

theguardian**Comment**

Academic publishers have become the enemies of science

The US Research Works Act would allow publishers to line their pockets by locking publicly funded research behind paywalls

Mike Taylor

guardian.co.uk, Monday 16 January 2012 12.13 GMT

[Article history](#)



The free dissemination of lifesaving medical research around the world would be prevented under the Research Works Act. Photograph: LJSphotography/Alamy

This is the moment academic publishers gave up all pretence of being on the side of scientists. Their rhetoric has traditionally been of partnering with scientists, but the truth is that for some time now scientific publishers have been anti-science and anti-publication. The Research Works Act, introduced in the US Congress on 16 December, amounts to a declaration of war by the publishers.

The USA's main funding agency for health-related research is the National Institutes of Health, with a \$30bn annual budget. The NIH has a public access policy that says taxpayer-funded research must be freely accessible online. This means that members of the public, having paid once to have the research done, don't have to pay for it again

when they read it – a wholly reasonable policy, and one with enormous humanitarian implications because it means the results of medical research are made freely available around the world.

A similar policy is now being adopted in the UK. On page 76 of the policy document Innovation and Research Strategy for Growth the government states that it is "committed to ensuring that publicly funded research should be accessible free of charge". All of this is great for the progress of science, which has always been based on the free flow of ideas, the sharing of data, and standing on the shoulders of giants.

But what's good for science isn't necessarily good for science publishers, whose interests have drifted far out of alignment with ours. Under the old model, publishers become the owners of the papers they publish, holding the copyright and selling copies around the world – a useful service in pre-internet days. But now that it's a trivial undertaking to make a paper globally available, there is no reason why scientists need yield copyright to publishers.

The contribution that publishers make – coordinating editors, formatting, and posting on websites – is now a service that authors can pay for, rather than a bargaining chip that could be worth yielding copyright for. So authors making their work available as open access pay publishers a fee to do so, and the publisher does not own the resulting work.

Open-access publishers such as the Public Library of Science are able to make a modest profit on a publication fee of \$1,350 (£880). But traditional publishers have become used to making much more than this, and so resist the inevitable conversion to open access. Early in the process, they did this by pouring scorn on PLoS, predicting that it would never take off. But now that PLoS ONE is the world's largest academic journal, that attack can hardly be maintained. Instead, publishers have turned to the approach that uncompetitive corporations have always used in America: lobbying for legislation to protect their unsustainable model.

If passed, the Research Works Act (RWA) would prohibit the NIH's public access policy and anything similar enacted by other federal agencies, locking publicly funded research behind paywalls. The result would be an ethical disaster: preventable deaths in developing countries, and an incalculable loss for science in the USA and worldwide. The only winners would be publishing corporations such as Elsevier (£724m profits on revenues of £2b in 2010 – an astounding 36% of revenue taken as profit).

Since Elsevier's obscene additional profits would be drained from America to the company's base in the Netherlands if this bill were enacted, what kind of American politician would support it? The RWA is co-sponsored by Darrell Issa (Republican,

California) and Carolyn B. Maloney (Democrat, New York). In the 2012 election cycle, Elsevier and its senior executives made 31 donations to representatives: of these, two went to Issa and 12 to Maloney, including the largest individual contribution.

For all their talk of partnering with scientists, Elsevier's true agenda is nothing nobler than to line their pockets at the expense of scientists worldwide and everyone with a preventable or treatable disease.

It's hardly surprising that publishers would fight dirty to hang on to a business model where scientists do research that is largely publicly funded, and write manuscripts and prepare figures at no cost to the journal; other scientists perform peer-review for free; and other scientists handle the editorial tasks for free or for token stipends. The result of all this free and far-below-minimum-wage professional work is journal articles in which the publisher, which has done almost nothing, owns the copyright and is able to sell copies back to libraries at monopolistic costs, and to individuals at \$30 or more per view.

What is surprising is how complicit scientists are in perpetuating this feudal system. The RWA is noisily supported by the Association of American Publishers, which has as members more than 50 scholarly societies – including, ironically, the American Association for the Advancement of Science, which by its implicit support of the RWA is making itself an association for the *retardation* of science.

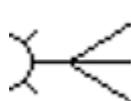
What can we do to prevent the RWA from passing? US citizens should write to their representatives explaining what a disaster it would create, and how unfair and unnecessary it is. And every working scientist should check their professional memberships to see whether their dues are being forwarded to an association that promotes sending science back into walled gardens. If so we should pressure our professional societies to withdraw from the Association of American Publishers, or at least to publicly state their opposition to the RWA.

The bottom line for scientists is that many publishers have now made themselves our enemies instead of the allies they once were. Elsevier's business does not make money by publishing our work, but by doing the exact opposite: restricting access to it. We must not be complicit in their newest attempt to cripple the progress of science.

Dr Mike Taylor is a research associate at the Department of Earth Sciences, University of Bristol

Comments

81 comments, displaying first

[g](#) Staff[c](#) Contributor**palfreyman**

16 January 2012 12:40PM

Wow. Is there another side to this story? It all sounds awfully cupiditous...

**ClickYourHeels**

16 January 2012 12:47PM

How about this - send off your work to a prestigious, peer-review journal which has paywalls. Have your article peer-reviewed and accepted for publication. Withdraw it from the journal, and post it online yourself along with the acceptance letter. That way you get free dissemination of your work along with a rubber-stamp saying it has been peer-reviewed. You could also publish it on Kindle if you want, and sell it for 49p a go - proceeds to e.g. charity?

**Telescopier**

16 January 2012 1:00PM

This has been said before, by many people including myself.

The current system of academic publishing is simply a racket: academics put in all the work of doing the research and writing the papers; they receive no fee from the publishers, and sometimes even have to pay page charges for the privilege of seeing their work in a journal; then the journal sells the product back to academia at an extortionately high price.

As a business model - obtain the product for free and then sell it back to the supplier at an inflated price - this can't fail, but as a means of disseminating scientific discoveries it is terrible. All research funded by the public should be openly available. In the digital age it is only the rapacious vested interests (i.e. companies like Elsevier) who want to maintain the status quo. It's a disgraceful situation.

[Recommend \(4\)](#)[Responses \(3\)](#)[Report](#)[Clip](#) | [Link](#)[Recommend \(52\)](#)[Responses \(2\)](#)[Report](#)[Clip](#) | [Link](#)[Recommend \(105\)](#)[Responses \(0\)](#)[Report](#)[Clip](#) | [Link](#)

**Suilevalliv**

16 January 2012 1:34PM

"What is surprising is how complicit scientists are in perpetuating this feudal system."

Open Access publishing is obviously a good solution, but why isn't a system along the lines of ArXiv discussed more widely?

[Recommend \(21\)](#)[Responses \(0\)](#)[Report](#)[Clip](#) | [Link](#)**Salto**

16 January 2012 1:37PM

I can't see public outrage happening anytime soon. You normally need a degree in the subject to at least understand what is going in a paper and I'm sure there's a good proportion of the public who don't even realise that their money is going towards funding the research.

[Recommend \(8\)](#)[Responses \(0\)](#)[Report](#)[Clip](#) | [Link](#)**basthagen**

16 January 2012 1:43PM

Response to palfreyman, 16 January 2012 12:40PM

I am afraid the other side is not really worth hearing and I doubt that that side is able to make a defensible defense - let's see if they try !!?

[Recommend \(16\)](#)[Responses \(1\)](#)[Report](#)[Clip](#) | [Link](#)**basthagen**

16 January 2012 1:48PM

Also, it is usually, or always, public publishing cost money (NIH, MRC etc.) that is talked about in terms of 'need to protect'. What about charities, that fund an awful lot of the work that many of us do. They really need protecting as well, but because they are often small and with limited resources and clout they are forgotten and ignored and as a consequence roundly ripped off by the publishers which is an equal or worse disgrace.

