance with the Diamond OA Standards and to establish a common quality standard for Diamond OA publishers:

- *Funding*, to guarantee the sustainability of this business model, protect editorial independence, and enhance transparency in costs;
- *Legal ownership, mission, and governance*, to define and safeguard ownership and control by the scholarly community, ensure transparent, mission-driven strategic governance, and establish clear relationships with service providers;

- *Open Science*, to promote open science by supporting authors' rights, safeguarding intellectual property, fostering transparent licensing practices, and enabling the sharing of research outputs through repositories;
- *Editorial management*, to emphasize the importance of maintaining robust and independent editorial bodies, ensuring transparency in peer review, upholding strict editorial quality processes, and protecting research integrity;
- *Technical service efficiency*, to support the development of strong publishing infrastructures, enhance interoperability and metadata quality, and implement effective strategies for collaboration and preservation;
- *Visibility, communication, marketing, and impact*, to enhance the visibility, dissemination, and impact of published content by ensuring indexing, utilizing different communication channels, and providing comprehensive usage metrics;
- *Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging (EDIB), multilingualism, and gender equity*, to promote EDIB policies and practices, ensuring that equal participation, accessibility, and multilingualism are acknowledged as fundamental quality components (Consortium of the DIAMAS Project, 2024).

Each of these sections is supported by detailed criteria and guidelines, developed through rigorous analysis of existing standards and best practices, and further refined by community feedback (Rico-Castro et al., 2024).

Each section comprises from 8 to 24 items depending on the subject. The items are marked as "Required" (53 items in total) or "Desired" (47 items in total) and lead to a "Yes" or "No" response. The required elements are mandatory to meet the Diamond OA quality standards, while the other elements provide advanced recommendations aimed at further improving compliance.

The first column of the module identifies the items in the core component, the second column reports the response, the third marks the status of each question as "Answered" (Figure 1).

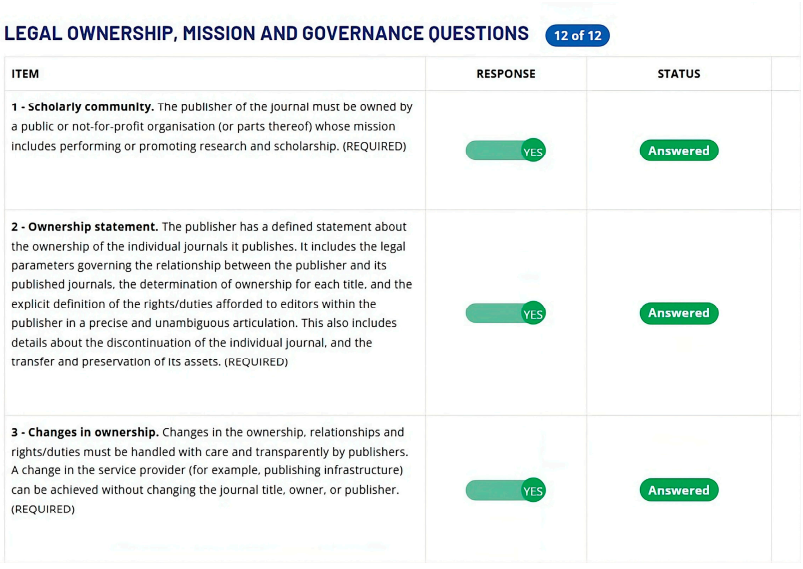

Figure 1. Example of part of the first page of the DOAS self-assessment tool, where the first three questions in the category "Funding" have been answered regarding *Annali dell'Istituto Superiore di Sanità*.

A last column appears whenever a "no" has been given as a reply, proposing a set of options to help explain the reasons for that negative response and the degree of agreement with the statement proposed by the specific item: Not applicable, Disagree, Partly Agree, Somewhat Agree, and Mostly Agree (Figure 2).

