



Open Access Journal Publishing in the Arts and Humanities

A workshop in association with SAS Open Journals and SAS-Space

October 20th, 2011

This event, held at the School of Advanced Study, was the official launch of SAS Open Journals, the new Open Access publishing service for arts and humanities journals produced by or in association with the School of Advanced Study (<http://journals.sas.ac.uk/>).

The three papers presented were:

- *Where to start ? Issues for the prospective new journal* (Dr Damien Short, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, University of London)
- *Moving from print to web: the journal Amicus Curiae* (Steve Whittle & Julian Harris, Institute of Advanced Legal Studies, University of London) [presentation available in [SAS-Space](#)]
- *Introducing SAS Open Journals* (Dr Peter Webster, School of Advanced Study)

The second part of the workshop consisted of four discussion group sessions, in which delegates discussed issues in OA journal publishing, including staffing and workflow, business models, marketing and publicity, and making the transition from print to web.

What follows is a summary of those discussions.

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How to run an Open Access journal

Running any journal without the involvement of a traditional commercial publisher necessitates some re-engineering of the process by which an article is turned from the author's word processor file into a type-set article. The first group considered the following questions relating to staffing and workflow:

*How do journal editors reassign some of the copy production work traditionally done by the publisher ?
Does one need a bigger team to take on the reassigned tasks ? Would readers accept less well-edited content, if it were free ?*

Taking this last question first, the group agreed that readers were likely to be put off by content that was visibly less well edited and presented than that to which they were accustomed. It was also thought that retaining confidence in this way was particularly important for a new journal in its early days.

Given this, the group thought that an enlarged editorial team would be necessary, such that a necessarily increased workload could be spread more widely. For a typical journal, three was thought too small, with as many as twelve not out of the question.

Would authors accept that a greater amount of work in copy preparation was likely to fall on them ?

The group agreed that this would represent a shift in culture, but that there were signs of such a requirement emerging already, although more so in monograph publishing. One member knew of a special issue of a journal that was so-oversubscribed that articles not already in the journal house style were summarily rejected.

How ready are authors, editors and peer reviewers to handle submissions and peer review in an online environment ?

The group noted that several of the larger commercial journal publishers had already moved in this direction, and so over time any reluctance was likely to wane. There needed still to be room for personal contact between editor, peer reviewer and authors; and also for flexibility in handling of particular pieces of work if the occasion demanded it.

One group member thought it crucial that any machine-generated emails were edited in such a way as not to alienate the recipient.

The group was very clear that content, once published, should not be open to corrections, just as was the case in print. The work involved in corrections after publication was thought to be too great.

Publicity and marketing

Can an OA journal compete with the marketing activities of the large journal publishers ?

The group felt that, yes, an OA journal *would* be able to compete, but that it would require imaginative use of the alternative tools and services that are available.

At the very outset, it was particularly important for journal teams to step back and consider carefully who their target readers and organisations were. Only then could they be effectively targeted. Journal teams should also ask themselves: who may be reached by an OA journal that would not have found the same journal in a subscription service ?

The quality of the 'product' was thought to be key to marketing. The look and 'feel' were crucial, both of the journal site and of the final PDF.

In general, each journal would need to communicate very clearly what it did to make its content discoverable, to encourage authors concerned about impact.

Do the search engines help ? Are there any other automated ways of making a journal visible ?

The power of search had certainly changed matters. The group felt that if the journal was delivered in one of the established platforms (Open Journal Systems or Eprints) then its page ranking would compare well with the same article on a commercial subscription site.

The Directory of Open Access Journals was also part of the solution, as it was picked up by other services such as EBSCO and JournalTOCs.

The ISI indexing services were thought to include OA journals, although it may be more difficult to be admitted to begin with, and there was still a perception of lesser quality. Both librarians in the group agreed that this latter perception was probably changing.

How might social media help ?

Social media commentary was thought to be a crucial part of the marketing: not only to readers, but also to potential authors and potential advertisers. There was a need to get the whole editorial team involved, including editorial board members. There might usefully be dedicated blogs/Twitter feeds/Facebook pages for a journal, but the impact would be heightened if the whole editorial team were also to use their personal channels. The group noted a modest administrative overhead incurred in maintaining the dedicated channels, particularly Twitter which required very active participation and reciprocal interaction in order to be most successful.

