

# Discussion paper: Help! I'm an author – get me out of here

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This discussion paper aims to point out some current contradictions for authors publishing scholarly articles. It is based on comments from a number of Oxford academics including professorial research staff, researchers, and doctoral students. It includes their opinions around author rights, practices, concerns and preferences with regard to research dissemination. The presentation that this paper is based on was originally written for science publishers – I acknowledge that there are significant disciplinary differences of opinion and not all the views expressed here will chime with all academics. I have purposefully chosen not to discuss costs in this paper – the paper focuses on author practice. The paper concludes with a wish list of potential solutions of how, in my opinion, we, that is publishers and libraries, can help academics better disseminate their work. This is not intended as a publisher-bashing exercise: it is a reality check.

## Precious time and control of content

Time is a critical factor for busy academics. They hate what in their view are pointless, timewasting, administrative activities. A member of professorial staff complained that when they wanted to submit a pre-submission query “to get a **quick** decision on whether it's likely to be worth my while battling with the submission portal!” they were asked to input lots of unnecessary detail.

*“Do not waste my time asking me to complete separate details of all authors for submission – even before the paper has been accepted.”*

Similarly, this academic was clearly not happy being asked by one publisher to submit lots of details about potential reviewers (my emphasis).

*“You'd think the advent of electronic submission would make life easier, but in fact it can just open up a whole new world of tiny, fiddly things that you are required to do before your paper is submitted. Each individual thing is usually fairly trivial, but they do add up. So, for instance, **if you'd like your authors to suggest referees, please allow them to paste in a list. DO NOT require them to cut and paste title, forename, initial, surname, email and institution into your horrible little boxes for each of six potential referees.** It all takes TIME. And we have more important things in life to be getting on with. Including doing the science that allows us to get the point of writing a paper.”*

<http://deevybee.blogspot.co.uk/2014/01/a-new-years-letter-to-academic.html>

These complaints could be interpreted as authors don't like lack of system integration and interoperability which causes more work for authors. This might include manually entering (and re-entering) data. Concerns include control (or lack of) of the work that authors submit to commercial publishers:

*“I want more control over the publication and dissemination process. We are giving content free. I'm the customer, not the workman .... Publishers have prayed on academics. They should be doing a job for us”*

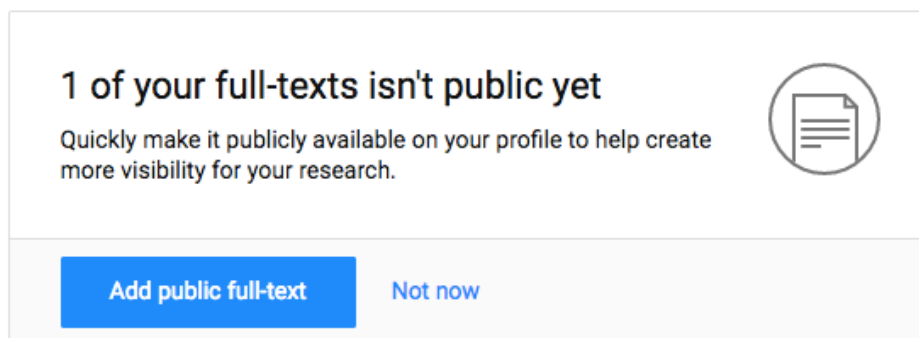
and whilst the scholarly dissemination environment is in its current state of flux, ownership of information and content is becoming muddled and confused:

*“There is an underlying problem of management and ownership of information. It's a chaotic transition – fraught because so much rides on it, for example, funding”*

## What authors want to be able to do with their work

Many authors choose to use ResearchGate (<https://www.researchgate.net/>), an academic social network. Once signed up, an author can be presented with an invitation to make their full text publicly available [see Fig 1].

Fig 1: Research Gate invitation



It's so easy to follow the invitation – all you have to do is click on the blue button and upload the file. Because authors want to disseminate their work, this is exactly what they are doing. Unfortunately for some, they did this without realising that they weren't allowed to because of the agreement they had signed with their publisher. This resulted in take down notices being issued to ResearchGate from some publishers, followed by explanatory letters to authors. As a result of situations like this, authors are beginning to realise that they can't do what they want with their own work. Despite the fact that publishers are exerting their legal rights, and authors are not following the rules they signed up to, authors don't necessarily see it in the same way as the publishers.

