

Proposal for editorial boards about emancipating their journals

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The proposal

We propose that editorial boards of journals ask their current publisher to agree to the principles of [Fair Open Access](#):

- The editorial board or a nonprofit society owns the title of the journals.
- All articles are published as Open Access (free to read, no subscriptions).
- The authors own the copyright of their articles, and a standard Open Access license is used. (We recommend CC By, but other options are available.)
- There are no payments by authors. All costs are subsidized by library consortia or other institutions, for anyone to read and be able to submit (i.e. one's subsidies cannot be restricted to one's own researchers). APC (article processing charges) are low (at most a few hundred dollars/euros), in proportion to the work carried out by the publisher.

We propose that if a journal's existing publisher cannot or will not meet these conditions the editorial board give notice of resignation, and transfer the journal to a publisher meeting the conditions. Below, we give details of three publishers that can take on journals on this basis -- there are many others.

Please see Technical Notes for more explanation.

In order to gauge community sentiment we have run a survey whose results so far (with over 1000 responses) are discussed below. The [survey results](#) indicate that there is widespread appetite for the kind of changes we outline in this document.

Who is presenting this proposal?

We are an informally convened group of researchers and information professionals with an interest in open access. The following people (listed alphabetically) are involved currently:

- Björn Brembs (Neurogenetics, Universität Regensburg)
- Saskia de Vries (project leader LingOA, previously director Amsterdam University Press)
- Martin Eve (literature/technology/publishing, Birkbeck, University of London; co-founder, Open Library of Humanities)
- Tim Gowers (mathematics, University of Cambridge; editor, *Discrete Analysis*)
- Alex Holcombe (psychology, University of Sydney)
- Danny Kingsley (Head of Scholarly Communication, University of Cambridge)
- Benoit Kloeckner (mathematics, Université Paris-Est -- Créteil Val-de-Marne)
- Cameron Neylon (research communications, Curtin University, previously Advocacy Director, PLOS)
- David Roberts (mathematics, University of Adelaide)
- Johan Rooryck (linguistics, University of Leiden, Editor-in-Chief *Glossa* (formerly *Lingua*))
- Mike Taylor (paleontology, University of Bristol; software engineer, Index Data)
- Mark C. Wilson (computer science, University of Auckland; academic editor *PeerJ Computer Science*, previously editor *Online Journal of Combinatorics*)

We have considerable experience in running journals and switching them to open access.

Recommended publishing options

In addition to the “do-it-yourself” option of running PKP’s open-source software Open Journal Systems, we have investigated some in detail several publishing services companies and are very satisfied with two options that offer different levels of service at different prices. Of course, there are other options which may well be equally acceptable. The options are (in increasing order of services provided) listed below. (We give more details later.)

1) [Open Journal Systems](#) (as used by [Electronic Journal of Combinatorics](#)). The software itself is free, and operating it provides complete freedom. The developers of the software, PKP, also offer Web hosting for under \$1000/year. Maintenance by academics can be difficult, however. We recommend this option only if there are editors with strong technical knowledge and interest.

2) [Scholastica](#) (as used by [Discrete Analysis](#)). This company provides very nice editorial software and a website, for a flat charge of \$10/submission. All other services must be provided by others.

3) [Ubiquity Press](#) (as used by the Open Library of Humanities journals, including [Glossa](#)). This company provides various levels of (excellent) service. The one we guess to be most appropriate for most mathematical journals costs about \$200/paper.

Who will pay?

We believe strongly in the principle of no direct payments by authors - a principle with wide support in the mathematical community. Since the journals would be Open Access, there would be no payments by readers. However, there are still costs of publication to be met. Note that under the current subscription model, costs to the community are estimated to be over \$4000 per published paper, yet actual costs of production are far less, hence the huge profits of publishers.

