DIGITAL PUBLISHING FORUM: Open Access – the experience so far

University College, London (UK), 28 November 2012

Anthony Watkinson - forum organiser and chair

This forum, sponsored by the UK Publishers Association (PA) and hosted by University College London (UCL), holds events about seven times a year. The regular format is 90 minutes to presentations, 30 minutes to questions and discussion, and 60 minutes to informal discussions and networking over refreshments. The usual number of the participants is up to 60, mostly students, publishers, editors and technical staff. As the organiser and chair, I am pleased to report that all seemed well received by the immediate audience.

The presentations of the current forum are or will be available at the website of the PA (www.publishers.org.uk). This time the forum had to reflect on the recently published Finch Report commissioned by the UK government which strongly backed gold open access (OA) journal publishing and was welcomed by the UK-based publishing bodies. Questions related to the experience of publishers actually 'doing' open-access, are there differences in open-access workflows and procedures and what opportunities does open-access offer publishers.

The first speaker was Natasha Mellins-Cohen, the head of publishing operations at BioMed Central. Her first statement was that OA publishing is not very revolutionary and that all publishers have to make money, even the Public Library of Science (PLoS). Authors are 'customers', who need to be satisfied, and publishing staff should have training in communication to meet their goals. Relations with authors involve financial dealings. Authors, or funding bodies, have to pay the Author Processing Charges (APC). In certain circumstances the APC may be waived. All matters pertaining to the payment has to be handled completely separately from any editorial decisions. All staff and even jouranl editors have training in publication ethics.

Rhodri Jackson, responsible for Oxford Open, discussed the experience of Oxford University Press (OUP). OUP moved one of their most successful journals from a subscription-based to an open-access model. The speaker presented statistical data on the growth of open-access articles. Interestingly, optional OA for OUP journals has not increased. However, the publisher's flagship journal, *Nucleic Acid Research*, has continued to be a big success since its move to OA in 2005. The number of accepted articles and the journal impact factors have both substantially increased. There are still print subscriptions, but these constitute only 15% of the revenues. There were early difficulties with author publishing charges including some bad debts and some delays in publication but they installed an online system which now works well.

Ubiquity Press was represented at the forum by Tom Pollard. This is a small publisher that is really using the opportunities presented by open access in a way that few other publishers are doing. The commercial component gives the publisher more flexibility. Articles of Ubiquity Press go online without waiting for an issue. Peer review is crucial and so is fast publication. Their processing charges are relatively low, partly because of subsidies. The big issue, however, is how to standardise the workflow across the growing number of journals. As well as their standard journal service they have also created what they rather oddly call a *meta-journal* platform. The first example in a series of 'data journals' is in archaeology, working closely with data centres in the subject - http://openarchaeologydata.metajnl.com/. The publisher is now working on new metrics and peer review of data, which they see as essential.

There were many questions from an informed audience. Most established publishers experimenting with OA were there. The general interest focussed on how to handle the payments.

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Joint EASE/ISMTE Conference, September 23rd & 24th, 2013

Aazaert Hotel/Conference Centre, Blankenberge, Belgium http://www.aazaert.be/

Hold the date - it will include the EASE AGM.
Planning is underway: there will be no overall theme, just plenty of exciting presentations and discussions. Registration will open in April/May. Watch the EASE website for details.

Photo (courtesy of Christiaan Sterken) shows the pier, not the Hotel Aazaert!