A group of medical scientists told me:

*"We want to share our work with anyone and everybody"*

This group not only wants free distribution and access of author accepted manuscripts (AAMs), they want it immediately at the point of acceptance.

*"Speed of publication is very important because it affects metrics and funding"*

The long-standing dissemination model is changing and there are many attractive new forms and platforms for dissemination emerging. One researcher, who is also chair of an editorial board of a scholarly society publisher, described the chaos of the current transition to a much freer dissemination environment, but also his views about the likely demise of the traditional model of journal publishing:

*"We are in the death throes of journal publishing. None of us knows where it's going. We are excited, energized and threatened. All are jockeying for position in a landscape where we don't know where it's going. It's a symptom of chaos"*

Some academics predict that the article as we know it will remain as a record at a fixed point in the research, but think that discussion and debate about research should be much more fluid and open.

*"There is still a role for traditional journals for well-researched, carefully evaluated manuscripts, but not as the core hub of dissemination in this day and age."*

and

*"There is need for a definitive [article] version at some point. Until then it can be fluid"*

Some researchers I've spoken to believe the writing is on the wall for one model of open access article publication.

*"Hybrid will not last. We are trying to save a failing model"*

### New shiny services on offer to researchers

We can see clear signs of change in scholarly dissemination tools being used by researchers with lots of new services and platforms emerging (see Fig 2)

Fig 2: A selection of services available to authors

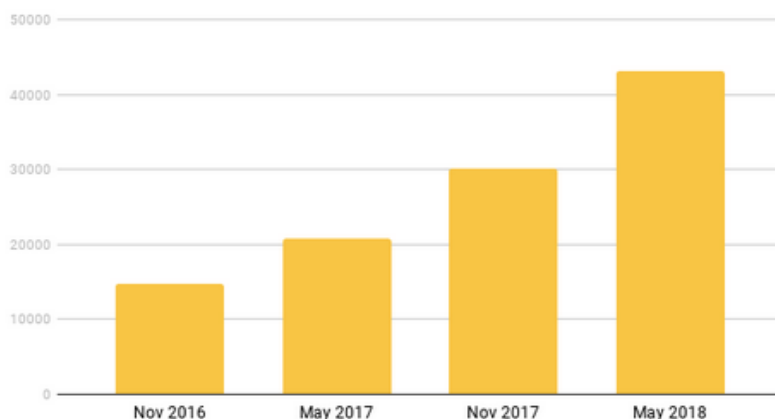


Authors are using academic networks like ResearchGate and Academia.edu; many are using (the illegal) Sci-Hub; there is increasing use of pre-print servers. Other services popping up are discovery and access services such as Open access button, Unpaywall and Kopernio, plus there are innovative models of peer review and publishing. The rise of pre-print servers has been particularly noticeable of late, and authors other than high-energy physicists are beginning to use them:

*"Pre-print servers like BioArxiv are at a tipping point. I would use it"*

Crossref has reported growth in preprints of around 30% for the past 2 years, about ten times higher than growth in numbers of articles at 2-3% for the same period (<https://www.crossref.org/blog/preprints-growth-rate-ten-times-higher-than-journal-articles/>)

Preprints registered with Crossref



## Problems with the existing publishing model

Being somewhat overdramatic one might say about the current scholarly dissemination landscape ‘Thou art weighed in the balance and found wanting.’ (Bible, Book of Daniel). One problem is, that many publishers are promoting two mutually contradictory points at the same time. That is, publishers claim to disseminate work widely, whilst also controlling access to the same works via copyright and permissions. You can’t have both.

