Researcher to Reader Conference London 24-25 February 2020 Report

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R2R is a relatively new meeting which in Europe in February fits in well for conference junkies between APE in Berlin and the group of meetings in March and April (all now cancelled this year). Mark Carden, the owner and chair continues the policies of its predecessor the annual conference of the Association of Subscription Agents (ASA) which is - now defunct, of bringing together the stakeholders in the scholarly communication ecosystem over questions of mutual interest advised by an international advisory board. For more on the governance see https://r2rconf.com/r2r-conference-governance/.

There were approaching 200 delegates of which a little under half were publishers. There was an emphasis on what publishers were doing, which will be reflected in this report. The conference appears to be on the up. From 2019 to 2020, in the feedback 'strongly agreeing' on relevance grew from 40% to 63% and on value from 32% to 56%.

The programme and slides for presentations are at https://r2rconf.com/r2r-conference-programme/. There were some panels, which were not videoed and a debate on journal and article metrics but a special feature were five workshops – see later in the report. For a personal view from a vendor see http://www.consultmu.co.uk/2020/02/25/the-researcher-to-reader-conference/ (link included with permission)

The keynote was on **Research Ecosystem Dynamics – publication adaptation, evolution or extinction.** The presenter was Dr Jonathan Adams now the chief scientist of the Institute of Scientific Research (ISI). His main thesis was that we as a group of stakeholders are threatened by climate change which is also assaulting the research system. The movement towards Open is disruptive but so is the investment of new players - pre-eminently China. The ecosystem is under threat from an invasion by poor quality (and worse) information. Key actors are complicit in this, including institutions and some countries; many more are compromised, including editors and publishers. Without an adequate defence, the system of research publication that has maintained a validated knowledge corpus so effectively over 350 years will disintegrate.

The next two presentations under the general heading of **Open Access Models and Impacts** were more up-beat.

Representing what smaller but significant self-publishing learned society publishers can do was Tasha Mellins-Cohen (Director of Publishing at the Microbiology Society) She spoke under the heading of Open Access Models for Society Publishers: a framework for institutional Publish & Read Deals. It could be seen as an exemplar. For more see Mellins-Cohen, Tasha, and Gaynor Redvers-Mutton. 2020. "Transformation: The Future of Society Publishing". Insights 33 (1): 1. DOI: http://doi.org/10.1629/uksg.486. She has been organising similar publishers mainly in the UK.: The Society Publishers' Coalition (SocPC) is a group of likeminded, not-for-profit learned societies and membership charities who publish as part of their charitable objectives and who re-invest the surplus from their publishing into the disciplinary communities they serve.

From the Global South Dr Solomon Derese of the department of chemistry at the University of Nairobi, Kenya explained from his own experience the impact of **Research4life and Open Access: Impact on access to e-resources in Africa**. Dr Derese was positive about Research4Life which STM

continues to actively support now with Andrea Powell at the helm (see https://www.stm-assoc.org/research4life-outreach/research4life-programmes/). It had enabled his own research career and those of others

The debate centred on a motion - **The venue of its publication tells us nothing useful about the quality of a paper**

There were two polls at the start of the debate and at the end to see how convincingly the case was made. Under these rules the motion was won. Speaking against was Pippa Smart the editor-in-chief of *Learned Publishing*

There were two individual presentations in the afternoon:

Measuring Science Your Way was the title chosen by Dr Sabine Hossenfelder of the Frankfurt (Germany) Institute of Advanced Studies. Her argument was that scientists do not like assessment of scientific impact but we cannot do without them. Currently they create perverse incentives. The popular H index is a good example: it encourages too much publishing and it militates against novelty. She then unveiled her own remedy: https://scimeter.org/.

Secondly Dr Laura Fogg-Rogers from the University of the West of England spoke about **Catch 22 – Women Peer Reviewers.** Her thesis was that there is a significant under-representation of women in STM research which is damaging societal progress for democratic, utilitarian and equity reasons. There was plenty of evidence offered

The second day began with a panel on **Research metrics** which was mainly a UK concern though some of the points made were relevant worldwide. The speakers were Sage publisher Caroline Porter (convener and making sure that the social sciences were not ignored) Euan Adie formerly of altmetrics.com and mainly quiet, and David Carr of the Wellcome Trust and Professor James Wilsdon of Sheffield currently Digital Science Professor of Research Policy, Department of Politics and Director, Research on Research Institute (RoRI) both of whom spoke a lot. There was some discussion about assessment of funders themselves. Carr told us that Wellcome often in the lead as a funder were now forcefully guiding the institutions that they fund, to really commit to approved policies such as DORA – judging by the article and not the journal the article is published in. It was agreed that incentives were important but difficult to align across national boundaries. The question was raised about lack of consultations with disciplinary representative bodies among the funder world before rather than after they mandated new policies.

Two expert presentations by publishers followed – on **Reproducibility and Reusability.** Both can be accessed from the R2R site are worth studying. Catriona Fennell who directs publishing services at Elsevier spoke on **Applying the Reproducibility Manifesto.** The challenges were many. Incentives are needed for researchers and more rigour needed in methods and statistics. It is difficult to validate reproducibility in peer review. Rebecca Grant of Springer Nature's presentation was entitled **From Data Policy Towards FAIR Data for All: how standardised data policies can improve sharing.** The emphasis was very much on benefits to researchers and the increase in numbers actually sharing. Almost all major publishers have endorsed FAIR. The current emphasis is having good policies (guidance) but Grant thinks that mandates are on their way.

The final two presentations were on **Artificial Intelligence.**

The original speaker on **Artificial Intelligence in Scholarly Information: a guide to the current landscape** was Jim Longo but he is no longer with HighWire and a colleague Olly Rickard gave a

skeleton presentation ending with the summary*: AI doesn't replace humans; it deals with the huge scale and leaves the clever bit to us.* Michael Upshall of UNSILO did give his presentation as expected: **why has the take-up of AI been so limited in the Academic Work Flow** was the question? The answer helpfully began with some sensible definitions and some explanatory graphics. He explained how to implement AI tools successfully**.**

Mark Allin, former president and CEO of Wiley, provided a magisterial **summary**. Finally, there was a keynote postscript from semi-retired Richard Charkin, former OUP academic publisher and the founder of Bloomsbury Academic which nicely complemented the Adams keynote which began the meeting. He had similar concerns but his context was different -Is unfettered open access an unfettered opportunity or a threat?

The workshops were mentioned earlier. For some they represented what was especially useful about the conference. Here are the topics: Achieving an equitable transition to Open Access for low and middle-income countries; Improving Peer Review Support for Researchers; Transformative Agreement Collaboration - Identifying the problems; Recommendations for a sustainable and successful environment for the development and dissemination of scholarly research.
They each bar one produced a report – short but available on the site. Here are the topics which were discussed and reported: it looks as if the workshop with the most difficult mission did not send in its report – Open Access Price Transparency a demand from Plan S.

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