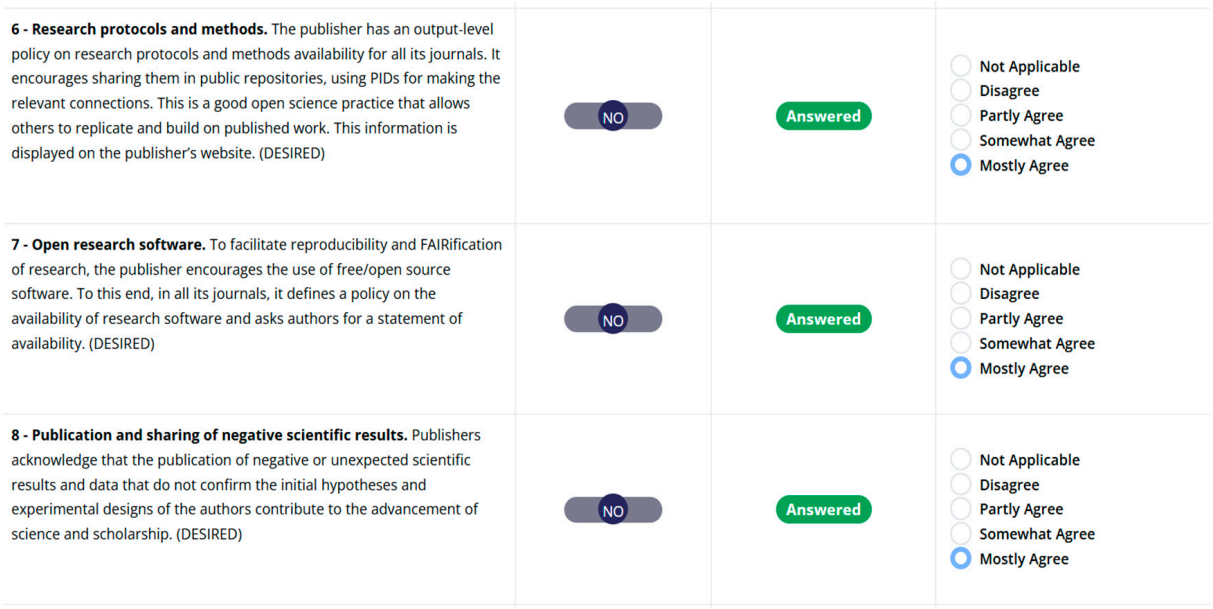

Figure 2. Example of a part of the Open Science section, where a "no" was given as a reply, and the extent of agreement with the statement proposed by the specific item.

After completing the DOAS self-assessment module, the authors received a full report, which is not intended as an evaluation tool to rank the *Annali ISS* or the ISS publishing services, but as a series of self-assessed information based solely on the answers provided, which are not based on any independent and verified evidence.

To complete their self-assessment, the authors referred to the DIAMAS recently released Diamond Open Access Standard (DOAS) Guide for Journals (https://zenodo.org/records/15147823, accessed on 15 September 2025), which translates the DOAS requirements to the context of individual journals. This guide is useful as it helps editors and editorial teams, who are usually responsible for implementing changes in journal policy, to translate some of the DOAS questions. This Guide is also a useful tool for journals wishing to be indexed in the DOAJ as it clearly marks the DOAS requirements that align with the DOAJ's Guide for Applying (https://doaj.org/apply/guide/, accessed on 15 September 2025).

3. DOAS Applied to *Annali ISS*: Some Considerations

The module is very well conceived and structured with its coherent units and user-friendly interface. However, it has been proven rather challenging, especially regarding some questions on the list, which appeared to be more difficult to answer than others. Each question required considerable reflection, not so much to fully comprehend its content, but to determine an appropriate response. The answers needed to be accurate and reliable to reflect both the journal's current situation and its alignment with the stated standards and practices.

While taking the very first steps, it was clear that this deep reasoning was leading to a positive and beneficial outcome for the *Annali ISS* and that, on the whole, this would have served as an extremely useful way to check all journal procedures and to assess its compliance with standards applied not only to Diamond OA journals but to all scholarly journals in the reporting of studies as indicated by international recommendations.

Compiling the module was also helpful as it forced the authors to critically examine the organization of the journal's information on the website and to render it more unequivocally explicit and transparent. It helped to identify other gaps in the content presented.

The journal's weaknesses and strengths identified by the authors while compiling the module are reported below in a narrative form with the main intent of giving some practical

examples of the benefits acquired taking the questionnaire and in doing so promoting this important tool.

