

Webinar - Wayfinders #2: building equity from a 'per-publication charge' context– Q&A

Panelists: Nathaniel Gore, Stacey Burke and Kellie O'Rourke and Chaired by Malavika Legge.

Q. Is the AIMS model competitive in terms of Impact Factors?

NG: Impact Factor is not really relevant to AIMS. As a signatory of DORA, PeerJ does not endorse reliance on the Impact Factor as an assessment of researchers or journals.

Q. Does the AIMS model address paper mills?

NG: A concerted, community effort is needed to address paper mills and their root cause. AIMS is not designed to combat the issues of paper mills, but as a publisher, we see the importance and value of close relationships with institutions - which can be developed and supported by institutional agreements such as AIMS - when it comes to research integrity.

ML: I personally feel that all approaches that break the link between per-article payments and OA outputs could perhaps alleviate the paper mills issue, although this is speculation on my part and I have no data to evidence this thinking. More on this in answer to the next question about paper mills.

Q. Is the growth of paper mills and the damage they do to the reputation of academic publishing an impediment to moving to the new models you're developing?

NG: As per my answer to the earlier question, I think that close ties between institutions and publishers can be an important tool in combating some of the dangers to research integrity. In many ways, I think the rise in paper mills has helped the wider industry think more concretely about moving beyond the per-unit/article payment model and should support publishers in focusing on quality over quantity; integrity is of vital importance to trust in science and research, and institutions and publishers need to work together to help combat the factors that drive bad actors in this space. The tools and resources publishers need to ensure integrity of the literature come at a cost, and it's important that publishers help institutions understand, and that institutions recognise and support, the costs to publishers associated with the integrity of the literature, and the impact that has on the price of publishing.

ML: I agree with Nathaniel and also feel that the newer approaches discussed in this session today present an opportunity to mitigate against paper mills.

Q When authors with funding donate their amount to cover an author from a LMIC - does that go into a pot, or does it fund a specific paper?

NG: It will go into a Global Fund which, in the short-term, will help support our waiver and discount program for authors without sufficient funding to choose open access.

Q For Nathaniel - can you provide the percentages of the survey results re: APCs and OA?

NG: If this question regards the surveys we did of authors after our free publishing promotions, the trends I shared were the interpretation of a number of data points and questions, across slightly different surveys we ran depending on the promotion and subject area, so I'm afraid it's difficult to share straightforwardly and in this context.

Q. Where does faculty author individual membership benefits bump up against (or conflict with) the institution's agreement with APS? Or maybe it doesn't?

SB: APS members and our community is why APS exists - to support our community of scientists and educators dedicated to solving major problems that affect life and health. And the publishing piece is all part of how APS reinvests any income completely back into the research community we serve and the science we support. When you publish your research with APS, your paper helps to support your community.

ML: This is an interesting question not just in the APS case. For a learned society granting access (to published content) to individual, paying members of the Society was often part of the membership benefits package offered. In transitioning to OA, learned societies are having to think differently about their membership benefits as they publish (either more or fully) OA content. The live session covered how payers and publishers have the opportunity to think differently about funding flows in the context of increasing equity in OA. This could extend also to the individual researcher/scholar-member of a learned society in their consideration of not just what they personally gain, but also what they support and enable, when they pay a learned society a membership fee.

Q. Answered Live - For APS OA Journey, in 2025, I didn't understand who will be responsible for APC, if the authors aren't?

ML: As discussed in the live session, in the S2O approach there will be no APCs at all, and authors will not need to make any payments. All content will be published OA. An important clarification to add is that this is, of course, conditional on the S2O (Subscribe2Open) funding target being reached through sufficient library payments so that APS can "open" all the content that will be published in 2025 without needing any APCs or per-publication payments.

Q. I remain concerned about how the very small (nonprofit >200 type of small) will ever be able to afford S2O, AIMS, or similar models. While these are good steps away from traditional models, they are still wildly unaffordable for the very small among us. I appreciate the efforts toward building equity for the Global South, but...

SB: I would suggest you become a member of SocPC and gain knowledge and learnings from like-minded and like-sized publishers - <https://www.socpc.org/>

Q. Equity in publishing tends to focus on socio-economic and geographic factors. How will marginalized populations that do not fall into these categories be addressed in equity initiatives? For example, students and trainees or other researchers in Global north, middle-higher income countries do not have access to funds. Likewise, there is a large socio-economic variation within ineligible countries (i.e. Mexico).

NG: For me, this is why the end goal has to be that no author faces a financial barrier to publish, and collectively supporting the costs of open scientific communication is so important. I completely agree that there will always be overlooked and underserved groups, and therefore it seems to me that the best way to give everyone the same opportunity to participate is to get rid of all author-facing fees.

KO: This is a really important question - and very much a 'live' question, that we need to keep working through. There is not going to be one answer, but a mixed economy of solutions to keep ensuring that no author has a barrier to open publishing. One way that we've tried to address this is by making the Cambridge TA as accessible as possible as far as cost and maintenance, and proactively engaging with institutions around the world about covering OA publishing for their authors through a TA. Another approach has been from the library side, where we're seeing consortia bring in community colleges, for example, under the TA deal umbrella, to ensure coverage - I think we need to see more of that kind of collaboration around the world. We need to keep talking and iterating, but from what I've seen it's going to come down to some top-down approaches from publishers, but also a range of initiatives that really tap into local and country-level needs (such as consortial cost sharing), too.

