

Comment is free

Science must be liberated from the paywalls of publishers

Research that is funded by the public should be freely available to all – a move to open access modes of publication is overdue



Stephen Curry

guardian.co.uk, Tuesday 10 April 2012 09.00 BST

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Time to free scientific literature? Photograph: Corbis

As a scientist and citizen I want to see the [universal adoption of the open access model](#) of academic publishing, because it will be better for science and better for society.

Open access, where costs are met upfront by the author and papers are free to readers, would improve science by making all published results and ideas easily accessible to researchers across the world and so fuel the engine of discovery. At present, far too much of our research is locked behind paywalls that restrict access and stall progress.

By shifting ownership of scientific literature away from commercial publishers, open access also provides a clear acknowledgement that the bulk of its value comes from publicly funded scientists and not from publishing companies. This is an overdue correction that will also facilitate the spread of scientific information beyond the research community and among the wider public who, through their taxes and donations to charity, have a moral right to its outputs.

In a connected world, more and more people are realising that they need – and deserve – access to the scientific literature they have paid for, be they patient groups seeking to understand the latest medical research or citizens trying to grapple with research that impacts public policy on important issues such as climate change, drug use or genetically modified foods. Arguably, most members of the public would not be able to understand the primary scientific literature even if they had free access, but the mere fact of its availability – through a shift to open access – should stimulate a healthy demand from the public for more digestible reports from the scientists they support. Direct exposure of the scientific community to the public appetite for research results could even have positive effects on the formulation of research priorities.

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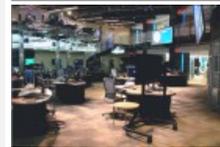
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With all these benefits on offer, why has the scientific community been slow to adopt open access modes of publication? Surely the ethos of open access chimes with the long-standing tradition of free exchange of information within the scientific community?

The problem is due to resistance from publishers, who see open access as a threat to a subscription model that generates massive profits and, in the UK, to a lack of resolve from the research councils who disburse government funds to scientists. The research councils have been encouraging their funded scientists to adopt open access since around 2006, but they have not provided coherent financial support or taken sufficient steps to enforce compliance.

As a result, although all publicly funded science in the UK should now be published through one of the open access routes, rates of uptake remain low. The research councils have only recently begun to monitor rates of compliance, so figures are hard to come by, but some reports suggest they may be as low as 5%. [The Wellcome Trust](#), a major medical research charity, has shown that simplification of the funding mechanism that enables authors to recover open access charges can increase compliance dramatically. Even so, the trust has been disappointed to learn that compliance rates among its funded scientists are only around 55%.

The lack of robust incentives or sanctions from funders fosters a lackadaisical attitude among scientists, who must also bear some of the responsibility for the slow adoption of open access. Though most would readily agree that open access is a good thing, they can lose sight of that during the arduous process of shepherding new results into the literature. For too many, the distractions of negotiating with reviewers or dealing with multiple rounds of submission and rejection at different journals can mean that the final step of sorting out open access arrangements simply drops off the radar.

The situation is not helped by the variation in terms and conditions on open access between different publishers and even between different journals from the same publisher. It's hard to keep up and too many scientists are simply ignorant of the options available to them. Too many presume that publication in the highest ranking journals such as *Nature* or *Science*, which is widely regarded as vital for success in funding and promotion applications, is incompatible with open access modes of publishing. But this is simply not the case. Not only do most high ranking journals permit open access publishing (albeit often via sub-optimal routes that involve a six- to 12-month delay), but the stable of serious and quality open access journals (eg the [Public Library of Science](#)), in which every paper is free to readers, is growing fast.

None of these problems is insurmountable. I am encouraged both by funders announcing their intention to bolster policies on open access and by the attention drawn to the issue by the recent boycott of [academic publishers Elsevier](#). The publishers may not like it, but it is time for scientists to take proper control of their work to make sure that the publicly funded science is made truly public.

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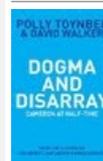


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Guardian pick

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Alexander
10 April 2012 9:06AM

Speaking as an ex-research student, this is long overdue.

