

Consultation report:

Draft voluntary principles for article sharing on scholarly collaboration networks

Summary

The STM consultation on article sharing was conducted from the 9th February to the 10th April 2015 and was designed to gain a better understanding of the current landscape of article sharing through scholarly collaboration networks (SCN) and sites.

Fifty responses were received from a variety of community stakeholders. These can be viewed on the [STM website](#).

Overall, the [draft voluntary principles](#) are supported by the vast majority of respondents, albeit in some cases with caveats. The general consensus was that the principles as stated are a good first step, but that '*the devil is in the (implementation) details*'. Many respondents are therefore seeking greater detail and clarity.

As a goal, the principles should aim to ensure that the rules and processes for sharing should be:

Clear - Simple - Uniform

In further refining the voluntary principles, a number of key areas have been identified by the respondents:

Process & Implementation

- **Stakeholder engagement** - ensure involvement of all stakeholder groups in developing the principles, but particularly SCNs and researchers (along with publishers)
- **Open Access** – some respondents are seeking all content to be OA, others recognise that this is not viable (at present), but are seeking greater clarity on the relationship between the voluntary principles and OA
- **A pilot / road test with publishers, SCNs and researchers was recommended for consideration**

Clarity of definitions

- **Academic Groups** - Many respondents referred to the difficulties in defining an 'academic group', while the specific exclusion of the 'general public' was opposed in very strong terms by a number of respondents. Some respondents are seeking clearly identified limits on groups while others recommend no enforced limits on group sizes
- **Other content types** – Some respondents are seeking all content types (e.g. journal articles, data, algorithms, code etc.) to be addressed via the principles, or at least to ensure that the principles evolve in such a way as to be inclusive of all types of 'scholarly products'

Usage and Rights

- **Usage measurement** – there was broad support for measuring usage, with some respondents specifying that usage data be aggregated and anonymised
- **Upload rights** – uploads should originate via researchers with a legitimate licence / subscription. For non-subscribed content, appropriate licences could be considered via reprographic rights organisations (RROs) or other article access services
- **Other rights** – does 'sharing' mean 'read only', or will it allow 're-use' of journal articles?
- **Metadata** – XMP in Version of Record PDFs (e.g. as used by CrossMark) could be used both to provide (uniform) guidance regarding sharing (along with on page information) and possibly also support reporting by SCNs

The few respondents who were not supportive included those who felt the principles did not go far enough (e.g. those seeking all content to carry a CCBY licence, or be publicly accessible via OA) and those who are concerned about possible impacts of actively encouraging sharing (e.g. editor / individuals concerned about financial impact of journals; editors concerned about encouraging plagiarism or piracy). One respondent questioned whether there was actually a problem needing to be solved.

A few responses seemed to misinterpret the intention of the voluntary principles. All feedback is available on the STM website, and comments are available in full. We have taken all feedback into account. But these comments are not considered to be key to moving forward in developing the principles other than to ensure that the voluntary principles themselves are explained in an unambiguous manner.

The key observations from the responses are summarized in the following sections.

Benefits:

Overall the potential benefits of a unified approach to scholarly article sharing were appreciated by the majority of respondents:

- K Anderson/AAAS: *[the principles]'. . . should make scholarly collaboration easier, not harder, for researchers, while ensuring that their privacy is maintained.'*
- SSRN: *'.. everyone will benefit from reducing the ambiguity and lack of consistency amongst publishers and even journals within a publisher.'*
- P Purseigle: *'It would certainly be a progress. At the moment, sharing happens but in a rather haphazard manner.'*
- Houck & Siegel: *'A unified approach to scholarly article sharing has the potential for being a major catalyst to information sharing in general.'*
- Taylor & Francis: *'less ambiguity about what content can be shared, when and where.'*
- P Johnson: *'I support the voluntary principles here if only to clarify the position of what is and is not acceptable practice...'*

Stakeholder engagement:

Apparent low representation from SCNs at this early stage was highlighted by a number of respondents and the active involvement of more SCNs on further developing the voluntary principles is seen as essential.