### The conundrum

Two mutually contradictory points are being promoted at the same time

<b>On the one hand...</b>	<b>...and on the other</b>
We'll disseminate your work to the widest possible audience	You can only share your work with certain people using certain channels at a certain time

Here's an example taken from the Taylor & Francis website (my emphasis):

*“Although it may feel like the end of the process, getting your article published is the beginning of a new journey. **Ensuring that your work is read (and ultimately cited) by as many researchers as possible** is at the very center of what we do at Taylor & Francis..... Your research can then be accessed in repositories or databases, usually **following an embargo period.**”*

<http://authorservices.taylorandfrancis.com/5-ways-taylor-and-francis-maximize-reach-research/>

Another example, this time on Elsevier's website. Authors are encouraged to promote public engagement with their research, but then the publisher curtails their sharing by offering limited options for sharing:

*“Step 5 – Dissemination. When you allow the public to work closely with you in shaping important, emotive research findings, disseminating the final project is often organic. Organisations that you consulted and shared your public engagement plans with early on, or who've put you in touch with others, **will often be curious about what you've produced**, and will be **keen to show it to others**. Make sure you **explore the sharing options** for your published work **as thoroughly as possible.**”*

<https://www.elsevier.com/connect/authors-update/how-to-drive-public-engagement-with-your-article-introducing-the-new-sense-about-science-guide>

The fact is that many authors are not interested in exploring complicated sharing options. As we've seen, they've got new tools and platforms, and want to distribute their work as widely and freely as possible, in the way that they, the author and creator of the work, choose. I realize researchers often have librarians and SHERPA Romeo to help, but the examples in this discussion paper affect all of us and describes the convoluted environment we're all working in.

If I want to find out what I'm allowed to do with my manuscript on the Cell Press journal web site, this is my user journey:

1. Information for authors <https://www.cell.com/cell/authors> instructs me that “An overview of the rights that Cell Press authors retain, the options for sharing articles at various stages, and the duration of embargo periods, as well as open access options, is available at [http://www.cell.com/rights-sharing-embargoes.](http://www.cell.com/rights-sharing-embargoes)”

- Following the link, I'm taken to the "rights, sharing and embargoes" page at <https://www.cell.com/rights-sharing-embargoes?code=cell-site>. Here I'm told "*We recognise that authors want to share their papers and we encourage this. Find out how you can share your paper here: [www.elsevier.com/sharing-articles](http://www.elsevier.com/sharing-articles).*"
- That link takes me to Elsevier's "Sharing and promoting your article page" <https://www.elsevier.com/authors/journal-authors/submit-your-paper/sharing-and-promoting-your-article>. Scrolling down I read "*There are a number of options for posting and sharing your article below. For further information see [Green open access with Elsevier](#), our [sharing policy](#) and our [FAQ on posting](#).*"
- I decided to follow the 'sharing policy' link. This provides the following instructions:

*"Authors who publish in Elsevier journals can share their research in several ways...There are some simple guidelines to follow"*

which continues for accepted manuscripts: *Authors can share their accepted manuscript:*

#### **Immediately**

- *via their non-commercial personal homepage or blog*
- *by updating a preprint in arXiv or RePEc with the accepted manuscript*
- *via their research institute or institutional repository for internal institutional uses or as part of an invitation-only research collaboration work-group*
- *for private scholarly sharing as part of an invitation-only work group on commercial sites with which Elsevier has an agreement*

#### **After the embargo period**

- *via non-commercial hosting platforms such as their institutional repository*

#### **In all cases accepted manuscripts should:**

*if aggregated with other manuscripts, for example in a repository or other site, be shared in alignment with our [hosting policy](#)"*

If you follow the [hosting policy](#) link it brings you to a page with this instruction:

*"A research institute can host its employees' and students' accepted manuscripts immediately for internal institutional use or private scholarly sharing as part of an invited research collaboration work-group. After an embargo period passes the manuscript can also be shared publicly."*

<https://www.elsevier.com/about/policies/sharing>

Complicated enough for you? I rest my case.

In a nutshell, authors can put their accepted manuscript in one specified place, but not another specified place, and if they want to put it in this specified place then they have to check special agreements and policies. Does Cell Press really expect authors to read and abide by these convoluted instructions?