Some editorial practices reported in the module were found to be already in use for *Annali ISS* but perhaps they were not fully acknowledged or openly disclosed; others were seen as a highly desirable change to be discussed and possibly included in the future policies of the journal.

This regarded, for instance, a few changes or insertions in the journal Instructions to Authors and in the information pages available online concerning the use of correct terminology or the rephrasing of sentences to improve text accuracy.

As an example, the term *blind* peer review was still in use in the online description of the *Annali* peer-review process policy, while it should have been amended in *anonymous* peer review, for a more inclusive terminology. Module's section 4.7 Peer review, in fact, gives useful information not only on the peer-review policy and procedures, but also on the correct terminology which identifies the different models, some of which might not even be known to less experienced editorial team members operating in small journals, like the Publish, Review, Curate (PRC) models (Corker et al., 2024).

> 4.7—Peer-review policy and procedures. The publisher guarantees that all its journals' websites publish a policy describing the evaluation or peer review process (both internal and external), indicating whether it is double-anonymous, single-anonymous, open peer review, etc., and specifying the tasks expected of reviewers. It will indicate whether reviews will be public or not (in which case, it will be specified whether they are transmitted to the author in full or edited). It also specifies the type of manuscript evaluation process. Evaluation can take place before or after publication, depending on the peer review model adopted: pre-publication peer review, post-publication peer review (Publish, Review, Curate—PRC—models), etc. (REQUIRED).

The use of terminology is extremely important, and the ISS dedicated one of its address documents to *Recommendations for the use of broad and non-discriminatory gender identity language in the documents, publications and communications of the Istituto Superiore di Sanità* (Gruppo di Lavoro per la Promozione di un Linguaggio Rispettoso del Genere, 2023).

The terminology should not only be correct, clear and explicit but inclusive, fair and free from gender stereotypes and societal pressure, as indicated in the EDIB (Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging) policy section, which clearly encourage publishers to report such information on the website.

> 7.1—EDIB policy at the IP level. The publisher has a policy that sets principles, commitments and actions for promoting EDIB in terms of linguistic, gender, cultural, academic, geographical, organisational, economic backgrounds and disabilities within its governing and management bodies, its editorial staff and boards, as well as reviewer pools and author's pool. It includes a Gender Equity Plan (GEP). This information is displayed on the publisher's website. (DESIRED)

Some small gaps were being filled in the communication of editorial policies, while going through the module. An amendment to the journal information pages followed the reading of the second question in the "Transparency on paywalls" section of the tool (item 1.2), which reads:

> 1.2—Transparency on paywalls. The publisher provides explicit information on its website that no fees are charged to either authors to publish or readers to read, as well as if there are any other types of fees involved. (REQUIRED)

The sentence "No fees are charged to either authors to publish or readers to read" was added in the APC journal policy pages to render them even more easily understandable and explicit. Regarding the journal subscription fees, exclusively related to the opportunity to acquire paper copies of the published issues, it was decided to repeat whenever necessary that the journal is nonetheless freely available online.

A specific information on the ownership of the journal was not provided on its website, though perhaps obviously inferred from its same title *Annali dell'Istituto Superiore di Sanità*, and that an ownership statement needed to be included as suggested in the item 2.2.

> 2.2—Ownership statement. The publisher has a defined statement about the ownership of the individual journals it publishes. It includes the legal parameters governing the relationship between the publisher and its published journals, the determination of ownership for each title, and the explicit definition of the rights/duties afforded to editors within the publisher in a precise and unambiguous articulation. This also includes details about the discontinuation of the individual journal, and the transfer and preservation of its assets. (REQUIRED)

Similarly, some possible future changes and foreseeable innovations were emerging, which will certainly be discussed in the future with the journal Scientific Committee and implemented whenever possible. These were the items for which the answer was "no", and in which the extent of agreement with the statement proposed by the specific item was indicated as either "somewhat agree" or "mostly agree". The authors decided therefore to create a list of matters to process after completion of the module and consider this an important outcome of the test.

To standardize and enhance institutional publishing practices, DOAS address some of the most currently debated issues in scholarly publishing—such as the accessibility of open data and software, the dissemination of negative research results, open peer review, and the use of artificial intelligence (AI).