The involvement of researchers was also recommended in developing the principles, with libraries / librarians, policy makers, and the public also mentioned as relevant stakeholders.

- Mendeley & Zappylab: *'We would encourage publishers to actively engage with sharing platforms in a continued discussion which recognizes that services which are finding adoption among academics aren't taking attention away from the publisher, but rather finding new audiences for publications that publishers have previously been unable to reach.'*
- Plutchak: *'The major flaw that I see in the development of these principles so far is that it does not appear that the SCNs have been actively engaged to the degree that they need to be.'*

- Houck & Siegel: *'The research community needs to have the cooperation of the journal publishers to make any meaningful progress. A dialogue between researchers and publishers must take place.'*
- AIP: *AIP Publishing believes that the continued involvement and feedback of the key stakeholders is absolutely necessary in order to move forward.*
- Taylor & Francis: *'Building relationships with all SCN-type enterprises is also essential in moving this initiative forward.'*
- Elsevier: *'... we believe that it would be helpful if SCNs and publishers would work together to help institutions and researchers seamlessly collaborate without having to worry about 'complex rules.' with both product and policy solutions.'*
- Thieme: *'We believe that, to this extent, it would be helpful if SCNs and publishers would work together to create clear policy and license solutions to help institutions and researchers with legal access to scientific articles collaborate without having to worry about 'complex rules.'*

Academic Groups:

Many respondents referred to the difficulties in defining an 'academic group' and some questioned the need or merits of doing so, while the specific exclusion of the 'general public' was opposed in very strong terms by a number of respondents.

On defining academic groups:

- MLA: *'How is the size of a typical research group of a particular discipline defined? When the authors of the human genome group shared their articles, more than 500 researchers participated.'*
- SSRN: *'The guidelines also need to very carefully define academic groups and scholarly collaboration networks so that future confusion and current concerns about perceived preferences for one service over another can be eliminated.'*
- Mendeley/Zapplab: *'Identifying what is "academic use" and who is a member of the "general public" is problematic, because many platforms do not authenticate users beyond name and email, and*

thus will have to arrive at their own definitions to avoid improperly excluding small biotechs and patient advocates.'

- *Hinchliffe: 'The research community is much more inclusive than the "academic groups" described. The FAQ comments on corporate researchers and the like. I would mention the development of citizen science and the increasing emphasis on exchange between academics and citizen science. Limiting sharing to academic groups posits a reality that does not map to the kinds of groups current and emerging on campuses. Likewise, academic groups does not account for the critically important public engagement function of the extension services of our land-grant universities, particularly with regard to applied science in agricultural practice.'*
- *Song: 'One of the sharing principles stated in the Voluntary Principles for Article Sharing on Scholarly Collaboration Network is that the sharing only can only occur within a collaborative group, which might be too restrictive. It is hardly to define what is a collaborative group in the first place.'*
- *Thieme: 'Across the various academic disciplines the size of research groups varies widely. We feel that setting a simple benchmark to clarify which groups can be considered as Academic groups would be helpful. We believe that the average number of contributing authors could serve as such a benchmark to determine which research group size should be considered typical for a specific discipline and therefore deemed acceptable'.*
- *ICE: 'STM could prepare realistic guidelines on what publishers regard as 'for personal use' and 'for commercial, use'. For example, ICE Publishing protects reprint revenue by defining the latter as 'greater than 50 copies; including work in a second party mailing such as an e-newsletter'. This is essentially an expansion of STM Permissions Guidelines.'*
- *AIP: 'We feel strongly that SCNs should not become vehicles by which authors are able to secure access from groups with which they have no collaboration activities.'*
- *NPG: Other issues that NPG see need consideration include sharing between academic and corporate researchers, especially in tech transfer or highly collaborative environments.*