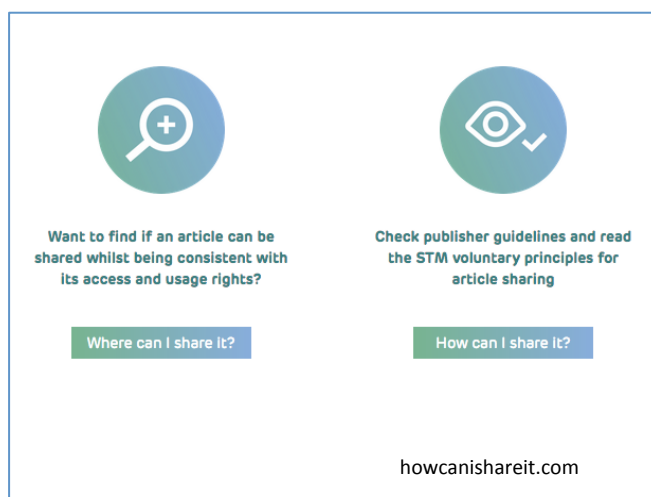


The "How Can I Share It?" website has been set up by STM publishers supposedly to help researchers through this morass of permissions. It is based on the STM voluntary sharing principles

[https://www.stm-  
assoc.org/2015\\_06\\_08\\_Voluntary\\_principles\\_for\\_article\\_sharin  
g\\_on\\_scholarly\\_collaboration\\_networks.pdf](https://www.stm-assoc.org/2015_06_08_Voluntary_principles_for_article_sharing_on_scholarly_collaboration_networks.pdf)

Authors are invited to read instructions about sharing their work based on the principles. This might be via an email:

*Dear Dr [NAME], .... Did you know, as an author, you can use your article for a wide range of scholarly, non-commercial purposes, and share and post your article online in a variety of ways? For more information visit [www.elsevier.com/sharing-articles](http://www.elsevier.com/sharing-articles)."*



Even if a busy researcher makes it to the 'How can I share it?' website, they don't have time to deal with all these instructions, they don't really care, and they use ResearchGate or Academia.edu anyway

Look at it through a researcher's eyes:

**The work is only to be used in certain types of service, after a specified date dependent on the type of service, and then by only certain people depending on the type of service.**

This is over-complexity in the eyes of authors when they just want their work to be read by as many people as possible. The instructions which state that "*Sharing should be allowed within research collaboration groups, namely groups of scholars or researchers invited to participate in specific research collaborations*" is frankly baffling to someone who is trying to disseminate their own work as widely as possible. It's no wonder researchers don't always obey the rules – even if they take the trouble to find out what the overly complex rules are in the first place.

## Copyright

A number of publishers insist on authors transferring copyright to the publisher. The reasons given for doing this can be somewhat dubious. There are plenty of examples (my emphasis):

*Authors will be asked to transfer copyright of the article to the Publisher...This will ensure the **widest possible** protection and **dissemination of information under copyright laws***  
Springer: Osteoporosis International <https://www.springer.com/medicine/orthopedics/journal/198>

*Upon acceptance of an article, **authors will be asked to transfer copyright. This transfer will ensure the widest possible dissemination of information.***  
Cell Press <https://www.cell.com/trends/editorial-policies>

*In order for Maney Publishing ('the Publisher') **to ensure the widest possible dissemination and protection of material published in the Journal, we request authors to assign worldwide copyright** in print, digital and other media in their papers, including abstracts, to the European Medical Writers Association.*  
[www.emwa.org/documents/journal/MEW\\_2012\\_Copyright\\_Assignment\\_Form.pdf](http://www.emwa.org/documents/journal/MEW_2012_Copyright_Assignment_Form.pdf)

Copyright does **not** have to be assigned to the publisher to ensure the widest possible dissemination. The Springer example actually implies a direct link between dissemination and 'copyright laws.' However, all of these instructions are nonsense.