One of the occupational hazards of doing a PhD was trying to get your hands on decent journal articles. They cost a lot, were hard to access and you had to wait for an age to get a copy.

Considering this was the middle of the last decade when every man and his research assistant could plonk something onto a .pdf and upload it online, and you see the problem.

And that was just for the humanities. Imagine being a science or engineering student doing his or her doctorate and still having to research like it's 1986. The piss is surely being taken.



recklessfox
10 April 2012 9:23AM

Guardian
pick

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Speaking as someone who used to work for a charity that owned a scientific publisher I can say that this is well intentioned but will be disastrous.

The main effect of this will be to transfer costs from readers of science to producers of science. Since the UK is a net exporter of scientific research this will produce a big cost to the UK as a whole, decreasing the amount of research that is done, as relatively more of the pot of available money is spent on research, and more on paying for publication.

This adverse impact may be lessened (but certainly not eliminated) if the income to publishers is significantly reduced.

The charity I worked for earned more than two thirds of its income from profits on publishing, and all of that was reinvested in science initiatives in the UK, mainly education. More than 90% of that income came from selling publications abroad with the biggest customers being the USA, China and Japan.

If open access comes in all that overseas income is lost to UK science. And my previous employer is not the only one. Almost all the major UK scientific societies earn significant amounts of money from publishing - The Royal Society of Chemistry, The Institute of Physics, The Royal Astronomical Society, The Institute of Engineering & Technology, the Institute of Chemical Engineers, and all of them will lose out from this change. They are all charities so all this money will be lost to the science and engineering base in the UK.

Yes, some money goes to commercial companies, but there will be huge collateral damage from this change.



recklessfox
10 April 2012 9:25AM

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Oh, and by the way, every single article published by my ex-employer, the charity, was freely available on the web for 30 days, so all research was freely available to those that needed it.



recklessfox
10 April 2012 9:25AM

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as relatively more of the pot of available money is spent on research, and more on paying for publication.

I did of course mean **less** on research



phlebasconsidered
10 April 2012 9:30AM

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Whilst I agree in principle, we have to be careful that the public funding is recouped wherever possible which may include restricting access so that intellectual property can be protected effectively. We don't want publicly funded scientific research to be usurped by private organisations to the detriment of the public at large.



Smity23
10 April 2012 9:31AM

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Response to [recklessfox](#), 10 April 2012 9:23AM

The main effect of this will be to transfer costs from readers of science to producers of science.

Just how much does it cost to place a PDF on the internet.

Or will it be yet another crony government quango agency organising it, at commercial rates multiplied by 10.



Smity23
10 April 2012 9:34AM

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Response to [phlebasconsidered](#), 10 April 2012 9:30AM

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oharar
10 April 2012 9:39AM

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Just how much does it cost to place a PDF on the internet.

ArXIV is [projecting a cost of half a million dollars](#) for 2012. Now they have a lot of papers in the archive, but it still gives you some idea.



meeh
10 April 2012 9:55AM

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Response to [oharar, 10 April 2012 9:39AM](#)

So not very much at all then!



Smithy23
10 April 2012 10:00AM

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Response to [oharar, 10 April 2012 9:39AM](#)

an effective cost per submission of <\$7.

Wow! That's a cost effective Business Model.



DavidPavett
10 April 2012 10:04AM

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I strongly support the case made by Stephen Curry. It follows a similar argument put a little while ago by George Monbiot with, [Academic publishers make Murdoch look like a socialist](#), which also made a powerful case.

This is a basic issue about the culture required for a truly democratic society compared to which considerations about how much money a particular charity might lose by the change, or how much (unstated) the UK makes from the sale of academic articles are pretty small beer.

I do not work or study in a university and therefore cannot use the access systems they provide to research documents. I try to follow interests in a number of topics that seem important to me both in terms of general philosophical considerations and in terms of issues which are important to public policy. Time and time again I follow a reference to an article in an academic magazine only to find that access is barred unless I pay £20 or so for the privilege of reading it. I recently read a booklet from a centre/left Labour group (Compass) in which about half the reference were of this sort. I am not in a position to spend that kind of money to read one booklet. I did not even feel in a position to follow *one* of those references.

