


2019

# A COPE Study (2019): Exploring Publication Ethics Issues in the Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences

Committee on Publication Ethics

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publicationethics.org



A COPE STUDY (2019):  
**EXPLORING  
PUBLICATION  
ETHICS ISSUES**  
in the Arts, Humanities,  
and Social Sciences

Supported by



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**COPE (Committee on Publication Ethics)** is a non-statutory body which aims to provide practical publication ethics guidance for journal editors working in all research disciplines. **COPE** was first conceived by an editor of a specialist medical journal at the **BMJ Publishing Group** but has since grown to become a fully multidisciplinary organisation. As a result of perceptions within **COPE** that some members not in **Science Technology and Medicine (STM)** disciplines might not consider **COPE** to be as relevant, in early 2019 **COPE**, with the support of **Routledge (part of the Taylor & Francis Group)**, commissioned primary research to better understand the publication ethics landscape for editors working on journals within the arts, humanities, and social sciences. The research used a two-stage methodology: first exploring the issues qualitatively via two online focus groups with a diverse group of journal editors from the arts, humanities, and social sciences, before creating and disseminating an online survey.

**The survey received 656 admissible returned forms.**

### Are arts, humanities, and social sciences editors/journals aware of COPE and familiar with the work it does?

- **28%** of respondents were completely unaware of **COPE**. The first step in supporting arts, humanities, and social sciences editors around the ethical challenges they face in their roles is to address this lack of exposure
- Levels of awareness varied across disciplines: awareness among those specialising in history and humanities was particularly low, as was awareness among new editors.

28% of respondents were completely unaware of **COPE**



**What publication ethics issues do arts, humanities, and social sciences editors/journals currently face?**

**PERCEIVED AS MOST SERIOUS:**

- Detecting plagiarism and poor attribution standards
- Fraudulent submissions
- Data and/or image fabrication issues

**PERCEIVED AS MOST WIDESPREAD:**

- Addressing language and writing quality barriers while remaining inclusive
- Detecting plagiarism and poor attribution standards
- Recognising and dealing with bias in reviewer comments

**PERCEIVED AS MOST FREQUENT WHEN EXPERIENCED:**

- Addressing language and writing quality barriers while remaining inclusive
- Issues around the way in which authors receive and respond to criticism
- Detecting plagiarism and poor attribution standards

**RESPONDENTS FELT LEAST CONFIDENT IN DEALING WITH:**

- Data and/or image fabrication issues
- Fraudulent submissions
- Intellectual property and copyright issues

Arts, humanities, and social sciences editors who took part in the survey thought that, in the future, technological changes and a data-driven, performance-based academic culture were likely to exacerbate the key ethical issues they currently struggled with.

## What support do arts, humanities, and social sciences editors/journals need from COPE? What is COPE currently not providing?

In many cases, issues raised are already addressed by COPE's resources. Lack of use of COPE appeared to be largely attributable to a lack of awareness of its resources or a lack of perceived need, rather than inappropriateness of COPE's resources for arts, humanities, and social sciences journal editors. However, not all resources are currently completely appropriate for these disciplines and require adaptation.



- Recently added resources appear to go some way to filling some gaps – for example, a podcast addressing issues of inclusivity and diversity in peer review.<sup>1</sup> However, more guidelines and flowcharts could help target specific issues.



- Specific issues around language are not currently given prominence by COPE and more could perhaps be done here. Specific suggestions were made for COPE to offer more support to editors in their responsibilities to mentor authors, to help them mediate between conflicting interests and moderate authorship standards.



- There were also requests for more person-to-person support, some of which might be difficult to deliver given COPE's current scale of operations. Advice is already available to COPE members via the Forum, or from among COPE Council Members in between Forums. More promotion of these sources of support is needed to raise awareness among these communities.

The study was the first conducted by COPE on publication ethics issues within the arts, humanities, and social sciences disciplines. It is recognised that it has a number of limitations, most notably the predominance in the sample of Routledge journal editors (due to their role as project partner) and of editors working for large journal publishers. While representation of Routledge editors was always likely to be high given the large number of journals they publish in these disciplines, the results cannot be seen as fully generalisable to the sector as a whole. In addition, although they were reassured about confidentiality, it is possible that respondents may have self-censored.

<sup>1</sup> <https://publicationethics.org/resources/seminars-and-webinars/diversity-and-inclusivity-peer-review-cope-podcast>  
<https://publicationethics.org/resources/discussion-documents/cope-forum-11-february-2019-diversity-and-inclusion-research>

## BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH

### About COPE

COPE aims to provide practical publication ethics guidance for journal editors working in all disciplines. The organisation offers different types of resources to support and educate editors and publishers with managing possible misconduct. All resources are developed in response to members' needs and COPE is always pleased to be contacted by members with suggestions. Please contact: [admin@publicationethics.org](mailto:admin@publicationethics.org)

### Key resources are:



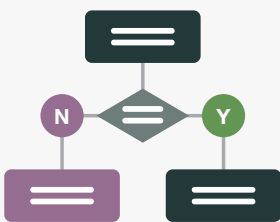
#### COPE Forum

One of COPE's core member resources is the [Forum](#)<sup>2</sup>. This is the foundation COPE was built on: an opportunity for peers to offer advice and exchange views on how to deal with difficult cases. The Forum meetings used to be held face-to-face in London, UK. They are now held online by webinar, allowing more members to participate from all regions of the world.



#### COPE Guidelines

[COPE Guidelines](#)<sup>3</sup>, [part of COPE's 10 Core Practices](#)<sup>4</sup>, cover many ethical issues and have been developed over several years, being revised as ideas and issues evolve. Although COPE's remit is to provide guidance and advice, it does not prescribe a course of action and members either implement their guidelines in full in their journal practices or use them to form the basis for their own policies.



#### COPE Flowcharts

[COPE's Flowcharts](#)<sup>5</sup> are designed to help editors follow COPE's Core Practices and implement its advice when faced with cases of suspected misconduct. There are currently 20 in total, with new ones being added regularly and many translated into other languages.

## COPE and publication ethics in the arts, humanities, and social sciences

COPE was first conceived by an editor of a specialist medical journal at the **BMJ Publishing Group**. Since its formation in 1997, COPE has grown to become a fully multidisciplinary organisation with over 12,000 journal members worldwide. There is a perception within COPE that due to its medical origins, some **non-Science Technology and Medicine (STM)** members might not consider COPE to be relevant, particularly because arts, humanities, and social sciences publication ethics norms do not always coincide with those of STM. This was reflected in a COPE membership survey in 2015, following which COPE committed to engage more with the arts, humanities, and social sciences disciplines to make its resources more relevant to their needs.

One of COPE's publisher members, speaking at a COPE seminar in 2017, stated that only one third of cases logged by that publisher were from arts, humanities, and social sciences, but that 83% of the cases dealt with by the publisher's legal team were from within these disciplines.

It is against this background that in early 2019 COPE commissioned primary research to better understand the publication ethics landscape for member and non-member editors working on journals within the arts, humanities, and social sciences. This research was supported by Routledge, as the world's largest publisher of humanities and social science journals (*Based on InCites data, Clarivate Analytics 2018*).

In a previous study, conducted ten years ago with 231 editors of Wiley-Blackwell science journals, Wager et al. (2009)<sup>6</sup> reported a lack of familiarity

with available guidelines and generally low levels of concern with publication ethics as these applied to their journal. Outside the issue of 'redundant publication' (often known as overlapping, or 'salami publication'), none of the issues tested were seen by respondents as a major area of concern in terms of either severity or frequency. The authors note that despite this confidence, many respondents did not know the severity and frequency of many issues, stating that "at least some editors of science journals may be unaware of many of the potential ethical problems that may arise" (Wager et al. (2009), p.352) and pointing to a range of evidence that ethical issues in scientific publishing may be more widespread than this suggests. To the research team's knowledge, prior to COPE's study, no such investigation has been conducted with arts, humanities, and social sciences journal editors.

The landscape for journal editors in both scientific and arts, humanities, and social sciences publishing has changed over the past ten years, not least through advances in publishing technology (including the development of plagiarism-detection tools such as CrossCheck), the further development of open access, increasing globalisation of academic activity and the increasing use of research assessment exercises such as the UK's Research Excellence Framework (REF). The research reported here aims to be an up-to-date examination of perceptions of publication ethics issues by arts, humanities, and social sciences journal editors.

“ These findings provide important information about the specific resource needs of editors and publishers in numerous arts, humanities, and social sciences fields.