[Recommend \(7\)](#)[Responses \(0\)](#)[Report](#)[Clip](#) | [Link](#)**MikeTaylor**

16 January 2012 2:00PM

[Recommend \(49\)](#)[Responses \(1\)](#)



oharar comments so far.

16 January 2012 2:02PM
in asks "Is there another side to this story?". Well.

Elsevier and other scholarly publishers will tell you that they
It's not just commercial publishers who are supporting this bill -
"add value" to the research and that is why they deserve to own
the Ecological Society of America is as well (pdf).
the result. They do add value -- by formatting research articles
nicely. Whether that contribution will damage science or, the
papers are read by printing, but since science preparation, the editing and
scientist's work, I leave you to judge. of papers (emailing friends or
authors, or asking on twitter).
Telescopier rightly points out that "This has been said before". It
There is a legitimate concern about how open access will affect
the commercial viability of scientific publishing. The PLoS Conf.
Model does have a downside: it removes the status of publishing
in "good" journals, which is a major reward that is measured
in science (for better or worse). Without there will be many more.
replacement. This is important in practice: job applications is
Suilevalliv asks why there isn't more discussion of a system like
one area that springs to mind (I don't have time to read the main
the fine pre-print archive arXiv that is used by physicists. I don't
publications of 10 or 20 applicants: I want a quicker way of
know why. That would be a pretty good solution. It may just be
filtering some of them out, so that I only have to read papers by
that there is not enough money sloshing around in other sciences
perhaps 3 or 4).
to build such a service.

The author, pays model also favours the rich: it costs about
Salto says "I can't see public outrage happening anytime soon ...
€1000 to publish a paper in PLoS One. That money has to come
I'm sure there's a good proportion of the public who don't even
from somewhere, so the more science one does the more one has
realise that their money is going towards funding the research.
to scramble around to find the money. The only way I'll be able
That is true: which exactly why articles like this one are so
to make everything I publish this year open access is if I don't
necessary. The public whose taxes fund medical research need to
travel to any meetings.

know, for example, that their GPs don't have free access to that
Research
Having written all that, I think the problems I raise will be
solved, one way or another. But it's going to mean changes in
publishing and other areas of the scientific society. I guess one
could argue that the government shouldn't interfere with the
process: let's wait 5 or 10 years and see where we are and then
think about legislation. OTOH, funding agencies are major
stakeholders, so we shouldn't restrict their abilities to innovate
and experiment.



MikeTaylor

16 January 2012 2:20PM

[Report](#) [mend](#) (20)

[Response](#) [links](#) (1)

[Report](#)

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IReadTheArticle commenting on my own post!]

16 January 2012 2:22PM.
ays "It's not just commercial publishers who are

supporting this bill - the Ecological Society of America is as well
Response to ClickYourHeels, 16 January 2012 12:47PM
(pdf)." But as the linked PDF explicitly states, the Ecological
Society of America is a commercial publisher: "ESA publishes
four of the world's most highly cited journals in ecology and
environmental science." I am afraid their submission is pure
self-interest (and I bet that it does not represent the views of
actual members).
But gharar also raises a much more important point (which I
would have liked to address in the article had word count not
made that impossible): "I bet, I'm not sure how much this will
damage science. Very few papers are read by people outside
science." This is a very widespread misapprehension, which
Peter Murray-Rust has discussed in some detail in his series of
posts on what he terms "the scholarly poor": groups of people
such as Dentists, Industry, The Climate Code Foundation,
Rankin arguing for a better deal for writers, before they too
become dust under the commercial publishing heel. So much for
available) on her behalf. Got cancer? Want your GP to be able to
give up to date advice? Sorry, she can't! Because Elsevier own the



zwicky
papers.

16 January 2012 2:27PM

OS One model does have a downside: it removes the
status of publishing in "good" journals, which is a major way that
merit is measured in science (for better or worse), without giving
access to a library read papers anyway - is that
a simple replacement". I hardly know where to start with this!
a) It's a matter of principle that the results of research paid for by
First, PLoS ONE is itself a "good journal" with a healthy impact
factor of 4.411. But pretty much everyone now agrees that
judging the quality of research by the company that it keeps is
research, who have to pay to access publically funded research.
[NOTE TO SELF: think of a polite way to say "stupid"]. If only
Surely (one of) the ultimate purposes of public research is to
PLoS and its brethren *could* remove the status of publishing in
trickle down to profitable businesses?
"good" journals", that would be another factor in their favour!
b) Libraries at universities pay absurd access fees for journals
The author pays model also favours the rich: it costs about
and these fees are undoubtedly inflated, by lack of proper
€1000 to publish a paper in PLoS One." Yes, PLoS ONE charges
competition on funding. Open access helps this.
US\$ 1350. But is also offers a no-questions-asked 100% fee
I admit that although it would be a good idea to appear open access to
publishing, and it means that researchers walking between the most explicit

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[Responses](#) (0)

[Report](#)

[Clip](#) | [Link](#)



GreyBrother lives and publishes work, but in the profit and they know what the good of the science is anyway. PhDs is not their reputation if they thought that other people publish with the same success. Such publicly funded research avoid publishing your work as open access.

It's other what the UK gov't has indicated support for open access, how they will just enforce it properly and declare that all UK

science, a major world funder, will be open access -- that should As a UK taxpayer, why would I agree to non-UK scientists freely accessing the fruits of UK science? **Anyone from outside the**

UK should pay to access, otherwise surely it's just a form of freeloading on the taxpayer?

Research is expensive and so is digitisation and web hosting. **At a time of budget cuts in UK education, is it fiscally irresponsible to just give science away to users outside the UK when it could be used to generate revenue?**



StephenStewart

16 January 2012 2:47PM

Thanks for bringing this matter to my attention. The implications go well beyond medical research and Elsevier. A quick glance at the membership of the Association of American Publishers (www.publishers.org/members/) reveals that it's more than 300 members do include more than 50 scholarly societies. The list includes, for example, both of the principal computer science societies, the Association for Computing Machinery (www.acm.org/) and the Institute of Electrical & Electronics Engineers, Inc. (www.ieee.org/). It seems ridiculous in the extreme that these associations, whose members built the internet and made open source software a key technology, should now seek to retreat behind a paywall.



pinch2sins

16 January 2012 2:49PM

Very glad to see this article on The Guardian. Hope to see more on similar topics of the enclosure of ideas.

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Responses (1)

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Responses (0)

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DrMLHarris

16 January 2012 2:59PM

Recommend (18)

Responses (2)

Report

Clip | Link

Response to [basthagen](#), 16 January 2012 1:43PMM

Okay, ~~Bill hit~~ the linked PDF explicitly states, the Ecological Society of America is a commercial publisher. The other side of the story is that not all academic publishers operate on Elsevier's model, and the services provided by ~~publishers~~ ~~isn't making~~ ~~What I meant was a "for-profit publisher".~~ ~~The ESA is a not-for-profit society, so its primary purpose is to make money.~~

I work for a learned society publisher allied to the Institute of Physics (my capabilities, my employer, the former's employer). Being a learned society publisher generally means that any profits should go to staff, salaries, overheads etc. and ~~not to the shareholders~~ ~~the relevant work done by the learned society.~~ In our case, that includes promoting and supporting physics teaching and research in the UK, Ireland and elsewhere. How did GPs survive before the internet? Did they really all pop off down to the library to read the latest *J. Colds Infl. Treat.*?

And ~~it's ready for other publishers~~ ~~long~~ ~~but I know the ways of getting the information and reading the primary literature, and it's probably better read to.~~ And all of the papers that a GP does find, most have had the requisite level of expertise in it (e.g. emailing the authors) work that is commensurate with their training. A partial list would include weeding out poor articles, selecting qualified reviewers for more promising ones, the quality of research by the company that it keeps is managing the peer-review process (everything from chasing up late reviews to deciding what to do when reviewers disagree), and so on.

