20 January 2006

London

Ralph Weedon, Director
JISC LEGAL INFORMATION SERVICE
Learning Services
Alexander Turnbull Building
University of Strathclyde
155 George Street, Glasgow
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Dear Mr. Weedon:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the draft statement from JISC/SURF entitled "Check list of key needs for authors and publishers when publishing a journal article". As you are probably aware, the STM association represents nearly 100 professional and scholarly publishers from 26 countries, including the UK, and includes commercial and not-for-profit organisations.

We recognize the significant efforts made in the draft Check list to set out the views and positions of both the author and publishing community, and to emphasise the commonalities (of which there are many) rather than the differences (of which there are few). We do think however that some additional points might be raised which would create a more complete picture, and we had some relatively minor points of disagreement.

The publishing model is framed as an arrangement between a single author and the publisher. We are not sure whether it makes a significant difference in the overall document, but do think it worthwhile to point out that typically in scholarly publishing, publishers deal with a team of authors. It is also worth mentioning that the status (e.g. governmental) or policies of employers of authors may well impact questions of retained and transferred rights.

With respect to the definitions of pre-prints and post-prints, we are very much encouraged by the efforts made in part by our colleagues at ALPSP concerning questions of version identification. We would note that the middle category of "post-print" is the most nebulous, and our view is that in connection with this "middle" category, the actual practices of authors, and views and policies of publishers, are far less uniform and homogenous than the post-print definition implies. Given this variation in practice, we are not sure how useful it is to mention or emphasize this definition—it may well need to be expanded to be more accurate and definitive. Clearly much more work is needed on this

question, and we are pleased that ALPSP and others have taken on this important task.

We also think an introduction concerning this area of versions and version control would be useful, and would apply equally to authors and publishers, as both communities value the identification of a final published version of an article, that such version be definitive and stable, with a static bibliographic record for citations and a digital object identifier (DOI) used to enable persistent online linking.

You are probably aware of the useful and important work of the CIBER group at University College, London (**www.ucl.ac.uk/ciber**), who have recently published a September 2005 study on scholarly author behaviour, funded in part by STM. The CIBER study is focused on new business models in publishing, but also has very useful information on key issues for authors in choosing journals. This study and similar studies suggest that author motivations or perceived needs are somewhat more complex than may be suggested in the "key needs for authors" section in the Check list. Generally speaking, authors do seek to publish in journals with a good reputation, and impact factors are often considered to be a "proxy" for reputation (although increasingly citation, usage and downloading patterns are becoming useful barometers). However, authors are keenly aware that not all of their articles are likely to be published in the journal with the highest reputation and are, as a result, trying to 'match' the perceived quality of their own article with that of a suitable journal in the subject area at hand, so as to maximise the chance of acceptance by the journal. In this process they are also considering other factors, including their perception of the "readership" of a particular journal (e.g. are colleagues whose opinion they value likely to read the journal?) , "history" of the journal (i.e. have previous articles on this particular strand of research been published in this journal?), "service" aspects (such as speed of publication, quality of technical manuscript vetting and proofreading), the reputation of the editorial board, and the like. Our experience is that authors are generally keenly aware of the potential outlets for their work, the subtle differentiations of orientation and subject matter amongst the journals, and the relative likelihood of acceptance. To indicate simply that authors want to publish in journals with high impact factors is an over-simplification.

With respect to dissemination, our experience is that authors want visibility with their peers (i.e. those whose opinion they value and/or are important to them, see above) and visibility requires more than "maximizing access"—it requires for example to be included in the most appropriate abstracting and indexing service for the discipline (as is noted under the publisher section). Internet search engines are also increasingly important as a way of ensuring visibility. The checklist document seems to equate dissemination with the ability to post articles to various sites, but posting policies per se may not drive visibility in an organised and coherent fashion.

We noticed that there is no reference in the author section and only minimal reference in the publisher section concerning the need for peer review. Authors

place a high value on peer review, both as to the literature in general, and also as to their own submission and rewriting process.

There seemed to be little attention paid to the actual editorial processes involved in publishing journals, even though those processes have a very significant impact on journal quality. These quality standards are significant for both authors and publishers. Some processes such as copy-editing and proofreading may be perceived as mundane, but they are quite critical. Publishers are also heavily involved in standardisation efforts (for example, the STIX project for mathematical fonts), the preparation of content in multiple formats (the increasingly important electronic "document type definition"), and the linking of references from article to article and publisher to publisher. These efforts are fundamental to publishing, and because they add to the quality of the informational content and the authority of a particular journal, are important to both the author and the publishing community.

The discussion on financial issues for publishers is only relevant because of the costs of these core publishing activities, and the costs involved in arranging for and maintaining the editorial and peer review communication systems.

I hope our comments will be useful in your review of this document. As noted, we very much welcome the recognition that authors and publishers in scholarly publishing have more in common than in the divisive.

Very truly yours,

Mark Seeley

Chair of the STM Copyright and Legal Affairs Committee

Cc: Pieter S. H. Bolman, CEO
        Jerry Cowhig, Chairman