ML: Thank you for this important question. As Nathaniel says, lifting financial barriers to participation in OA (by removing author-facing charges) can help all authors, anywhere, including those based in places judged to be "rich nations", or based in countries that are "ineligible" for waivers/special measures as judged by national statistics. This is an important first step. But equity in OA also extends beyond financial barriers - all stakeholders, based anywhere, need to feel able to have a voice and have influence. This includes a number of additional factors that we did not have the chance to discuss in this session, such as representation in publishing governance, diversity of languages, formats, and other factors enabling more equitable engagement and participation in OA.

Q. Have any of the publishers explored a different publishing model before trying to find a better business model? I know PeerJ has a bit but I feel like the "article" as the output is hindering innovation at a large scale. Are legacy publishing practices holding us all back?

NG: I think this is a really interesting question, and I think that the tradition of the research article as it currently stands is not the long-term future. However, I think that the future of how research is reported, data and methods are shared, and how knowledge evolves needs to be led by different research communities and by researchers and requires systemic changes to research evaluation as well. Important steps are happening in this space, but I think there's also a history of publisher-led efforts and innovation falling a bit flat as they haven't actually provided what researchers want or need.

SB: APS launched the Read, Publish & Join in 2020 and grew our institutions to over 30, which was really a drop in the bucket compared to our total subscriber list. With S20 we can do more at scale and to all of our content if the program is successful. Of course, we will continue to monitor all business models as closely as we will measure and evaluate our S20 program that we will launch in 2025.

ML: I take the very well-made point that traditional publishing, with the predominant approach of one single "final published output", is ripe for evolution. However, the publishing model, whatever it is (and whatever it can be), absolutely needs the financials to work. Else the publishing, in whatever form, cannot operate. This is a key reason (not by any means the only reason, but an important reason) why the business-model needs to be thought through. And while this session has thrown light on the fact that we need funding flows to work differently to enable more equitable OA that is separate from per-publication payments, revised attitudes to and practices in funding flows fact may perhaps also be helpful for evolution and innovation in publishing - along with research-community inputs, of course, just as Nathaniel points out in his answer. Different disciplines will also likely need differing sorts of innovations and changes to the publishing model.

Q. For Stacey - I wonder if you can say more about how you determined your cost for publishing - to get to "cost-neutral"? What was involved in that process?

SB: Yes-there are two costs-those for the publisher and those for the authors or libraries and in this discussion, we were aiming at the latter. With transformative agreements, such as our Read, Publish and Join, we were asking libraries to add additional costs to ensure their authors comply with funders, in the S20 model, we are not adding this additional expense. As for APS as a publisher, we are always trying to strike the sustainability of the Society and so this includes cutting costs while remaining dedicated to the advancement of physiological research and publishing highly regarded, peer-reviewed journals examining major physiological systems.

ML: Cost neutral is an interesting term. While not speaking here for any particular approach discussed by our speakers in this session, I will add that in the context of transitioning to OA this term is often used to actually mean "spend-neutral" - i.e. participating libraries spend the same as they did before - the 'before' here most commonly pertaining to subscriptions for paywalled content, or payment for a subscription to paywalled content plus APC spend on affiliated authors' OA publishing. This is easily determined, then, by what a payer (most often a subscribing or participating library) has spent with the publisher in the past. This practice of staying neutral on past spend is sometimes very helpful indeed in enabling a new model supporting OA, but sometimes it is not the

fairest determination of pricing, especially when considering global equity and payments from different regions and differing types of institution. The individual case really matters here.

Q. For those articles, past and present, not made OA through any of these mechanisms, any consideration toward a free reading program like JSTOR's Register and Read (or similar offerings from most major news publications that give a free limited number of monthly articles to registered users)?

ML: Interesting idea, and one that I admit I need to look into some more. I am presuming that this is a way to enable free, read-only status for published content, and so, akin to repository-enabled access (but without re-use licensing). It also raises the point that while we focus on OA of newly published content there is a huge corpus of backfile literature in every discipline that remains closed / inaccessible to most.

Q. If we have an agreement with CUP, does that automatically make our support for the COEI, means in-built in the agreement if not which in my understanding is not then and what steps to be taken to support the COEI model?

KO: At the moment, the current set-up is that COEI is a separate fee/line item that can be added to a Cambridge TA invoice during the renewal process, but participation has been voluntary, and it's not part of the Cambridge TA. It can also be a totally distinct fee/invoice, if preferred. If you're a librarian, and interested in contributing, please get in touch with your Cambridge Library Sales Rep - some COEI FAQs here (<https://www.cambridge.org/core/open-research/open-access/cambridge-open-equity-initiative/faqs>) and also a link to our Library Sales global contact list: (<https://www.cambridge.org/core/services/librarians/find-my-sales-contact>).