Another point I'd make is that although the existence of modern communications has made it much easier and cheaper to disseminate information, cheap does not mean free. We may not have to post physical bits of paper around the world anymore, but we need techies to build and maintain websites, fix them when they break, and otherwise make sure that people can upload papers for publication and download them for reading. These techies are also quite highly trained, and they don't work for free. The problem is not unrelated to those faced by



Telescopemedia that, which are struggling to
in a "publish or perish" environment, having to
conclude that information is not zero.

It's worth pointing out the actual cost of the arXiv.
On the one hand, the fact that open access publishing is hilarious -
most of the annual budget for the UK is \$400,000,000. With the UK
it costs 90,000 dollars which is a significant amount of money.
The actual cost of the arXiv is \$5 per submission; in
particular, it costs 10,000,000 full-text papers that
ultimately are published in journals, and hence
no-questions-asked 100% fee waiver for authors
produces no revenue. So the only reason other than sheer
naked greed for cost-cutting service.

They are right that it is cost effective - it covers most physics
research across the entire world - and, given that a single physics
journal subscription for one institution can easily be \$20,000, it
be in big trouble. So the system penalises the productive and the
honourable.
traditional publishers.

Recommend (21)

Responses (1)

Report

Clip | [Link](#)



Jimmyji
16 January 2012 3:08PM

Reply to CLICKYOURHEELS; just recently I did something
almost like you propose. So yes, I approve your idea. The editors
of the journal I now have in mind don't have a paywall, but they
presumably have a backlog of refereed manuscripts which they
have approved and accepted. Anyway, my article which, they
wrote me, would be published in 2000-and-something had not
been published nearly four years later. So after writing them that
I wished to withdraw the article I put it on the internet myself.

In other circumstances they might cost a chap his Nobel, or
something.

Recommend (1)

Responses (0)

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LindaR
16 January 2012 3:09PM

I'm a self-employed author who writes books for "crossover"
(academic and nonacademic) readers. I've never received any
advance payment from any publisher that's accepted my work, so
I research and write the books at my own expense. It's become

Recommend (25)

Responses (0)

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basthagen for me to gain access to published papers in **social scientific disciplines** because of the paywall. I can't shell out \$30 or more for each article, especially when **Response to DrMLHarris, 16 January 2012 2:59PM**h any university. I can't afford to pay the high annual fees university libraries charge for access to their databases and online archives. Important point which is that not only for profit Elsevier like local public libraries can't afford to provide these resources. Good of you to point this out. The question still remains though: even if the profit goes to teaching and the like, destroyed by the greed of the multinational conglomerates that have created a closed community accessible only to a tiny elite of researchers. That elite seems uninterested in communicating with anybody outside its confines. No wonder so many 'peer review', our holy cow not to be touch under any circumstances, professional associations have endorsed the Research Works Act. On Marx, that thou wert living at this hour! system' of 'reviewing' and accepted as such?

[Recommend \(8\)](#)[Responses \(1\)](#)[Report](#)[Clip](#) | [Link](#)**DrMLHarris**

16 January 2012 3:14PM

Response to [Telescopier, 16 January 2012 3:04PM](#)

The arXiv is a wonderful thing, I agree, and they certainly do a lot with a little, financially speaking.

But there's also a fair amount of dreck on the arXiv, since nothing on it has been peer-reviewed (unless, of course, authors replace the original, un-peer-reviewed version of their paper with the peer-reviewed version after a journal editor and reviewers have done some work whipping it into shape).

So I guess the question is, how much (or how little) are you willing to pay to add a quality filter and paper-improving process to a dissemination service like the arXiv?

[Recommend \(5\)](#)[Responses \(0\)](#)[Report](#)[Clip](#) | [Link](#)**ybdetsoP**

16 January 2012 3:15PM

Someone mentioned that the journals format your paper nicely but this is becoming less and less true - usually a template is provided and wobetide you if you go beyond its measure. The only value added as far as I can see is that they organize the peer

[Recommend \(8\)](#)[Responses \(0\)](#)[Report](#)[Clip](#) | [Link](#)



rybdetsop (some journals) will actively promote papers side of a high 20 page 17PM

I agree with some of the people here who have pointed out that Oh, and I think most Elsevier journals would be considered the public don't care what science is published (unless it involves 'archival' ... I think is the term some reviewers use as a 'some juicy sex research) but I don't think open access is about euphemism for 'boring' the public, it is about other scientists freely viewing colleagues' work. This would certainly benefit interdisciplinary work and



PatPoppy scientific portfolios of many research groups and 16 January 2012 3:19PM al scientists all over the world.

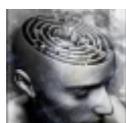
Who would pay is still the main question and if the US bill is passed then publishing standards in the social sciences for open access. On the other hand, many articles work back published whose articles have been digitized and realized copy rights is what the publishers. freely available? many small academic societies are ceasing to publish themselves, but are going through commercial publishers, because of the "need" to be online. As Linda R has pointed out, in the past university and other libraries had print Something like "You paid for that, ay, ay, ay?" I shouldn't wonder. copies of journals and almost anyone could come in and read them, now access agreements mean the journals are only available to registered students and staff. It is not only the "general public" who are losing access, but retired and unemployed academics and independent scholars, who are finding it more and more difficult to access material.



Jimmyji 16 January 2012 3:26PM

While you are giving Elsevier the thrashing they deserve please do the same to the other big publishers of scientific research. Google anything you like and it will turn up. Click on, and you may, if lucky, get a summary of the research. But if you want to read it in full, MONEY, MONEY, MONEY!

We interested readers are not all being subsidized, but we are all taxpayers who paid for the research in the first place.



neurobonkers 16 January 2012 3:26PM

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Recommend (16)

Responses (0)

[Report](#)

[Clip](#) | [Link](#)

Recommend (2)

Responses (0)

**JohnCan45**, 16 January 2012 12:40PM16 January 2012 3:48PM
It's also pretty depressing.

See my blog post earlier today for an in depth look at the problem.
It's no better purchasing scientific tests, including psych tests.
The publishers really are a racket.

**DrMLHarris**

16 January 2012 3:55PM

Response to [basthagen](#), 16 January 2012 3:12PM

These are important questions, and I hope some commenters (above the line as well as below it) move on to address them instead of throwing around words like "racket", which are pretty insulting for organizations like ours.

Re: levels of payment, although it may seem like J Q Taxpayer is paying twice over -- once for the research, and then again to read about it -- they are in fact paying for two different things. They are paying the researchers to carry out the work, and they are paying for journals publishers to help improve it and disseminate it. Whether they are paying too much for these services is, of course, a different question, and the fact that in some cases the profits are lower, and go to worthy causes, does not wholly answer it.

As for a system to replace peer review, I'd personally welcome it, as long as it really was an improvement on the status quo.

"Open" peer review has occasionally happened (somewhat by accident) with really big papers that attract legions of science bloggers etc. to discuss their merits in public fora, so that's one alternative. However, it does seem to have some flaws. One, of course, is that it's unlikely to work with worthy but obscure papers that get little attention. The other is that a lynch-mob mentality can develop as critics pile on; the authors of that "arsenic life" paper in Science a year ago may have got their science wrong, but I'm really not sure they deserved the volume of bile poured on them by their public reviewers. Is what happened to them better or worse than the anonymous "knife in the dark" of having a paper rejected by private peer review?

