

October 2023

ALLEA STATEMENT ON CURBING PREDATORY PRACTICES IN OPEN ACCESS SCHOLARLY PUBLISHING

The European Federation of Academies of Sciences and Humanities (ALLEA) hereby contributes to the theme of the 2023 International Open Access Week on “Community over Commercialisation”, and specifically to the challenge of recognising “which approaches to open scholarship prioritise the best interests of the public and the academic community – and which do not”.¹ With this statement, ALLEA aims to inform and advise its Member Academies and the broader research community on how to counteract the proliferation of open access journals that have unacceptable editorial and publication standards, so as to avoid the wasting of research funds and erosion of research integrity standards.

Unexpected developments

In the last 20 years, open access publishing has grown into a global industry,² rendering the majority of scholarly publications immediately accessible to researchers, policymakers, and society at large. While this is generally perceived as a positive step, its implementation also yields unexpected negative developments.

For example, ALLEA has repeatedly expressed concerns that the increasingly dominant “Gold” Open Access model creates inequities for researchers in different disciplines, career stages, and geographical locations by replacing the barrier to access with a barrier to participation.³ Other unintended consequences include constraints on researchers’ autonomy regarding where to publish, increasing monetisation of the academic research enterprise, and the large-scale emergence of journals whose editorial and publication standards do not match those upheld by the research community – so-called “predatory” journals.^{4,5,6}

1 See <https://www.openaccessweek.org/theme/en> (accessed on 27/09/2023)


2 Directory of Open Access Journals: <https://doaj.org/> (accessed on 27/09/2023)

3 ALLEA (2021). Statement on “Equity in Open Access”. <https://allea.org/portfolio-item/equity-in-open-access/>

4 ALLEA (2018). Report on “Ethical Aspects of Open Access: A Windy Road”. <https://www.allea.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Ethical-Aspects-of-Open-Access-Report.pdf>

5 ALLEA (2022). Statement on “Open Access Publication Under “Big Deals” and the New Copyright Rules”. <https://allea.org/portfolio-item/allea-statement-on-open-access-publication-under-big-deals-and-the-new-copyright-rules/>

6 Taylor, G.A. (2021). “Predatory journals: a different pandemic”. *Pediatric Radiology* 51, 516–518. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00247-020-04918-4>



Predatory journals and their publishers are “entities that prioritise self-interest at the expense of scholarship and are characterised by false or misleading information, deviation from best editorial and publication practices, a lack of transparency, and/or the use of aggressive and indiscriminate solicitation practices”.⁷ This consensus definition broadly applies to the spectrum of fraudulent, deceptive, and low-quality publishing outlets displaying predatory behaviour, which are not limited to open access journals, as a recent InterAcademy Partnership (IAP) study shows.⁸ As the number of predatory journals and publishers grows, the predatory behaviour of those entities becomes more sophisticated, impacting many researchers, eroding research integrity, becoming further ingrained into common research culture, and leading to the waste of financial and human resources.

Many researchers are duped into choosing to publish with predatory journals because they are simply unaware of the difference between bogus and quality open access journals. Early-career researchers are at particular risk, as they may feel a great pressure to publish but lack experience. Equally, these journals have disproportionately negative effects on researchers from low- and middle-income countries, who may not have the resources to identify those outlets and/or are seeking more affordable ways to publish. Still others, however, knowingly use predatory journals to advance their careers.⁸

One of the key pillars in ALLEA’s mission is to uphold the integrity of scholarly work. As such, the updated European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity, which ALLEA published in 2023,⁹ emphasises: “Establishing, supporting, or deliberately using journals, publishers, events, or services that undermine the quality of research (‘predatory’ journals or conferences and paper mills)” are violations of research integrity norms and viewed as misconduct.

⇒ Bearing a long-term responsibility to uphold the highest research integrity standards, ALLEA’s Member Academies are expected to play a leading role in promoting publishing with outlets whose editorial and publication standards have been deemed appropriate by the larger research community. Likewise, ALLEA Member Academies should raise awareness of the complex issues of predatory practices, warn against and disincentivise the use of predatory journals and conferences.