This blocking of access to knowledge for the purpose or private profit is profoundly anti-democratic. It gives a clear notice that knowledge is only for people who can afford it. All other considerations pale into insignificance by the side of this. Where genuine problems are caused by a switch to open access they should be looked into and solutions found. They should not be used to block the open access that is so vital to a democratic and well-informed society.



ReticentQuant
10 April 2012 10:04AM

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Not sure the article mentions peer review, which is what *published* science is all about.

Anyone can write anything and stick it on the internet.



HarmoniousFrog
10 April 2012 10:09AM

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The main effect of this will be to transfer costs from readers of science to producers of science. Since the UK is a net exporter of scientific research this will produce a big cost to the UK as a whole, decreasing the amount of research that is done, as relatively more of the pot of available money is spent on research, and more on paying for publication.

I don't think that's a strong argument worldwide, because at present the only people who can pay to read the literature are researchers. The UK gets much of its research funding back via the extortionate fees paid by foreign students who are attracted by the healthy researched-based academic environment.

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Head of PR, Sky 1
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[Original article:] Arguably, most members of the public would not be able to understand the primary scientific literature even if they had free access, but the mere fact of its availability – through a shift to open access – should stimulate a healthy demand from the public for more digestible reports from the scientists they support.

I'd take that further. Many scientists are retired or otherwise out of work, but still have a role in disseminating information via the education and voluntary systems. The point about digestible reports is a good one, and journals that publish reviews might, in an open-access system, be more inclined to put more effort into tutorial-type reviews that are reasonably accessible without being dumbed-down. We must bear in mind, though, that writing such reviews is both difficult and time consuming; you never know how far to go with your explanations for the non-specialised reader (who might be a scientist working in a different field).



bullsareup

10 April 2012 10:14AM

Response to [meeh](#), 10 April 2012 9:55AM

As ReticentQuaint points out, the cost of just putting the PDF on the internet may be tiny, but this isn't a good model for science. Anyone can put a PDF on the internet. For reliable *science* you need a model with peer review. That isn't to say that this requires the big publishers and expensive journals - it could still be an up-front fee to publish with the end article being open access.

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speedkermit

10 April 2012 10:15AM



Great news.

There needs to be a similar revolution in the field of law reporting. There is absolutely no justification for there not being full, free access for all to the decisions made in the courts of England and Wales. It strikes to the very heart of a fair justice system that a defendant or claimant be able to examine and analyse the state of the law in the area in which they have a significant interest. Anything else amounts to a monopoly by the law profession who can charge what they wish to access and interpret it on their behalf. It might increase the number of people choosing to defend themselves (and badly!), but at the moment they are not empowered to make the decision about whether to engage the services of a professional, or whether to challenge the representation they are provided by the State (who often act in the interests of persons other than the defendant).

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Tarantella

10 April 2012 10:19AM

Hang on a minute! There are many of us who aren't funded to do our research or are un- or under-employed thanks to the devaluation of tertiary education, especially in the humanities, and produce work mainly at our own cost already! Luckily I have access to most of the research I need, or can get articles from the authors direct (but not always and its not ideal). So I'd argue that it's the high costs that are the real problem. I'd pay a pound an article, but not twenty or thirty. As things are I go round it so I don't pay anything - because I can't.

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scww

10 April 2012 10:21AM



Response to [recklessfox](#), 10 April 2012 9:23AM

@recklessfox

You raise some interesting points (DOI - I am the author of this comment piece). I would like to see the potential problem that open access models of publishing creates for learned societies that rely on journal income discussed in more detail.

It's important to bear in mind, however, that there is a huge overlap between readers and producers of science and that the total funds for publishing (author charges and subs paid by university libraries) largely come from the same pot: the public purse. Part of the solution is therefore to manage the different pools of money (currently mostly disbursed by research councils, HEFCE — and charities like Wellcome) to facilitate a transition from subscription-based publishing to properly supported author pays arrangements. The total amount of money should be about the same so I think it should be possible for society journals to earn a living in an OA world. But that will certainly depend on funders and universities getting their acts together.

