

EASE-Forum Digest: March to June 2017

You can join the forum by sending the one-line message "subscribe ease-forum" (without the quotation marks) to majordomo@helsinki.fi. Send in plain text, not HTML. Details at www.ease.org.uk/node/589.

One of the most interesting and lively discussions on the forum during the time I have been compiling the digests started when Karen Shashok posted the abstract of an article she had written entitled "Can scientists and their institutions become their own open access publishers?"¹ In her article, she advocated that academic institutions and research funders should take over responsibility for publishing research because the scientific community is beset with journals that contribute little valuable knowledge, overload the community's capacity for high-quality peer review and waste resources.

Andrew Davis was the first to react, pointing out that as funding of university departments and individuals was often based in part on the number of articles they produce rather than citation statistics, institutions would be inclined to publish too many articles without the necessary quality control. He had seen this happen with in-house journals in Japan, where there was no independent quality control. Peer reviewers were selected by the researchers themselves or by their hierarchical superiors who benefit directly from high numbers of publications. This resulted in an unavoidable conflict of interest. Tom Lang added that many journals in China were published by universities with government support. They just published articles from their own faculty and could publish whatever they liked without fear of losing income.

Valerie Matarese suggested using individual article metrics, placing greater value on peer reviewing efforts and quotes in the acknowledgements as measures of quality to tackle any such problems that might arise with institutional journals. Furthermore, universities could produce journals of tiered ranks with a catch-all journal as the lowest in the series. In any event, Karen emphasised large numbers of articles were already being published as lower ranked commercial journals published those rejected by the larger ones. In addition to assessing individual articles, she argued that if institutions took over the sole responsibility for disseminating research results they would be motivated by a desire for prestige to ensure a high-quality output.

To further allay Andrew's fears, Eva Baranyiová demonstrated how university journals could be successful by explaining the history of the institutional journal published by the University of Veterinary Medicine in Brno, Czechoslovakia, which is called *Acta Veterinaria Brno*. The institution started publishing in 1922 and had from the outset provided summaries in English, French and German. Publication had only ceased during WWII. The journal went through many difficulties during the communist era facing interventions from the Ministry of Education, a lack of printing capacity and censorship etc; sometimes an issue published on time was a little miracle. Despite the political

pressure, in 1969 the scientific editor had had the foresight to start publishing all articles in English. The journal progressed to become an international journal indexed by the Institute for Scientific Information. Throughout, it had always had editorial boards composed of scientists of high standing. Eva described the measures taken to ensure a strict and objective peer review process, including end of year assessments when unreliable reviewers were dropped. Even when only a few manuscripts were rejected before the journal started to receive international submissions, the pressure to publish no matter what, was non-existent. Eva thought institutional journals could be more free and independent than those swallowed by huge publishing houses.

Agreeing with Eva, Magda Luz Atrián Salazar reported that although not many journals in Mexico were included in the Journal Citation Reports (JCR), no less care is used or (were they) less stringent in the publication process, including peer review. Reme Melero concurred because the made in ... should not be a quality seal.

Andrew considered Eva and Magda's cases as ones published in a different environment. For him, maintaining quality control independent from production was vital. He wanted to know in which way in-house journals were freer and more independent than those published by companies or societies. Anna Sawicka's answer was free from working for profit. Although dependent on their institutions they were free from top-bottom decisions to close the journal and their voice is better heard ... than in a large consortium publishing ... thousands of titles. Eva added that unlike some publishing houses they did not sell individual articles for 45 euros. They also provided an excellent learning experience for young scientists.

Karen felt talking about journals from a given country or defining a journal as in-house may not be helpful. She cautioned against over generalising as the assumptions and practices relied upon for classifying journals would not hold for all journals in a given sample. Further, she wondered what Andrew meant by no independent quality control, to which he replied, independent of the organisation from which the research originated. Karen also questioned his earlier statement that reviewers were selected by people who produced the research, pointing out that it was common for commercial journals to ask authors to recommend reviewers. Andrew replied he considered that reviewers for in-house journals were inevitably selected by those who benefitted from publication of the research in that particular journal, whereas editors should be free to accept or reject reviewers suggested by authors, as with journals published by large publishing houses. But Valerie saw no reason why institutional journals could not insist on external reviewers.