For the OJS option, financial costs are few -- the main cost is in time spent by editors. Hosting by a university is easy to achieve at no cost to the journal. The PKP-hosted option costs less than \$1000/year. With the Scholastica option, the direct cost of \$10 per paper is small enough to be absorbed by grants and donations: for example, Tim Gowers has received an anonymous donation allowing *Discrete Analysis* to run for several years. Any support staff costs would need to be added to the above figures, and to do this most efficiently the cost should be shared by several journals.

For the third suggested option, Ubiquity have quoted us prices in the range of \$200-500 per article for a much higher service level including some staff support for editors (they also have a cheaper option with basic service).

In the long run, these kinds of costs will be paid by library consortia -- an approach whose potential is being demonstrated by the very successful [Open Library of Humanities](#), which is already supported by over 200 universities. In the meantime, we are arranging transitional

funding via MathOA, a mathematics analogue of LingOA, based in the Netherlands. There are currently several applications for funding; however, funders are more likely to fund if we can give them names of specific journals willing to take up their offer.

Pros and cons

The positive consequences to the suggested action are many; but we do not pretend that there are no drawbacks. As to the advantages:

- The research community will reclaim control of important journals. This will allow for much faster innovation and improvement in journal processes, and align the interests of the journal with those of the community. Publishers and other service providers interested in being involved will have to compete to satisfy the users of the journal, not the other way around.
- All papers published will immediately be freely available to anyone with an Internet connection: no paywalls, no embargo periods, no discrimination against readers in poorer countries.
- The impact of the journals will in general increase: many studies show that open access journal articles attract higher citation rates. See SPARC's [summary of published research](#) on the open-access citation advantage.
- Mathematics journals that have broken away from large commercial publishers are without exception doing better in bibliometric terms than their original versions, even if the original versions survive. See [blog post](#) by Mark Wilson.
- Libraries will move closer to being able to cancel exorbitant subscriptions, freeing up money for the research community to use more productively than donating to shareholders of high-profit commercial organizations.

Our discussions with editors have also uncovered common concerns centering around workload, funding, reputation and legal issues:

- If the existing publisher does not agree to the demands of the editorial board, they may have the rights to the title of the journal. This will require editorial boards to adopt a new journal name when moving to another publisher (as *Lingua* did when leaving Elsevier, becoming *Glossa*).
- The publisher will then control access to the back issues of the journal.
- The current contract of the Editor-in-Chief may contain a no-compete clause.
- Readers and administrators may be confused about quality.

- The ISSN of the renamed journal may not be the same that of the old; the format of DOIs for future articles may change; it may take time for the new journal to be listed on MathSciNet, Scopus, and get an impact factor etc.
- Some publishers make cash payments to some editors of some journals, which may not continue under a more spartan arrangement.

We do not dismiss these concerns: we recognise that they are very real.

What we have done to address these concerns

- Several mathematics journals have left commercial publishers and changed their name. The right way to do this is clear. A unanimous or almost-unanimous decision by the editorial board, advertised openly and widely to the community, makes it very likely that the original journal will cease production fairly quickly because of lack of editors and submissions. Authors usually agree to withdraw their papers from the old journal and submit them to the new one. Mathematical journals that have done this switch successfully include *Journal of Algorithms*, *Topology* and *Topology and its Applications*. Their replacements (*ACM Transactions on Algorithms*, *Journal of Topology*, and *Algebraic & Geometric Topology*) are all highly regarded.

We have recent direct experience with the case of the prestigious linguistics journal *Lingua*, which carried out the entire process within a period of months. The original title still exists but is rapidly declining into irrelevance, while the renamed *Glossa* thrives. [A larger list of journals that have declared independence](#) is available.

- Back issues: this is not a problem for any library subscribing to the usual “Big Deal” package. In some cases, if libraries eventually cut these packages, they may lose access (although many deals do allow access to be retained after cancellation). Currently for example, Elsevier provides free access to back issues of mathematics journals from 4 years after publication date. If a journal ceases publishing, which is a likely outcome if the switch is done right, its back content is supposed to be available via services such as LOCKSS, CLOCKSS and Portico.
- One way around no-compete contracts is for an interim EiC to be named for a short time until the EiCs can resume their position. This is exactly what was done with *Lingua*.