Deborah Poff, COPE Chair. ”

<sup>6</sup>Wager, E., Fiack, S., Graf, C., Robinson, A. and Rowlands, I., 2009. Science journal editors' views on publication ethics: results of an international survey. *Journal of medical ethics*, 35(6), pp.348-353. <https://jme.bmj.com/content/35/6/348>



## THE RESEARCH

The research focused on the following areas:

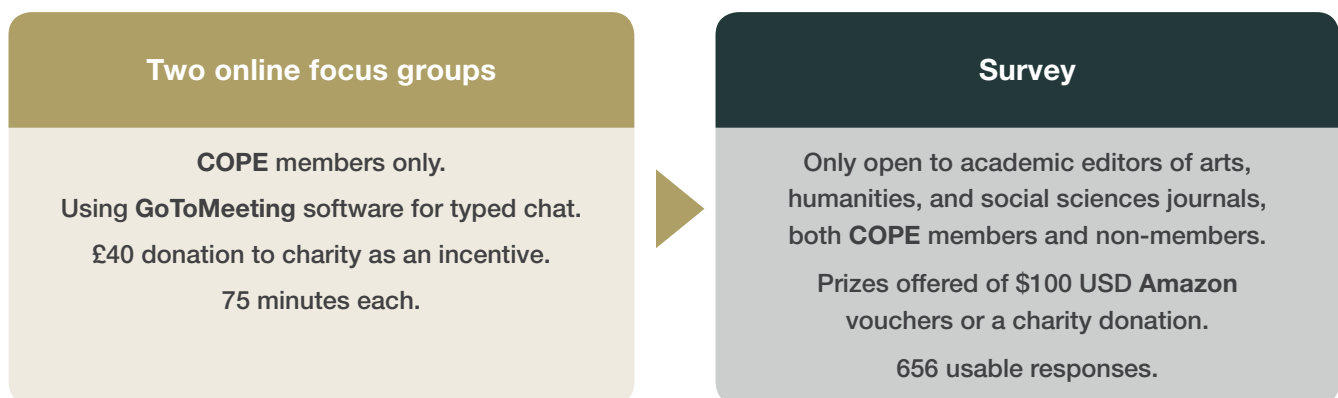


The first three are reported in brief in this study.

### Methodology

The project used a two-stage methodology. The initial qualitative stage involved two online focus groups with 10 **COPE** publisher members, allowing for responses from a geographically dispersed group of editors. A profile of these respondents is given in [the appendices on p26](#).

Following the online groups, a survey was constructed and tested using a small number of cognitive interviews and a small pilot survey to ensure it was well understood and unambiguous before full dissemination.



### Anonymity and confidentiality

Given the sensitivities involved, anonymity was key and care has been taken not to report the data in such a way that individuals could be identified, such as through a combination of their characteristics. By using an independent organisation for data collecting and processing and through reassuring respondents of their confidentiality, **COPE** hoped to reduce any unwillingness to report problems or areas in which respondents lacked confidence. Throughout this report, participants are identified by subject area only, in order to avoid any potential for their identification.

## Survey content

The survey script consisted of seven demographic questions to contextualise respondents' answers, two questions that investigated objectives around awareness, five questions investigating issues and points of pain, and eight questions that investigated needs and gaps.

## Survey distribution

COPE supplied a survey link and invitation letter to each of its publisher members with arts, humanities, and social sciences journals. These publisher member contacts were asked to cascade the link and information down through departmental publisher managers to academic journal editors. Publisher member contacts at **Routledge** did likewise. In addition, the survey and link were promoted on social media and through networks by **COPE** and **Routledge**.

## Incentives

Respondents were incentivised with entry to a prize draw to win one of four \$100 USD **Amazon** vouchers or a charity donation to one of three named charities.

## Data cleaning and processing

Participants who completed the survey in under four minutes were automatically cleared from the data. The dataset was checked for nonsensical responses to open-ended questions or poorly completed questionnaires. These were then removed from the data. Incomplete cases (where the respondent failed to finish the questionnaire) were not included.

Those who had not had an editorial role in the past two years or had never had an editorial role on a scholarly journal, those who were not involved in editorial decisions around which research articles are included in a journal, and those who were not involved in any arts, humanities, and social sciences subjects as a journal editor were removed.

There was no weighting (for example around geography, subject or publisher) applied to the survey due to a lack of reliable data about the shape of the target population. [See Section 2, p12](#) 'Limitations of the study'.

The survey went live on 11 February 2019 and closed on 24 February 2019

The graphic features the COPE logo (C O P E) in a stylized font with vertical bars. To the left is a purple megaphone icon. The central text reads 'CALLING ALL ARTS, HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES EDITORS!' in bold black letters. Surrounding this central text are various academic disciplines: GEOGRAPHY, LAW, PHILOSOPHY, EDUCATION, RELIGION, ANTHROPOLOGY, PSYCHOLOGY, HISTORY, ECONOMICS & FINANCE, ARTS, POLITICS, BUSINESS & INDUSTRY, and CLASSICS. In the top right corner, a purple triangle contains the text 'ONLINE SURVEY (8 minutes)' with a clock icon. At the bottom, a dark purple banner contains the text 'COPE ONLINE SURVEY' and 'Tell us about the publication ethics issues facing your journal.' To the right of this banner, it says 'Supported by Routledge' and features a purple button with the text 'TAKE OUR SURVEY' and a right-pointing arrow.

## THE RESEARCH

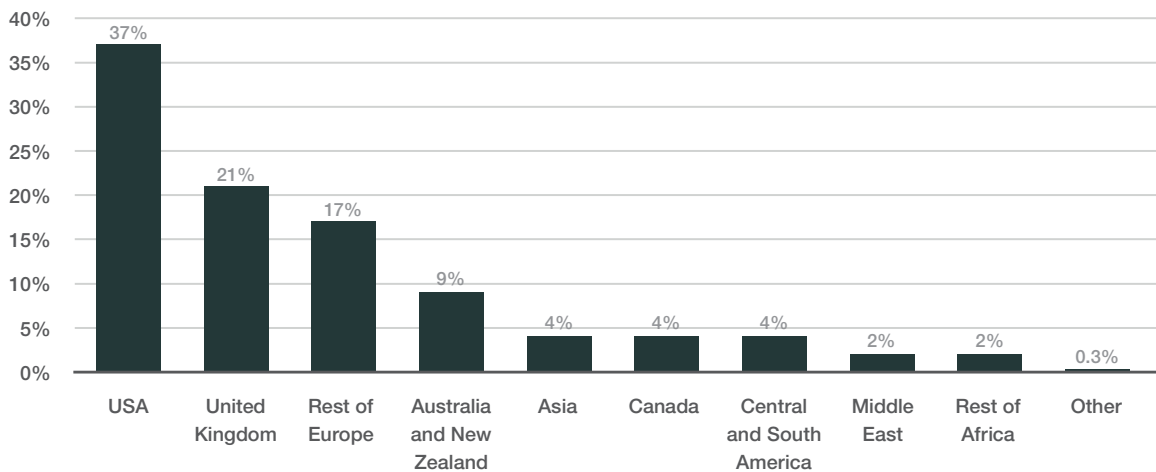
### Profile of respondents

The final survey sample included 656 respondents.