ReportRecommend (2)Responses (0)ReportClip | LinkRecommend (7)Responses (1)ReportClip | Link

**conejogen**

16 January 2012 4:05PM

Response to [StephenStewart](#), 16 January 2012 2:47PM

The advantage of the old system is that it is set the associations, at least should be able to find out and Yes, they could potentially develop software key technology, should I think that seeks to create behind it paywall trying their best to be fair and concentrate on the science. Just as likely that 'unfair' My guess is that there are factions within each society: usually comments are brought down by others. After all, the old learned societies are significant publishers of research articles in principles in science should apply, i.e. any criticism should be their own right - IEEE and ACM certainly are, and well underbuilt and supported by counterarguments and maybe representatives of the publishing arms will have lobbied for the contradictory data even. Should they be anonymous or not - i societies to join AAP. But societies should be subject to the would favour a system where choice exists, and people can then wishes of their members, and another guess is that the judge the reasons for someone going anonymous if that happens overwhelming majority of those members would be in favour of when needed open access. So they need to make their voices heard, PDQ.

This is a situation which is crying out for a user-based, open-source type solution. It is an example where the free market should apply to select the 'best' (some combination of fastest, cheapest, most accessible, most reliable) solution. Publishing in the old way is doomed; it belongs in museums alongside using a scythe to harvest wheat and travelling about a city in a sedan-chair. Tough on the people employed in that business, but that's progress. Looking back, do we really regret the loss of scythe-mowers or sedan-chairmen?

**brembs**

16 January 2012 4:19PM

Response to [oharar](#), 16 January 2012 2:53PM

In my experience this is wrong: we do use journals to decide how good a paper is, and also the style of the paper.

Yes, you are correct that people do that, but there are two sides to it: one, which you explicitly mention, is topic: clearly, journals serve as 'tags'. this is a functionality which is not too difficult to

[Recommend \(7\)](#)[Responses \(0\)](#)[Report](#)[Clip](#) | [Link](#)[Recommend \(8\)](#)[Responses \(0\)](#)[Report](#)[Clip](#) | [Link](#)



Chronos

add value - by formatting research articles nicely."

16 January 2012 3:10PM

This is totally disingenuous since they bare the cost of publishing and distributing the work of academics. They

upfront. It's not the business risk it will damage science to print.

Formatting academic work is done by people outside science,

and if you're a scientist you know how to get hold of 10-15 years ago online publishing did not exist. No one could published their own work and be taken seriously. Even electronic publishing was technically demanding for this kind of

But scientific papers are expensive. The time in writing papers and other media but frequently a reader can't access anything beyond If you're going to tell the story then tell it, but if you're just a very brief abstract if they want to learn anything more and pushing an ideological barrow then should you be writing in a potentially judge the quality of the work. newspaper? The bias is outrageous.

We see papers being mentioned in the Guardian science section Alright the publishing business is changing, and the academic regularly by journalists and contributors to CiF. Open access publishers are hanging on too tight. So what is the alternative to would allow readers to get a proper understanding of how just putting them out of business? The trouble with extreme science is done and get an appreciation for the quality (or lack of views is that no compromise is possible. it) of research being quoted.



Gareth100

16 January 2012 5:25PM

Response to [Chronos](#), 16 January 2012 5:10PM

If you think the average Guardian reader could make sense of the average scientific publication then I admire your optimism, after all the majority of science journalists repeatedly fail to do so.



Robstacle

16 January 2012 5:30PM

Response to [GreyBrother](#), 16 January 2012 2:38PM

It would perhaps make economic (if not scientific) sense to ask those who have not funded the research to pay for access to its findings - e.g. asking Americans to pay for access to British research - if it weren't for the fact that scientists don't necessarily publish in journals based in their own country.

Research in my own field (like in most fields nowadays) is

[Responses \(0\)](#)

[Responses \(1\)](#)

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[Recommend \(5\)](#)

[Responses \(0\)](#)

[Report](#)

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[Recommend \(7\)](#)

[Responses \(0\)](#)

[Report](#)

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ralfmuschally in American journals. Come to think of it, I am mostly in the UK, 100% of my papers are in US publications.

I think there is a significant population outside of academia which wants to read papers: Ex-scientists who work in other professions now but want to stay in touch with what they did when they were young (only a few % of PhDs etc. get tenure).

Unless we force UK scientists to publish in UK journals, your idea won't fly.

@GreyBrother: My guess is that the number of potential readers of science papers is approximately proportional to the number of authors in each country, so making papers paywalled for foreigners only would be equivalent to customs fees - i.e. just a hindrance for everybody with a zero net result. In addition, the money from paywalls currently doesn't go to research but to private corporations, i.e. it is not even redistributed (however just or unjust that might be) but simply lost.



StephenStewart

16 January 2012 5:56PM

Most of the comments to this article are quite encouraging, but they seem to come primarily from the academic community, The Research Works Act (RWA) makes the Stop Online Piracy Act (SOPA) look tame. RWA spells the end of academic freedom and will choke off innovation. How can we generate the kind of broad based opposition to RWA that SOPA has encountered?



Holiestofcows

16 January 2012 5:56PM

The current system of academic publishing is simply a racket: academics put in all the work of doing the research and writing the papers; they receive no fee from the publishers, and sometimes even have to pay page charges for the privilege of seeing their work in a journal; then the journal sells the product back to academia at an extortionately high price.

As a business model - obtain the product for free and then sell it back to the supplier at an inflated price - this can't fail, but as a means of disseminating scientific discoveries it is terrible. All

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Responses (0)

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Responses (1)

Report

[Clip](#) | [Link](#)



SimpleMinds public should be openly available. In the
of January 2012 12:06:21 PM
like Elsevier) who want to maintain the status quo. It's a
disgrace of congratulations on your self archiving policy re. your
Palaeo Manuscripts.

Recommend (2)

Responses (0)

Report

Clip | Link

(BTW FYI, if you "google" your name and Guardian, this article
That's all true, but you're forgetting a few important things:
is the 1st result) ;-)

1; Peer review costs huge amounts of money
I'm not a scientist but I'm an active Patient Advocate in my spare
time and have been like really following papers. The publishing for several
papers now, short deadlines even more.

Publishers hire huge numbers of highly qualified physicists
themselves, on high salaries, to ensure they get these reviews to
I was actually at The Guardian a few months ago to host a
very short deadlines. This is generally done through investing
podcast with some of their science guys and OA came up a
even more time into building relationships in the community.
couple of times. The Monbiot article came out a few days before
It's no exaggeration to say big players in the industry probably
have 200-300 Physicists on their payroll themselves. You're
Alok Jha made a couple of great points about OA which
talking 10s of millions a year just on peer review.
essentially were:-

The truth is, academics don't want peer review, They want very
1) The Monbiot piece (*whilst not really reporting anything we*
very fast peer review,
didn't know about already) reached a large audience who didn't

know about these issues, high citations, high visibility and high
impact - again, this is something that costs huge amounts of
2) There's a lot of discussion about these issues, but it's up to
money. On marketing, PR, web technology etc etc. Millions of
scientists themselves to do something about it.
pounds a year.

3) If you don't want to publish in a TA Journal, then "don't do it".
You can't expect publishers to outlay tens of millions a year on
but we know that obviously it's "*not as simple as that*".
reviewing, and promoting articles for nothing.....

Also FYI, I posted a link to your article on FriendFeed at
lunchtime and there are some comments for you to read over
there.

There's also been coverage on Google+ such as this post by Peter
Suber.

Graham Steel



SimonRoss
16 January 2012 6:22PM

Recommend (1)

Responses (0)

Report

Mike Taylor



Simon Ross another...

16 January 2012 6:25 PM
aware of the Public Knowledge Project (PKP)?

PKP have already produced an open access electronic journal publishing system. The links should be

See <http://pkp.sfu.ca/?q=ojs> to PKP <http://pkp.sfu.ca/?q=ojs>

An example of an Open Access Journal published by PKP. An example journal <http://pkp.sfu.ca/?q=o>

<http://pkp.sfu.ca/?q=ojs> and list of PKP published journals

A list of open access journals produced through PKP <http://pkp.sfu.ca/ojs-journals>



Holiestofcows Geological Society (of London) on

16 January 2012 6:27 PM
ess and what are your views on them publishing this way. The one is that is high time that their journals were open

access and need to take into account that most journals charge such huge membership fees.....