- Plutchack: *'...it is not clear to me that these academic groups are something that is already clearly identified and understood throughout the research community. A great deal of collaboration, it seems to me, is less formal and more ad hoc. It will be necessary to probe this notion of academic groups more thoroughly to be sure that it is loose enough to reflect the ways in which people are actually using SCNs to work together.'*
- Donald: *'I am also peeved that there is so much focus on the "Academic" environment and the emphasis on setting them apart. There is a lot of "research" AND "learning" that goes on within a hospital and the healthcare environment, many times having direct impact on a life. Why aren't educational offerings within a hospital treated the same way?'*

In one response the mechanism by which group members would be invited to share content was addressed:

- Houck & Siegel: *'There is also the issue of who shall be able to view and interact with shared material. The "Voluntary Principles" speak of having to be invited to share by an individual researcher. This is too restrictive and can lead to a "silo effect".'*

On excluding the general public:

- Toby Green OECD: *'this strikes me as difficult to regulate..'. 'I also feel that this is fundamentally restrictive and divisive, even 'elitist' because non-academics / researchers are excluded.'*
- DeepDyve: *'trying to define sharing is going in the wrong direction, and the attention should be on the sharing itself – **we should focus on defining levels of access, rather than levels of sharing.** In that respect, I suggest that sharing be unlimited.'*
- Copernicus: *'it is against our principle of openness that the general public per se is excluded from academic groups and from sharing'*
- Al Sosiak: *'Excluding anyone as a member of 'the public' seems discriminatory and arbitrary'* He then further explains that *'In part our concern reflects the nature of lake and reservoir management, which is practiced by a wide range of individuals outside academia'*

such as consultants, private citizens, and members of all levels of government.'

- *MLA: 'MLA would like to see a "unified approach to scholarly article sharing" include making the content of articles openly available (and not just limited to scholarly research networks), and broadened to allow for reuse of content in compliance with the copyright law.'*
- *Hinchliffe: 'Likewise, academic groups does not account for the critically important public engagement function of the extension services of our land-grant universities, particularly with regard to applied science in agricultural practice.'*

Note: OECD has subscription based content and allows sharing of read only PDFs both on the OECD platform and via embedded content in third party sites. Copernicus is an open access publisher.

In contrast, IOP Publishing observed that *'there is not a clear delineation between sharing for the purposes of a specific research group and simply making content publicly accessible'* by social networks currently and that *'the two are not the same'*. NPG recommends *'decoupling private group and public group sharing'* for expediency. They themselves have been running a pilot allowing 'read only' sharing by groups on the NPG platform.

Clarity is therefore required regarding the exclusion of the general public. The FAQs welcomed feedback on situations involving collaborations between academia and corporate researchers. The observations from Al Sosiak and Hinchliffe above extend this to a number of individuals outside academia, including private citizens, who are actively involved in research. A consideration would be whether members of the public, linked to a specific research endeavour along with academic researchers, would qualify for access to shared content. Can this be addressed separately from the 'public access' issue?

Other group examples:

Examples of networks already in place:

- *C Day (Physics Today): '...science journalists, in a sense, belong to SCNs. Run by Nature, PNAS, Science and other journals, these SCNs allow journalists to download and share PDFs of papers with researchers (to get comments) a week or so ahead of publication.'*

- NPG: *'In December 2014, as a first step we introduced a one-year pilot to support reasonable sharing of subscription journal content on nature.com for personal and non-commercial purposes. Subscribers to 49 journals on nature.com can share a unique URL to a full text, read-only version of published scientific research with colleagues or collaborators in the most convenient way for them, e.g. via email and social media.'*

Usage measurement

Usage measurement appears to have broad support, with caveats regarding ensuring the privacy of individuals is protected via anonymized and aggregated usage.