656  
respondents

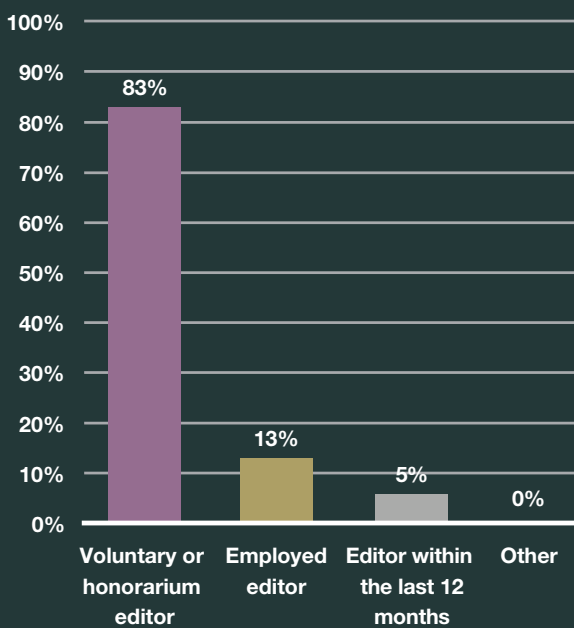


#### IN WHICH COUNTRY ARE YOU BASED?



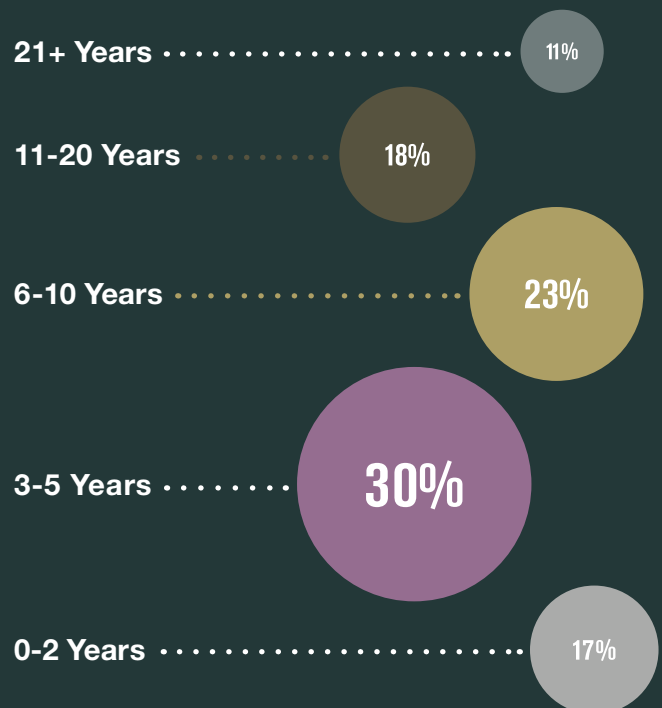
Base n=645

#### DO YOU HAVE AN EDITORIAL ROLE ON A SCHOLARLY JOURNAL?



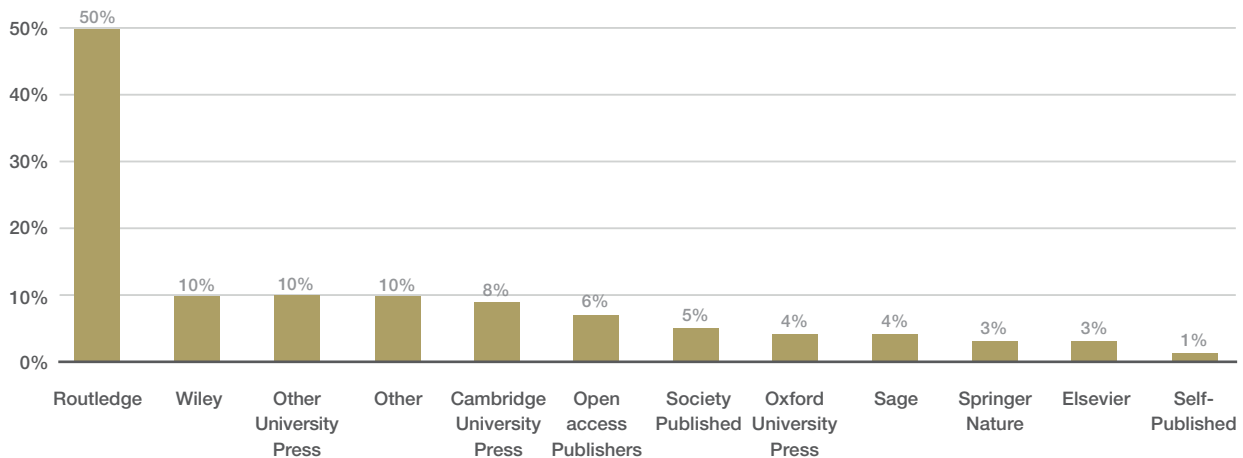
Base n=656, all respondents, respondents were able to give more than one response. Decimal numbers rounded off. Other responses <1% excluded from the chart.

#### HOW MANY YEARS HAVE YOU HAD AN EDITORIAL ROLE ON A SCHOLARLY JOURNAL?



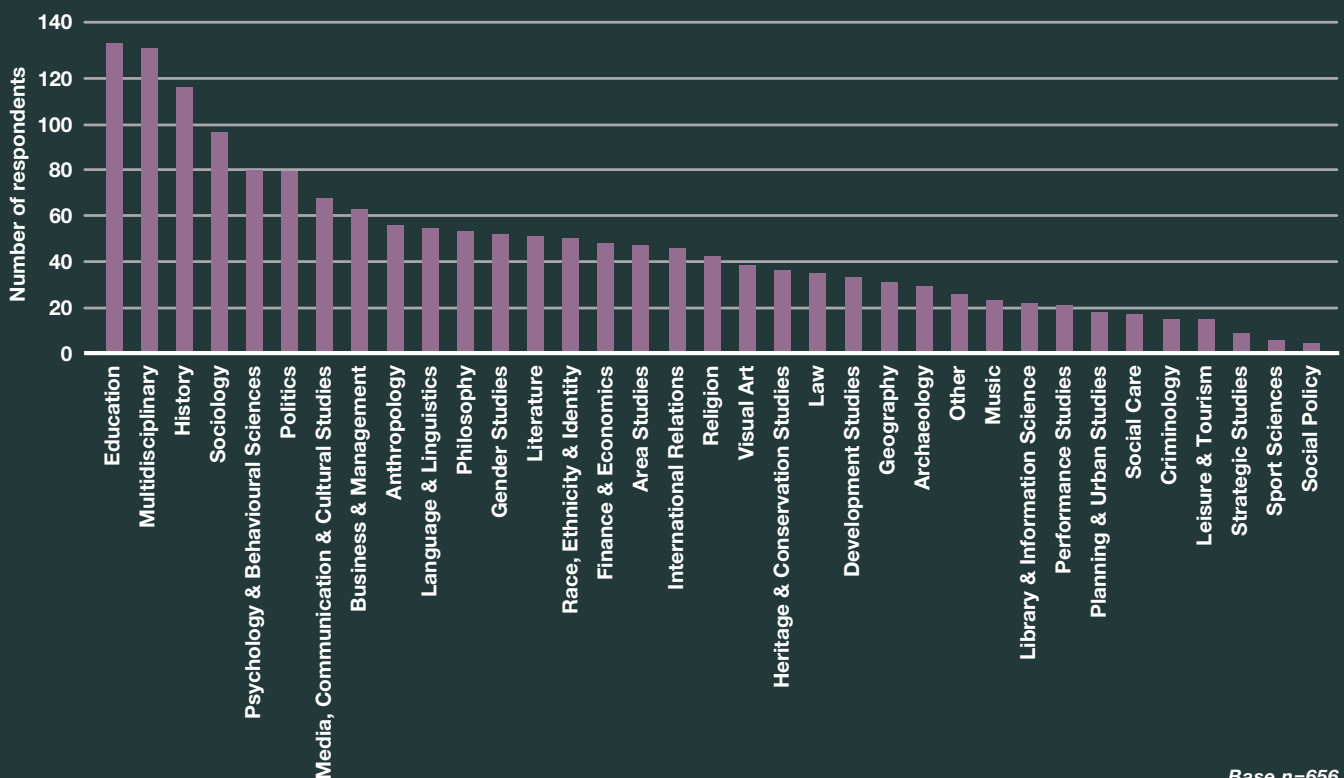
Base n=656, all respondents

### WITH WHICH PUBLISHERS ARE YOU CURRENTLY INVOLVED AS A JOURNAL EDITOR? (PLEASE SELECT ALL THAT APPLY)



Base n=656, all respondents, respondents were able to give more than one response

### WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING BEST DESCRIBE THE SUBJECT AREA(S) YOU ARE INVOLVED IN AS A JOURNAL EDITOR? (PLEASE SELECT ALL THAT APPLY)



Base n=656

## THE RESEARCH

### Limitations of the study

This study is the first primary research **COPE** has undertaken looking specifically at publication ethics within the arts, humanities, and social sciences research communities. It has a number of limitations and it is hoped that some of these can be overcome in further research.

#### Distribution of the sample in terms of particular publishers

Although reliable data on market share and the distribution of academic journal editors globally does not exist, it is clear that the sample is unlikely to reflect the sector. Although the survey was open to arts, humanities, and social sciences journal editors working with any publisher, **Routledge** was over-represented and some other major publishers under-represented in collected responses. While strong representation of **Routledge** authors was appropriate given the size of its arts, humanities, and social sciences portfolio and the number of journal editors with whom it is associated as well as its role as project partner, there is likely to have been some over-representation here.

Based on survey responses, **Routledge** editors have a different profile from those at other publishers in terms of years in service, subject levels and editor locations which may have impacted on our results. In addition, there is likely to be an overrepresentation of major publishers in general. Therefore, the results cannot be seen as fully generalisable to the sector as a whole. Subsequent surveys will hopefully gain the fuller involvement of editors from other publishers and organisations and thus more responses from a wider range of journal editors.

#### Sample size and making generalisations about subjects

Our sample of 656 is nearly triple that of the previous study by **Wager et al. (2009)**. However, it may be that it is still not large enough for subject-level differences to be fully apparent, given the diversity of arts, humanities, and social sciences academic communities.

#### Geographical representation

The sample contains fewer editors from outside the UK and USA than we would hope to enable broad geographical representation. The survey was only available in English. A multi-language survey might have encouraged wider participation and should be considered for subsequent research.

#### No subject comparison group

The survey was designed to understand the issues faced by arts, humanities, and social sciences journals. It would be very valuable for subsequent research to survey **STM** journal editors as a comparison between the two groups.

**Self-categorisation and subject groupings**

The survey asked respondents to indicate the subject area(s) they were involved in as a journal editor. These subjects were subsequently categorised as social sciences or arts and humanities. Future surveys would ideally require respondents to place themselves in these two categories, enabling a more accurate subdivision of respondents where this is possible.

**Respondent self-selection and self-censoring**

The survey is likely to have attracted respondents with a pre-existing interest in publication ethics issues, or some relationship with COPE, thus potentially biasing the results. In addition, although they were reassured about confidentiality, it is possible that respondents may have self-censored.



## THE RESULTS

### What were the main publication ethics issues identified?

20 different publication ethics issues in arts, humanities, and social sciences were identified in the qualitative work as shown below in alphabetical order:



“ I don't always feel confident the list of authors reflects reality. ”  
 Journal editor, social sciences.