Concluding, Karen thought the arguments raised against publication by institutions could be countered if they were careful about what they published and if any potential conflicts of interest were made transparent. This could be done by publishing the names and contact details of those responsible for quality control and publishing signed reviewer's comments.

Use of Impact Factors to assess researchers

When Aleksandra Golebiowska mentioned that the impact factor (IF) was used to evaluate individual researchers in Poland the discussion morphed into questioning the validity of this practice. Andrew thought it was worrying, particularly as Eugene Garfield, the originator of IF, had specifically stated the it should not be used for such a purpose. Tom Lang thought nevertheless the practice was the norm worldwide, for instance in China promotion was tied to publication in high impact factor journals. Researchers could even reap monetary rewards such as US\$30,000 for a publication in *Science* or *Nature*. Disagreeing with Tom's contention of the worldwide use, Andrew said Germany had officially forbidden the use of IFs to assess researchers and China did take factors other than IFs into account. In any event, in 2010 the Chinese government said it was taking action against plagiarism, low-quality erratic publication and corruption.

Andrew rallied, saying that we scientists do not have to accept it (evaluation by IF). He related how at his university those officials who rejected its use were winning the battle against those who supported its use. His director no longer used the IF. Furthermore, Andrew did his bit by stating the arguments against its use and presenting better methods to his students.

Valerie assumed Andrew was referring to German universities. Her experience in Italy was different. She quoted the prerequisites for funding by the Italian Association for Research on Cancer², probably the biggest funder of biomedical sciences in the country, as being a total active IF higher than 30 in the 5 years before the submission. Even though the association also stated the IF was not an absolute standard for evaluating scientific productivity, researchers knew they had no chance of obtaining funding without a high personal IF. Hence, whatever a teacher told young scientists, the IF remained firmly in their minds as the only criterion by which they would be judged. Andrew gave examples of how an individual might fight IF abuse: make sure colleagues and students were aware of its problems by for example referring them to articles³ and EASE's statement⁴.

Eva saw the abuse of the IF as a kind of infection. After relating the system in the Czech Republic, where points are ascribed to articles depending on the IF of the journal of publication and then used for career promotion, she gave some examples of how this system bred absurdity. For instance, one of her PhD students described the aim of her study as to publish at least two articles in high impact factor journals, when the aim should have been to describe the maternal behaviour of the animal species she was studying.

Helle Goodman presented the publication indicator introduced into the Norwegian academic system in 2004^{5,6}, which has had important consequences for funding and promotion. It was a number largely based upon her publications in "Level 1" (worth 1 point if the researcher is the sole author) or "Level 2" journals (worth 3 points if the researcher is the sole author). The IF was a key but not the only determinant of a journal's "level" in the system.

Guides to impact metrics

A second side shoot of the main discussion arose when Michael Altus asked if there were any guides that explained

and compared the various impact factors. Andrew said there were many. The Wikipedia article on the topic was a good place to start. World of Science, Scopus or Google searches would also bring up sources. He praised Elsevier for basing their IFs on their Scopus database, which contained twice as many articles as the Clarivate Analytics Web of Science used for the JCR. Using a more strict definition of impact factor, Anna Sharman said that there were only two, the 2-year and 5-year ones published in the JCR. Other impact metrics included the Scientific Journal Rankings, the new CiteScore and others based on Scopus from Elsevier, and the Eigenfactor metrics such as the Article Influence Score and Immediacy Index. She recommended a guide from one of the Royal Society's Journals⁷ and from Elsevier (cautioning that it plugs their own metrics)⁸. Her own blog post is also helpful⁹.

Posting of articles on ResearchGate

Valerie Matarese had received notifications from ResearchGate of papers where she had been acknowledged for copyediting. She wondered how ResearchGate knew she was the person mentioned in the acknowledgements. Andrew explained that ResearchGate harvests names from uploaded papers and notifies other users. He frequently received notifications, some relating to another person also called A J Davis.

Liz Wager thought EASERs might be interested in concerns raised over ResearchGate's breaches of copyright^{10,11}. Andrew explained two possible concerns:

- the uploading of articles by people other than the copyright holder, eg by authors who had transferred their copyright to a journal and
- the possibility that authors transferred the copyright which they had retained to ResearchGate. He had not ascertained if ResearchGate did lay claim to authors' copyrights but noted LinkedIn considered uploading transferred copyright to them.