During the compilation of the questionnaire, it became evident that an explicit reference to a policy on underlying research data was missing in the information pages of the journal, though the ISS already has issued a policy on the matter (Istituto Superiore di Sanità, 2023) as well as recommendations on archiving data in the ISS public open data archive (https://www.iss.it/opendata, accessed on 15 September 2025). Such a policy should include a statement indicating that the journal's open policy encourages authors to make research data, protocols, and methods accessible to all, in accordance with the FAIR principles (Wilkinson et al., 2016).

This is a policy that should be implemented by all journals. Recent technological developments have led to an exponential increase in the production and complexity of data, which, to be used effectively, must be organized in a structured, standardized, and accessible way, thus ensuring their reusability. Publishers have begun to support and encourage data sharing through the implementation of specific policies even if those policies are sometimes inconsistent and, in many cases, not meaningfully enforced (Science et al., 2024).

Similarly, the journal should encourage the use of free/open-source software and, as for the content of the manuscript, the publication of negative or unexpected scientific

results, which are recognized as contributing equally to the advancement of science and at present are not often published in the journal (items 3.7 and 3.8).

> 3.7—Open research software. To facilitate reproducibility and FAIRification of research, the publisher encourages the use of free/open source software. To this end, in all its journals, it defines a policy on the availability of research software and asks authors for a statement of availability. (DESIRED)
> 3.8—Publication and sharing of negative scientific results. Publishers acknowledge that the publication of negative or unexpected scientific results and data that do not confirm the initial hypotheses and experimental designs of the authors contribute to the advancement of science and scholarship. (DESIRED)

Providing reviewers with the possibility of publishing and/or signing their reviews for the journal (item 4.9) was noted as one of the items to discuss in the future as well as the development of a reward policy that guarantees reviewers receive proper acknowledgments.

> 4.9—Open peer review. The publisher provides reviewers of all its journals with the possibility of publishing and/or signing their reviews (either with their identity only visible to the editor, author, and the other reviewers, or with their identity visible to all readers), and/or the publisher makes reviews publicly available to a broader community. (DESIRED)

In accordance with the *Recommendations of the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors*, the journal's policy on the use of AI is already included in the journal Instructions to Authors (Napolitani et al., 2023) (item 4.24).

> 4.24—Guidelines for Artificial Intelligence. The publisher has a guideline on generative AI tools, respecting changes of the research process in a technology-enhanced environment, and is informing and educating researchers/authors, reviewers and editors about responsible use of generative AI tools. This policy is displayed on the publisher's website. (DESIRED)

However, since AI in science publishing is a subject constantly evolving, any changes in the above-mentioned Recommendations will be reported on the journal website and guidelines on AI will be constantly reviewed and updated.

As for the publication of the full texts in more than one language, which is a multilingualism equity issue reported in item 7.10, it is interesting to note that the *Rendiconti dell'Istituto di Sanità Pubblica* (former title of *Annali ISS*, 1938–1964) used to publish abstracts in different languages, over the years, such as English, French, German and even Latin. Already at that time, therefore, removing language barriers was considered useful to increase accessibility.

> 7.10—Full text. The publisher's journals can publish full texts in more than one language, either bilingual, simultaneously as separate documents in the same journal, or sequentially in other journals. (REQUIRED)

Annali ISS used to be published only in Italian, then moved first to double-language abstracts and then to full English, still maintaining in Italian the original title of the publication.

At completion of the module, a DOAS self-assessment report was produced and sent to the authors. The report acknowledged that the journal is already aligned with 89% of the required standards and desired advanced recommendations outlined in DOAS. This can be considered a very successful result for the journal and for the Institute considering the high level of compliance with the quality Diamond OA standards.

The report is accompanied by two graphical representations designed to facilitate a clear and immediate understanding of the areas of strength and of those in need of improvement, thereby providing a concise visual representation of both strengths and weaknesses (Figures 3 and 4).