Most big companies have 2-3 big journals that make lots of money. But they also have 50+ that lose them money. Lots of money.

In truth, most journals (and the papers they publish) are subsidised by the big sellers, and the star authors.

It's true to say that the companies make profit. But most of that comes from 2-3 big products. They still publish the 50+ that lose money.

So how you do convince Publishers to print articles, in journals, they know is going to lose them money - If you don't allow them to make profits?

The truth is, they wouldn't. They publish loss making papers, in loss making journals, to put something back in.

As I said - you need to take into account that probably 70% of all published papers COST the publisher money.

If you decide you don't want the publisher, then you need to accept that the number of published journals and papers would plummet.

It's not true to say Publishers make huge profits on papers.

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Responses (0)

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Responses (1)

Report

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Holiestofcows on SOME papers. They lose money
 of 16 January 2012 6:30PM

Recommend (1)

Responses (1)

Report

[Clip](#) | [Link](#)

What is the position of the Geological Society (of London) on open access and what are your views on them publishing this way. Mine is that is high time that their journals were open access and perhaps members would not have to be charged such huge membership fees.

=====

The problem with Open Access is the fact that not all papers pay for themselves.

In fact most papers cost the publisher money to print.

Journals and papers tend to subsidise each other. As in, a company will have 3 huge money making journals, and 50 that lose money.

So why's the company going to continue publishing 50 journals that lose money, if they get nothing out of it?

Truth is, Publishers are taking huge financial risks with every single article they publish. They do it because the model, at the end of the year, guarantees them a profit.

How would you convince a publisher to take a financial risk on a paper?



SimonRoss
 16 January 2012 6:33PM

Recommend (0)

Responses (0)

Report

[Clip](#) | [Link](#)

Jimmyji

16 January 2012 3:26PM

While you are giving Elsevier the thrashing they deserve please do the same to the other big publishers of scientific research. Google anything you like and it will turn up. Click on, and you may, if lucky, get a summary of the research. But if you want to read it in full, MONEY, MONEY, MONEY!

We interested readers are not all being subsidized,



Holiestofcowsers who paid for the research in

16 January 2012 6:37PM

It is not quite as bad as you have stated. Try using Google Scholar and carefully chosen keywords for your subject of interest. It will typically return many recent papers in PDF form.

They see the subject, and know it's not going to do enough to cover the publishing costs.

But they still do it. As they have a secure model that allows them to profit from their big journals/articles.

As I said, if the publishers don't make the profits, there is no way they would continue publishing loss making journals, and loss making papers.

And seriously, when I say loss making, I mean probably 50% of every article currently published in academic journals.

A model where publishers don't make guaranteed money, is a model where they just stop publishing articles that aren't commercially viable

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Holiestofcows

16 January 2012 6:39PM

Simple fact is, you're asking the big publishers, on an hourly basis to take a substantial financial hit to ensure that your paper is published.

The only reason they do it, is they know it will be subsidised elsewhere.

If you remove this model, and say "every author for themselves" the result is that Publishers stop publishing work that nobody wants to read (50% of it)

[Recommend \(1\)](#)

[Responses \(0\)](#)

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SimonRoss

16 January 2012 6:45PM

Holiestofcows

16 January 2012 6:30PM What is the position of the Geological Society (of London) on open access and

[Recommend \(4\)](#)

[Responses \(0\)](#)

[Report](#)

[Clip](#) | [Link](#)



Trogopterus *ws on them pubsihing this way.*

16 January 2012 6:49 PM *At their journals were*

open access and perhaps members would not have

What sustains the existing symbiosis between academics and

publishers is that both parties thrive on it. The main career asset

of an academic is her list of publications in expensive journals

that have proliferated with Open Access is the fact that not all

papers pay for themselves as a stabilizing factor, ensuring

that the editorial board are unlikely to turn around and do

something crazy.

Journals and papers tend to subsidise each other. As
Sure enough, it is rotten system, since it excludes those on the

fringes: young academics who have been rejected and who are
struggling to get back into the career, academics from weak

universities in weak countries, well-educated amateurs who

would be capable of making a contribution. In mathematics and

some areas of physics, such people would be able to participate

in research if access to the literature were available to them.

But some alternative system has to be proposed that would

provide the necessary stability. And, although some departments

do run their own journals, that approach is hardly ideal, because

of conflicts of interest

How would you convince a publisher to take a

financial risk on a paper?

Royal societies and state academies did serve that purpose

during the 18th and 19th centuries. Hence my proposal:

academic publication should be the responsibility of state

institutions that are separate from the universities.

For that, of course, the first step has to be to get rid of all the

major political parties that exist at present, since none of them

would ever consider the proposal for a moment. So obviously,

the proposal is a rather idealistic one.

[Recommend \(0\)](#)

[Responses \(0\)](#)

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Abcdefggggg

16 January 2012 7:16PM

Response to [oharar, 16 January 2012 2:53PM](#)

How did GPs survive before the internet? Did they
really all pop off down to the library to read the latest
J. Colds Infl. Treat.? And are they now unable to read

[Recommend \(2\)](#)

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Abcdefgggggther ways of getting the
 on National on-line reading PM
 it's probably a better read too.

Americans: sign into Popvox or Open Congress etc. and write
 That's completely absurd. Have you ever read a mainstream
 your congressmen in opposition to this act.
 media article about science? It's all "Harry Potter's invisibility
 cloak recreated by huffins!1!" with complete misunderstanding of



dedicatedtutoneilove
 aggeration of everything, no mention of numbers or
 16 January 2012 7:59PM
 names, etc. If doctors got their information from blogs,

they'd be prescribing herbs for cancer. Those of us with even a
 Perhaps this might be a good way for our on-line UK National
 little understanding of science need to be able to read the
 Archives to add an extra string to our bow/ repertoire, as
 original article to understand what was actually done,
 ordinary members of the public who may or may not have an
 interest in research of any kind.

Surely one's form of employment need no longer be kept as an
 aside to the broadest context of loving and learning ie this
 wonderful jungle that is the charity world..

Open donation of research seems quite reasonable to me.
 Perhaps everyone concerned with our on-line UK National
 Archives should critically reflect or do some appropriate type of
 SWOT analysis about it's position and future eg how we can
 complement and better appreciate it's capacity - Even some
 virtual research using eg that really old NHS research strategy (
 the one that may accommodate types of blue sky research that
 might have low chance but high impact)... "Best Research for best
 health"

For example a good start might be some research work
 concerning the difference between thew so-called " firm" and the
 so-called "commons" especially during the current confusions
 about the future of taxpayer funded NHS. I daresay the UK
 National on-line Archives should be a great place to situate such
 a very important and enduring research dialogue.



hervebasset
 16 January 2012 9:09PM

Nice article, even nothing really new unfortunately.
 But do not forget that the most conservatism group is not the
 STM publishers but scientists themselves, especially in Life

Recommend (1)

Responses (0)

Report

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Responses (0)

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Recommend (1)

Responses (0)

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profevil
 16 January 2012 11:38PM
 Majority of researchers expect
 from their companies to get access to unaffordable e-journals
 platforms. Every body complains out. you pay and then it's free.

<http://scienceintelligence.wordpress.com/>

[Recommend \(0\)](#)

[Responses \(0\)](#)

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wotisaidiz
 16 January 2012 11:58PM

I am a lay member of an Ethics Committee and really need access to scientific papers, but also can't afford the \$20 to \$30 charge for a view. Neither can I afford the massive subscriptions many journals charge.

In research committees where my opinion is sought, I regularly ask that the researcher publishes so that the papers can be read by anyone who is interested, but of course, researchers need peer review.