Identifying and promoting quality open access journals

There exists at present no centralised global or European authentication of academic publishers and journals to certify that they meet the fundamental requirements of professionalism and financial transparency. However, extensive efforts are made to provide resources that allow researchers and institutions to vet the quality of publishing services. Some specific recommendations for researchers can be found below:

7 The international consensus definition taken from Grudniewicz et al. (2019). “Predatory journals: no definition, no defence”. *Nature* 576, 210-212. <https://doi.org/10.1038/d41586-019-03759-y>

8 InterAcademy Partnership (2022). “Combatting Predatory Academic Journals and Conferences”. <https://www.interacademies.org/project/predatorypublishing>

9 ALLEA (2023). “The European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity – Revised Edition 2023”. <https://allea.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/European-Code-of-Conduct-Revised-Edition-2023.pdf>

- » Searching the databases listed in the Directory of Open Access Journals ([DOAJ](#)) (empowered by the global science community), and Web of Science ([WoS](#)) can be starting points for finding open access journals that follow good editorial practices. Additionally, Cabells provides a subscription service featuring a database of deceptive and predatory journals.¹⁰
- » There are also several national and institutional resources that regularly evaluate and categorise scientific journals and publishers based on their editorial and publication standards.¹¹ These can often also be accessed by external researchers, and could be extended and adopted for regional or European use.
- » The [Think-Check-Submit](#) initiative provides tools to help researchers identify trusted journals in which to publish their research. The [Journal Comparison Service](#) by cOAlition S provides a platform that improves price transparency for researchers, libraries, and funding organisations.
- » Most academic libraries can advise researchers; they are encouraged to follow evidence-based characteristics of potential predatory journals¹² and IAP-recommended markers for fraudulent, deceptive, or unacceptable journals.⁸
- » In general, authors are recommended to keep full control over any published work by retaining their intellectual property rights.¹³ By doing so, authors will always be able to deposit a copy of the Author Accepted Manuscript (AAM) in a repository of their choice, and it allows them to re-use figures and tables from the publication in subsequent presentations or other works without having to seek permission from the publisher.

⇒ Academies are urged to introduce and promote the use of available resources, tools, and services to guide researchers in selecting quality journals in which to publish their work. In addition, they are asked to recommend that research funding organisations, research, and other higher education institutions stop using funds to pay article processing charges (APCs) to open access journals that engage in predatory practices.

Reforming research assessment culture

One of the most crucial factors that determine publishing behaviour is how researchers are assessed in funding, hiring, and promotion decisions. The predominance of quantitative indicators in current evaluation systems is one main incentive for researchers to take short-cuts and publish in predatory journals.⁸ As far back as in 2012, signatories of the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment ([DORA](#)) recommended focusing on the content of researchers' publications instead of relying on journal-based metrics to measure the quality of research articles and individual researchers. The [Hong Kong Principles](#) for assessing researchers also provide explicit guidance on how to recognise and reward behaviours that strengthen research integrity.

10 Teixeira da Silva, J.A. et al. (2023). "Cabells' Predatory Reports criteria: Assessment and proposed revisions". The Journal of Academic Librarianship 49, 102659. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acalib.2022.102659>

11 One example being the Norwegian Register for Scientific Journals, Series and Publishers: https://kanalregister.hkdir.no/publiseringsskanaler/Forside.action?request_locale=en (accessed on 27/09/2023)

12 Shamseer, L., et al. (2017). "Potential predatory and legitimate biomedical journals: can you tell the difference? A cross-sectional comparison". BMC Medicine. 15, 28. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12916-017-0785-9>

13 For more information on copyright retention, see the Plan S Rights Retention Strategy: <https://www.coalition-s.org/rights-retention-strategy/> (accessed on 16/10/2023).

