

*Insights* – 31, 2018

People in the News: Paul Ayris | Steve Sharp



## People in the News

### Paul Ayris

#### **Keywords**

Megajournals; UCL Press; scholarly publishing; library publishing; university presses

In recent years the appearance of 'megajournals' has begun to reshape the research publishing landscape; PLOS ONE is perhaps the most famous exemplar. At the same time, we have witnessed the emergence of universities exploring alternatives to traditional commercial publishing. With that in mind, your Editors were interested to see the recent press release announcing that UCL Press has its own megajournal, so we took the opportunity to speak to Dr Paul Ayris (Pro-Vice-Provost, UCL Library Services) to explore further UCL's ambitions and the reasons why he and the Press believe that the time is right to launch such a new and innovative product.

UCL Press is the press of University College London, and it is the first fully open access (OA) university press in the UK. The Press publishes a range of books and journals, including enhanced digital editions which offer features such as the ability to examine artefacts at any angle using the 3-D modelling feature and the use of deep zoom to research archive documents.

For those unfamiliar with the term, we began by asking Paul to explain exactly what a megajournal is. 'A megajournal is bigger in scope than a traditional journal – it brings together materials from a wider range of disciplines and encourages inter- and cross-disciplinarity,' replied Paul. The new megajournal will be piloted with Environmental Science, but this could scale quickly with further megajournals across UCL's research domains.

In choosing to launch an OA megajournal, your Editors were keen to understand what aspects of the traditional commercial publishing model Paul and the Press are hoping to develop and/or change. Paul responded by highlighting two specific issues: speed of publication and the model of peer review. The journal will have fully open peer review, the reviewers will identify themselves and readers will be able to see what the peer reviewer actually said. Paul went on to say that UCL is seeking to create '... impact through the open access business model'.

And that reference to the business model provided the perfect opportunity to ask Paul how the megajournal is being funded and whether the aim is for it to be self-sufficient in the long term. Paul began by confirming that '... UCL is funding the infrastructure for the creation of the megajournal', before adding that in the longer term '... non-UCL authors will be charged an APC to publish'.

2 OA is still to gain full traction in some quarters, so your Editors were keen to find out how UCL is encouraging researchers to publish in the megajournal. Paul explained that 'UCL authors are free to choose where they publish', but, when pressed on the issue of the megajournal, he added, 'The megajournal encourages the creation of larger subject communities and this will be a driver for authors to publish with us.'

STM researchers have already demonstrated a keenness for OA, so, your Editors wondered, will there be a bias towards STM outputs in the megajournal? Paul was keen to assure us that 'all subject areas will be invited to engage with the UCL megajournal platform'. When asked whether the scope of the megajournal will extend to non-research articles, such as method papers or protocols, Paul was clear. 'Yes, we will publish non-traditional forms of output as well as journal articles.'

'The megajournal encourages the creation of larger subject communities'

Launching a megajournal is a significant undertaking, even for an established press like UCL, so it will be necessary to evaluate how the project has gone. We asked Paul what his measures of success are. He responded, pragmatically, 'Still to be decided definitively. But we are looking closely at DORA and the Leiden Manifesto to feed our understanding of evaluation.' DORA (Declaration on Research Assessment) aims to assess research on its own merits rather than on the basis of the journal in which the research is published and to capitalize on the opportunities provided by online publication. The Leiden Manifesto argues that research evaluation has become routine and increasingly driven by data and not by expert judgement, and proposes ten principles for the measurement of research performance.

Moving on from the megajournal itself, your Editors were interested to talk to Paul more about his role as CEO of UCL Press and Pro-Vice-Provost (UCL Library Services) and, in particular, how he sees his role in helping to shape the future scholarly communication landscape. Paul began by saying that 'The role of Pro-Vice-Provost has as one of its remits the introduction of open science approaches across the institution, so I am looking [for example] at new forms of scholarly publishing (UCL Press); new research bibliometrics based on DORA/Leiden Manifesto principles; new reward systems which recognize openness as a core part of teaching and research', adding that '... the new UCL Promotions Framework now explicitly acknowledges this.'

With so much talk about the role of the institution, your Editors asked why UCL had chosen a commercial publisher to host the megajournal, and what had influenced their choice of ScienceOpen. To this question, Paul had a simple answer. 'We chose ScienceOpen because they were most closely able to provide what we were looking for in a publishing platform.'

Alongside this commercial partnership, UCL Press is also furthering its publishing endeavour by developing its own OA platform for textbooks. Textbook publishing, and the future for the traditional textbook, is a subject of much discussion in the community, so, when asked how this new venture is going, Paul was able to provide some fascinating data. 'As of December 2017, the total number of downloads of UCL Press materials (overwhelmingly research monographs) across 221 countries and territories was:

- 56 monographs published
- 8 journals published
- 705,055 downloads (books + journals).'

'the value of universities bringing publishing back into the academy'

He added, proudly, 'This has exceeded our expectations and underlines the value of universities bringing publishing back into the academy.'

It is clear that UCL is leading the way when it comes to institutional publishing, so, in bringing the interview to a close, your Editors finished by asking Paul whether he believes

3 that the 'institution-as-publisher' model marks a significant step towards achieving sustainable, long-term change in the scholarly publishing environment. In a fitting final statement, Paul commented, 'I certainly believe that the institution-as-publisher model is the future; and where Presses share values such as openness, there is no limit to the levels of collaboration in which they can engage.'

On that optimistic note, your Editors thanked Paul for his time and said farewell.

'the institution-as-publisher model is the future'

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