The idea of Kindle operating a scientific publishing division (mentioned in an earlier post) is an excellent one. I would be more than happy to pay a few pence to read an article.

Researchers are usually very happy to send out a pdf of an article they have written, but if many people asked for a copy, it would be very tiresome.

Anything published as a result of research using public money should indeed be available to anyone to read. But then how do we deal with research done as a result of public and industry collaboration, as so much health research is currently done?

[Recommend \(0\)](#)

[Responses \(0\)](#)

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EleeschlenderJD
 17 January 2012 3:53AM

This is not only a scandal but well, just sickening.

I work with leading research M.D s and scientists here in the U.S.

Access to critical papers , even in the most prestigious medical journals are controlled by this company (EIS) which charges huge fees even for most complete abstracts. Where is government oversight of handing over taxpayer's subsidized

[Recommend \(0\)](#)

[Responses \(0\)](#)

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Benulek [lam ? Follow the money; folks are being paid this Janhappen, it 8:45AM](#)

Eleeschlender ^{TD}

Response to [ClickYourHeels](#), 16 January 2012 12:47PM

Nice idea! You first?

[Recommend \(0\)](#)

[Responses \(0\)](#)

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GrahamRounce

17 January 2012 9:33AM

Open-access publishers such as the Public Library of Science are able to make a modest profit on a publication fee of \$1,350 (£880).

HOW MUCH?? So much for my dreams of ever publishing anything.

[Recommend \(0\)](#)

[Responses \(0\)](#)

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Suilevalliv

17 January 2012 9:33AM

Response to [MikeTaylor](#), 16 January 2012 2:00PM

Re ArXiv-oid services you say:

It may just be that there is not enough money sloshing around in other sciences to build such a service.

Really? ArXiv costs \$7 per article, all told. The average for traditional publishing is \$2000+ per article.

[Recommend \(0\)](#)

[Responses \(0\)](#)

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insignificance

17 January 2012 9:37AM

I'm a technical editor working for a nonprofit scientific publisher, where the profits generated by our publications are used to promote the area of science in which we are involved by, for example, organizing meetings and conferences, sponsoring and supporting students from and in the developing world, etc.

While it's always interesting to have another round of debate about traditional versus open access publishing models and fine to criticise the profits taken by Elsevier and their ilk, I really

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[Responses \(1\)](#)

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AllyLN The continual belittling handed out in these comments is a disgrace to the profession.

While I am used to my hard work being underappreciated by the academics who submit it to our journals, who seem to think that there is a lot of very interesting and useful information here in comments, some of which has changed my view as I've read just the press of some magic button converts their efforts into the finished product, it is particularly offensive to read of my work being dismissed as 'not fully formatted'.

One argument against 'open access' for all - as I've been given it - is that pharmaceutical companies and other businesses of course academics being what they are all think that their work that would usually pay a lot of money for the valuable research, cannot possibly be improved on, but science academics are not generally renowned (and why should they be expected to be) for their writing skills. Adding to this, where as the majority of papers are written for profit scientific publishers could send them back into English to fund medical science; but at the same time papers could be available through public libraries maybe for a small fee?

My job is a very highly skilled job that took me years to master, and I realise that not all journals operate to the same standards, but in our publications every paper is read through several times and corrected for spelling, grammar and style, made to conform to the overall journal style and inconsistencies and errors pointed out for consideration by the authors; figures are resized, rearranged, relabelled; pages typeset and figures and tables arranged. This is all done by one in a house. However, that is just the start of the process of formatting and can just be dispensed with. Imagine a large textbook with, say, 500 figures reproducing graphs, tables and diagrams from published scientific papers. The bill to the author (or the money that s/he will lose in royalties) could run into the thousands of dollars (Nature Neuroscience, for example, are keen to charge \$500 US to reproduce one figure).

oldpom My job is a very highly skilled job that took me years to master, and I realise that not all journals operate to the same standards, but in our publications every paper is read through several times and corrected for spelling, grammar and style, made to conform to the overall journal style and inconsistencies and errors pointed out for consideration by the authors; figures are resized, rearranged, relabelled; pages typeset and figures and tables arranged. This is all done by one in a house. However, that is just the start of the process of formatting and can just be dispensed with. Imagine a large textbook with, say, 500 figures reproducing graphs, tables and diagrams from published scientific papers. The bill to the author (or the money that s/he will lose in royalties) could run into the thousands of dollars (Nature Neuroscience, for example, are keen to charge \$500 US to reproduce one figure).

This is not confined to the publishing houses. The American Physiological Society are keen to charge upwards of \$50 for each figure reproduced or adapted from one of their publications. This is likely to discourage authors from writing textbooks as seeking permissions, paying the fees and losing the relative small amounts of royalties is a substantial disincentive. This has the potential to damage scientific education in a significant way.

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Responses (0)

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**herrison2000**

17 January 2012 10:13AM

As someone who works for the "Big Bad", but doesn't have any particular axe to grind and has no interest in astro-turfing, there are a couple of points I'd like to make.

1) Publishing articles and books is only part of how Elsevier earns money. We have a bunch of other scholarly services, knowledge curation, etc. Statements about how much profit Elsevier makes out of publishing science articles need to take this into account.

2) We have always invested shit loads of money in new technology - sure, "simple" search engines a decade or more ago, but now semantics, natural languages, ontologies etc. as well as community infrastructure projects like DOIs

3) Not doing anything more than "nicely formatting" the article is BS, as other people have indicated. There's more curation in an article now than there has ever been. I wish it was as simple as uploading a PDF to a website. If it was, everyone would do it.

4) Unless I'm horribly mistaken, the papers we do publish have titles, abstracts and references freely available to all. Not enough for research scientists, but good for the non Phd reader. And a lot more than has been available hitherto.

I should also point out that I 'attempt' to earn money by writing and publishing away from the office, so I have a vested interest in not giving away my output for free :-)

**rhymeguy**

17 January 2012 1:39PM

Er yeah, I definitely want books to be free as well, if they are based on publically-funded research. And I want buses to be free because I pay taxes and buses are subsidised by my tax payments, and I wouldn't mind if you could waive my bank charges for a while since I own a proportion of the bank we bailed out with my money. That would be nice.

Seriously though. Do I really want access to full primary research

[Recommend \(8\)](#)[Responses \(0\)](#)[Report](#)[Clip](#) | [Link](#)[Recommend \(6\)](#)[Responses \(0\)](#)[Report](#)[Clip](#) | [Link](#)

ballymichael ss to someone who is going to tell me
 all January 2012 9:15 PM informed. Don't point the
 finger too much at the publishers. It's the apathetic attitude that
 I think has taken hold of the sector (don't have a guide, I can't
 although I'm some support of publishers) will do so don't have
 journals has perpetuated this wave of moaning. As scientists it's
 your obligation to participate in outreach to make sure your
 academic publishing is very valuable indeed. (I work in the
 work is understood if it's that important. Don't blame publishers
 digital library field, and have an idea of the charges).
 when it's your own lack of will/time/skill [to translate your own
 Do they "add value"? From the point of view of most scientists,
 science into everyday speak]. If you could effectively translate
 yes they mostly do. Because the journal titles have the prestige
 you work into coherent prose and publish it in a well-regarded
 so it's better to be published in a commercial than most open
 blog or other public outreach vehicle, then there would be no
 access journals
 need for the layperson to demand access to the methods or
 dataset
 (the scientists, of course, don't see the bills either). Could it be
 done far more cheaply? Yes, and it is so done. but it's a chicken-
 Open access doesn't = outreach.
 and-egg problem, trying to get scientists to publish in a new open
 Why not spend a few minutes looking around the big publisher
 access journal.
 websites (those that are most moaned about inaccurately):
 It's certainly no area that needs new legislation, though
 Wiley, Elsevier, Springer. In every single case they all seem to be