- On reputation: we acknowledge that some authors are under pressure to publish in journals with high impact factors, and that they may thus not want to submit to switching journals during the few years needed to get an impact factor; but our survey data shows that the community overwhelmingly care about editorial board research quality, peer review quality and ethical standards, and are for the most part very little concerned with impact factor or who publishes the journal: we thus expect sufficient good submissions for the journal to thrive through this IF-less window. The new incarnations of the mathematics journals mentioned above have a very high reputation: indeed, the reputation and citation impact usually increase because there is no loss in quality of refereeing, editing and papers, while there is an improvement in ethics and often in efficiency. All these reputational issues are most easily dealt with by making a decisive switch backed by the research community, so that the true situation is made publicly very clear.

Some people have expressed concerns in the other direction: the old journal may lose reputation and researchers who published with it before the switch may be unjustly penalized. This seems unlikely: it takes at least several years for reputations to change outside the community of users of a journal.

- Indexing is relatively straightforward. The most difficult is getting listed in databases such as Scopus and Thomson Reuters. However for an existing journal that is merely changing publisher (albeit with a possible name change) this is easier than for a completely new journal. Even in the latter case, as long as the journal is publishing regularly it is usually just a matter of filling in a form and waiting several months. We have experience with this and can assist if the lower-cost options are chosen, while the full service option we recommend will take care of all such matters.
- On editorial payments: our survey shows that 43% of respondents are opposed to these on principle under any circumstances. Of course, administrative support is a different matter, and our recommended options allow for customized support at different funding levels.

Other help that we can offer:

- We have substantial experience based on successfully carrying out the entire process with *Lingua*, which we are happy to make available. This includes advice on contracts from lawyers we have worked with, help with setting up a nonprofit foundation, etc.

- We will connect you with the Open Access publishers mentioned above, who are aware that we have contacted you; we are happy to act as go-betweens initially.
- We will personally supply some administrative assistance for editors if required, in addition to any funding for administrative assistance that we can get from funders.
- We continue to explore more funding options. In addition to MathOA, we are pursuing an analogue of the Open Library of Humanities for mathematics (OLM). Funding for the OLH is [provided by library consortia](#) and we expect a very similar model for OLM.
- We will help with publicity, which is key to success. For the switch to operate as cleanly as possible, the community of readers, authors and reviewers, not to mention grant funders, must realise that the new journal is the continuation of the old one, and that the original journal (if it continues) is a serious journal in name only. We plan a substantial campaign (again inspired by the successful *Lingua* action) involving social media, professional venues (e.g. Notices of the AMS), blogs, and coordinated presentations at conferences.
- We are happy to discuss any issues you feel are not adequately addressed in this document, by email, phone, Skype, in person if possible, etc. We have spent many months planning to get to this point, and are committed to helping you succeed.

Further questions and answers

Q. Are you suggesting switching to an open access journal with publication charges?

A. No. We are recommending that the journal become fully open access with no reader fees. But this does not entail article processing charges for authors. For fields such as mathematics, these charges are controversial and we believe unnecessary. The lower cost options can be run for the foreseeable future on the donated funds we already have. Costs even for our “full-service” recommendation can be met by library consortia reallocating subscription funds along the lines of the [Open Library of Humanities](#), and we are actively pursuing this, along with options for transitional funding. For example, a mathematics analogue of OLH is under detailed discussion.

Q. *Discrete Analysis* is an arXiv overlay journal, so it does not actually publish papers. Is that what you are suggesting for my journal?

A. Not necessarily: this is only one of several options. It would make no difference to costs of *Discrete Analysis* if it hosted the papers on the journal's website. The main area in which costs are cut is in copy-editing, paywall maintenance, legal costs, etc. Like many newer journals, *DA* provides a style file but otherwise takes the attitude that the final author submission after refereeing (“postprint”) is usually perfectly adequate, as the widespread use of arXiv shows. Of course, paid copyediting can be included in any journal’s offering as funding permits.

