

## **NAVIGATING THE CHALLENGES OF THE NEW DIGITAL FRONTIER**

The programme is available at <https://www.stm-assoc.org/events/frankfurt-conference-combined-2020/>. There are also links to the programmes of the three associated satellite webinars.

There was one major change to the programme. The EU Commissioner had unfortunately tested positive for COVID-19 at the last minute – too late for a replacement – which meant that the programme began with the first panel.

The registrants were welcomed by Jim Milne (American Chemical Society), the Chair of the STM board, and the programme was introduced by Ian Moss the CEO of the organisation at the helm for his first Frankfurt conference. For those who have not looked at the STM site recently it has been recently redesigned (see <https://www.stm-assoc.org/>) and there are many good things on it for both members and others in the scholarly communications ecosystem plus enquirers from the outside.

Both Milne and Moss in their introductory remarks emphasised the commitment of STM members to Open Science on a sustainable basis and for researchers globally not just in the developed world.

The first panel was not surprisingly concerned with **The Global Outlook for Open Access**. Chris Kenneally the Director of Content Marketing for the Copyright Clearance Center moderated proceedings in characteristic style and the first speaker was appropriately from Africa in the shape of Joy Owango of Nairobi. For her background see <https://www.stm-assoc.org/people/joy-owango/>. This was a hard-hitting presentation from the inside. She emphasised that South Africa was not typical of African nations. Most governments do not understand Open Access and Ethiopia is the only country with a relevant policy. She sits on the board of one organisation tasked with enabling visibility for African scholarship - <https://info.africarxiv.org/>. It is not clear that a continental transformation deal would work by see the work of STISA (<http://africapolicyreview.com/science-technology-and-innovation-strategy-for-africa-2024-stisa-2024/>).

The other two speakers were essentially innovative OA publishers explaining their systems. Rebecca Lawrence managing director of F1000 now under the umbrella of Taylor & Francis (<https://newsroom.taylorandfrancisgroup.com/f1000-research-joins-taylor-francis/>) argued that their model was the result of a look at the technology and starting with a clean slate bringing the roles of preprint server and a journal publisher together in a way to maximise author control and minimising delay, bias and wastage. Sara Rouhi, a relative newcomer to PLOS, explained their reasons for rethinking business models to enable selective journals to be sustainable while open to all authors. This project was set out a year ago in <https://theplosblog.plos.org/2019/10/flipping-to-more-open-when-youre-already-open/>. See also a very recent post by her CEO Alison Mudditt <https://scholarlykitchen.sspnet.org/2020/10/28/in-search-of-equity-and-justice-reimagining-scholarly-communication/>.

There was an excellent discussion session where all three speakers engaged with questions, mainly from the moderator, and with a wide level of agreement.

The “traditional” **Meet the CEOs** session was moderated by Ian Moss in the first of a new series. He included the two biggest players, Kumsal Bayazit of Elsevier and Frank Vrancken

Peeters of Springer Nature, alongside Vicky Williams of the smaller Emerald Publishing which concentrates on applied areas - business and management, social sciences and engineering.

Bayazit emphasised that 2021 will still be another difficult year. 2020 has taken its toll on the publisher as well as researchers and other stakeholders. It is a time for publishers to work together in a sense of professional pride and in collaboration with these stakeholders. There was an obvious and positive reference to progress towards open science allied with some real commitments for example to United Nations sustainability goals. As in previous presentations she has given she emphasised the need of the industry to (re)gain trust.

Vrancken Peeters was in general agreement. He emphasised that submissions and usage show how essential what we do is for the research community. Our job must be to unlock more value from research articles.

Again Williams agreed with what had gone before. However as a social science publisher there is a different picture for her as much of the research she publishes is unfunded. They are working proactively with their customers to move to open science. In her view the pandemic has just accelerated disruption towards a less closed system. There are unfortunately disincentives to change and universities have to change too. She described a “ruthless concentration on users”. She is optimistic if, that is, we can see change as positive.

Some questions had been sent to STM in advance. Early ones related to where we have got it wrong and who are our customers – we learnt in particular how Elsevier are working with stakeholders – Bayazit is keen on testing and trying. New evaluation systems need to use metrics as clear as impact factors.

There was no real agreement on models. Springer Nature saw complexity replacing the old working with agents: evolution towards the open science world. Not surprisingly Vrancken Peeters argued for transformative agreements which they pioneered. Is it the end of the big deal? He said no. Williams saw it as dead. For smaller niche publishers transformative agreements are probably not the answer. Emerald emphasise the value for the communities where they publish. Bayazit agreed with both.

Moss raised consolidation. The general view was that not much more was likely. Bayazit had looked up the data and claimed that in half of disciplines a specialty publisher provided the lead journal. More standardisation says Vrancken Peeters would help smaller publishers with big deals. Williams said that we have a shared customer base so that we need to make sure that our technology standards must help customers. Bayazit has worked in legal – what the users really value is curation where information is all open.