dianthusmed albeit at a slower pace than the PLoS
 n, and at the same time all fully comply with NIH,
 17 January 2012 4:15 PM
 RCUK, Wellcome etc funding body mandates. Even Elsevier has
 Perhaps I'm missing something here, and since IANAL that's
 a rapidly expanding open access journals programme, but then
 quite possible, but I can't see how the RWA inhibits open-access
 you'll all probably moan about that anyway.
 publishing. What it actually says is as follows:
 Finally, if you preach open access, don't publish in paid
 No Federal agency may adopt, implement, maintain,
 subscription journals (where you can incidentally publish your
 papers free). A quick search on Scopus or Web of Science for the
 continue, or otherwise engage in any policy program
 or other activity that
 noisiest open access evangelists perfectly paints the apathetic
 attitude you take to your ideology. It is this same apathy among
 (1) causes, permits, or authorizes network
 scientists that has so far produced very few workable,
 dissemination of any private-sector research work
 sustainable, financially-viable alternatives to the traditional
 without the prior consent of the publisher of such
 work; or
 publisher.
 (2) requires that any actual or prospective author, or
 the employer of such an actual or prospective author,
 assent to network dissemination of a private-sector
 research work.

Someone help me out here: how does that stop people publishing
 in OA journals? Surely if someone publishes in an OA journal,

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Responses (0)

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Recommend (1)

Responses (1)

Report

Clip | [Link](#)



solen13ld give consent to the network dissemination
ork January 2012 5:43PM forbidden.

Am I missing something?

"The result of all this free and far-below-
minimum-wage professional work is journal articles
in which the publisher, which has done almost
nothing, owns the copyright and is able to sell copies
back to libraries at monopolistic costs, and to
individuals at \$30 or more per view."

This caught my eye because of a discussion I just had with HR
about a high school student who wanted to do an unpaid
internship in our lab. The bottom line came down that either we
had to PAY him or he couldn't DO anything, only shadow. This is
directly tied to the Fair Labor Standards Act which has a 6 point
system for determining whether an internship can be unpaid.

Number four is the key:

"The employer that provides the training derives no
immediate advantage from the activities of the intern;
and on occasion its operations may actually be
impeded"

Or, essentially, employers are not allowed to make a profit off of
free labor, *even if* the laborer volunteers and benefits from the
experience. It's a system designed to prevent corporations
skirting minimum wage laws to make a profit off of volunteer
work. Peer reviewers aren't typically thought of as interns, but
their is an interestingly similar dynamic at work.

There have been class action lawsuits relating to this.



fearisthemindkiller

17 January 2012 6:10PM

A lot of scientists question the necessity of publishers at all, and
question the value of the 'value added' aspects of the publishing
process. I think it is certainly legitimate to question what
publishers are contributing when they charge the amount they
do; both subscription based and open access publishers.

As someone on the inside of a for-profit Open Access publisher

Recommend (1)

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Recommend (2)

Responses (1)

Report

Clip | [Link](#)



ishoogledoogle I will say that we do offer more than 20% of our total volume of manuscripts (although it of course this is a big proportion of what we do!).

We provide the money and the manpower to drive new initiatives that extend and build upon existing publishing capabilities and services, such as open data initiatives, developing best practice in research and publishing; apps and online journals; and making it easier to find and share research. We also provide a way of safeguarding against poor science or unethical authors - we regularly pick up on and act on instances of biased reviewing or conflicts of interest etc. We provide a well maintained and accessible venue for and archive of published work, and highlight and promote authors and their work, as well as provide an opportunity for others to comment on this work online. In addition, the company I work for waives the costs of publishing for those working in developing countries (massively) and for making scientific research a globally level playing field for those who can show that they are unable to pay the cost for other legitimate reasons.



vanprooi s or unethical authors - we regularly pick up on and act on instances of biased reviewing or conflicts of duplication, instances of biased reviewing or conflicts of interest etc. We provide a well maintained and accessible venue for and archive of published work, and highlight and promote authors and their work, as well as provide an opportunity for others to comment on this work online. In addition, the company I work for waives the costs of publishing for those working in developing countries (massively) and for making scientific research a globally level playing field for those who can show that they are unable to pay the cost for other legitimate reasons.



Response to palfreyman, 16 January 2012 12:40PM
No, this is it. That is how people roll. Researchers are beholden to publishers because competition for publication determines professional success, and it spreads from there. In addition, the company I work for waives the costs of publishing for those working in developing countries (massively) and for making scientific research a globally level playing field for those who can show that they are unable to pay the cost for other legitimate reasons.



StevanHarnad it for making scientific research a globally level playing field for those who can show that they are unable to pay the cost for other legitimate reasons.

Subscription based publishing is on its way out - most big publishers have launched an open access journal in the last couple of years." It is the only tenable, and ethical, method of publishing. And, as more and more people publish in OA journals, the lower the cost of publishing will become, therefore increasing value for money exponentially!
EXCERPT:

The US Research Works Act (H.R.3699): "No Federal agency may adopt, implement, maintain, continue, or otherwise engage in any policy, program, or other activity that -- (1) causes, permits, or authorizes network dissemination of any private-sector research work without the prior consent of the publisher of such work; or (2) requires that any actual or prospective author, or the employer of such an actual or prospective author, assent to network dissemination of a private-sector research

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brems

.18 January 2012 1:08PM
ion and Comments:

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"If public tax money is used to fund research, that research becomes "private research" once a publisher "adds value" to it by managing the peer review. Academics don't like reviewing papers. They hate reviewing papers to short deadlines even more.

[Comment: Researchers do the peer review for the publisher for free, just as researchers give their papers to the publisher for free, together with the exclusive right to sell subscriptions to it, on-paper and online, seeking and receiving no fee or royalty in return]. Publishers hire huge numbers of highly qualified physicists themselves, on high salaries, to ensure they get these reviews to very short deadlines. This is generally done through investing even more time into building relationships in the community.

"Since that public research has thereby been transformed into "private research," and the publisher's property, the government that funded it with public tax money should not be allowed to themselves. You're talking 10\$ of millions a year just require the funded author to make it accessible for free online for those users who cannot afford subscription access."

This is probably the biggest falsehood I've yet seen in this debate [Comment: The author's sole purpose in doing and publishing and I'm not suprised it's the publisher's lobby which drops the the research, without seeking any fee or royalties, is so that all level of commenting to that of YouTube, potential users can access, use and build upon it, in further

research and applications, to the benefit of the public rather than the business; this is also the sole purpose for which the tax money is used to fund research. No official publisher has ever come out with that information to justify their obscene subscription rates. You H.R. 3699 misunderstands the secondary service role that are correct, however, that publishers like Elsevier would want to peer-reviewed research journal publishing plays in US research make you believe just that, e.g. on Elsevier's site, when in fact and development and its (public) funding. they pay only the 7,000 editors and have 970,000 unpaid

It is a huge miscalculation to weigh the potential gains or losses from providing or not providing open access to publicly funded research in terms of gains or losses to the publishing industry: not by an academic but by a paid shill from a commercial publisher. Lost or delayed research progress mean losses to the growth and productivity of both basic research and the vast R&D industry in publisher. Most certainly I wouldn't want my work to be all fields, and hence losses to the US economy as a whole. reviewed by a non-peer. If anything, paid professional reviewers

What needs to be done about public access to publishers and scholarly publications resulting from federally funded research?

The minimum policy for all US federal funders to mandate (unpaid) as a condition for receiving public funding for research, that (i) the funded researcher accepted refereed final



bremsb reed journal articles resulting from the funded

8.14.12 (iii) depositing immediately upon acceptance

for publication (iv) in the fundee's institutional repository, with

Response to Holiestofcows, 16 January 2012 5:56PM

OA embargo) wherever possible (over 60% of journals already

endorse immediate gratis OA self-archiving) and at the latest

after a 6-month embargo on OA

technology etc etc. Millions of pounds a year.

