

Researcher to Reader Conference

25–26 February 2019, London, UK

The successor to the meeting formerly hosted by the Association of Subscription Agents and Intermediaries, *Researcher to Reader Conference* takes place in London every year in late February.

R2R covers the full life-cycle of scholarly communications – from inception through to publication and reporting – and welcomes contributions and participation from a diverse range of stakeholders to the scholarly ecosystem, including librarians, publishers, editors, society representatives, funders, platform and software providers.

Each year, some specific themes are identified and contributions particularly encouraged. This year global access issues, Open Access (especially Plan S), artificial intelligence, piracy and commercial vs scholarly business models emerged as key themes.

A particular feature of the meeting is its ‘Workshop’ format. This involves delegates selecting one of a suite of topics – such as Open Access Books, Automating Funder & Researcher Workflows, Equality of Opportunity in Research, Supporting Early Career Researchers, and Automating Citations with Identifiers – and breaking out into small groups three times during the conference for active discussions and project work.

As one of the organisers, I was very pleased to chair two sessions, Marc Schiltz’s keynote on “Plan S and European Research”, and a panel on Research Data Management with Rebecca Grant of Springer Nature and Jean Shipman of Elsevier. Both sessions were characterised by interesting presentations and very lively Q&As.

As a delegate, I was looking forward to the Sci-Hub debate. The resolution to be debated was “*Sci-Hub is doing more good than harm to scholarly communication*” with Daniel Himmelstein, a Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Pennsylvania arguing in favour of the proposition and Justin Spence, Publisher Solutions International (an IP services consultancy) providing the counter-argument. Delegates were invited to vote at both the start and finish of the session, so we could measure what, if any, change of opinion was provoked by the debate. At the start, 40 were in favour of the motion, with 60 against (out of 100 voters in total). Much of the discussion – and some thought-provoking comments! – are given in this Scholarly Kitchen

blogpost. However, the key finding, which is surprising given that the majority of voters were publishers and university librarians, was a move in Sci-Hub’s favour, with a final tally of 55 against and 45 in favour of Sci-Hub doing more good than harm.

My personal favourite session was a panel on Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning in the International Knowledge Chain. A selection of experts, chaired by Phill Jones, discussed the changing intellectual and technological requirements of research and scholarly communications, and how individuals and companies are responding to the challenges.

Daniel Ebner, of Karger Publishers, Jennifer Schivas of software consultancy 67 Bricks, Isabel Thompson of Holtzbrinck Publishing Group, and Jon White of content management system Pagemajik, had a lively discussion, from which I drew the following takeaways:

- Tagging, metadata, keywords and other content types are going to be more and more auto-generated. At the same time, user experiences should become more personalised, such as personalised recommendation services and interfaces.
- The challenges are at least as strategic and social as they are technical. Many of the current perceived issues are problematic because they have been incorrectly defined.
- As well as AI and machines, human beings still need to be factored into the process – what are the strengths that humans bring, and how do we ensure an ethical framework is in place to help shape the changes to come?

If this has whetted your appetite, then the good news is that the Call for Papers for Researcher to Reader 2020 is now live, so EASE members have an excellent opportunity to participate in this smoothly-run and well-catered event.

Declaration of interest

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