Issues around the way in which authors receive and respond to criticism

Issues handling responses from reviewers to authors

Issues of self-plagiarism

Issues of submitting the smallest-publishable-unit (also known as *'salami publishing'*)

Managing complaints and appeals

Potential conflict of interest between authors and reviewers

Predatory publishing

Querying data reproducibility

Recognising and dealing with bias in reviewer comments

Responding to concerns about so-called controversial research topics/authors/communities/methods



## THE RESULTS

### Which issues were most serious, widespread, frequent – and how confident were editors in dealing with them?

Survey respondents were asked to report how serious, widespread, and frequent these issues were, as well as indicating those which they had the least confidence handling. Key issues are indicated below:

Most serious <sup>1</sup>	Most widespread <sup>2</sup>	Most frequent when experienced <sup>3</sup>	Least confident in dealing with <sup>4</sup>
<p>Detecting plagiarism and poor attribution standards</p> <p>Fraudulent submissions</p> <p>Data and/or image fabrication issues</p>	<p>Addressing language and writing quality barriers while remaining inclusive</p> <p>Detecting plagiarism and poor attribution standards</p> <p>Recognising and dealing with bias in reviewer comments</p>	<p>Addressing language and writing quality barriers while remaining inclusive</p> <p>Issues around the way in which authors receive and respond to criticism</p> <p>Detecting plagiarism and poor attribution standards</p>	<p>Data and/or image fabrication issues</p> <p>Fraudulent submissions</p> <p>Intellectual property and copyright issues</p>

#### Question wording:

<sup>1</sup>Which of the issues listed do you consider to be most serious in ethical terms? (Please select a maximum of 5)

<sup>2</sup>Which of the following have you encountered or heard about in your role as a journal editor?

<sup>3</sup>Which five arise most frequently in your role as a journal editor?

<sup>4</sup>Which of the issues listed do you feel least confident about dealing with? (Please select a maximum of 5)



Fraudulent submissions, data and image fabrication, and intellectual property and copyright issues were seen as **most serious** and were also issues that respondents had the **least confidence** handling. In the case of fraudulent submissions, these appeared to come up infrequently, though nearly **20%** of respondents had experience of this issue.



COPE's Core Practices include cases with advice, guidance for day-to-day practice, education modules and events on topical issues, to support editors and publishers.



COPE Core Practice:  
Data and Reproducibility  
<https://publicationethics.org/data>



COPE Core Practice:  
Journal Management  
<https://publicationethics.org/management>

Intellectual property and copyright issues were seen more frequently. These were linked in the online groups to authors contravening journal guidelines by posting their articles elsewhere. Issues around the use of images and intellectual property produced by the participants during the course of the research process were also mentioned here, for example drawings or sketches.



COPE Core Practice:  
Intellectual Property  
<https://publicationethics.org/intellectualproperty>

Issues around **language** were considered most prevalent. Balancing issues of language and diversity was a key discussion point in the online groups, with some editors indicating tensions between full representation of authors globally and the quality of papers due to issues around language skills and access to literature. Assuring the diversity of peer reviewers also proved problematic for some. Others were keen to stress that this was a wider issue around diversity in the norms of academic discourse and different scholarly traditions.

**44%** of arts, humanities, and social sciences editors considered **fraudulent submissions** to be among the most serious ethical issues and **24%** reported lacking confidence in addressing this issue. Respondents mentioned various types of fraudulent submissions – from hoax articles written to gain notoriety or discredit a journal, topic or field, to submissions by a third party on an author's behalf. This not only causes extra work for editors before publishing, such as requests for author list modification either at revision or acceptance stage, but can also potentially lead to retractions and damage to reputation.



COPE Core Practice:  
Ethical Oversight  
<https://publicationethics.org/oversight>



COPE Core Practice:  
Post-publication  
Discussions and Corrections  
<https://publicationethics.org/postpublication>

## THE RESULTS

The full findings from the survey are given in the table below. Here, colour coding indicates the percentage endorsement. The colour red indicates the minimum value for a response to that question, the median is yellow, the maximum value is coloured green. All other cells are coloured proportionally.

[See p16 for question wording.](#)

The Issue	Most serious	Most widespread	Most frequent	Least confident in dealing with
Addressing language and writing quality barriers while remaining inclusive	19%	64%	41%	14%
Assessing contribution and co-authorship claims	11%	24%	5%	15%
Assuring fair representation of new voices and diverse perspectives	18%	40%	16%	10%
Data and/or image fabrication issues	31%	14%	2%	24%
Dealing with different cultural or international publication practices, eg, authorship attributions	9%	31%	11%	14%
Dealing with post-publication corrections and retractions	7%	40%	8%	9%
Detecting plagiarism and poor attribution standards	58%	58%	26%	17%
Difficulties in upholding anonymity of authors and/or reviewers during peer review	11%	48%	20%	4%
Fraudulent submissions	44%	20%	3%	23%
Intellectual property and copyright issues	26%	37%	11%	21%
Issues around the way in which authors receive and respond to criticism	9%	54%	27%	7%
Issues handling responses from reviewers to authors	9%	49%	22%	3%
Issues of self-plagiarism	23%	50%	22%	17%
Issues of submitting the smallest-publishable-unit (also known as 'salami publishing')	7%	21%	7%	13%
Managing complaints and appeals	11%	44%	13%	12%
Potential conflict of interest between authors and reviewers	23%	49%	14%	10%
Predatory publishing	25%	27%	5%	12%
Querying data reproducibility	8%	13%	2%	15%
Recognising and dealing with bias in reviewer comments	22%	55%	19%	11%
Responding to concerns about so-called controversial research topics/authors/communities/methods	11%	26%	4%	12%

## Key respondent differences in main publication ethics issues identified

There were no prominent regional differences though it should be noted that sample size was low in some territories.

Generally, the subject areas that editors were involved in made no significant difference in issues identified, which might suggest many of the issues are experienced across arts, humanities, and social sciences disciplines, though in some cases, sample sizes by subject may be too small to identify small effects.

However, there is some evidence that business, finance and economics editors face more ethical issues than other arts, humanities, and social sciences disciplines. These editors were more likely to encounter or hear about some of the ethical issues relating to plagiarism and attribution, self-plagiarism, managing complaints and appeals, fraudulent submissions and data or image fabrication issues. Journal editors involved in the humanities were less likely to encounter issues around authorship than those in other subject areas.

A full breakdown by broad subject area is included in [the appendices, Section 7, p26](#).

## Drivers to publication ethics issues in arts, humanities, and social sciences

Respondents thought technology and data-driven culture were likely to exacerbate the key ethical issues they currently struggled with, as shown below:

### Online access to papers and the peer review process

“Ties between reviewers and authors that make blind review impossible are also worries. In particular, a reviewer can often easily uncover the author because working papers are published online prior to submission to a journal.”

Journal editor, social sciences.

### Globalisation, inclusion and diversity

“Increased numbers of writers from non-English speaking backgrounds whose language issues seriously affect how we can work with their material. We presently have a good diversity of reviewers but this must be kept up through active searching for appropriate reviewers.”

Journal editor, social sciences.

### Technology and authorship

“Machine-authored manuscripts are beginning to seem like a real possibility.”

Journal editor, humanities and social sciences.

### New technologies around data gathering and analysis

“With the increased mainstreaming of “big data”, machine learning, and artificial intelligence, there will be new ethical issues that emerge in terms of data privacy, reproducible research, and knowledge generation. I could imagine investigators using methods they do not understand completely and inadvertently publishing misleading or identifying information.”

Journal editor, social sciences.

### Academic culture an incentives

“Weighing speed of publication given REF (Research Excellence Framework) requirements in the UK... is it ethical to ask an emeritus professor to wait to be published if a junior professor in the UK needs a publication now for REF 2020?”

Journal editor, humanities and arts.

## THE RESULTS

### Did respondents raise issues which COPE’s existing resources already address?

COPE’s existing resources were often praised and many felt that these largely met their needs. Lack of use of COPE appeared to be largely attributable to a lack of awareness of these resources or a lack of perceived need, rather than their inappropriateness.

“ It sounds like the ones you offer are worthwhile. Underutilisation is more about lack of awareness than the quality of resources. ”  
 Journal editor, politics.

As shown below, those resources used most frequently by the wider COPE community address some of the issues raised in the survey – particularly around misconduct, authorship and the peer review process.

### COPE’s most viewed resources

Page view data of COPE’s website (2018) shows the top five most accessed resources:



Recently added resources also appear to go some way to fill some gaps, for example the [recent podcast on diversity and inclusivity in the peer review system](#)<sup>7</sup>. However, more guidelines and flowcharts could perhaps be added to COPE’s resources in this area as it is so crucial. Specific issues around language are not currently given prominence in COPE’s offering and more could perhaps be done in this area. A number of respondents mentioned the importance of seeing case studies from the arts, humanities, and social sciences. Cases included on COPE’s website are those submitted by members to the Forum; therefore raising awareness of the Forum, and encouraging members from the arts, humanities, and social sciences to submit cases to the Forum, will help COPE’s resources become more relevant to these communities.

### Did the research reveal similarities and differences between publication ethics issues experienced by arts, humanities, and social sciences and STM disciplines?

It is interesting to compare these results with those of Wager et al. (2009). While the two studies use different methods to measure the seriousness and frequency of an issue, comparison of the rankings is still informative, with issues of diversity and representation brought more clearly to the fore in this more recent research into arts, humanities, and social sciences editors. In addition, issues around human interactions and the role of journal editors as mediators between authors and peer reviewers are highlighted for arts, humanities, and social sciences editors.