Wiley not only state on the sample CTA (Copyright Transfer Agreement) form that:

***“In order to expedite the editing and publishing process and enable the Owner to disseminate your Contribution to the fullest extent, we need to have this Copyright Transfer Agreement executed.... The Contributor assigns to the Owner...all copyright...”***

[https://authorservices.wiley.com/asset/photos/licensing-and-open-access-photos/eCTA\\_sample.pdf](https://authorservices.wiley.com/asset/photos/licensing-and-open-access-photos/eCTA_sample.pdf)

but is an example of another problem – the agreement document is 6 pages long! It’s no surprise then that our busy authors are not bothering to read the CTA before signing. This is another reason why they then end up taking actions that contravene the agreement.

Not all publishers take this tack. Two contrasting examples:

The Royal Society author retains copyright, assigns a CC-BY licence to their work and is permitted to post their AAM in a repository at acceptance:

*In relation to the Author Generated Postprint only, You are free to:  
post it on Your personal or institutional web site and load it onto your institutional repository once accepted for publication;*

<https://royalsociety.org/~media/journals/author/Royal-Society-Licence-to-Publish-27062017.pdf?la=en-GB>

The AIP (American Institute of Physics) is similar (and additionally eliminated publication page charges and colour charges, as of January 1, 2018, for all of the organization’s journals):

*“Since 2016 ... authors retain copyright of their work, and can share author manuscripts, without embargo, upon acceptance into an AIP Publishing journal.”*

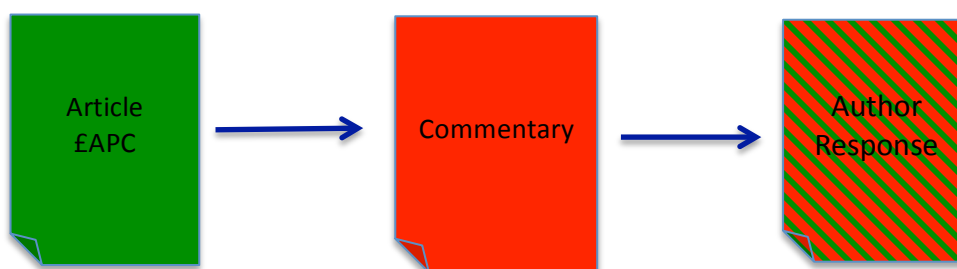
<https://publishing.aip.org/publishing/news/aip-publishing-eliminates-publication-page-charges-across-all-journals>

### **How restricted access can affect scholarly debate**

This example demonstrates how current dissemination situation can affect scientific debate and which happened to an Oxford researcher. The authors wrote an article and took the journal’s paid gold OA option. Their article was published in September 2016

(<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cortex.2016.03.019>)

A commentary on the article was written by a different group of authors from other universities, and published in the same journal in Nov 2017 (<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cortex.2017.03.025>). There was no APC paid for the commentary, so it remained behind a paywall. The original authors later



submitted a response to that commentary (<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cortex.2017.06.012>), again in the same journal. On realising that their response would be behind a paywall they queried this with the journal. They then realised that the other researchers’ commentary is behind a paywall. Having paid the original APC they felt that the whole discussion and sequence of related pieces should be open.

The publisher agreed that the Oxford author’s response would be made OA without an additional fee. However, this is unsatisfactory because the intervening commentary is not open. In fact, the response was made open for only 50 days. The result: disgruntled authors who feel that open scientific debate that has been paid for has been scuppered.

## **Confusion concerning dissemination of work in a doctoral thesis**

Another example of convoluted and confusing dissemination and access concerns two articles included as part of a D.Phil. student's doctoral thesis. At Oxford, D.Phil. students are required to deposit their thesis in the institutional repository as a condition of award. The student's research was funded by EPSRC. EPSRC funded requirements:

- Articles to be made OA within 6 months of publication
- Theses to be made OA within maximum 12 months following award

The two articles were published by two different publishers. The publishers permitted the article version of record (VoR) to be included in the thesis (for example, as a chapter or appendix) and made OA immediately electronically. However the publisher's instructions stated that the VoR should not be made available in the institutional repository. The funder requires the thesis is made OA within one year.

To add to the confusion, the author had to deposit the accepted manuscripts of the articles in the repository to satisfy funder requirements. One publisher required a 12-month embargo and the other a 24-month embargo. Neither is compliant with the EPSRC's requirements.