- AAS/ Science: *'... should ensure that there are clear counts of article usage in these collaborative networks, as these counts are important to authors, librarians, and publishers alike.'*
- Hinchliffe: *'measuring amount and type of sharing should be done in ways that also allow individuals to protect their personal privacy and the competitive advantage of their work'*
- Setti: *'Also valuable is the reference to publishers and libraries having the ability to measure sharing using available standards such as COUNTER as a first step in order to monitor and understand user practices and preferences.'*
- Plutchack [on COUNTER]: *'This would clearly be extremely useful in determining how well the SCNs facilitate article sharing, as well as identifying the degree to which non-OA articles are shared.'*
- AIP: *'We also believe that the ability to track, aggregate and monitor usage should be a key element of a successful unified approach to scholarly article sharing. [...]research groups that choose to actively collaborate on projects should be allowed to share articles freely, as long as there is some way to monitor the usage statistics of articles that are being shared.'*
- Elsevier: *'We believe that the proposed idea to embrace the standard COUNTER method for sharing usage information across platforms and networks where articles are shared would be*

extremely helpful'... 'It would be important to only report usage in an anonymized way.'

- NPG: *'We encourage COUNTER-compliant solutions.'*
- Mendeley / Zappylab: *'The main concern from a sharing platform would be maintaining the privacy and security of user information. Any reporting would need to be presented in aggregate, anonymous fashion.'*

The advantages of developing technical standards in usage reporting from SCNs was also raised:

- Elsevier: *'We believe it would also be helpful if publishers and SCNs develop a simple and standardized (technical) solution to report usage counting in a distributed way, so that any platform that wishes to embrace these principles would be able to do so easily.'*

And IOP Publishing suggested that the XMP metadata include in Version of Record PDFs (CrossMark) may be used for reporting: *'Ideally SCNs could be reporting on this data to publishers, giving us a report on what data is stored in the networks and how much of it is being shared.'*

Upload rights & licencing

The draft principles allow journal article sharing between subscribers and non-subscribers within the group.

Some respondents expressed views regarding who should have the right to upload content:

- Thieme - wishes to ensure that only those who have obtained the document from a legal source should be entitled to initially upload
- A possible solution proposed for non-subscribers include possible licencing by e.g. RROs was mentioned by Rogier van Erkel, Thieme and OUP. Proposed engagement of licencing organisations is also supported by Copyright Licensing Agency (CLA) / Publishers Licensing Society (PLS) and DeepDyve.

Other rights

Does 'sharing' mean 'read only', or will it allow 're-use' of journal articles?

- Toby Green (OECD) and DeepDyve suggest having no limits on 'read only' sharing, but place restrictions on the functionality or services surrounding shared content and in the case of OECD, only allow sharing of a URL for the OECD site or for content to be embedded on third party sites.
- DeepDyve: *'I believe trying to define sharing is going in the wrong direction, and the attention should be on the sharing itself – **we should focus on defining levels of access, rather than levels of sharing.** In that respect, I suggest that sharing be unlimited.'*

Some respondents seek full re-use rights for any shared content while others warn against limiting existing practice:

- MLA: *'MLA strongly recommends that the concept of "a unified approach to scholarly article sharing" be redefined to encompass open access as well as "re-use" of articles and data.'*
- L J Hinchliffe: *'I am concerned that such a unified approach as it is currently proposed will be interpreted as the maximum limits of what is allowed rather than a set of minimum expectations of what publishers should enable and expect.'*

Librarians are also seeking clarification on what the voluntary principle may mean for them:

- E Donald (Cone Heal Medical library): *As the Library, I find it a morass of clarity when it comes to what can be done with the articles. Can we only send "one" copy of an article to someone? (and then they send to a group or post to an intranet to facilitate sharing) Or are we allowed to distribute it to a group of folks saving them time and putting us in the loop?*

Metadata

In terms of defining rights, Mendeley / Zappylab suggest that guidance for authors [readers] and third party platforms regarding sharing could be represented on the article page and in the metadata of the content itself (for example, as XMP fields in a PDF).