<sup>7</sup> <https://publicationethics.org/resources/seminars-and-webinars/diversity-and-inclusivity-peer-review-cope-podcast>

#### This Study: Arts, humanities, and social sciences journal editors – 2019

##### MOST SERIOUS ISSUES:

1	Detecting plagiarism and poor attribution standards
2	Fraudulent submissions
3	Data and/or image fabrication issues
4	Intellectual property and copyright issues
5	Predatory publishing
6	Issues of self-plagiarism
7	Potential conflict of interest between authors and reviewers
8	Recognising and dealing with bias in reviewer comments
9	Addressing language and writing quality barriers while remaining inclusive
10	Assuring fair representation of new voices and diverse perspectives

##### MOST FREQUENT ISSUES:

1	Addressing language and writing quality barriers while remaining inclusive
2	Issues around the way in which authors receive and respond to criticism
3	Detecting plagiarism and poor attribution standards
4	Issues handling responses from reviewers to authors
5	Issues of self-plagiarism
6	Difficulties in upholding anonymity of authors and/or reviewers during peer review
7	Recognising and dealing with bias in reviewer comments
8	Assuring fair representation of new voices and diverse perspectives
9	Potential conflict of interest between authors and reviewers
10	Managing complaints and appeals

#### Wager et al.: Scientific journal editors – 2009

##### MOST SERIOUS ISSUES:

1	Redundant publication
2	Plagiarism
3	Duplicate submission
4	Undisclosed author conflicts of interest
5	Undisclosed reviewer conflicts of interest
6	Gift authorship
7	Disputed authorship
8	Falsified or fabricated data
9	Reviewer misconduct
10	Unethical research design or conduct

##### MOST FREQUENT ISSUES:

1	Redundant publication
2	Gift authorship
3	Duplicate submission
4	Plagiarism
5	Undisclosed reviewer conflicts of interest
6	Undisclosed author conflicts of interest
7	Reviewer misconduct
8	Unethical research design or conduct
9	Undisclosed commercial involvement
10	Falsified or fabricated data

## AWARENESS AND RELEVANCE OF COPE to arts, humanities, and social sciences journal editors

### Awareness of COPE

Some survey respondents indicated that they did not know what COPE is and what it does, with 28% of respondents indicating that they were completely unaware of COPE prior to receiving the survey<sup>8</sup>. While 73% of COPE's members feel highly aware of what COPE does, there are a number of misconceptions about COPE's role. Some even indicated, incorrectly, that they believed that COPE had statutory powers.

The first step to supporting arts, humanities, and social sciences editors in the ethical challenges they face in their roles would be to address this lack of exposure. The levels of awareness varied across disciplines and were particularly low among those involved in history and humanities.

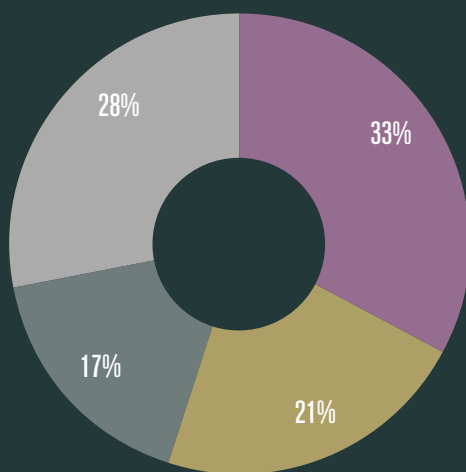
### Usefulness of COPE resources

Guidelines were felt to be particularly useful, with 43% indicating that these were extremely useful.

A lack of awareness of the support package COPE provides (48%) or of COPE itself (22%) was a common reason why respondents did not mention COPE as a source of support. Irrelevance to their role (3%) or discipline (2%) was rarely cited as a cause of non-engagement here, suggesting that COPE's services do cater effectively for the arts, humanities, and social sciences editors that use them.

COPE resources were consulted by 57% of those surveyed and 18% considered them to be an extremely important source.

PRIOR TO RECEIVING THE SURVEY,  
HOW AWARE WERE YOU OF COPE?



Key

High awareness	Low awareness
Moderate awareness	No awareness

Base n=656, all respondents<sup>8</sup>.

Decimal numbers rounded off. Other responses <1% excluded from the chart.

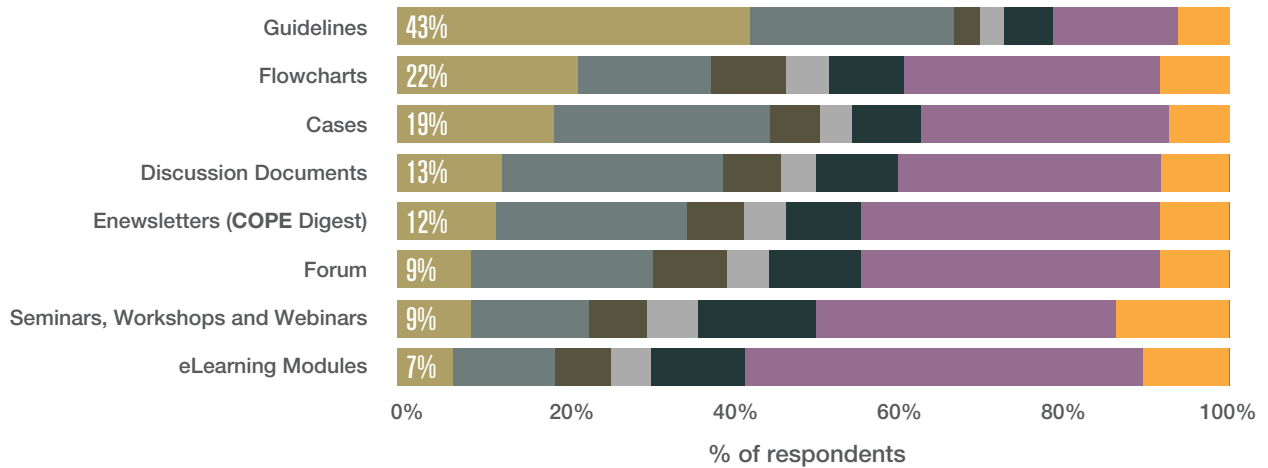
73%

of current COPE members are highly aware of what COPE does vs. 19% of non-members



<sup>8</sup> The question asked here was 'Prior to receiving the survey, how aware were you of COPE?' Respondents were asked to rate this on a scale of 1-10 where 1 is totally unaware and 10 is extremely well aware. 28% of respondents responded with 1 out of 10 to this question. Those responding with 8 or above were said to be 'highly aware' of COPE, a score of 4-7 was said to be 'moderate awareness' and 2 or 3 was 'low awareness'.

### HOW USEFUL DO YOU FIND THE FOLLOWING COPE RESOURCES



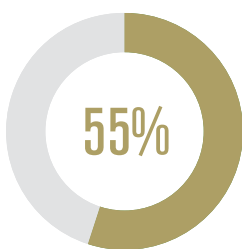
Base n = 350 – only asked of those who were aware of COPE (giving >3 on a scale of 1-10 to the question ‘Prior to receiving the survey, how aware were you of COPE?’)

#### Key

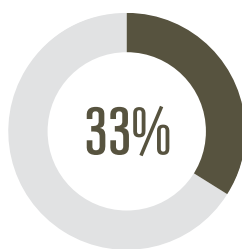


### Relevance of COPE to arts, humanities, and social sciences journal editors

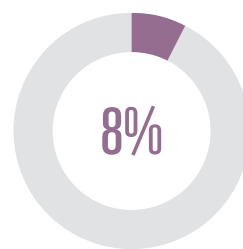
More than half of those who were aware of what COPE does consider its activities **highly relevant**<sup>9</sup> to their role. However, sometimes this perceived relevance was due to their awareness of the importance of ethical issues in general and their commitment to addressing them rather than the specifics of COPE’s support. **Those who knew COPE better perceived it as more relevant**, with those identifying as members significantly more likely to see COPE as highly relevant to their role.



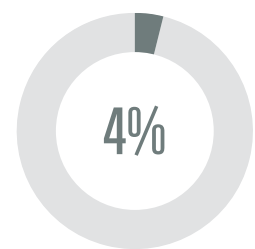
High relevance



Moderate relevance



Low or no relevance



Unsure of relevance

Base n=357 – only asked of those who had some awareness of COPE (3+ on a scale of 1-10)

<sup>9</sup> The question asked here was ‘How relevant are the activities of COPE to your role as an editor of a journal/journals in the arts, humanities, and social sciences? Please answer on a scale from 1 to 10 where 1 is totally irrelevant and 10 is extremely relevant’ An ‘unsure’ option was also offered. Those responding with 8 or above were said to see COPE as having ‘high relevance’, a score of 4-7 was said to indicate ‘moderate relevance’ and a score of 1-3 was interpreted as indicating a view that COPE had ‘low relevance’ to their role.



## KEY SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE DIRECTIONS

### More tailored support on specific issues

Many respondents indicated that they were happy with the resources that COPE already provided. However, respondents suggested that ideally, they would want access to immediate, tailored consultation and advice with a COPE representative as some cases are too complex to be solved through passive resources. Respondents wanted this direct communication channel to be confidential and independent of publisher influence in order to preserve the integrity and impartiality of the advice.

While, as many respondents recognised, this direct one-to-one support may be beyond the means of COPE, there may be possibilities to increase awareness of the usefulness of COPE’s member Forum to address this area of need. All cases submitted to the Forum are anonymised and increasing the number of arts, humanities, and social sciences members aware of, and using the Forum, will make it a more useful resource for the community.