It is the above policy that H.R.3699 is attempting to make

illegal. You can't expect publishers to outlay tens of millions

http://openaccess.eprints.org/index.php:/archives

/867-guid.html.....

Actually, closed access is the opposite of visibility. 'Open' means all people can see it. Which might explain why our PLoS One paper is cited more highly than our Science paper. And what we paid for our PLoS One paper is only a fraction of what our library pays for Science. The PR of PLoS One was also much better than that of Science. Actually, the press releases are also generated by the press offices of the universities, so even there the publishers get to promote the publications for free which they already either get for free or even ask a page charge for. Finally, tens of millions is a drop in the bucket when, like Elsevier alone, you make more than a billion US every single year. That's probably less than their board earns - per month!



bremsb

18 January 2012 1:26PM

Response to Holiestofcows, 16 January 2012 6:27PM

Also, you need to take into account that most journals and papers lose money.....

Most big companies have 2-3 big journals that make lots of money. But they also have 50+ that lose them money. Lots of money.

In truth, most journals (and the papers they publish) are subsidised by the big sellers, and the star authors.

It's true to say that the companies make profit. But

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brembs comes from 2-3 big products. They still
 18 January 2012 12:09PM

If that's correct, that makes it even worse! Are you trying to tell me they charge some tens of thousands of Euro for things like "Nuclear instruments and methods in physics research" (which with every single article they publish. They do it because the model, at the end of the year, guarantees them a profit I'm sure everybody reads for breakfast every day) to be able to make a loss on stuff like Cell (which is one of the most highly ranked journals of all) for which they only charge a measly US\$1700???. Are you kidding me? How would that ever be an argument supporting corporate publishers? It's a ripoff that earns these racketeers about US\$4b annually and it's time we stop it! Yes, it's probably the huge risk that gave us 25,000 journals as opposed to just a few dozen 50 years ago and a publishing business that makes record profits with obscene profit margins off of taxpayer funds at the time when the whole world is in financial turmoil. I'd love to have those risks for everything I spend my money on, I certainly wouldn't have to work anymore then!

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brembs
 18 January 2012 1:34PM

Response to insignificance, 17 January 2012 9:37AM

My job is a very highly skilled job that took me years to master, even starting with a PhD. I realise that not all journals operate to the same standards, but in our publications every paper is read through several times and corrected for spelling, grammar and style, made to conform to the overall journal style and inconsistencies and errors pointed out for consideration by the authors; figures are resized, rearranged, relabelled; pages typeset and figures and tables arranged. This is all done by me in house. However, that's all just worthless 'formatting' and can just be dispensed with...

No, it is not. It is a valued contribution - just not one that leads to any copyright. Moreover, this valued contribution factors in as a cost that we as scientists should be prepared to pay, but I can't

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sbrembs work like yours justifies obscene profits of shareholders since 1945. My publisher is non-profit, the criticism leveled here does only very partially apply to publishers
 Response to [fearisthemindkiller](#), 17 January 2012 6:10PM

We provide the money and the manpower to drive new initiatives that extend and build upon existing publishing capabilities and services, such as open data initiatives, developing best practice in research and publishing; apps and online features to make it easier to find and share required information; and methods of tracking related publications to improve transparency in research reporting.

Yes, a lot of publishers say that. But compared to the profits, these investments must be either ridiculously minuscule or the money has been misappropriated or the tasks you mentioned have been carried out by imbeciles. The technical standard of, e.g. ScienceDirect is laughably antiquated and restricted to the 2000 or so Elsevier journals. Thus, the results of these investments are both functionally obsolete and even if they weren't, the restricted coverage would make them useless for academics anyway.

Publishers also provide a way of safeguarding against poor reviewers or unethical authors - we regularly pick up on and act on cases of duplication, instances of biased reviewing or conflicts of interest etc.

Again, these efforts seem to be marred by either embezzlement or incompetence: 2011 has been dubbed the year of the retraction and it weren't the publishers who caught the fabrications...



USbonobo
 18 January 2012 4:43PM

Okay, I'm complicit in the racket. For the sake of argument, consider me an evil scientist with no better than an indirect interest in the public good. I do research that requires little direct cost at an institution with extensive library resources. I pay no money to have my work published in journals that are

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calmeilles The vast majority of researchers in my field -

small pieces to big puzzles, and I assume that the general public
Response to dianthusmed, 17 January 2012 4:15PM

Perhaps I'm missing something here, and since
lives better.

So... I'm still trying to wrap my head around the idea that it's bad
for libraries to have to pay for articles, and bad for readers to

have to pay for articles, but perfectly reasonable for scientists to
have to pay thousands of dollars to have their research
published. Is this money supposed to come out of the
researcher's pocket? If so, you're going to have a hard time

convincing me that I should prefer submitting to an open access
journal instead of a commercial journal. Is it supposed to come
out of my grant? Assuming that my research is grant supported

(and much isn't, in fact it's quite difficult to get a grant without a
successful publication record in the first place, ...) then the
money to publish the paper is coming from the taxpayers
anyway, the vast majority of whom will never read a paper. The
extra money budgeted into grants for publication will reduce the
number and size of grants - reducing research productivity. Or

perhaps the researcher's institution should pay for the
publication - after all their library budgets will not need to be so
large. Of course, libraries can decide which journals are worth
publishing in an OA journal, the publisher would give
consent to the network dissemination of that work, so
which outlets they are willing to pay to publish in. If universities
have policies that pay any amount for any publication, costs

might well spiral upwards. They have for libraries. The result of
that would be replacing a situation in which researchers at
Today, Federal Agency pays a grant to Private University
wealthy institutions have exclusive direct access to research done
Research Fellow for all or part of a project. A condition of that
grant is that any resulting papers be published online, for free.
access to research done exclusively by researchers at wealthy
And they are.

institutions, which doesn't seem much more desirable.
Should the bill be passed not only can that not happen but
On a different note, I am not sure that any given researcher will
Federal Agency cannot even have a policy to ask for such
get more readers in an open access format than they would in the
publishing to happen.

current system. I personally am much more likely to read an
article by a researcher that I've never heard of if it is in a highly
selective and prestigious journal. With open access, I am likely to

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restrict my reading to familiar researchers and narrow keyword searches. I am also more likely to do peer review for a selective journal- because I am much less likely to waste my time on papers that have no merit. An open access journal with publication fees as the sole means of financial support has little incentive to screen out such papers prior to the peer review process. And I don't see how I'm better off providing my time and expertise for free to an open access journal than I am providing my time and expertise for free to a for-profit journal. Either way, someone is benefiting economically, and it's not me. For instance, the Tea Party never rails against a physics study - even if they could not name a single practical application of the Higgs Boson, nor discern what is or isn't a counterintuitive finding regarding it, but are happy to seize on publicly funded behavioral research because they believe that they understand it better. Thinking of the general public as ignorant savages who have no standing to determine what the appropriate use of their tax money should be is exactly the sort of position that enrages many proponents of open access. It's undemocratic, arrogant, and threatens the existence of publicly funded research altogether. I understand that, and don't dispute it. But the majority of Americans are scientifically ignorant and do themselves a disservice by taking the evaluation of research out of the experts' hands and into their own. If my complimentary labor makes someone's life easier and wallet fatter, I can understand why you might assume that I would rather it be the American taxpayer than a Dutch shareholder, but really, I'm pretty ambivalent.

So a move to open access means that my research is more expensive, and the demands on my time increase, in return for which I still get no money for the publication process, no better access than my library already provides, and the ability for anyone in the world to read my research whether or not they have any worthwhile reason to do so. Would this be better overall? Maybe. But if I'm the one making all the sacrifices for it to come about... I'm not so motivated to take up the cause.