The result: contradictory permissions regarding the VoR, permissions that do not comply with the funder's requirements, and an unhappy doctoral graduate. I have not included eligibility for REF by the co-authors in this description and which adds another layer of complexity.

An inordinate amount of time was spent by both the student and library staff sorting out this problem.

## **What researchers want as readers**

Here are some comments from researchers about what they want as readers of journals:

*"Easy access without embargo. To be able to get hold of stuff easily."*

*"Barrier free access to research findings is becoming the norm for researchers globally."*

The idea of limited 'sharing,' a term that in my opinion has been hijacked, is not attractive to researchers. University researchers are increasingly used to easy access via a combination of institutional subscriptions (on campus perceived by them as having barrier-free access), plus open dissemination channels, legal or otherwise. As stated previously, they do not want some parts of the debate open, but others behind a barrier.

## **The Emperor's new clothes**

One of my great aunts reportedly took part in the mass trespass of 1932 (<https://web.archive.org/web/20171015195948/http://www.kindertrespass.com/>). At that time, working people objected to being prevented from access to little-used Pennine moorland for recreation. In order to make their point, a mass trespass was organized, and walkers set out from Manchester and Sheffield. Their demands were modest, for example to open a public path across Kinder Scout to allow ramblers through when the land was not in use, but as a result of their action, there was a scuffle with police and 5 men were jailed.

As a result of this campaign, the National Parks (<http://www.nationalparks.gov.uk/students/whatisanationalpark/history>) and later on, the long distance Pennine Way (<https://www.nationaltrail.co.uk/pennine-way>) were instigated. More recently, the Countryside and Rights of Way Act was passed in 2000 (<http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-1378>). It was tellingly noted by one of the original walkers that the shift in the pattern of land ownership caught them unawares.

*"The shift in the pattern of land ownership caught us largely unawares in the last century"*

Roly Smith (previously at <http://kindertrespass.com/index.asp?ID=141>)

This story has a number of resonances with access to research outcomes: restrictions imposed on access to something of general interest, the people affected having good reason to question those restrictions, then taking direct action to change things. Given the way things are going with scholarly dissemination, if publishers don't support authors' freedom to disseminate and access research outputs, many researchers will take (indeed, are taking) the matter into their own hands, and not necessarily legally.

### **Game changers**

Some services such as ResearchGate and Sci-Hub are, in my opinion, game changers. We know many researchers are making use of academic social networks.

*"ASNs [Academic Social Networks] have for many become the primary way to provide access to one's research output..."*

<https://theidealists.org/research-output-availability-on-academic-social-networks-implications-for-stakeholders-in-academic-publishing/>

It would seem that authors don't read, and are not interested in, the complexities of copyright transfer agreements. Publishers are unlikely to write individually to authors to tell them how naughty they've been – this would be tantamount to killing the goose that lays the golden egg – they are approaching the platform directly instead (see publishers vs ResearchGate <http://www.sciencemag.org/news/2017/10/publishers-take-researchgate-court-alleging-massive-copyright-infringement>). Despite the fact that we don't condone, nor promote it, researchers are using illegal Sci-Hub (I notice such encouragement in a Twitter thread as I write). So far, we have not seen any evidence of the demise of commercial publishers or publications. As a radical solution, instead of trying to change authors' habits, it may be possible to cut through the complexity and for publishers and journal editors to change the rules to make it easier for researchers.

The easy access genie is out of the internet bottle. Many researchers want their work openly available. To this end they are using OA to share their own work and to access other's work. They are getting increasingly used to accessing research findings easily online:

- a. Through the 'barrier-free' access at their institution (via subscriptions)
- b. By sending copies to whoever asks
- c. By posting on their own institutional web pages (legitimately or not)
- d. By posting on academic networks (legitimately or not)

It is clear to me that researchers are not in the slightest bit interested in sharing that has lots of complicated restrictions.