### Managing authors, supporting editors when mediating between conflicting interests, and mentoring

Areas where more support was needed related mostly to guidelines around professional standards, especially on authorship issues and peer review:

Managing authorship challenges	Mediating the politics and logistics of peer review	Mentoring authors and educating new editors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dealing with scholars who accuse others of plagiarising their work</li> <li>Identifying fake submissions</li> <li>Detecting, verifying and dealing with plagiarism</li> <li>Avoiding and responding to self-plagiarism</li> <li>Best practices around multi-author contributions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Handling authors’ responses to feedback</li> <li>Help with clarifying responsibilities around maintaining confidentiality</li> <li>Managing reviewers’ non-response and delays</li> <li>Developing an alternative model of organising peer review</li> <li>Handling conflicting reviews</li> <li>Clarifying what constitutes abuse of the peer review system</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improving attribution standards and minimising ‘salami publishing’</li> <li>Raising awareness of ethical issues among potential authors</li> <li>Helping international authors improve language and writing standards</li> </ul>

The qualitative nature of many arts, humanities, and social sciences research projects led to particular challenges in reviewing and verifying research which COPE resources and activities need to reflect.

### Materials for early career researchers

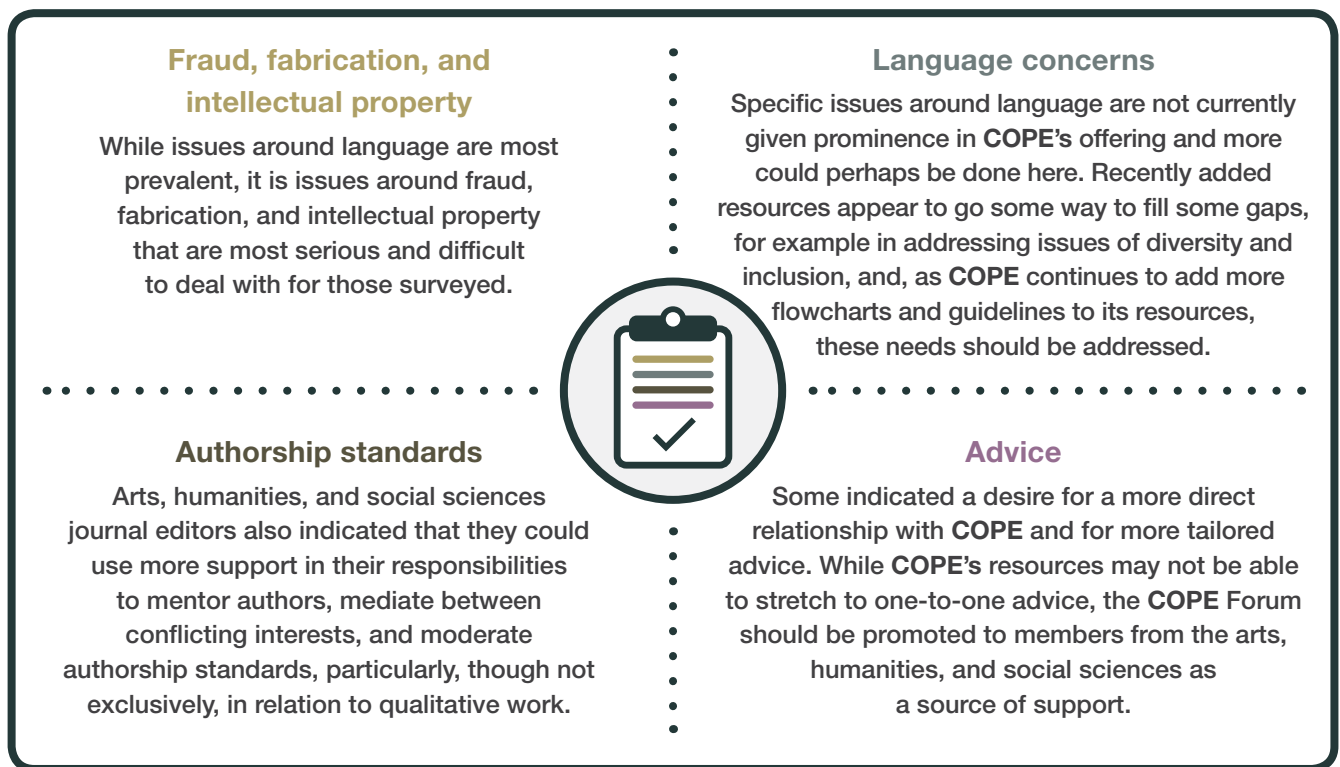
There were also requests that COPE provides more education tailored to early career authors and editors. There may be opportunities for partnerships with universities here – for example, in devising curricula or materials for publication ethics training at all levels. COPE already provides an eLearning programme with 10 modules. There may be opportunities to develop modules for discipline-specific subjects and for early career authors and editors.

## CONCLUSIONS

There are a number of publication ethics issues that arts, humanities, and social sciences journal editors report as being both most serious and prevalent, where **COPE's** resources can be of use, particularly to those less experienced and those who lack the support of a major publisher behind them. Respondents appeared to be aware of the importance of publication ethics issues in general and committed to addressing them. However, current awareness of the specifics of **COPE's** offer to support editors with these issues is often low.

### Perception of COPE

**COPE** appears from this research to be respected by those who know it, with guidelines and flowcharts in particular found to be extremely useful by many, especially those in smaller university presses. In addition, respondents in the arts, humanities, and social sciences appeared largely to recognise the relevance of **COPE** to their activities, though the sample may be biased towards those who understand **COPE** better.



### Next steps

The research outlined here has been a useful first step in understanding publications ethics issues for arts, humanities, and social sciences journal editors. While many publication ethics issues are similar to those experienced by **STM** journal editors, there are some differences in emphasis which **COPE** should respond to. A useful next step might be for a more detailed review of individual **COPE** resources, to establish where adaptations for specific arts, humanities, and social sciences needs are required.

Awareness-raising of all **COPE's** resources is needed, with emphasis on particular groups identified in the research including history and humanities journals and early career researchers.

Further research could focus on engaging with editors in non-English speaking territories and those from disciplines with the lowest current levels of awareness and engagement.

## APPENDICES

### Profile of respondents – online focus groups



**Role** – All respondents were editors working with major publishers, such as **Wiley** or **Routledge**. Seven respondents worked on a voluntary or honorarium basis and three were part of in-house editorial teams. They had varied levels of experience from 0-3 to 21+ years working as a journal editor.

**Subject** – Respondents for the online focus groups specialised in a range of different subject areas, including: Business and Management, Behavioural Sciences, Education, Geography, Leisure and Tourism, Social Sciences, Media, Heritage and Conservation Studies, Philosophy, Information Science and International Relations.







**Geographies** – Respondents were based in UK, USA, Australia, Israel, Cyprus, Norway, India and South Africa.

### How were the disciplines categorised?

Respondents were asked to select the discipline of their journal from an extensive drop-down menu adapted from the **JACS (Joint Academic Coding System)**. These were grouped in eight broader subject groups for analysis, following discussion with **COPE** and reference to **JACS** subject groupings and **Dewey Decimal Classifications**.

SUBJECT		SUBJECT AREA GROUPING			
Race, Ethnicity, Identity	Social Care	<b>SOCIAL STUDIES AND BEHAVIOURAL SCIENCES</b> 			
Criminology	Sport Sciences				
Politics	Psychology and Behavioural Sciences				
Sociology	Geography				
Gender Studies	Leisure and Tourism				
Anthropology					
Development Studies					
Planning and Urban Studies					
Literature	History			<b>HUMANITIES</b> 	
Language and Linguistics	Philosophy				
Religion	Archaeology				
Heritage and Conservation Studies					



### APPENDICES

SUBJECT	SUBJECT AREA GROUPING	
Visual Art Performance Studies Music Area Studies	ARTS	
Education	EDUCATION	
Law	LAW	
Business and Management International Relations Strategic Studies Finance and Economics	ECONOMICS, FINANCE, BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY	
Library and Information Science Media, Communication and Cultural Studies	INFORMATION SCIENCES	
Multi- and Interdisciplinary (across all arts, humanities, and social sciences subjects)	MULTI- AND INTERDISCIPLINARY	

## APPENDICES



## Issues by broad subject area

Respondents were asked to select the seriousness, frequency and prevalence of publication ethics issues from a drop-down list, as well as identifying which they felt least confident dealing with. For each question they were asked to select multiple issues. The figures in the table show the total number of times issues were selected by respondents in each of the eight categories.

Category (n in brackets)	Most serious (Choose a maximum of five)	Most widespread (Tick as many as apply)	Most frequent (Choose a maximum of five)	Least confident in dealing with (Choose a maximum of five)
<b>ARTS (66)</b> 	Detecting plagiarism and poor attribution standards (36)	Issues around the way authors receive and respond to criticism (43)	Issues around the way authors receive and respond to criticism (22)	Data and/or image fabrication issues (17)
	Intellectual property and copyright issues (28)	Recognising and dealing with bias in reviewer comments (39)	Detecting plagiarism and poor attribution standards (21)	Dealing with different cultural or international publication issues (14)
	Fraudulent submissions (25)	Addressing language and writing barriers while remaining inclusive (39)	Issues handling responses from reviewers to authors (17) Recognising and dealing with bias in reviewer comments (17)	Addressing language and writing barriers while remaining inclusive (13) Fraudulent submissions (13) Salami publishing (13)
<b>BUSINESS, FINANCE AND ECONOMICS (97)</b> 	Detecting plagiarism and poor attribution standards (62)	Detecting plagiarism and poor attribution standards (77)	Addressing language and writing barriers while remaining inclusive (44)	Fraudulent submissions (32)
	Fraudulent submissions (46)	Issues of self-plagiarism (63)	Detecting plagiarism and poor attribution standards (44)	Data and/or image fabrication (25)
	Issues of self-plagiarism (28)	Addressing language and writing barriers while remaining inclusive (62)	Issues of self-plagiarism (28)	Issues of self-plagiarism (19)

Note: Respondents were able to indicate more than one subject and are therefore sometimes in more than one broad subject area.



