

‘WHAT AUTHORS WANT’: the ALPSP research study on the motivations and concerns of contributors to learned journals

The author survey was carried out on behalf of ALPSP by Key Perspectives Ltd, a specialist information industry consultancy company. Many of the publisher members of ALPSP were involved, as well as other publishers in the UK and elsewhere, distributing a total of 11,500 questionnaires to authors who had contributed to selected journals from their lists. This paper is based on the 2,500 responses to hand at the time of writing, though the final report will draw on a database of over 3,000 returned sets of answers from respondent authors.

The primary aim of the survey was fourfold and sought to examine:

- The motivations involved when authors publish their work.
- Which factors authors take into consideration when deciding where to submit their work.
- The concerns of authors about the publishing process.
- The hopes and expectations of authors for the future of scholarly publishing.

Motivations

The main objective for publishing work remains communication with the author’s peers. Enhancing career prospects is the second most common reason, followed by



Fig. 1 Objectives when publishing.

gaining personal prestige and funding for future work. Direct financial reward was only given as a reason by a tiny minority of respondents (Figure 1).

Authors from the sciences and arts differ with respect to the importance of publishing their work on future funding (Figure 2). For

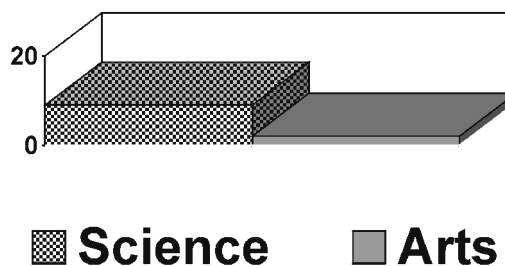


Fig. 2 Relative importance of funding.

scientists, funding is an important reason for publishing, but this is much less so for authors in the arts.

Where to publish?

When authors are considering which journal to submit to, there is a range of factors which are of importance (Figures 3 and 4). First among these is the reputation of the journal. Its impact factor, international

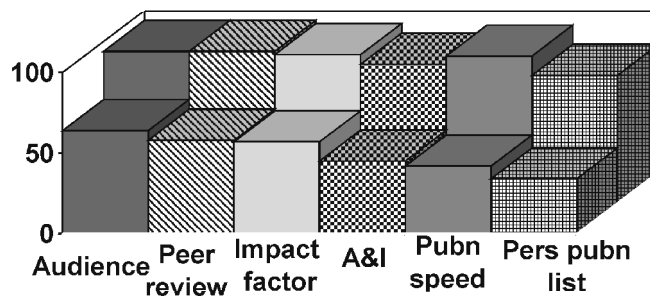


Fig. 3 Factors of importance.

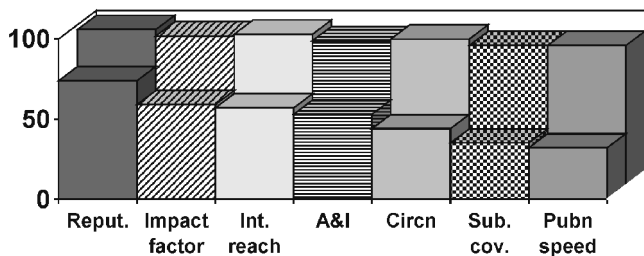


Fig. 4 Submission decision factors.

reach, and the coverage by abstracting and indexing services follow, very close together. The journal's circulation, subject coverage, and publication speed were also cited by substantial numbers of respondents.

There are other differences between authors working in various fields here, too. Scientists are much more concerned about the availability of an electronic version of the journal than are workers in the arts

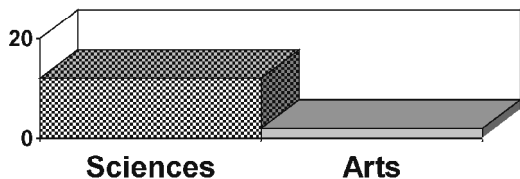


Fig. 5 Electronic version available.

(Figure 5). Publication speed is also significant to scientists, particularly chemists, whereas it is much less important to people working in social sciences or the humanities (Figure 6). Similarly, reproduction quality matters more to scientists, presumably because half-tones and colour photographs now

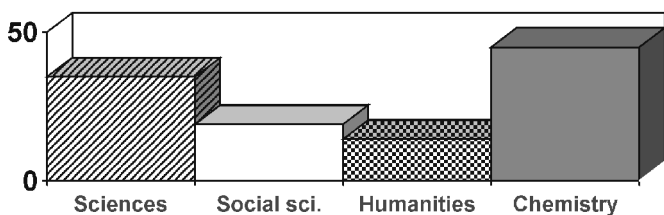


Fig. 6 Publication speed.

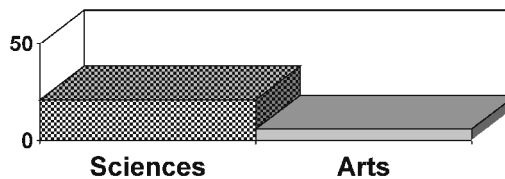


Fig. 7 Reproduction quality.

represent one of the major ways of recording their experimental findings (Figure 7).

Concerns about the publishing process

Authors' concerns fell under three main headings: copyright, publication delays, and peer review. Although in general copyright agreements seem to be reasonably well understood by authors, there are more authors in favour of retaining the copyright on their work themselves than relinquishing it to the publisher (Figure 8). This is particularly pronounced in the arts sectors and especially so in social sciences.

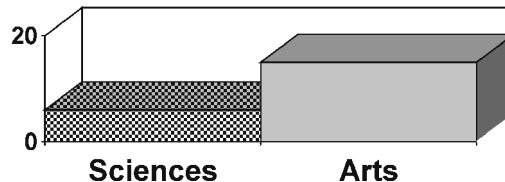


Fig. 8 Retention of copyright by author.

A huge majority of authors cite publication delays as a major obstacle to their publishing objectives. There are several reasons for this worry. The scientists are concerned that someone else will publish very similar work first, while authors from the arts fields are worried that their work may be out of date by the time it is published.

Although around two-thirds of authors are generally satisfied with the peer review process as it currently operated, more than half still consider it to be an obstacle in achieving their objectives when publishing

work. They cite as their reasons for any dissatisfaction delay by the reviewer, superficial reviews, and unnecessarily hostile reviews.

Looking forward to the future, more than two-thirds of authors wish to see scholarly publishing continue broadly in its present way, but the most popular expectation (and also hope) for the future was that electronic publishing with a rapid peer review system might develop further than at present.

And finally, two-thirds of authors agree that the purpose of scholarly publishing does seem to be changing. It is seen as moving away from knowledge dissemination to the

building of an author's CV/résumé or reputation.

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