

Correspondence

Global responsibility for publishing costs

As readers, many scientists in Europe will welcome the news that most work will have to be published in open-access journals from 2020 (M. Schiltz *Front. Neurosci.* **12**, 656 (2018); see also *Nature* **561**, 17–18; 2018). But as knowledge producers, I fear that many more scientists around the globe are likely to be disenfranchised by richer nations, institutions and funding bodies.

Open-access publication requires authors to pay in the region of US\$1,000–3,000 (more than the cost of many research projects in some disciplines). Although scientists from low-income countries are eligible for full-fee waivers, compulsory open access will force many others to use money intended for research, or to publish in low-tier journals that still retain reader paywalls.

In my view, sources of all publication fees should be recorded — just as funding sources are now — so that marginalized researchers can be identified and rates of waiver use tracked. The findings would guide realistic fee capping by European open-access publications.

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Plan S debate is not “a pity”

Robert-Jan Smits declares it a “pity” that arguments about academic freedom are stifling debate on his ‘Plan S’, which promotes a radical shift towards open-access publishing (see *Nature* **562**, 174; 2018). In fact, the opposite is happening.

Spirited debates on the topic are ongoing among researchers, publishers, librarians, journalists, funders and members of the public (see, for example, go.nature.com/2qtusrb; go.nature.com/2coxgrx; go.nature.com/2nm2dmq; go.nature.com/2ckhnr; go.nature.com/2qw2hv6). We have yet to reach agreement on what to make of the major European funders’ radical shift to compulsory open-access publishing by 2020, but we continue to explore this important issue in good faith.

In a Plan S world, the research community will need to address academic responsibility, the future of scholarly societies and their journals, and how to respect disciplinary differences and ensure the high quality of publications. We invite Smits and all other architects of the plan to engage academics in constructive discourse on these issues.

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Bullying: report without reprisal

I appreciate efforts by institutions to counteract academic bullying (see *Nature* **560**, 420 (2018); *Nature* **560**, 529; 2018). They should also set up a clear, fair and accessible reporting system, with no fear of reprisal for the institution or the people who have been abused.

Bullying issues are arguably worse for international students and scholars than for domestic lab members. International researchers are already disadvantaged by visa requirements and financial constraints, and such abuse exacerbates their insecurities over position and job prospects — particularly if it takes the form of infringement of intellectual property and unfair authorship positioning on publications.

An efficient reporting system for victims would also benefit their institutions and funding organizations by helping them to select a new generation of

more nurturing leaders. The media could also play a part by making it clear in their reporting that individual cases are not an indictment on an institution’s overall reputation. This might also speed up the handling of abuse cases.

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Co-producers: move into charity sector

The James Lind Alliance has a 14-year track record of involving patients, carers and clinicians in determining priorities for health research (see www.jla.nihr.ac.uk). Charity Futures, another co-produced research initiative, is using the James Lind Alliance’s consultation process for the first time outside medicine.

We ask charities and donors about the research topics that they consider the most important (see go.nature.com/2pwsre4). Our aim is to encourage more research into those areas and so enable charities and donors to base their work on better evidence (see also C. Fiennes *Nature* **546**, 187; 2018). We shall report publicly on our findings next year.

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(see go.nature.com/2ph6tz3 for details).

Co-producers: frame only the questions

I work at the interface of science and public policy, so appreciate the importance of public values in prioritizing research problems (*Nature* **562**, 7; 2018). The challenge is to make this happen without disrupting the evidence base that enables effective delivery of solutions.

There is a general principle here that traces back to philosopher David Hume’s famous distinction between ‘is’ and ‘ought’, ‘fact’ and ‘values’ (*A Treatise of Human Nature*, 1739). In a democracy, it makes sense that the way we frame what is studied and how we respond to results is subject to dialogue that affords more importance to those affected than to those doing the research. However, values should frame the questions, not the answers.

This is less clear-cut in the social world (where co-production has its roots) than in the natural world, because in the social world observed and observer are not so distinct from one another.

The answers need to be grounded in the scientific treatment of carefully collected evidence.

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Let writers author scientific literature

Footnotes listing individual author contributions to research papers help to offset ambiguities in formal authorship, but are easily overlooked. Until due credit can be fairly allocated by artificial-intelligence algorithms (see G. L. Kiser *Nature* **561**, 435; 2018), I propose confining authorship to those who wrote the paper. People assessing credit for all other functions would then be forced to consult the detailed contributions list.

This ‘authorship for authors’ scheme would promote scientists’ writing skills. A journal article is a short story: it needs creativity, clarity, structure and pace. Yet scientists receive little training in narrative and tend to write poorly. This impairs progress because readers are forced to struggle with tedious or confusing text. Let’s help the scientific literature live up to its name.

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