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*From the Cutting Edge*

*Report – Academic Publishing in Europe, 16–18 January 2017*

*Anthony Watkinson reports on the 2017 APE meeting, the theme of which was ‘Doing the Right Thing – Doing Thing’*

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This was the twelfth APE meeting under the benevolent auspices of Arnoud de Kemp, the founder. The theme was *Publishing Ethics: Doing the Right Thing – Doing Things Right*. The pre-conference on the first day, led Bas Straub of Konvertus, was an interactive look at the future of scholarly publishing with special reference to the role of digital natives. This report will pick up items of interest to STM members at the main conference, covering the second and third days of the event, with attendance of about 200. STM is one of the sponsors of this annual event. Old hands considered it one of the best APEs but a certain level of coherence was at the expense of the book publishers and librarians who used to form a larger part of the audience. The programme is available and video recordings of the conference are now available on River Valley’s YouTube site.

The keynotes were really useful. The first covering **Peer Review: Openness, Experimentation and Integrity** was from Rachel Burley, Publishing Director Open Research at Springer Nature. She set peer review in context. It is to do with validation, significance and originality. It cannot prevent plagiarism, fraud and bias. For taxonomy she pointed to an entry on [OpenAIRE BLOG](#) and related blogs. It can be improved: there is transparency offered by *Nature Communication*, there are varieties of open peer review and post-publication peer review, there are different forms of recognition of reviewers, there are results-free models, journal independent peer review, standardisation and automation (not bots) and cascading. Finally there is the black swan – the move from a publisher-centric system to an author-centric one.

Equally impressive was the **Safeguarding the Integrity of Research** contribution by IJsbrand Jan Albersberg of Elsevier. As publishers we are not responsible. Researchers are, but we are responsible for the outputs. He analysed retractions – they may not be increasing. However, we can help with the training of researchers. Proper statistical support is needed at the planning of research stage. There is certainly scope for explaining when image manipulation is wrong. He liked registered reports. What can we do across publishers with the help of CrossRef?

The last two keynotes were by Will Schweitzer of AAAS/Science on **Helping Readers Assess the Quality of Peer Review** and an update on COPE from Mirjam Cueno. Schweitzer emphasised [Peer Review Evaluation](#). Cueno explained how increased membership of COPE was bringing more insights and a wider usefulness.

There was a return to the **frontiers of peer review** in session five on the next day convened by Alice Meadows of ORCID. It was dedicated to the PEERE project. The website provides information about a number of initiatives dedicated to quality and efficiency which brings together academics and publishers including data sharing and also “the transparency of peer review of conferences” – a new take on neglected scholarly outputs.

A significant part of the programme was taken up with various different ways of viewing **open access**. It is a pity that the speakers in session 1 on *OA 2020: An Achievable Reality* could not be brought together with the hard-nosed and suspicious Scholarly Kitchen chefs in the closing panel. Assumptions might be challenged. The earlier presentations from the European Research Council and Science Europe did not actually project total OA in Europe in three years but “irreversibility” was suggested. Ralf Schimmer offered an update to a presentation last year which at the start of 2017 seems to propose 90% conversion from subscription to open access. Emma Wilson from the Royal Society of Chemistry showcased some “flipping” and some success with hybrid but in a sensible/modest way. At the other end of the spectrum the chefs (Anderson, Crotty, Michael and Meadows) saw changing models as probably a risk rather than an investment, suggested a slowdown in OA growth and posited unsustainability.

There was also some salutary critical thinking about our industry. Liz Marchant of Taylor & Francis introduced a “structured debate” on the glass ceiling for female publishers under the heading *Room at the Top – It is Good for Business*. There was a general agreement from men in the audience as well as the women on the platform that those problems that definitely still exist should be brought into the open and dealt with. Alice Meadows produced statistics. The sole researcher, Gerlind Wallon, described monitoring at EMBO.

In a very different session Bob Campbell asked Michael Mabe, Jo McShea of Outsell and Philip Carpenter now a senior adviser at Wiley the question – *Is our industry in good shape?* The STM Association is – as Mabe pointed out. It is gaining members unlike other representative bodies. We have embraced open access with some success but “digital objects escape”. He showcased <http://www.howcanishareit.com/>. McShea pointed to innovations in the humanities and social sciences and growth in medicine in particular where you can “leverage Data Mountains”. Carpenter asked why we are in the dog house and posited access and convenience problems. He threw the dreaded name of SciHub into this civilised discourse. He also mentioned sharing in Springer Nature. Is there a bigger project on its way?

Finally the annual APE lecture on the 17th by Richard Horton of the Lancet morphed into a draft proposal for a *Berlin Declaration on Knowledge in the Sciences and Humanities for Sustainable Development*. The declaration – (now visible at the Lancet. Ed.) – pointed back to the principles of the enlightenment and to the importance of defending facts. Some of us thought it was a challenge to publishers to help researchers reach out to the public and policy formers. It was our job too. Others heard a different message. The bottom line is that the lecture was not mentioned by any speaker on the second day.

As is customary in most conferences now there was a lot of interest in **innovation** and innovators including presentations by Euan Adie of Altmetric, and Kaveh Bazargan of River Valley with material perhaps heard before and something rather different from newcomer Dr Jessica Polka of ASAPbio. This is a “scientist-driven initiative to promote the productive use of preprints in the life sciences”. There was a strong undercurrent of interest in preprints throughout the meeting. Polka thinks that bioRxiv has taken off. Eefke Smit also provided her line up of exciting young entrepreneurs whom we voted on.