

Diversity and inclusion in research publishing

It is widely recognised that teams and organisations in all sectors of society perform better and make better decisions when they embrace diversity and inclusion in their culture and, particularly, among their leadership. Diversity refers to having a wide range of human differences in the composition of a team. Inclusion, inclusivity, or inclusiveness refers to ensuring that all team members feel engaged and their contributions and perspectives are valued. Efforts to actively promote both diversity and inclusion need to be ongoing, given that demographics and team composition continuously change with time.

Within the scholarly publishing industry, diversity and inclusion principles and practices apply to authors, peer reviewers, editorial boards, and academic and professional societies, as well as editorial and publishing personnel.

Among recent initiatives to promote diversity and inclusion in research publishing are the publication of the *Diversity and Inclusion Manifesto for Scholarly Publishing* by the Association of Learned and Professional Society Publishers [1] and the establishment of the Coalition for Diversity & Inclusion in Scholarly Communications (C4DISC) [2].

Peer Review Week 2018 highlighted the importance of diversity and inclusion in increasing the quality, fairness, and integrity of academic peer review. In an online survey conducted to mark the event, COPE found that 71% of 384 respondents cited that their employer or publication values diverse involvement and opinions in its peer review process. However, only 25% were aware of a diversity policy for recruiting members of their peer reviewer pool, and only 13% said there is in-house training to promote diversity and inclusion in peer review [3].

COPE is keen to promote diversity and inclusion in not only peer review but also scholarly publishing in general, by facilitating dialogue and developing resources for key stakeholders in the publishing landscape.

For example, the upcoming COPE North American seminar is themed “Challenges and solutions: issues of inclusivity and diversity in the humanities and social sciences” [4]. And COPE is currently conducting a trial membership programme with several research institutions. Indeed, research institutions are important stakeholders in the research publishing ecosystem, not least because they train researchers to become the next generation of scholarly authors, peer reviewers, editors, and leaders of scholarly societies.

Questions

- How can COPE help members (and non-members) to encourage diversity and inclusion?
- Should and how can diversity and inclusion be incorporated into COPE’s Core Practices?
- How can diversity and inclusion be improved for different communities involved in research publishing?
- What challenges are there (or may arise) and how could they be overcome?

References

1. Association of Learned and Professional Society Publishers. Diversity and Inclusion Manifesto for Scholarly Publishing. <https://diversitymanifesto.wordpress.com/>
2. Coalition for Diversity & Inclusion in Scholarly Communications (C4DISC). <https://c4disc.org/principles/>
3. COPE. Diversity in Peer Review: Survey Results. <https://publicationethics.org/news/diversity-peer-review-survey-results>
4. COPE North American Seminar, 3 May 2019. Registration site. <https://publicationethics.org/news/challenges-and-solutions-issues-inclusivity-and-diversity-humanities-and-social-sciences>

This was discussed at the start of the COPE Forum on Monday 11 February 2019.

COMMENTS FROM THE FORUM (Monday 11 February 2019) – NOTE, Comments do not imply formal COPE advice, or consensus.

- We need to build awareness and track the diversity of our reviewer pools. Some journals do this proactively. There are benefits of tracking the diversity of our author and reviewer communities, and editorial board members, but we need to do so in a sensitive way.
- The Royal Society has produced a briefing document on what unconscious bias is and what can be done about it (see comments from the website below). The aim is to make editors and reviewers aware there are biases and ask them to take time before making decisions.
- It is important to think about diversity from a range of perspectives. It goes beyond gender or race and can include career status. Looking at metrics regarding participation in peer review and editorial boards is very helpful. This can identify if there are any gaps. Having peer review mentoring programmes in place may help early career researchers to be part of the peer review process, which can increase diversity.
- Is there any value in attempting to match gender/geography ratios of authors (who voluntarily submit) to editorial boards and reviewers (who we select)?
- Arguably a journal's diversity should at least reflect the composition of the community it serves. For example, in surgery, there is a very low proportion of women. It would be difficult to get a 50:50 balance of reviewers.
- We also need change in ways that are necessarily reflective of the community that the journal yet serves. For example, perhaps surgeons very deliberately create an editorial board that is diverse and therefore not necessarily representative of the community that the journal serves. This might effect change.
- The composition of an editorial board will help dictate the composition of the reviewer pool. So, we can increase the diversity of the board to shape the diversity of the reviewer pool.
- A lot the Chinese scientists feel excluded as they are not asked to review or serve as guest editors. One technical issue is that when journals check for conflicts of interest, Chinese names can be difficult to disambiguate.
- There is a preference for well written reviews so editors do not have to spend as much time cleaning them up, which can discriminate against non-native English speaking authors/reviewers.