How might journal staff help authors to publicise themselves ?

The group noticed a reticence among authors to self-promote – some authors did not even inform their own library of their recent publications (assuming this to be the publisher's role). In an OA environment, authors would need to do rather more. Authors should be encouraged to engage with social media themselves, perhaps following the lead given by the journal team. It was felt that, between authors and journal team, audiences for specialist journals were not so large that they could not effectively be reached in this way.

Are there specialist librarians who might be able to help ?

Part of profiling a journal's potential audience was to identify the specialist libraries in the field. Journal editors would need to promote directly to specialist librarians, who know the readership and are often well aware of OA and its possibilities.

Finally, the group stressed that traditional paper methods of marketing shouldn't be neglected. Judiciously placed posters and flyers in targeted locations and at conferences, if pursued by the whole journal team, would reach at least as far as the efforts of a publisher.

Also, if the journal was based in a university, then engagement with the university's in-house marketing department was worth pursuing.

What are the possible business models to support OA journals ?

The group agreed that there was considerable ignorance as to the real costs of traditional journal publishing, and that publishers have tended not to divulge breakdowns of costs.

Freemium. The group saw some possibilities for providing content in different ways, some of it free, some at a premium. This could involve additional content with greater functionality, and/or the same content but in different formats.

Advertising. There was considerable reticence about advertising amongst both academic editors and readers, but the group felt that there was a growing acceptance that a free resource must generate revenue from somewhere. Journal editorial teams would need to be ready to make this point to potential authors in particular. The potential was noted for services like SAS Open Journals to access a wider pool of advertising revenue when spread across a larger site.

The university-based service. The group also agreed that universities should seriously consider centralising some production services for journals produced within the institution. This would make more efficient the *pro bono* work that was already being done but in a dispersed way. There would then perhaps be scope for ventures such as training internships in journal publishing for graduate students, once there was a critical mass of work to be done.

A “print-and-web” model ? This option, where a journal appears in print perhaps one issue ahead of its appearance free online, was thought most appropriate if part of a learned society subscription package. In this case, the free online version acted as publicity for society membership.

As to the issue of embargo periods, one possibility was to invert the usual model, making the most recent content freely available but the archive chargeable. In this case, the temporarily free material acts as publicity for the paid archive.

It would then be necessary to collect micropayments for content, although this would incur administrative costs in its own right. It was noted again that a service like SAS Open Journals could aggregate this process and thus achieve economies of scale.

Print on demand There was potential for (relatively small) revenue streams from print-on-demand delivery of content through services such as Lulu. There was some possible resistance amongst scholars to their work appearing in the catalogues of such services, alongside material of lesser rigour. However, as the bulk of readers would reach it by way of links from the journal, this was felt to be a less significant objection.

Moving a journal from print to web

What issues of perception are there in transferring a print journal to the web ?

Some in the group wondered whether a move away from print would deter some authors, perceiving an OA journal to be of lesser quality and/or impact. Others however saw the challenge with regard to the REF as fundamentally no different for a new online journal as a new print journal; the task of building a reputation was the same.

What do you do with the back issues ?

The group thought it desirable to digitise back issues, but there was the matter of cost. One editor professed herself at a loss as where to start with regard to digitisation. Journal publishers could aid the process with advice as to the options.

Do you need a new ISSN ?

There was some uncertainty as to the position as to whether an existing print journal needed a new ISSN. (It depends on whether or not the journal continues to appear in print.) Services such as SAS Open Journals would need to stand ready to advise.

Should you carry on printing, and why (or if not, why not ?) ?

One member would prefer to go online with his journal, but might print later, if funds were available.

Others thought that, if stopping printing was inevitable eventually, it would be as well to make the change straight away.

Where receipt of a printed journal was part of a learned society membership, the society would need to discern how great an importance members attached to the print copy, and whether a reduction in subscription fees might be appropriate if that print copy were discontinued. However, this loss in revenue might be offset by new members, reached by the online journal.