Switching publisher does, of course, give an editorial board a good reason to review its procedures and consider innovations that may improve the journal’s quality. The model used

by *Discrete Analysis* is just one possible way to run a journal. The key is to have a journal that is under control of the research community, not large for-profit corporations whose goals are not aligned with that of the field.

Q. What about the *K-Theory* debacle?

A. It is important to avoid duplicating the sad case of the journal *K-Theory*, which broke away from a commercial publisher only to be involved in a battle between editors over ownership, (it was owned personally by the editor-in-chief, supposedly temporarily). This is part of the reason that we suggest each journal be owned by a nonprofit organization. After its false start, *K-Theory* became *Annals of K-Theory*, which is owned by a non-profit foundation (<http://www.ktheoryfoundation.org/>). Other options include ownership by a learned society. The key point is to ensure that publishers provide services to the journal and do not constrain efforts by the editors, reviewers and authors to improve it. Publishers should compete on quality and price to provide these services and always face the possibility of losing the contract to another provider. Disputes among editors should be solved systematically by a specified transparent process, to be clearly stated by the nonprofit organization owning the journal. We have some experience with these issues and are happy to help.

Q. Will switching my journal make any difference to the current publishing system?

A. In one sense, no: companies such as Elsevier and Springer will continue to sell their big bundles of journals at high prices. However, for a major mathematics journal (or better still journals -- we are approaching editorial boards of many journals) to leave a major publisher would be a powerful signal that at least some people in the academic community have had enough. It would also weaken the negotiating position of the publishers, by providing an easy-to-follow example for other journals. It would be unlikely for any single journal switching to bring about a phase transition of the system, but it could play a very important part in accelerating the change that is so badly needed, leading to a broader transition within a few years instead of several decades.

Q. How can you realistically provide professional journal services so much more cheaply than the charges of the major publishers suggest?

A. The major publishers have a large investment in old-fashioned systems which are much less efficient than those used by newer publishers. On top of that, many have large profit margins. Also, they provide and charge for some services that are of little or no value (such as managing payments from readers or authors, preventing non-authorized people from reading the articles, and arguably typesetting). Realistic estimates of the cost of a community-run open access journal range from near zero up to \$500 per article, less than 15% of the price offered by the traditional publishers.

Q. Why haven't more editorial boards already switched in the way you propose?

A. This is a good question. We believe that one reason is that there has never been a coordinated and determined attempt to facilitate such switching, which is precisely the point of the current project. Also, it is a classic collective action problem -- it is much easier to adopt an innovative new model if many others are already doing it. The goal of our current initiative is to normalize this behaviour among our colleagues. Another obstacle may have

been perceived lack of alternative publishing options, although good independent publishers using the subscription model, such as MSP of Berkeley, have been operating for a long time. Until recently it was not easy to run an open access journal because of possible lack of income stream, but this is no longer a serious obstacle, hence this proposal.

Appendix: Technical notes

Details of publishing options

Scholastica

Provides a modern online platform for running journals. US\$10/submission is the only cost. Extra features such as indexing, typesetting, DOI assignment, plagiarism checking, etc, must be provided by other means.

The company is based in Chicago: <https://scholasticahq.com/>

More information:

- An example journal publishing on Scholastica:

<http://discreteanalysisjournal.com/>

- A short PDF overview of Scholastica:

<http://docs.scholastica.s3.amazonaws.com/Scholastica%20overview.pdf>

- A 1-minute video about Scholastica here

<https://vimeo.com/107074391>

- Screenshots and videos in Scholastica's editor guide:

<http://help.scholasticahq.com/customer/portal/articles/1228155>

Ubiquity Press

Basically a full-service operation, the one behind the Open Library of Humanities. Costs range from the hundreds of dollar/euros per year to the hundreds of dollars/euros per article depending on the level of service (which can be chosen feature-by-feature). The editorial system is modern, based on Open Journal Systems, but nicer.