As reported in a previous section, IOP Publishing suggested that metadata presented in XMP fields (e.g. CrossMark) may also facilitate reporting by SCNs. Elsevier also recommend the use of CrossMark or other article tagging for the identification of article versions.

Open Access

Open access was referred to by respondents from a number of perspectives. Some respondents wish that all published journal articles be available to everyone as open access content, with some individuals desiring a CCBY licence. Others appear to have a similar desire for OA through their requests for the principles to include access for the general public.

Additional comments relating to open access include:

- SSRN: *'The guidelines are not a debate about the merits of Open Access but I think it is important for the guidelines to specifically mention OA (not just in the FAQ) and help readers by explaining how they fit within the OA framework.'*
- Mendeley / Zappylab: *'... to realize the potential benefits of a uniform approach, we would recommend that publishers implement full open access where possible and where that's not possible, to provide simple and uniform guidance regarding sharing, both with the author in mind, and with third-party platforms in mind. Exceptions for different categories of sites or versions of documents should be minimized to reduce the identification and reporting burden.'*
- Elsevier: *'We believe it would be helpful if publishers work together to provide better support to platforms to automate checks against green Open Access policies. Ideally there will be a joint approach, for example via Crossref, to provide platforms with one integration point instead of one for each publisher.'*
- Thieme: *'Publishers and platforms should work together to develop strategies to provide to uploaders easy access to information on publishers' OA policies.'*

OA publishers

It may be challenging to include open access publishers on the list of supporting organizations, for reasons similar to those raised by Copernicus: *'In general we very much appreciate that you are taking action regarding the important topic of article sharing. [...] However, we cannot sign the document: since we are an open-access publisher, it is against our principle of openness that the general public per se is excluded from academic groups and from sharing.'*

Other content types

The draft principles refer to 'supplementary material', however the statements for signatories appear to focus on journal articles. A number of respondents expressed a wish for content covered by the principles to extend beyond the journal article.

- MLA: *'Researchers are not just interested in sharing articles; they are becoming increasingly interested in sharing data as well. Research collaboration and the ability to exchange articles, information, data, ideas, etc. freely and easily are important for the advancement of science.'*
- Setti: *'... I suggest that the references in the guidelines to "journal articles" should be changed to "scholarly products." This would help develop recognition of the fact that conference proceedings, as well as data sets, algorithms, and other material, are important types of scholarly research material that may be shared...'*

Pilot / Road Test

A pilot or road test was specifically mentioned by both Wiley and NPG and was implicit in other responses, such as that from Mendeley / Zappylab and others that encourage the working together of the various stakeholder groups.

NPG has recently undertaken its own pilot of read-only sharing among research networks on its own Platform and reports:

Early results of this pilot show that there has been little to no abuse, and we will be presenting a fuller set of results in the coming weeks. More information including a draft set of principles and guidelines is available here; www.nature.com/npg/_company_info/content-sharing.html

Final comments

It appears that a number of questions are likely only to be answered through direct practical engagement with SCNs, including information on typical research group sizes and identifying existing tools and standards, which could be adopted or that need to be developed in order for the implementation of the principles.

This was highlighted in the following statements from Mendeley / Zappylab and T Scott Plutchak:

- Mendeley / Zappylab: *'Any site which has access and entitlement barriers will drive users away to less restricted platforms, which weakens the sites who are most willing to cooperate with publishers. The call to "integrate access and usage rights...into*

research workflows” must therefore be done carefully and in consultation with platforms in order to prevent creating a large technical burden that sharing platforms may not have the resources to implement.’

- *Plutchak: ‘Tactically, what I would recommend is engaging more directly with the developers of the major SCNs to see if it is possible to use these principles as a basis for consensus principles that they and the STM drafters could agree to. If that could be achieved they could then reach out to the members of their networks for reaction and further refinement. If that can’t be done, then the goal of unified voluntary principles can’t be reached. Publishers might use these principles to develop their own policies, but without buy-in from the SCNs themselves, I’m afraid they will have little effect.’*