In 2022, the EU-facilitated Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment ([CoARA](#)) was formed. To date, more than 500 European organisations, including ALLEA and many of its member academies,¹⁴ have joined CoARA in support of a timeframe for reforms that recognise the diverse outputs, practices, and activities that maximise the quality and impact of research.¹⁵

Reforming research assessment practices requires not only new regulations, guidance, and policies from institutions. Members of the research community who review the manuscripts, evaluate grant proposals, sit on promotion committees, and partake in the election of academy members must also commit to changing research culture. The individuals who take on such roles should support best assessment practices that catalyse progressive change in their institutional and research environment.

⇒ *Academies are encouraged to implement and advocate for community-wide reforms of research assessment practices in line with DORA and CoARA. They should lead by example and establish working dialogues with funding agencies, governmental organisations, and universities towards the development of coherent and unbiased national policies that recognise and reward quality practices in publishing and to curb predatory practices.*

Towards non-profit publishing models

Increasing monetarisation and commercialisation^{5,16} of the scholarly publication enterprise is another principal driver of predatory practices. It contributes to an academic publishing system whose commercial interests may conflict with research integrity standards and an author-pays model that is especially prone to be abused by predatory actors.

Alternatives to the current system include non-commercial APC-based journals and non-commercial open access publishing models with no APC (i.e., Green and Diamond Open Access), which are gaining support within the research community.¹⁷ The recent Conclusions of the Council of the European Union aim to further strengthen the commitment to an open, equitable, and sustainable scholarly publishing system.¹⁸ The Council highlights that immediate and unrestricted open access without costs for individual authors or readers should be the norm in publishing research using public funds. Further, it encourages EU Member States and the Commission to ramp up support for the development of policies and strategies regarding not-for-profit open access multi-format scholarly publishing models in Europe that bear no costs for authors or readers. Finally, it advocates for training on responsible, open, honest, and ethical publishing practices for students and researchers, thereby also improving awareness of predatory, questionable, deceptive, and otherwise unacceptable publishing practices and their negative impact on the quality and trustworthiness of research and its outcomes.


14 ALLEA (2022). Statement on “Reforming Research Assessment within the European Academies”. <https://allea.org/portfolio-item/allea-statement-on-reforming-research-assessment-within-the-european-academies/>

15 See <https://coara.eu/agreement/the-agreement-full-text/> (accessed on 27/09/2023)

16 See <https://www.designresearchsociety.org/articles/the-future-of-design-studies-update> (accessed on 27/09/2023)

17 Bosman, J., Frantsvåg, J.E., Kramer, B., Langlais, P.-C., and Proudman, V. (2021). “OA Diamond Journals Study. Part 1”. <https://www.scienceeurope.org/our-resources/oa-diamond-journals-study/>

18 Council of the European Union (2023). “High-quality, transparent, open, trustworthy and equitable scholarly publishing - Council conclusions” <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-9616-2023-INIT/en/pdf>



⇒ Academies and learned societies, institutions in Europe with a long tradition of establishing and maintaining non-profit journals, are asked to align strong support for non-commercial publishing policies and contribute resources to developing alternative, non-profit open platforms for scientific publishing, as exemplified by [Open Research Europe](#), [Wellcome Open Research](#), and [HRB Open Research](#). In addition, academies are expected to continue promoting the use of preprint servers to stimulate early dissemination of new research findings.

About ALLEA

ALLEA is the European Federation of Academies of Sciences and Humanities, representing approximately 50 academies from nearly 40 countries in Europe. Since its foundation in 1994, ALLEA speaks out on behalf of its members on the European and international stages, promotes science as a global public good, and facilitates scientific collaboration across borders and disciplines. Learn more here: <http://www.allea.org>

About this Statement

This ALLEA statement has been prepared by ALLEA's Permanent Working Group on Science and Ethics, with Professor László Fésüs as principal author. Through its Working and Expert Groups, ALLEA provides input on behalf of European academies on pressing societal, scientific, and science-policy debates and their underlying legislations. With its work, ALLEA seeks to ensure that science and research in Europe can excel and serve the interests of society. Read more about the ALLEA Permanent Working Group on Science and Ethics and its members here: <https://allea.org/research-integrity-and-research-ethics/>

DOI: [10.26356/PREDATORYPUBLISHING](https://doi.org/10.26356/PREDATORYPUBLISHING)

