

Editorial

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Abstract

This editorial piece marks the launch of the Essex Student Journal on our new publishing platform. To mark this event, we take the opportunity in this editorial to speak about the scholarly publishing landscape, and how rapid changes have led us to shape the Essex Student Journal around the current climate.

Keywords: Accessibility, Covid-19, Essex Student Journal, Scholarly publishing

Article

Last year marked ten years of Essex Student Research Online [ESTRO]. It's with great pleasure, that on the eleventh year of operating, we write this first Editorial for the re-launched student journal, now named the Essex Student Journal. In this Editorial, we would like to give you a window into the world of scholarly communication and how it has changed in the past few years. We do this to set out the good practice we are following to make sure the Essex Student Journal is as open and accessible as possible, whilst being a place where education, research, and publishing meet the Essex spirit. We would also like to briefly introduce both our Editorial Team, and how we have worked on moving the journal to this new platform over the past year. Lastly, we reflect on how COVID-19 has affected our work, and how the Essex Student Journal is truly a part of marking a new era for the world of scholarly communication, where free access to information is the norm. We welcome any thoughts you might have, and look forward to another ten years of our Essex students showcasing excellence in research.

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For a long time, research has primarily been hidden behind paywalls, with access only granted if your wallet is big enough, or if your library has a subscription deal with publishers. The last two decades have seen a lot of slow change toward making research more open, with the term ‘open access’ created to talk about free access to research. Open access can be achieved in a few ways. One, is to add a version of the manuscript without journal formatting to institutional or subject specific repositories, however often with delayed access. This is called Green Open Access. For an example of a repository, please see the Essex Research Repository (University of Essex, 2015). Immediate open access is usually achieved through publishing in an open access journal, known as Gold Open Access. However, the catch is that the author, usually the funder or institution, pays an Article Processing Charge [APC], to make the article available freely to everyone on publication. The average APC is £2,000.

Many have been impatient with these slow moves to open access. In addition, subscription prices have kept rising for libraries at a rate far beyond that of normal inflation. In *Paywall: the business of scholarship* (2018), which was screened at the University of Essex during the June Open Access Week in 2019, it is highlighted that some publishers make a profit of 37% a year, indicating that the price increases for libraries are purely for financial gain. Publishers are increasingly accused of not caring about the research they publish, not being transparent with their fees, and are often seen as ‘the villains’ of scholarly publishing. We recommend you read Buranyi’s (2017) article to get some more background knowledge about how many traditional publishers came to be what they are today: purely business. Yet they continue to thrive.

However, this might change. In the last few years, we have started to see abrupt changes, or calls to change, in the world of scholarly communication. Plan S, an initiative by several funders to make research open immediately (regardless of publishing route; green or gold), and with rights kept by authors or institutions, rocked the research world with their demands, which we are now starting to see in funders’ updated policies or consultations. One example of this is the recent UK Research and Innovation [UKRI] consultation (UKRI, 2020). Scholarly-led and institutional publishing are emerging, with many operating as non-profit. Diamond Open Access journals are increasing too, where both publishing and access is free, and there are no delays in access.

The world of research and scholarly communication now starts to demand open. This has become even clearer in the current crisis, where publishers have made research on COVID-19 open on publication, with APCs on these topics being waived. However, all other topics still pay the price of publishing, and some of the fee waivers have only been temporary. Can we go back to paywalls when this crisis is over?

The Essex Student Journal wants to set a good example on how scholarly communication should be. We are rebels with a cause, and the cause is to make our student-led research open. The student journal operates as a fully Diamond Open Access journal, meaning it is free to both publish and access articles. We also have no submission fees, and all publications are peer reviewed by postgraduates. In addition, we have been working on making sure all of our content is accessible and in line with WCAG 2.0 standards. The authors retain copyright to their work, and all published works have Digital Object Identifiers [DOIs]. The Essex Student Journal operates on the professional publishing platform Janeway to give students an authentic experience of publishing; this is where excellence in research and education merges.

As a team, we are committed to fulfilling these goals of the Essex Student Journal. Our Journal Manager, Katrine Sundsbo, is also the Scholarly Communications and Research Support Manager within Library Services. Her expertise is mostly used as guidance for the journal, as the aim is to continue the ethos of the student journal; by students and for students. Hannah Pyman is the Editor of the journal. Hannah has so far been working to ensure that the journal is fully accessible, through converting the back issues of the journal to various accessible formats. Until June of this year, Lina Abdelhafiz was our Student Journal Editor. While setbacks this year meant that Lina did not get to edit any submissions to the journal, her contributions toward the re-launch were invaluable.

Despite these setbacks disrupting our initial plans to re-launch the Essex Student Journal, we have continued to work on getting the platform and content ready for our virtual launch. In the current

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climate brought about by COVID-19, it is clear that now, more than ever, open access to research must be the way forward, and some of our early decisions, like moving all content to online only, have suddenly become dauntingly timely in a 'new normal' where access to physical library spaces is limited.

Having said that, we are hoping the re-launched Essex Student Journal will teach readers, authors, and reviewers alike about publishing, and all the exciting work our Essex students undertake.

We look forward to submissions, and welcome postgraduates to sign up as peer reviewers.

Editorial Team

Katrine Sundsbo (Journal Manager)

Hannah Pyman (Journal Editor)

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