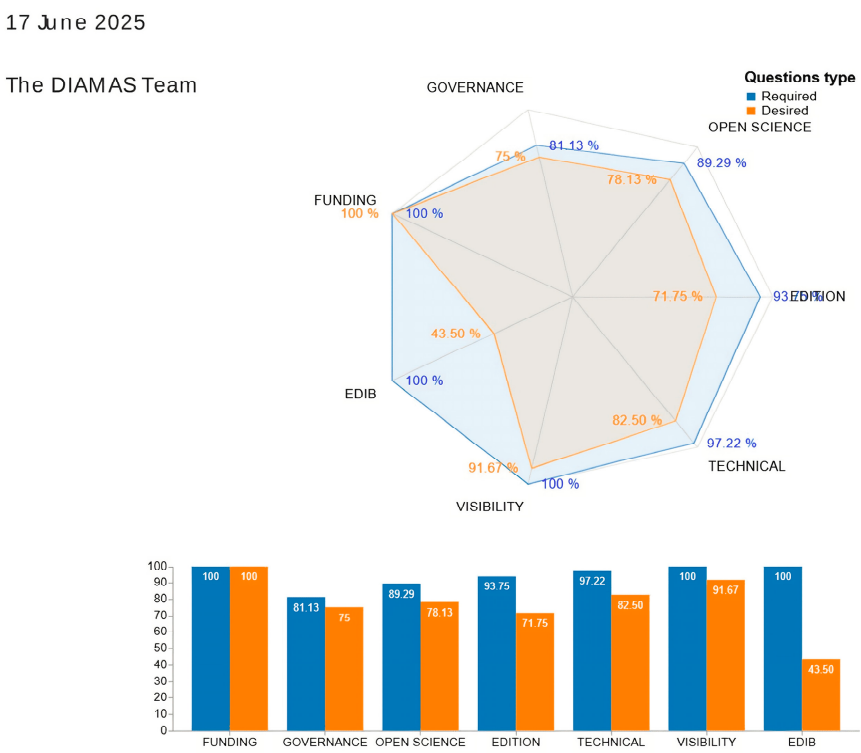

Figure 3. DOAS self-assessment report carried out for *Annali ISS* in June 2025.

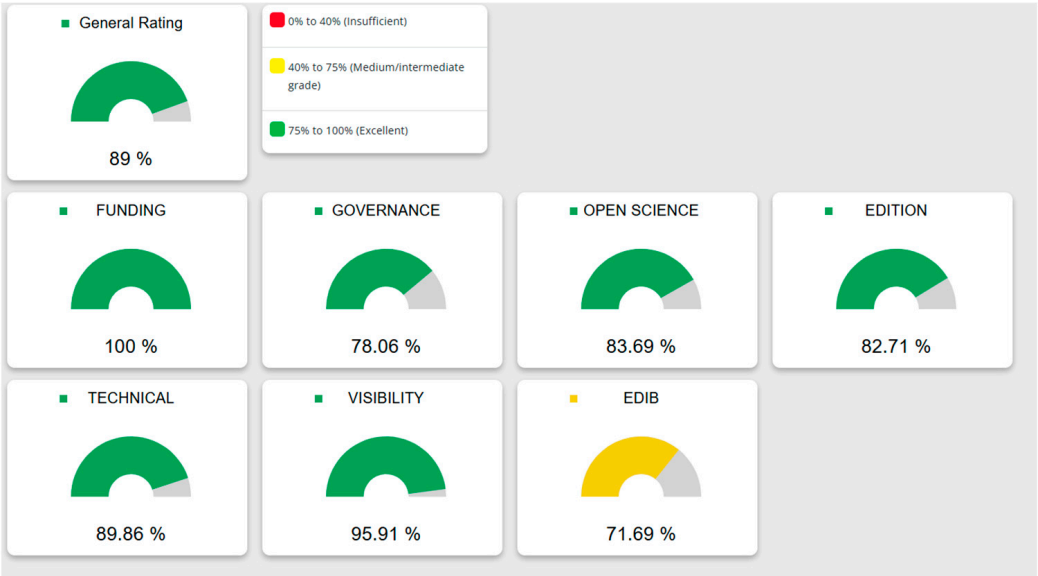

Figure 4. Questionnaire statistics for *Annali ISS* for each of the seven categories (June 2025). Level of compliance according to the percentage of both desired and required positive responses.