Moss asked if peer review is still robust in spite of the increased number of submissions. Elsevier have put a lot more resource to maintain quality. It was admitted that there have been instances where they have dropped the ball. Elsevier and Springer Nature vied to demonstrate how many COVID-related papers they had made open. The latter admitted that the movement towards enabling diversity has meant lots of internal work for the CEO.

There have been internal and external advantages and disadvantages in the need to be digital admits Williams. There are the potential mental health problems for staff and for customers there is the fact that not every market is geared up for it.

Moss asked about STM priorities and pointed to their new strapline – **advancing trusted research**. Bayazit (as at Charleston 2019) argued the importance of working throughout the ecosystem to improve impact of research. She hopes that STM will play a big role in bringing

people together. Vrancken Peeters argued for transparency as basic to this approach. Williams was in 100% agreement.

The final session covered **Publishing in COVID-19** was moderated by Joyce Lorigan, who is Group Head of Corporate Affairs at Springer Nature. There were two speakers setting the scene followed by a panel.

The first presentation was on the **Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on UK STM Publishing** from Jeremy Brinton, Senior Associate, Maverick Publishing Specialists. He was referring back to their survey <https://www.maverick-os.com/news-events/insights/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-the-uk-publishing-industry/>. The survey was July 2020. Little has changed since then. Even research intensive universities are suffering from the loss of foreign students. The good news is that revenue to publishers from journals and science impacted less than revenue from print and humanities. Librarians are however expecting free access associated with COVID literature will be extended. They have had to cancel some deals and there are more to come. There are increased costs to publishers for example due to the increase in submissions. Whereas government furlough policies have proved helpful to companies recruits are not able to get formal training.

The second presentation was also UK oriented. The title was **Hope, hype and headlines: responsible publicity in a health crisis** and the speaker was Tom Sheldon, Senior Press Manager at the Science Media Centre. For his organisation see <https://www.sciencemediacentre.org/>. He showed how outreach to reach the public is done. For how they work see the site but what particularly relevant was reflections on previous presentations. Preprints may be great for science but dangerous in the public domain and journalists are under pressure to report work described before peer review. Media are under no obligation to relate corrections.

Ian Roberts, Head, WHO Library and Annette Flanagin, Executive Managing Editor and Vice President, Editorial Operations, JAMA and the JAMA Network joined Sheldon for the panel discussion.

Roberts described the work of his library as part of the quality assurance work of the WHO and it is also a publisher of guidance to governments. They already have a partnership with STM over Research for Life (see <https://www.research4life.org/about/partners/>). This was of great importance during the pandemic – retrieval on a daily basis. They need immediacy of access and filter to ensure rigour. This gives greater visibility and more scope to the latest evidence. There is no one-stop multilingual database and a precursor of that is something they are working on. New sense of urgency is accelerating change. He agreed that there is a real need for and real caution about preprints. Preprint servers do not yet have standardised bibliographical data and this is needed

Flanagin showed real-life examples of how JAMA in Chicago worked in these special times. She is a member of the STM Board. As staff moved to working from home they devised new workflows. These are explained in an JAMA editorial in June. All Covid-19 publications are open as they were in previous pandemics. There were special opinion pieces from trusted leaders and also important epidemiology studies such as one from Wuhan. They also provide lay summaries and other experiments. Other journals of course do this. There are co-ordinated publication events relating to special articles. Higher citations and quicker than ever before and altmetrics mentions also.

There were general questions.

Lorigan asked about trust in science. Yes – this is behind what JAMA is doing.

Sheldon was asked if there is anything the industry should do to encourage trust. He is not worried about the way publications are handled. Arguments among scientists do not hamper this. He found recent re-assurance from Pew. Publishers should continue to make sure that peer review is robust and that press releases remain relevant. Brinton was asked if they came out in his survey. Yes was the answer – integrity was important.

Roberts said that scientists have to tackle all the misinformation that is now provided. Social scientists are needed because of the behavioural issues. The challenge of sheer volume has been mentioned. A question was asked if AI might help. Roberts thought that there was – some promising developments.

Preprints came up again. Once they are out they are in the public domain and scientists will be asked by journalists about their relevance and quality. They are stepping up to the mark which is impressive says Sheldon. Roberts is getting preprints from publishers (very helpful) all the time and WHO checks on them.

Are media going to social media? Sheldon does not know for sure. For journalists source is important and some of the reporters are very up to date because often “COVID journalists” now.

There was a parting shot from Sheldon. Scientists should only talk about what they know about and not talk about policy

**Anthony Watkinson**

**Principal Consultant CIBER Research and Honorary Lecturer University College London**