### **Competing or complementary**

It is possible to view alternative channels of dissemination as complementary rather than competing with high quality commercial publishers' platforms. Such alternative channels assist rapid dissemination of research. Institutional repositories act as free publicity for publishers via DOI links to articles and book chapters. Accepted manuscripts in repositories act as a vehicle to finding the version of record, and users tend to cite the VoR.

Some publishers already have zero embargo on AAMs and have not collapsed. This supports the assumptions that the VoR has value added by the publisher, and that authors currently want to continue publishing in reputable journals. From an institutional perspective, the repository acts as a shop-window for that institution's research, and enables the university to retain for the long-term a local copy of the outputs published under its affiliation.

### **What are we trying to achieve?**

Researchers want to publish and disseminate the results of their research. They want to use the dissemination channels of their choosing. Universities want to help their authors take advantage of new models of publication and dissemination if they so choose, in ways that are affordable, so they

can use open access for the benefit of researchers and research, for universities, and the wider benefits for society. Green OA is complementary to formal publication – it is a great discovery tool and in many cases, allows assessment of the work before buying and citing the VoR (try before you buy). Compliance with funders’ OA policies is a useful driver towards open access, but it is ultimately a means to an end. Open access means unrestricted dissemination and access: it is not about COMPLIANCE – it is not a box ticking exercise.

Given the rat’s nest of complexity described above, and author responses to it (it is generally not on their radar), something must be done to cut through the mess. Publishers could help authors by resolving the conflict between widest dissemination and limited sharing, and by making it easier not to contravene convoluted, confusing permissions.

### **Some suggestions to simplify and remove annoying practice**

Publishers and journal editors might like to consider these suggestions:

- a) All authors retain copyright with no restrictions
- b) Sharing should not be limited to groups. Open is open for all.
- c) Sharing should not be limited by type of system, service, or repository
- d) Zero embargo at acceptance for accepted manuscripts for authors that want it
- e) If an APC is paid for open access to an article, apply open access to all subsequent responses and discussions to that article in that publication
- f) Attach a licence to all gold OA articles to ensure they stay open for the long term
- g) Abandon ‘open for a limited period only’
- h) Do away with long terms & conditions in publishing agreements

Some other suggestions for publishers that would be helpful for authors and universities:

- a) Participate fully in Jisc Publications Router (<https://pubrouter.jisc.ac.uk/>)
- b) Abandon the STM principles and the howcanishareit.com website. Authors won’t use them.
- c) Enable theses to be disseminated online prior to publishing other type of publication emanating from the thesis. Some publishers won’t publish a monograph if the thesis online. Some will. A thesis is very different output to a monograph.
- d) Issue DOIs at acceptance
- e) [I add here a suggestion to avoid difficulties with payment: Encourage authors to check with their institution that funds are available to pay publishing charges such as APCs *before* committing to paid OA.]

In summary: authors deposit their AAM in their institutional repository at acceptance, and make it immediately available if they choose, including a linked DOI to the published version. They can then use the repository link on whatever platform they prefer.

### **The benefits**

1. **Publishers** gets links to the VoR via DOI in repositories
2. **People who don’t have free access** to the VoR (charities, small businesses, the general public, etc) can read to assess usefulness before buying and citing the VoR
3. **Universities** have a local copy of the research published under their affiliation, held for long-term local preservation and can provide a shop-window of the research at that institution
4. **Authors** can disseminate their AAM when and where it suits them, knowing that there is a value-added publisher’s version of record that can be cited.

### **A final thought**

Whilst we are in a world where researchers want to disseminate work freely, where gold OA is not ubiquitous and not currently financially sustainable, researchers and journal editors can help by changing the rules so that authors who undertake the research and who create the resulting papers can do with their own work what they want and need. The scholarly dissemination environment continues to change, but a complex stranglehold on dissemination by publishers is not going to help. We have a situation where publishers are promoting two mutually contradictory points at the same

time, that is, claiming widest possible dissemination, coupled with limited and controlled sharing. That conundrum needs to be resolved: instead of publishers trying to change the culture and practice that academics already choose to share their work (such as the variety of platforms), they could change the rules and get rid of embargoes and complex sharing instructions. Many authors are ignoring them anyway.

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