

News Notes

News Notes are taken from the *EASE Journal Blog* (<http://ese-bookshelf.blogspot.com>). Please email items for inclusion to Richard Hurley (rhurley@bmj.com), with "News Notes" as the subject.

Open access day 2008 . . .

In 2008, 14 October was international open access day, with the goal "to broaden awareness and understanding of open access, including recent mandates and emerging policies, within the international higher education community and the general public." The Open Access Directory compiled a wiki to help organise much of the world's material (http://oad.simmons.edu/oadwiki/Main_Page), and Greg Laden wrote a poem for the day (http://scienceblogs.com/gregladen/2008/10/a_poem_for_open_access_day.php). The Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association announced their formation. And the day's organisers published six videos (from a teacher, librarian, funder, student, physician scientist, and a patient advocate) on why open access matters (<http://vimeo.com/oavideos>). See <http://openaccessday.org>.

. . . and open access week 2009

Open access week has been declared for 2009. For the first time, this popular international event will be extended from one day only to a whole week, 9-23 October, to accommodate widespread interest in the movement toward open access (free online access forever) to scholarly research results. This event will present an opportunity to broaden awareness and understanding of open access to research, including access policies from all types of research funders within the international higher education community and the general public.

Weak pound hurts subscriptions

The fall in the value of the pound is damaging the budgets of UK university libraries. Costs of subscriptions to research journals from the rest of Europe and the United States have risen as a result of changes in the exchange rate. Since July 2008, the value of the pound has fallen by about 25% against the US dollar and the euro. The increased cost is a problem because libraries at large institutions typically spend 75% of their acquisition budgets on journals. (www.knowledgespeak.com, 05 Jan 2009, "Weak pound hurting journal subscriptions in UK, say associations")

Australian journal restricts access

From January 2009 the *Medical Journal of Australia* (www.mja.com.au) is restricting online access to general content, excluding research papers, to subscribed users only. The online edition of the journal has been free since its inception in 2001. All previously published articles will remain open access. Research articles will be freely accessible online for two weeks after publication, after which a subscription will be required. Twelve months after publication, all articles will revert to open access. (www.knowledgespeak.com/newsArchiveviewdtl.asp?pickUpID=7415&pickUpBatch=1066#7415, 6 Jan 2008, "Online edition of Medical Journal of Australia retreats from OA")

They underestimated me!

To celebrate the end of George Bush's presidency of the United States, the *Guardian* newspaper has published online a random generator of Bushisms, his infamous gaffes. For such delights as "Free societies are hopeful societies. And free societies will be allies against these hateful few who have no conscience, who kill at the whim of a hat", "You know, one of the hardest parts of my job is to connect Iraq to the war on terror," and "I've been in the Bible every

day since I've been the president" try www.guardian.co.uk/world/interactive/2009/jan/09/bushism-random-generator. *Pikestaff*, the newsletter of the Plain Language Commission, also marks the change in US president by sending readers to www.dubyaspeak.com. The latest *Pikestaff* is at www.clearest.co.uk/newsletter/newsletter.php?id=30.

Societies investigate journals' future

The European Respiratory Society and the American Thoracic Society have been selected for a pilot to test the application of semantic web and Web 2.0 technologies to journal articles, from a large number of applications. The project will explore the potential of these tools to help society publishers increase readers' and members' engagement with the society and its publications. These two societies were selected because they publish "a significant proportion of high quality articles" in their field, and their content is highly structured. They hope that the experiment will help them better understand what the next generation of online journals might look like. (*UK Serials News*, 23 Jan 2009, www.ringgold.com/UKSG/si_pd.cfm?AC=2244&Pid=10&Zid=4289&issueno=187)

Talking about older people

"The terminology used to describe older persons varies considerably, even in international documents," a United Nations report says. "It includes: 'older persons,' 'the aged,' 'the elderly,' 'the third age,' 'the ageing,' and, to denote persons more than 80 years of age, 'the fourth age.' The committee opted for 'older persons' (in French, *personnes âgées*; in Spanish, *personas mayores*), the term employed in General Assembly resolutions 47/5 and 48/98." In the United Nations' statistical services, these terms cover people older than 60. The statistical service of the European Union considers "older persons" to mean people aged 65

or above, because 65 is the most common age of retirement and the trend is towards later retirement still. See United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. *The economic, social and cultural rights of older persons*. Geneva: UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, 1995 (<http://www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/0/482a0aced8049067c12563ed005acf9e?Opendocument>) and *BMJ* 2007;334:316, doi:10.1136/bmj.39111.694884.94.