Elise Langdon-Neuner (compiler)

a.a.neuner@gmail.com

Discussion initiators

Karen Shashok: kshashok@kshashok

Valerie Matarese: vmatarese@uptoit.org

References

- 1 Shashok K. Can scientists and their institutions become their own open access publishers? Available at: <https://arxiv.org/ftp/arxiv/papers/1701/1701.02461.pdf> (Accessed 6 June 2017).
- 2 Associazione Italiana per la Ricerca sul Cancro (AIRC) call for proposals. Available at: https://www.direzionescientifica.airc.it/DataFiles/Calls/254/Bando_2017_IG_nuovo%20formato_FINALE.pdf (Accessed 6 June 2017).
- 3 V. Lariviere *et al.* A simple proposal for the publication of journal citation distributions, 2016. Preprint available at bioRxiv <http://doi.org/bmc2> (Accessed 6 June 2017).
- 4 Ease Impact Factor Statement. Available at: <http://www.ease.org.uk/impact-factor-statement/> (Accessed 6 June 2017).
- 5 Aagaard *et al.* Evaluation of the Norwegian Publication Indicator- English summary, 2014. Available at: http://www.uhr.no/documents/Evaluation_of_the_Norwegian_Publication_Indicator___English_

Summary.pdf (Accessed 6 June 2017).

- 6 Aagaard *et al.* Impacts of performance-based research funding systems: The case of the Norwegian Publication Indicator. *Res Eval* 2015; 24 (2): 106-117. Available at: <https://academic.oup.com/rev/article-abstract/24/2/106/2364728/Impacts-of-performance-based-research-funding?redirectedFrom=fulltext> (Accessed 6 June 2017).
- 7 Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society A. Citation Metrics. Available at: <http://rsta.royalsocietypublishing.org/citation-metrics> (Accessed 6 June 2017).
- 8 Measuring a journal's Impact. Available at: <https://www.elsevier.com/authors/journal-authors/measuring-a-journals-impact> (Accessed 10 June 2017).

- 9 Journal Metrics. Cofactor. Available at: <http://cofactorscience.com/blog/journal-metrics-2> (Accessed 10 June 2017).
- 10 Illegal file hosting site, ResearchGate, acquires massive financial investment. Green Tea and Velociraptors. Available at: <http://fossilsandshit.com/illegal-file-hosting-site-researchgate-acquires-massive-financial-investment/> (Accessed 10 June 2017).
- 11 Jamali HR. Copyright compliance and infringement in ResearchGate full-text journal articles. *Scientometrics*. 2017; 112 (1): 241-254. Available at: <http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11192-017-2291-4> (Accessed 10 June 2017).

New member of the editorial board - Anna Sawicka



From this issue we have a new member of the editorial board, our apprentice and student editor, Anna Sawicka. Anna will be helping our section editors and learning from them. She has started editing News Notes with John Hilton. We wish her a warm welcome to the journal!

Anna is Polish, she studied her Masters in biophysics at the Jagiellonian University in Krakow and is currently

studying for a PhD in immunology and biophysics at École polytechnique and Institut Curie in Paris. Her topic is the biophysics of T cell activation: the pushing and pulling forces that T cells develop in the first few minutes after antigen recognition. She likes being involved in interdisciplinary research and is interested in finding ways of presenting results to different audiences, and in scientific publishing.

Anna has been a member of EASE since 2016 and plans to develop a career as a scientific editor. She would like to learn more about new forms of publishing and the day-to-day practice of being an editor. In the meantime she enjoys finding new favourite places in Paris all year round, and in the mountains during summer holidays.



PUBMET2017

THE 4TH CONFERENCE ON SCHOLARLY PUBLISHING IN THE CONTEXT OF OPEN SCIENCE

21–22 September, 2017

Zagreb, Croatia

Hosted for the first time in Zagreb at the Faculty of Engineering and Computing of the University of Zagreb, with a pre-conference day on 19 September. The themes of the conference are mostly focused around openness, new trends in publishing of scholarly journals and books, editorial practices and ethical issues, advances in digital scholarly publishing, new forms and formats of digital publishing, innovations in the peer review processes, and scholarly impact, including relationships between traditional and new metrics and the new models and approaches to the assessment of both researchers and academic institutions.

The organisers have brought together a diverse community of researchers, university lecturers, publishers, editors, librarians/information specialists, policy-makers, and experts from many fields of research and development.

Further information: <http://pubmet.unizd.hr/>