[Recommend \(13\)](#)

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Pazoozoo

10 April 2012 10:22AM

Not before time, the journal publication method should be anathma to the scientific method.

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OpiumEater
10 April 2012 10:23AM

I think the open access as proposed here and by Wellcome wouldn't be a good idea. I think academic publishing needs reforming, but not in this total glasnost way.

I also object to months and months of work being put into article becoming just another HTML text on the web. The printed, bound word is invaluable, and it would become obsolete under these proposals.

And at the risk of sounding elitist about this, but the vast majority of academic work is niche and of no interest to a general readership. Simply having it open access would blur the lines between serious scholarship and simply online content. Both within the sciences and humanities (in different ways), opening up access would not "democratize" knowledge, but just open the floodgates of a mass of unmanageable content.

This age is dominated by ideas of openness, and that will solve everything, but I don't think people have really thought this one through.

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recklessfox
10 April 2012 10:27AM

Response to [Smithy23](#), 10 April 2012 9:31AM

Even a relatively small publisher, like my ex-employer, spends massive amounts of money on servers, data connections, business continuity, to ensure 99.5% uptime. Are you one of these people who think the internet is really free - who do you think pays for all the IT hardware and software which enables you to click on a document, no to mention all the editors, proofreaders etc who ensure the document is fit for purpose - have you ever seen how many errors there are in a typical first draft paper from a scientist?

[Recommend \(20\)](#)

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ReticentQuant
10 April 2012 10:28AM

I don't have a lot of time to post today but there is a lot more to this than what is being debated.

Science journals are international; publishing science from all over the world, and the UK taxpayer is only funding *some of the UK research.

*Not all science is funded by the tax payer either. Some Unis get private funding for some research which may or may not get published.

There is a cost in publishing which has to be met, but I think the main complaint is the large profit being made, is that right?

I would welcome methods to reduce this large profit, but as bullsareup said, peer review must be maintained.

Not just to distinguish between science and a load of nonsense, but to establish who did the original work. A growing problem in China now, as they insist on copying work done previously without any acknowledgements.

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Gerbilator
10 April 2012 10:30AM

Physicists sorted this out years ago with ArXiv. That has real peer review, in the sense that everyone gets to see what's been done, and can comment, criticise or ignore as they see fit. As for quality assurance, those with (or trying to build) a reputation made damned sure they don't put up tripe, as it'll get blasted by, well, your peers in front of the whole community (rather than just you and a couple of referees).

The idea that only the kind of peer review Nature/Science/JAMA provides constitutes real QA, is risible propaganda put about by their publishers. They routinely override referees reports (for or against) to suit their own agendas, forcing good stuff into second-tier journals like GRLett, Phys Rev Lett, while promoting eye-catching cobbler's.

Am not keen on the researcher-pays model being promoted by Open Access journals, for the reasons spelt out by other contributors.

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recklessfox
10 April 2012 10:31AM

Response to [scww](#), 10 April 2012 10:21AM

It's important to bear in mind, however, that there is a huge overlap between readers and producers of science and that the total funds for publishing (author charges and subs paid by university libraries) largely come from the same pot: the public purse.

In total, that is obviously true but for the UK it is certainly not as we are a significant net exporter of science research. There will be a large net cost to the UK, which someone will have to pay.

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Also, you will understand my lack of confidence that anyone will care about, or manage the impact on, charities, when major changes like this are being made. Charities rarely get any thought from government at the best of times, and this is decidedly not the best of times.



wombatty

10 April 2012 10:31AM

Response to [DavidPavett, 10 April 2012 10:04AM](#)

David,

Always feel free to email the lead author of a paper, I have done this hundreds of times and never once has somebody refused to send me a copy. Within reason you can also ask them questions about the work and they are usually happy to respond - as long as you have had a good read of the paper and thus have an interesting question

One issue that was not mentioned here is the rash of open access journals which appear to have sprung up (and spam me day in and day out). One was offering money to be an editor, which one would earn as a percentage of the open access fee for papers that one managed to get published. The open access fees can be a few grand. This might be a way to waste more public money earmarked for research. These 'instant' open access journals may not be easy to spot, with names as similar as possible to good ones.