## APPENDICES

Category (n in brackets)	Most serious (Choose a maximum of five)	Most widespread (Tick as many as apply)	Most frequent (Choose a maximum of five)	Least confident in dealing with (Choose a maximum of five)
<b>EDUCATION (133)</b> 	Detecting plagiarism and poor attribution standards (78)	Addressing language and writing barriers (91)	Addressing language and writing barriers while remaining inclusive (61)	Data and/or image fabrication issues (39)
	Fraudulent submissions (55)	Detecting plagiarism and poor attribution standards (79)	Issues around the way authors receive and respond to criticism (39)	Intellectual property and copyright issues (34)
	Data and/or image fabrication (42)	Recognising and dealing with bias in reviewer comments (79)	Detecting plagiarism and poor attribution standards (36)	Fraudulent submissions (27)
<b>HUMANITIES (300)</b> 	Detecting plagiarism and poor attribution standards (166)	Addressing language and writing barriers while remaining inclusive (116)	Addressing language and writing barriers while remaining inclusive (193)	Data and/or image fabrication (66)
	Fraudulent submissions (131)	Issues around the way authors receive and respond to criticism (176)	Issues around the way authors receive and respond to criticism (86)	Intellectual property and copyright issues (62)
	Intellectual property and copyright issues (91)	Recognising and dealing with bias in reviewer comments (171)	Detecting plagiarism and poor attribution standards (84)	Fraudulent submissions (61)

Note: Respondents were able to indicate more than one subject and are therefore sometimes in more than one broad subject area.



## APPENDICES

### Issues by broad subject area (continued)

Category (n in brackets)	Most serious (Choose a maximum of five)	Most widespread (Tick as many as apply)	Most frequent (Choose a maximum of five)	Least confident in dealing with (Choose a maximum of five)
<p><b>LAW (34)</b></p> 	Detecting plagiarism and poor attribution standards (13)	Addressing language and writing barriers while remaining inclusive (91)	Addressing language and writing barriers while remaining inclusive (13)	Addressing language and writing barriers while remaining inclusive (8)  Intellectual property and copyright issues (8)
	Fraudulent submissions (11)	Detecting plagiarism and poor attribution standards (77)	Difficulties in upholding anonymity of authors/reviewers during peer review (11)	
	Potential conflict of interest between authors and reviewers (10)  Recognising and dealing with bias in review comments (10)	Recognising and dealing with bias in reviewer comments (76)	Issues around the way authors receive and respond to criticism (6)  Recognising and dealing with bias in reviewer comments (6)	Detecting plagiarism and poor attribution standards (7)  Querying data reproducibility (7)
<p><b>MULTI- AND INTERDISCIPLINARY (130)</b></p> 	Detecting plagiarism and poor attribution standards (83)	Addressing language and writing barriers while remaining inclusive (91)	Addressing language and writing barriers while remaining inclusive (60)	Fraudulent submissions (35)
	Fraudulent submissions (60)	Detecting plagiarism and poor attribution standards (79)	Issues around the way authors receive and respond to criticism (40)	Data and/or image fabrication (31)
	Data and image fabrication (42)	Recognising and dealing with bias in reviewer comments (79)	Detecting plagiarism and poor attribution standards (39)	Intellectual property and copyright issues (30)

Note: Respondents were able to indicate more than one subject and are therefore sometimes in more than one broad subject area.

## APPENDICES

Category (n in brackets)	Most serious (Choose a maximum of five)	Most widespread (Tick as many as apply)	Most frequent (Choose a maximum of five)	Least confident in dealing with (Choose a maximum of five)
<b>LIBRARIES AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (22)</b> 	Fraudulent submissions (12)	Addressing language and writing barriers while remaining inclusive (13)	Addressing language and writing barriers while remaining inclusive (4) Issues around the way authors receive and respond to criticism (4) Detecting plagiarism and poor attribution standards (4)	Responding to concerns about so-called controversial research topics/authors/communities/methods (9)
	Data and/or image fabrication issues (11)	Predatory publishing (13)	Dealing with post-publication corrections and retractions (4)	Data and/or image fabrication issues (7)
	Detecting plagiarism and poor attribution standards (8) Predatory publishing (8)	Issues around the way authors receive and respond to criticism (12)	Difficulties in upholding anonymity of authors/reviewers during peer review (4)	Querying data reproducibility (6) Assuring fair representation of new voices and diverse perspectives (6)
<b>SOCIAL SCIENCES (309)</b> 	Detecting plagiarism and poor attribution standards (174)	Addressing language and writing barriers while remaining inclusive (194)	Addressing language and writing barriers while remaining inclusive (129)	Intellectual property and copyright issues (72)
	Fraudulent submissions (134)	Detecting plagiarism and poor attribution standards (180)	Issues around the way authors receive and respond to criticism (90)	Data and/or image fabrication issues (68)
	Data and image fabrication (97)	Issues around the way authors receive and respond to criticism (174)	Detecting plagiarism and poor attribution standards (84)	Fraudulent submissions (66)

Note: Respondents were able to indicate more than one subject and are therefore sometimes in more than one broad subject area.



## APPENDICES

COPE guidelines, discussion documents and flowcharts currently available to support editors and publishers with some of the issues raised by respondents.



### ALLEGATIONS OF MISCONDUCT



- Responding to Anonymous Whistleblowers  
<https://bit.ly/2MKfBEP>
- Responding to Whistleblowers – Concerns raised via social media  
<https://bit.ly/2ynxOi0>
- Responding to Whistleblowers – Concerns raised directly  
<https://bit.ly/2MJ6ELI>

### AUTHORSHIP AND CONTRIBUTORSHIP



- Adding or Removing an Author Before or After Publication  
<https://bit.ly/2NFUsuT>  
<https://bit.ly/2Zy9vJt>  
<https://bit.ly/2PkX9oa>  
<https://bit.ly/2MITFK8>
- How to Recognise Potential Authorship Problems  
<https://bit.ly/346j85H>
- Suspected Ghost, Guest or Gift Authorship  
<https://bit.ly/2NEfwSQ>
- What Constitutes Authorship?  
<https://bit.ly/2yCtCvj>

### COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS



- Addressing Ethics Complaints from Complainants who Submit Multiple Issues  
<https://bit.ly/2ZvrG2B>

## APPENDICES



## CONFLICTS OF INTEREST/COMPETING INTERESTS



- Handling Competing Interests  
<https://bit.ly/2LeDcua>
- What to do if a Reviewer Suspects Undisclosed Conflict of Interest in a Submitted Manuscript  
<https://bit.ly/2MJP22G>
- What to do if a Reader Suspects Undisclosed Conflict of Interest in a Published Article  
<https://bit.ly/2Zw8wh4>

## DATA AND REPRODUCIBILITY



- Suspected Fabricated Data in a Submitted Manuscript  
<https://bit.ly/2ZssTHS>
- Suspected Fabricated Data in a Published Manuscript  
<https://bit.ly/2ZiN2F0>

## ETHICAL OVERSIGHT



- Best Practice for Thesis Publishing  
<https://bit.ly/2Uew6Kj>
- Citation Manipulation  
<https://bit.ly/2ZoxAal>
- Cooperation between Research Institutions and Journals on Research Integrity Cases: Guidance COPE  
<https://bit.ly/2Zv1YAh>
- COPE Forum 11 February 2019:  
Diversity and Inclusion in Research Publishing  
<https://bit.ly/2zuKVyQ>

## APPENDICES



## ETHICAL OVERSIGHT (CONT.)



- Sharing of Information Among Editors-in-Chief Regarding Possible Misconduct  
<https://bit.ly/30loxhh>
- What to do if you Suspect an Ethical Problem  
<https://bit.ly/2ZiRjly>

## INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY



- How Should Editors Respond to Plagiarism?  
<https://bit.ly/2Zop7US>
- Suspected Plagiarism in a Submitted Manuscript  
<https://bit.ly/2MvdTpY>
- Suspected Plagiarism in a Published Manuscript  
<https://bit.ly/2GGKpSi>
- Text Recycling Guidelines for Editors  
<https://bit.ly/2FyBu66>

## JOURNAL MANAGEMENT



- A Short Guide to Ethical Editing for New Editors  
<https://bit.ly/2KqwLmg>
- COPE Forum 5 November 2018: Predatory Publishing (new discussion document due September 2019)  
<https://bit.ly/2zuY5vs>
- General Approach to Publication Ethics for the Editorial Office  
<https://bit.ly/2F8e0Wp>
- Guidelines for Managing the Relationships between Society-owned Journals, Their Society, and Publishers  
<https://bit.ly/2JItbE7>
- Preprints  
<https://bit.ly/2ND3TLL>