Birmingham abandons apostrophes

Road signs and street names in Birmingham will no longer include apostrophes. The city council has decided that the areas such as “Kings Heath” and “Druids Heath” should be apostrophe-free, citing a need to avoid confusion and prevent emergency services from getting lost. In the *Birmingham Mail*, the councillor Len Gregory said, “I don’t see the point of them.” But the Apostrophe Protection Society said that the decision was “absolute defeatism” and sets a bad example. John Richards, founder of the society, said, “Teachers are trying to teach children correct grammar and punctuation. Now children will go around Birmingham and see utter chaos” (www.birminghammail.net, 30 Jan 2009, “Battle to save Birmingham’s apostrophes”).

Do blogs break embargoes?

Scientists are uncertain if blogging is part of science, journalism, or public discourse, says an editorial in *Nature* (2009 Feb 26;457:1058, doi:10.1038/4571058a). Embargoes rest on the principle that work should be peer reviewed and published before being covered by the press. To promote scientific communication, however, work can be presented at scientific conferences ahead of publication, and its authors can answer journalists’ questions—so long as they don’t actively promote media coverage. The same considerations apply in disseminating new scientific results in the blogosphere. *Nature* adds that researchers would do well to blog more than they do: societal

debates have much to gain from the uncensored voices of researchers.

Students armed with subediting skills

A former editor of the *Daily Mirror*, Roy Greenslade, has said that subeditors are disposable in these days of highly educated journalists and straight-to-screen copy. An article in *THES* disagrees: subs are almost always underpaid but they are only rarely underappreciated by the writers whose reputations they safeguard. Excellent subs are not disposable relics of a bygone era. They are the keyhole surgeons of journalism – fast, precise, and adept at ensuring that prevention averts the need for expensive or embarrassing cures. At best they write attention-grabbing headlines and turn convoluted codswallop into plain, comprehensible English. To abolish subbing would risk inflicting on journalism damage comparable to that imposed on team sports by the sale of school playing fields (www.timeshighereducation.co.uk, 5 March 2009, “Students armed with sub-editing skills are given tools for life”).

Clarity is everything

If something is easy to read about, it seems easier to do. The simplicity or complexity with which a task is described affects our attitude towards the task itself and our willingness to do it. Psychologists gave college students information about exercise in either an easy-to-read font (Arial) or an unfamiliar “brushstroke” font; they found that those who read the instructions in Arial were subsequently more willing to make exercise a part of their day. Another way to introduce simplicity is to use simpler words and sentences. Commentators on the article in *Scientific American Mind* say that this points to the value of both clear textual presentation and graphic design (<http://www.sciam.com/article.cfm?id=a-recipe-for-motivation>).

COPE launches newsletter

The Committee on Publications Ethics (COPE) has launched a newsletter to tell its members what

the organization offers. The editor, Jeannie Wurz, hopes to “produce eight pages that other editors will actually want to read.” The inaugural newsletter, *Ethical Editing*, includes an interview with Tim Feest, the new operations director, and Harvey Marcovitch, the outgoing chairman (Liz Wager has now taken the reins). Since large publishers, such as Elsevier, Wiley-Blackwell, Springer, and Taylor and Francis, recently joined, COPE’s membership has swelled to more than 5000 journals, in disciplines including law, earth science, and economics, as well as the physical and biomedical sciences. See <http://publicationethics.org/newsletters>.

JAMA gags whistleblowers

Whistleblowers who spot undeclared competing interests in papers in the top medical journal *JAMA* will be told that they must “not reveal this information to third parties or the media while the investigation is under way,” according to an editorial coauthored by *JAMA*’s editor, Catherine DeAngelis (2009 Mar 20, doi:10.1001/jama.2009.480). The gagging policy comes after Jonathan Leo, a professor of neuroanatomy, divulged a dispute over competing interests to the *BMJ* (www.bmj.com/cgi/eletters/338/feb05_1/b463#208503). He had written to *JAMA* last May (*JAMA* 2008;300:1757–8) to criticise a study for being unduly favourable to a drug (*JAMA* 2008;299:2391–400, doi:10.1001/jama.299.20.2391), and the journal took five months to publish the letter. In a subsequent internet search, Leo found that one of the original authors had a further undeclared connection with the drug manufacturer. The *Wall Street Journal* reports that the journal’s reaction to Leo’s criticism was “angry” (<http://blogs.wsj.com/health/2009/03/13/jama-editor-calls-critic-a-nobody-and-a-nothing/tab/print/>). See http://online.wsj.com/public/resources/documents/leo_statement_for_WSJ.htm

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