Why don't universities publish their own work, and why don't they instigate a double blind system, (at the moment, if you review a paper, you do this anonymously, but you know who wrote it and so can be influenced by the knowledge - for good or bad) - anyhow this would also mean that reviewers were effectively paid as part of their tenure, to do reviews.

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fflump

10 April 2012 10:38AM

Personally I think an equally large issue is that of **who** you publish with.

Publish with a for-profit organization (Elsevier, Nature Publishing Group) and you line the pockets of shareholders/business owners and money leaks out of science.

Publish with not-for-profit learned societies (AAAS, Society for Neuroscience) who run equally prestigious journals and the money goes back into Science and education.

Personally I think the grants conditions from research councils is that work must be published with not-for-profit publishers

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SamsonB

10 April 2012 10:38AM

Not sure that this is a good idea at all.

I quite like the idea of regulating who may study one's research- especially if that research may give an oppressive regime or our competitor countries an advantage. Well meaning maybe, but poorly thought out.

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HamiltonVeneering

10 April 2012 10:39AM

I'm not a scientist but I am a UK taxpayer. I have some questions perhaps some scientist here could please answer?

Do other countries publish results of publicly-funded research? Would open access mean that foreign corporations - such as pharmaceutical companies - could use UK medical research entirely free of charge?

It seems to me that the UK taxpayer has a legitimate interest in protecting research that it has paid for, particularly if it has some commercial value.

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Smithy23

10 April 2012 10:41AM

And at the risk of sounding elitist about this, but the vast majority of academic work is niche and of no interest to a general readership. Simply having it open access would blur the lines between serious scholarship and simply online content.

When Dark Matter theory existed in a peer reviewed "academic niche interest", it gained a lot of credibility. Once it was thrust into mainstream science, it needed to make a lot universal constants, variable to maintain credibility. In the last year, it looks more and more like the tellying of a bad lie. But then, its probably just a physics V theoretical astrophysics thing.

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Phos4

10 April 2012 10:42AM

Response to [wombatty](#), 10 April 2012 10:31AM

Always feel free to email the lead author of a paper, I have done this hundreds of times and never once has somebody refused to send me a copy.

The absurdity of the system is that such an action is illegal. Authors sign a transfer of copyright which means they are not allowed to distribute the paper without permission of the publishers.

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DrDel

10 April 2012 10:44AM

The problem is not just the publishers, and it is the government also that is driving this. The former Research Assessment Exercise and now the Research Excellence Framework compel academics to submit to high impact journals, most of which are behind paywalls owned by publishing conglomerates. There are one or two big journals that are not behind paywalls, such as PLoSONE, but the vast majority are.

The problem with making academics pay for review and publishing is that the sciences are well funded and set up to do this, but the social sciences and humanities are not. It will be very difficult under such a system for humanities researchers to publish in big journals if you do this.

What is needed is a flexible system whereby pre-payment for immediate open access is possible, and a delay of two years behind a paywall and then open access without prepayment is available for those that lack the funds.

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snoozeofreason

10 April 2012 10:44AM

Response to [ReticentQuant](#), 10 April 2012 10:04AM

Not sure the article mentions peer review, which is what published science is all about.

Anyone can write anything and stick it on the internet

Open access journals can be peer reviewed just as strictly as anything else. For example everything in Biomed Central is peer reviewed, and the process is much more transparent than it is with traditional journals.

As others have mentioned, [its not cheap](#) though.

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Smithy23

10 April 2012 10:45AM

Response to [HamiltonVeneering](#), 10 April 2012 10:39AM

It seems to me that the UK taxpayer has a legitimate interest in protecting research that it has paid for, particularly if it has some commercial value.

This is about who makes the money from research that is published. Intellectual rights are something else, for example China and India do not acknowledge patents, within their own borders.

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Phos4

10 April 2012 10:45AM

Response to [HamiltonVeneering](#), 10 April 2012 10:39AM

Do other countries publish results of publicly-funded research?