- Some publishers have been addressing diversity from a reader perspective—for example, increasing accessibility of content by including descriptions of images, compatibility of content with assistive technologies, etc. What is best practice for increasing the diversity of readers? Should we be looking for guidance around this issue?
- *The Lancet* has devoted a whole issue to the subject of ‘Advancing women in science, medicine and global health’
[https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/issue/vol393no10171/PIIS0140-6736\(19\)X0006-9](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/issue/vol393no10171/PIIS0140-6736(19)X0006-9)
- Can editors/journals lead by helping to recruit diverse, representative and inclusive editorial boards that mirror the pool of early career researchers?
- Junior career professionals looking upward in their organisation and not necessarily seeing the leadership matching to the more entry level positions—can we improve on this?
- Underrepresentation of women as peer reviewers was shown in research presented at the peer review congress <https://peerreviewcongress.org/prc17-0308>
- Research shows women decline invitations to peer review more often than men
<https://www.nature.com/news/gender-bias-found-in-earth-science-society-journals-1.20708>
- IOP Publishing released a report of their investigation into diversity, and it includes details that might enable others to reproduce their efforts within their own context:
<https://iopublishing.org/about-us/diversity-inclusion-peer-review-iop-publishing/>

ACTIONS: COPE would now like to develop a discussion document on diversity and inclusion in research publishing that is relevant to all stakeholders, and this discussion will contribute to this document.

COMMENTS POSTED ON THE WEBSITE

Posted by Phil Hurst, 6/2/2019

Potentially COPE might issue a statement along these lines:

When assessing a piece of research, journals strive to identify the best people with the knowledge to properly review it. If the journal limits the diversity of this pool it is not using the broadest range of expertise available in the international scientific community. However, selecting from a much larger, diverse and international pool of researchers increases the chances of identifying (and appointing) the very best reviewers.

Posted by Charon Pierson, 10/2/2019

I wonder if different models of peer review encourage greater diversity and inclusion. In a double-blind or triple-blind system, would there be a greater possibility of including more gender or geographic diversity? As Phil notes above, the primary criterion is knowledge and expertise in the subject matter, but do editors select reviewers based on their own biases towards preferred gender in sciences, or towards language proficiency in written reviews?

I do think it might help to report diversity statistics on the reviewers and authors on an annual basis for journals to raise awareness among the researchers, reviewers, and readers of the need

for greater diversity and inclusivity. This may stimulate some to become reviewers and it could kick start a recruitment campaign for a more diverse reviewer pool. Publishers may be interested in using some of these metrics as a way to encourage and support editors and editorial boards to be more inclusive.

Posted by Wendy Hu, 16/2/2019

Couldn't agree more, Charon. A different model of peer review that takes into account contextual knowledge and expertise, in conjunction with a more "absolute" or universal notion of research rigour and what constitutes legitimate knowledge may address persistent inequity in publication rates across the globe. For example, could a panel or group reviewing model work, with reviewers who have complementary knowledges and experience, including methods, local experience and topic expertise? A secondary benefit would be to increase the pool of willing reviewers, induct and train those new to publication. However, rules around who can be a reviewer may need to be relaxed.

Posted by Phil Hurst, 11/2/2019

Re: editor biases. The Royal Society has produced a briefing document (<https://royalsociety.org/~media/policy/Publications/2015/unconscious-bias-briefing-2015.pdf>) and animation (<https://royalsociety.org/topics-policy/publications/2015/unconscious-bias/>) for all committees explaining what unconscious bias is and what can be done about it.

Prior to the start of each journal Editorial Board meeting, we have made a point of briefing members about unconscious bias and urge them to take it into account when making decisions (we do this when inviting new board members too). This message has been extended to reviewer invitations. There is probably more we can do.