Hybrid journals vital for extending author choice, research shows

Hybrid journals play an important role in extending author choice, a report by the Publishing Research Consortium, Research Consulting and Pleiade Management & Consultancy has shown.

The report, which aims to understand authors’ motivations when selecting to publish in Hybrid Open Access journals, found the most important factor for researchers when deciding where to publish was the scope and quality of a journal, with many researchers not factoring open access into their decision as they assumed an OA publishing option would be offered by default.

If no open access option was available, the report found, more than half of researchers who published in a Hybrid Gold OA Journal would have selected another journal, showing that without the hybrid option, author choice would be restricted.

Hybrid journals were also found to offer flexibility to researchers in cases where funding was limited. Without access to funding to cover article publication charges (APCs), many authors who had published via a Gold OA route in a hybrid journal said they would have chosen the subscription-only model in order to publish in their journal of choice. Meanwhile authors who had selected a pure gold journal because its scope best matched their article, sometimes encountered significant obstacles when they realised this entailed an APC payment.

Other key findings included:

- Gaining exposure is one of the strongest arguments for authors to publish Gold OA, with many researchers both expecting and experiencing more downloads, more feedback and faster citation rates of their OA articles.
- Offsetting deals were found to have a stimulating effect on open access publication, raising awareness of OA for some researchers, and for others increasing their appetite for Gold OA publishing in the future.
- A number of authors were not familiar with Green OA, while most authors did not believe Green OA was a full-fledged alternative to Gold OA. They saw it as a second-best alternative due to the poorer layout of authors’ accepted manuscripts.
- Gold OA is largely driven by, and reliant upon, external funding, with great resistance among authors to the use of discretionary budgets for APC payments. Authors are increasingly aware of variations in APC pricing and keen to see greater transparency.

Chief Executive of the Publishers Association and Chair of the Publishing Research Consortium, Stephen Lotinga said:

“This research highlights the importance of hybrid journals in the open access landscape and the valuable role they play in providing choice and flexibility for researchers. As the UK continues its transition towards open access, it is vital researchers can continue to publish their work in journals where the audience and quality most suit their needs.”

Director of Research Consulting, Rob Johnson said:

“We found it particularly striking that many of the researchers interviewed saw open access publishing as a must-have for at least some of their articles. The presence of the hybrid option, alongside pure gold OA journals, enables these authors to reach audiences outside the academic community without compromising on their choice of journal.”
Notes to editors:

The report is based on qualitative interviews with 33 authors of gold open access articles. This comprised of 24 authors of OA articles in Gold Hybrid journals, and 9 authors of OA articles in Pure Gold journals and were split between the UK (17 authors), the Netherlands (11 authors) and Germany (5 authors).