## APPENDICES



## PEER REVIEW PROCESSES



- Ethical Guidelines for Peer Reviewers (English version)  
<https://bit.ly/2xkGTcq>
- How to Spot Potential Manipulation of the Peer Review Process  
<https://bit.ly/2HuWBWu>
- What to Consider when asked to Peer Review a Manuscript  
<https://bit.ly/2L4g2b1>
- What to do if you Suspect a Reviewer has Appropriated an Author's Idea or Data  
<https://bit.ly/2zwFRKd>

## POST-PUBLICATION DISCUSSIONS AND CORRECTIONS



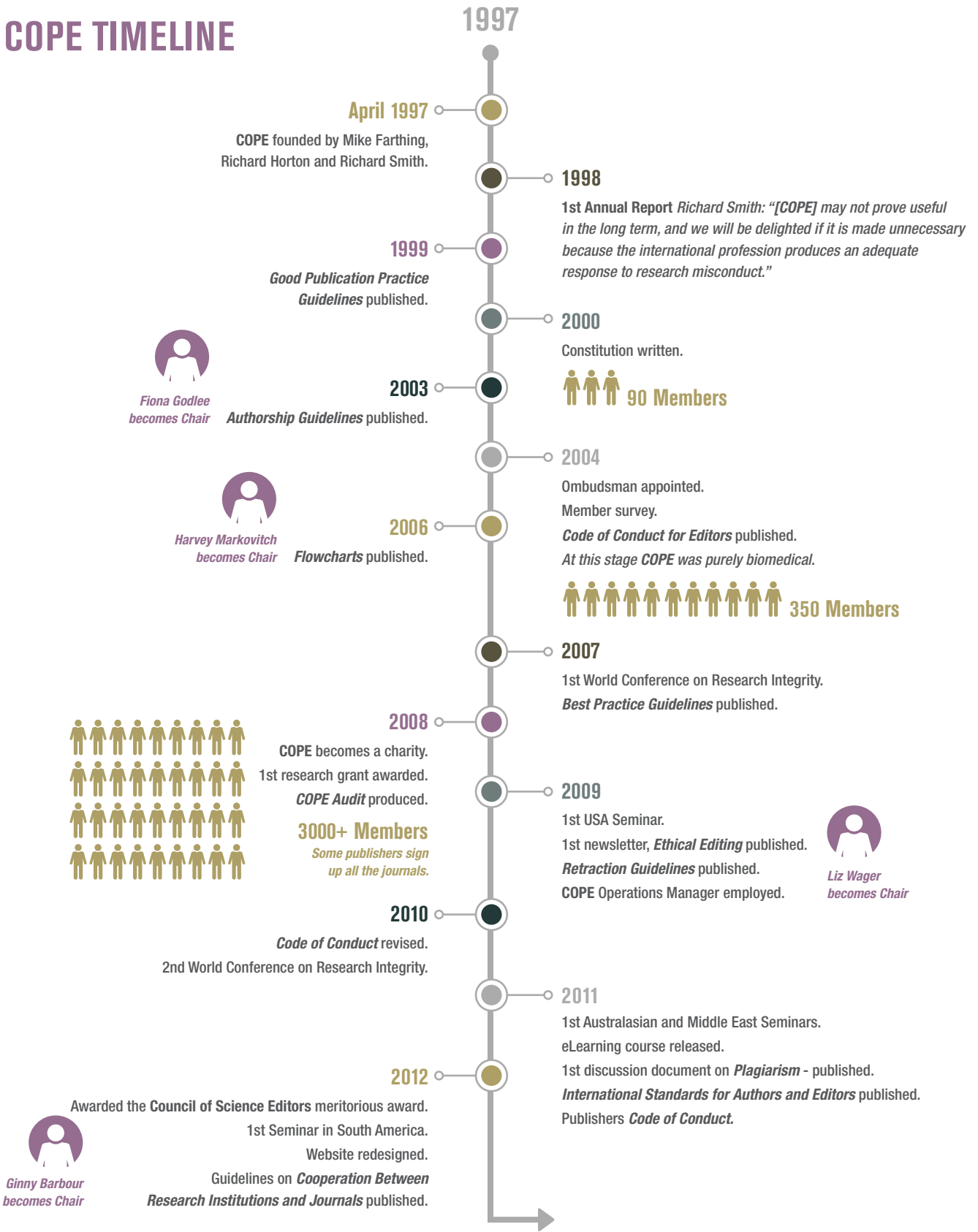
- Guidelines for Retracting Articles  
<https://bit.ly/2TM4Ros>
- What to do if you Suspect Image Manipulation in a Published Article  
<https://bit.ly/2L3RRt9>
- Suspected Redundant Publication in a Published Manuscript  
<https://bit.ly/34bdwHd>

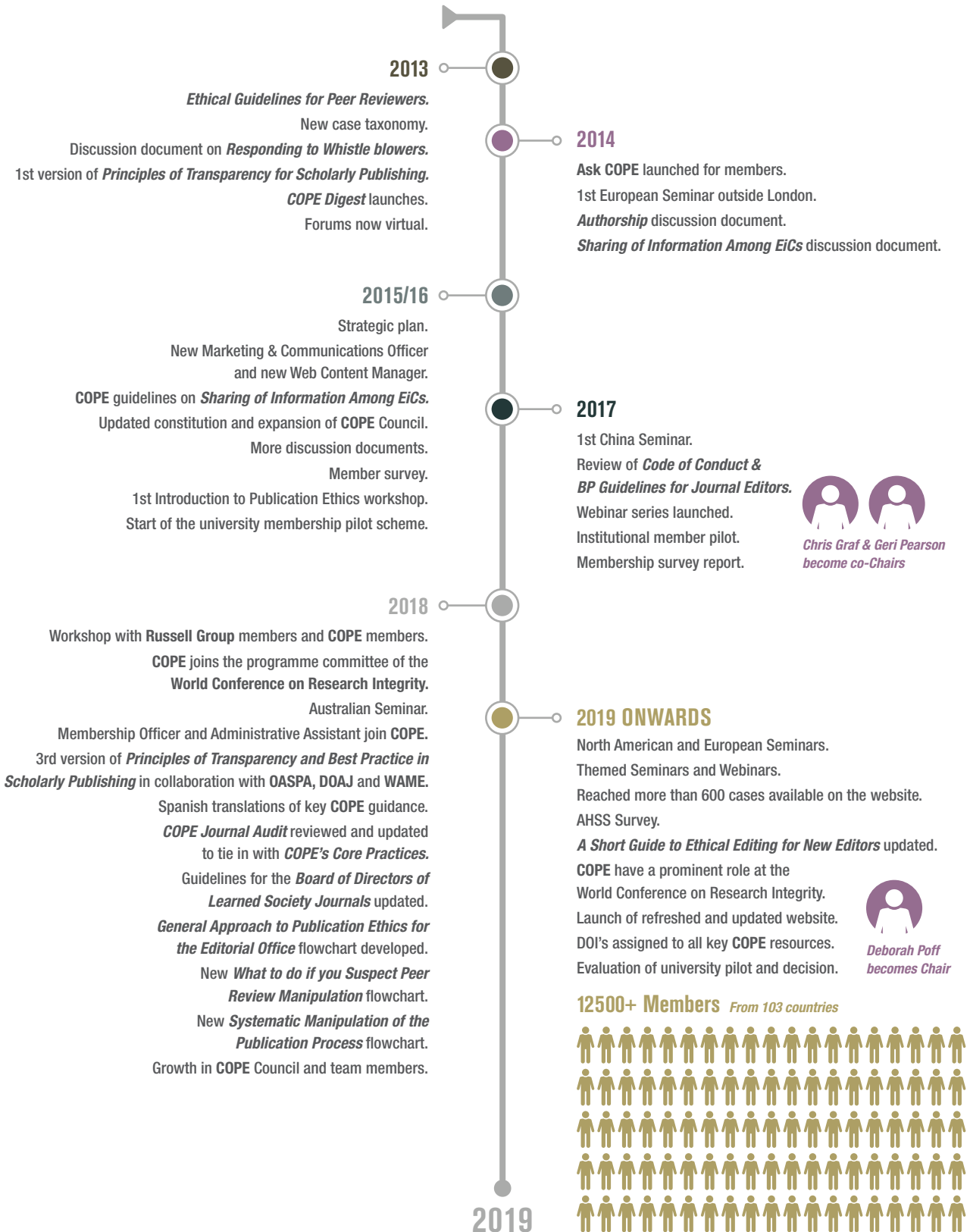
## BEST PRACTICES IN SCHOLARLY PUBLISHING



- COPE's Core Practices  
<https://bit.ly/2puBdb4>
- Principles of Transparency and Best Practice in Scholarly Publishing  
<https://bit.ly/2ENITwu>
- COPE Journal Audit (members only)  
<https://bit.ly/2SFVkQA>

# COPE TIMELINE





## FEEDBACK

*This study is a first step in understanding publications ethics issues for arts, humanities, and social sciences journal editors. We would be keen to receive your comments to help us continue our work on the issues raised here.*

*Please submit your feedback here:*

*<https://publicationethics.org/ahss-research-findings-your-feedback>*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*COPE would like to thank Routledge (part of the Taylor & Francis Group) for its invaluable support in conducting this research study.*

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*Finally, many thanks to all those who took part in the online groups or responded to the survey. Your help has been invaluable.*







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