In the US, NIH (which is funded by federal government and hence tax money) funded research must be openly available to the public by law.

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Phos4

10 April 2012 10:46AM

Response to [HamiltonVeneering](#), 10 April 2012 10:39AM

Do other countries publish results of publicly-funded research?

In the US, NIH (which is funded by federal government and hence tax money) funded research must be openly available to the public by law.

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SamsonB

10 April 2012 10:51AM

[Recommend \(4\)](#)

[Responses \(0\)](#)

Response to [Phos4, 10 April 2012 10:46AM](#)

The answer is we don't actually know. Japan publishes some of its research in my own field (polymer science) but having seen some of the innovations that have come out of Japan in terms of silicon replacement technology, I suspect that they don't publish all of their research until they have patents in place and a commercially viable product ready to roll out.



DodgyGeezer

10 April 2012 10:54AM

For the research which is 100% funded by the taxpayer:

- 1 - the taxpayer pays for the scientists, the equipment and the writing up of the research.
- 2 - the taxpayer then pays the extra charge for publishing the research in a magazine run by a private company.
- 3 - the taxpayer then pays again to gain access to that research, which they have already funded and paid to be published.

Nice business model...

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ElliottCB

10 April 2012 10:54AM

I don't see how this can be argued. I do, however, have a concern, and that is that anything that is placed on-line might be regarded as science. This danger already exists, of course, but making journals freely available might blur the demarcation. That is probably something we will have to live with, and in any case it is a Slippery Slope argument and so subject to its own weakness. Hence just a concern.

It is becoming very hard to tell what has and hasn't met scientific standards of quality in debates on-line, as the proportion of direct references to original papers is extremely small. Anything that includes "scientists say" often appears to be treated as having the full credibility of experts in the field in question. This comes through very strongly in debates on climate science and evolution, and is the basis of entire pseudo-scientific industries like nutritionism. We need to tread with caution. Keeping the journals closed to readers, however, is no longer a solution.

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eR0Kajah

10 April 2012 10:56AM

Why is this even an issue?

The only plausible explanation I can think of is that too many academics are unwilling to risk their REA rating by taking on the publishing monopolists.

If they didn't simultaneously bleat on and on about 'academic freedom', I'd be less inclined to call them out for being the spineless hypocrits that they actually are.

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meeh

10 April 2012 10:59AM

Response to [bull sareup, 10 April 2012 10:14AM](#)

arXiv manages to work well without peer review with moderation and an endorsement system. Peer review isn't itself without problems and the ultimate peer review happens after publication anyway when the discipline community at large gets hold of it.

Anyone can put anything on the internet and it's up to the user to be savvy in what they trust.

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HarmoniousFrog

10 April 2012 11:01AM

Response to [Phos4, 10 April 2012 10:42AM](#)

I don't think it's illegal to provide copies of your own papers to people you know. If someone emails you for a copy, that's evidence of a common interest & so you could say the 2 parties are acquainted.

However, the trouble with asking people to send pdf's is that it takes some of their precious time (or that of their staff). It's best not to overdo requests, and to make do with the freely-available abstract if possible.

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DodgyGeezer

10 April 2012 11:03AM

Response to [SamsonB, 10 April 2012 10:38AM](#)

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@SamsonB

Not sure that this is a good idea at all. I quite like the idea of regulating who may study one's research...

A novel approach to the scientific method here. Well meaning maybe, but poorly thought out. It reminds me of the famous quote from Phil Jones of the UEA CRU, when asked by Steve McKintyre for more information about his climate work:

"Why should I make the data available to you, when your aim is to try and find something wrong with it?"



Henderson88

10 April 2012 11:05AM

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How would the peer review system work in such cases?

Arxiv can be a wonderful resource, but it is not a peer reviewed site. Who would fund the reviewers?



DrDel

10 April 2012 11:07AM

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Response to [eR0Kajah](#), 10 April 2012 10:56AM

The only plausible explanation I can think of is that too many academics are unwilling to risk their REA rating by taking on the publishing monopolists.