The company is a spinoff from University College London: <http://www.ubiquitypress.com/>

More details:

- Example journal publishing with Ubiquity:

<http://www.glossa-journal.org> (part of <https://www.openlibhums.org/>)

- An editor training video

<https://vimeo.com/144631620> (password: JMSTraining)

Ubiquity offers various options and many services. The table below gives a summary (more detail is available). The costs are per article.

PACKAGE	1-100 articles	101-200	201-300	301-400	401-500
Hosting	£11.50	£5.75	£3.83	£2.88	£2.30
Indexing	£21.50	£20.75	£20.50	£20.38	£20.30
Peer review support (full)	£101.05	£101.05	£101.05	£101.05	£101.05
Peer review support (light)	£47.50	£47.50	£47.50	£47.50	£47.50
Copyediting, print quality PDF, full XML	£211.63	£208.63	£207.63	£207.12	£206.82
Copyediting, TeX to author PDF	£83.00	£81.50	£81.00	£80.75	£80.60

Survey results

The survey analysis will be published in March 2017, and raw data is available [on Figshare](#). Some key findings:

- 33% of respondents have acted as an editor, while 26% are PhD students or postdocs and 57% have a permanent position. Respondents are from many different countries and continents.
- The survey asks "How serious is the need for improvements to mathematical journals?" On a standard 1-5 Likert scale, where 5 means "almost all need serious work now" and 1 means "the status quo is completely acceptable", 78% answered 3,4, or 5. We interpret this as saying that there is considerable dissatisfaction about the state of journals.

- We included questions allowing respondents to name a journal that needs work, and explain why. Almost 200 journals were nominated, with Elsevier and Springer the most problematic publishers.
- Around 40% opposed any monetary payments to editors, around 40% want community election of editors, and 30% want term limits for editors. It is not our intention to push boards into changing their operating model, but we do believe that they should take aware of the wishes of the community they serve.

What exactly we mean by “open access”

Everyone agrees that at a minimum, open access means that the articles are absolutely free to read to anyone anywhere, without any technical barriers such as requiring registration. Beyond that, there are different definitions. The three classic declarations on Open Access ([Budapest](#), [Berlin](#), [Bethesda](#)) all agree that OA also includes the right to re-use content: for example, the Budapest statement [says](#) “free availability on the public internet, permitting any users to read, download, copy, distribute, print, search, or link to the full texts of these articles, crawl them for indexing, pass them as data to software, or use them for any other lawful purpose, without financial, legal, or technical barriers other than those inseparable from gaining access to the internet itself”. To achieve this, the canonical licence to use is the [Creative Commons Attribution \(CC By\)](#) licence.

However, some people feel anxiety about their work being used in ways they do not approve of, and especially of the possibility that others may make money from it without their getting a cut. For this reason, they may prefer a more restrictive licence such as [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial \(CC By-NC\)](#).

This licence prevents a large and fuzzy-bordered set of re-uses. The problem is that no-one knows exactly what is and isn't allowed under the terms "non-commercial" -- it's a thing that can be decided only in court. For example, it may be that CC By-NC materials can't be used in teaching in a university, because the university charges tuition fees -- an outcome that surely is not what any scholar intends for their OA works. Recently [a court in Germany ruled](#) that *any* non-personal use counts as "commercial" even when no money changes hands: under that interpretation no CC By-NC works could ever be used in any kind of teaching.

It's for these kinds of reasons that the people who have put the most thought into open-access licences have uniformly come down on the side of CC By. These include respected OA publishers ([BioMed Central](#), [PLOS](#), [PeerJ](#)), funding charities ([Wellcome Trust](#), [Gates Foundation](#)), national bodies ([RCUK](#)) and more. As a result, journals which publish

open access materials under more restrictive licences will not be acceptable venues for research funded by the Wellcome Trust, Gates Foundation, etc.

We therefore *recommend* the use of the CC By licence for all open access journals. But, recognising that different groups may wish to make a different choice, we *require* only that an explicit statement is made about which licence is used, and strongly suggest that it be one of the widely recognised and understood Creative Commons licences. Ultimately, this is a choice for individual journals to make.