

PRC-Ciber report reveals attitudes towards scholarly communication among Early Career Researchers



Present practice still geared towards high impact journals, but future trends emerging

London, 2 November 2016: ECRs, defined as researchers under 35 operating without tenure, are by far the largest group of researchers but there have been no recent investigations into their attitudes towards scholarly communication and the extent to which their behaviours may prove transformational. This report on data from year one of a planned three-year qualitative study investigates a wide range of hypotheses using personal interviews with 116 ECRs from seven countries (UK, US, China, France, Spain, Poland and Malaysia).

The vast majority of ECRs want to continue doing research, but their circumstances are constrained, unstable, even precarious, leading to generally conservative **current practices** geared towards the reputational impact of publication in highly ranked journals.

But ECRs do not invariably follow their mentors and seniors when it comes to **attitudes towards the future**. They are aware of the tensions and potential transformations around them and many are thinking about change or looking forward to a time when they can participate in or even drive changing practices.

ECRs are comfortable with the current system of **peer review** enabled by publishers and appear sceptical about open peer review or the role of learned societies in peer review.

There is evidence of growing use of **social media**, especially scholarly communication networks such as ResearchGate, but more for profile building than for communicating results or for active collaboration. Smartphones are used little differently than in normal life and generally not for reading, apart from in China.

Open access is not supported as a priority for individual publishing strategies and there are concerns about inequity of access to funds for APCs. Archiving or searching in institutional **repositories** is not a priority, but thematic repositories and community networks see significantly more support.

ECRs can often achieve '**first author**' status, and can influence the choice of where to publish from within their research group, although several countries operate approved lists of journals.

Awareness of '**open science**' initiatives is still low, and until reputational credit is given by tenure committees to outreach and impact behaviour then such activity is likely to remain at a low level. The exception is in the UK, led by the REF.

Sharing is seen as positive for reputational accrual and is much mentioned, although activity is geared more to sharing of outputs through scholarly communication networks than interim results beyond their research group. The

potential for **collaboration** is a clear objective for career progression and again community networks have a positive role to play here.

There is scepticism about the newer metrics, and it is still early days for '**altmetrics**' unless adopted by the university appraisal system.

There are mixed messages for **publishers**, and bad news for **libraries**. ECR attitudes towards 'commercial' publishers are generally negative and their brands are anonymous, but ECRs decide where to publish on the basis of the journal not the publisher, so the effect of this attitude is limited. Libraries however appear to have lost all visibility with ECRs. The library itself is seen as somewhere for undergraduates to work, and their discovery systems are bypassed in favour of other sources.

The large heterogeneous dataset compiled by the study reveals both similarities and considerable **diversity** between ECRs based in the seven countries. The report analyses these in detail.

Dave Nicholas, Principal Investigator for Ciber, said: "This is the first year's findings of a hopefully three-year long project. We shall be following our researchers for another two years, asking them the same questions so we can tell whether ECRs are the harbingers of change when it comes to scholarly communication. Nevertheless, we believe we have more than enough evidence already to suggest that some interesting things are taking place, especially with regard to publishers and libraries, so there is plenty of justification for continuing to study them."

Michael Mabe, chair of PRC comments: "ECRs are the future of research, and their attitudes and behaviour matter. We know little of how these are developing at what is seen as a time of rapid change, even transformation. This wide-ranging longitudinal international study is designed to reveal evolving opinion and how this impacts on practice."

Early Career Researchers: The Harbingers of Change? Final report on Year One (2016) is available on the [Publishing Research Consortium](#) website.

Publishing Research Consortium is a group of associations and publishers that support research into global issues that impact scholarly communication, in order to promote evidence-based discussion. Our steering group comprises representatives from the International Association of STM Publishers, The Publishers Association, Association of Learned and Professional Society Publishers, Association of American Publishers, Taylor & Francis, Elsevier, Springer Nature, and Wiley.

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