If they didn't simultaneously bleat on and on about 'academic freedom', I'd be less inclined to call them out for being the spineless hypocrits that they actually are.

It is a bit of a stretch to ask individuals to risk their and their families' futures by asking each one to be a maverick lone-wolf. Accusing people of being spineless hypocrites when they have forsaken higher salaries in the private sector in order to help uncover truths in their areas of interest, is also a tad over the top, in my opinion. What do you do that makes you so able and willing to accuse others of such behaviour?

On a more pragmatic note, I would, however, suggest that the lecturers' unions take a stand on this, which might draw a larger number of people in to submitting to open access journals.



SamsonB

10 April 2012 11:08AM

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Response to [DodgyGeezer](#), 10 April 2012 11:03AM

It's pragmatic.

Science for science's sake, yes publish by all means.

But science where the end application is a marketable product. Keep it in the UK domain only.

For instance, did you know that all the NMR magnets in the world (used for MRI machines) are made by one company in Oxford?

I just don't like the idea of letting research loose amongst the morally bankrupt.



fflump

10 April 2012 11:08AM

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Response to [Phos4](#), 10 April 2012 10:42AM

The absurdity of the system is that such an action is illegal. Authors sign a transfer of copyright which means they are not allowed to distribute the paper without permission of the publishers.

You are the one being absurd. It is perfectly legal to send someone a pdf of your work upon request.

What is illegal is any attempt to distribute the pdf in a systematic way i.e. mailshot hundreds of colleagues with your pdf.



MakeMPsOwnUp

10 April 2012 11:10AM

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Pretty much said all I wanted to say yesterday over in the comments at [Wellcome Trust joins 'academic spring' to open up science](#). Just because the article's author changed doesn't alter my view.



eR0Kajah

10 April 2012 11:11AM

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Shouldn't replicability count for more than peer review?

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In some respects, peer review seems like a cheap way to work around the costs involved in re-testing a research hypothesis.

Using re-testing as the default measure of research quality would undoubtedly increase the cost of individual lines of research, but if that meant cutting out 90% of the dross that's done purely to publish, I suspect that we would all be better off for it.



hazh

10 April 2012 11:12AM

The is just poorly thought-out idea. Instant access on the web free to all is a pretty idea, but just will happen to the journals if all articles are available free with no restriction? They will all die. Good you might say, but who is to judge what is an important research paper and what is just another run-of-the-mill one? I know an article is important if it is published in Science, Nature, Cell, or other important journals, less important when it is published in an obscure one. Thousands upon thousands of papers are published each years, it is impossible for an individual to sift through them, and we can't all be expert in a field to know what is important and what is not.

Someone has to pay for the publishing whatever the case, free access won't be free. I think limiting free access until after six months or a year is an acceptable compromise, I hope that is what will be adopted.

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oharar

10 April 2012 11:12AM

Response to [scww](#), 10 April 2012 10:21AM

The financial issue was one I wanted to discuss with you last week. The good news is that I suspect an author pays model will drive down the overall costs of publishing, because the users are aware of how much they're paying (at the moment we've no idea). But this is obviously bad news for learned societies, because they'll see less money.

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Clearcut

10 April 2012 11:12AM

The gist of your connotation is powerful and therefore compelling; he who funds the research should (the least) enjoy access and be eligible to freely examine the fruits. More generally there is much force in formulating a general rule which provides the public with transparency and free availability with public goods. All the more so where the very "goods" are those funded by the public (unless there are compelling reasons to the contrary where appropriate).

Yet,

but the mere fact of its availability – through a shift to open access – should stimulate a healthy demand from the public for more digestible reports from the scientists they support

may lead into a slippery road where "science" turns to be "popular science" and subsequently fiction. It is important to keep a sharp distinction between the rigidity of scientifically written, approved and published findings or theory on the one hand and popular journalistic material on the other hand.

Dumbing down is the name of the popular media's game. Requiring open access and generally demanding to capitalise our freedom to know and be well-informed human being must not be confused or compromised with the rigour well established standards the scientific has developed and concaved throughout the ages.

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