The columns in the graph in Figure 3 represent the compliance with the items included in the required questions (blue column) and in the questions marked as desired (orange column). As seen in the upper part of Figure 3, for *Annali ISS* the area which is needed to completely cover the perimeter of the graph (indicating full compliance), is very limited, showing almost full compliance with the Diamond OA standards (blue line *vs.* grey line). However, when considering the desired items, that is, the practices or standards still to be implemented, the area to cover appears larger (orange line *vs.* gray line) indicating the presence of some weaknesses, which still need to be addressed, and room for improvement (partial compliance).

As shown in Figure 3, in the first category "Funding", all the questions related to the 7 items in this area (both required and desired) received a positive answer (100%), indicating therefore full compliance. *Annali ISS*, being published by a leading academic and research institution committed to OA principles, can rely on both human and financial resources but there are many smaller organizations that struggle to cover the costs of operating their own journals. The diamond OA journal's financial support is one of the key challenges that need to be addressed when talking about the sustainability of these journals (Armengou et al., 2023). As a matter of fact, how to reduce costs, ensure sustainability, and maintain quality in the long term continue to be central topics of global debate talking about diamond OA. As stated in our Introduction, all the stages of scholarly publication, including article production, platform development, salaries, marketing, and more, entail costs that are very high even for not-for-profit publishers. These costs, in some cases, might be similar to those of commercial publishers so it is of fundamental importance that possible ways to decrease expenses are disseminated, discussed, implemented and adopted whenever possible (Brun et al., 2024; Ancion et al., 2022).

While full compliance was reached in the first category, as shown in Figure 4, in the other six categories the compliance ranged from 95.91 (Visibility) to 71.69 (EDIB) showing a general adherence to the Diamond OA Standard. The area with a least compliance is EDIB, though it is also true that it concerns relatively new matters that need to be carefully examined and on which continuous updating is necessary.

4. Conclusions

Many questions remain unanswered regarding the viability of the Diamond OA model as a comprehensive solution to the challenges hindering the full adoption of Open Access—particularly in terms of long-term sustainability and the perceived prestige of Diamond OA journals. In this context, the authors of this paper believe it is essential to promote initiatives like the DIAMAS project, which aim to support, professionalize, and coordinate the Diamond OA publishing sector across Europe and beyond.

Compilation of the DOAS self-assessment represents a strategic and valuable step for Diamond OA journals seeking to improve their practices and strengthen their position within the scholarly publishing ecosystem. This tool deserves support, as it reflects the core principles of what can be considered a sound scientific publishing and provides practical guidance to reach this goal. Furthermore, an active engagement with DOAS ensures the advancement of sustainable, community-driven publishing models.

DOAS is a European-level initiative; however, as noted in the introduction, in recent times several other global initiatives have been launched with the aim of ensuring that the diamond OA model can establish a true open access for the entire body of scientific and academic literature.

One of the DOAS goals was the implementation of an authoritative list of European Diamond OA journals, which is now available in beta version. At the time of writing this article, the Diamond Discovery Hub (DDH) has been released and indexes nearly

2500 Diamond OA journals. The discussion is also open on the methods to assign a possible sort of certification to attest full compliance with the required standards.

The most evident limitation of this work is that it reports the experience of a single journal and therefore offers a single case study. Nonetheless, it provides some considerations, hopefully useful, on the difficulties and advantages that OA journals may encounter while seeking to align with the DOAS framework and give full support to this initiative.

As reported on the DOAS self-assessment homepage, about 200 modules have been completed at present. It would be interesting to read about these experiences in the future.

Author Contributions: Writing—original draft preparation, A.B., M.C.B., F.N.; writing—review and editing, A.B., M.C.B., F.N. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: The authors declare that financial support was received for the publication of this article by Istituto Superiore di Sanità (OPEN25, Italian National Institute of Health, Rome, Italy).

Data Availability Statement: The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors on request.

Acknowledgments: The authors would like to thank Enrico Alleva, Editor-in-Chief of the journal *Annali ISS*, and Antonio Mistretta, Responsible Director of the journal *Annali ISS*, for their precious suggestions and for reading the final version of the paper.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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