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# Open-access row prompts editorial board of Elsevier journal to resign

The board of the *Journal of Informetrics* has launched a new open-access publication.

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The editorial board of an influential scientometrics journal – the *Journal of Informetrics* – has resigned in protest over the open-access policies of its publisher, Elsevier, and launched a competing publication.

The board told *Nature* that given the journal's subject matter – the assessment and dissemination of science – it felt it needed to be at the forefront of open publishing practices, which it says includes making bibliographic references freely available for analysis and reuse, and being open access and owned by the community.

“It's essential that this work be made openly available and that the communication of the research be managed by the community,” says Cassidy Sugimoto, an information scientist at Indiana University Bloomington and a resigning board member.

Board members also wanted Elsevier to lower the journal's article-publishing charges for authors and participate in the Initiative for Open Citations – a project aiming to free up citation data for study.

Elsevier declined to meet those demands. In a letter replying to the editorial board's requests on 9 October, it says that the ownership of the journal is not negotiable, and that its fees are set at an appropriate rate.

The *Journal of Informetrics (JOI)* typically charges researchers and institutions to access its content, but authors submitting to the journal can choose to make their paper freely available by paying a fee of US\$1,800, plus tax (a model known as hybrid open access).

The *JOI* editorial board, comprising 27 members and 2 associate editors, sent a joint resignation letter to Elsevier on 10 January.

## Community management

“We deeply regret the board’s decision to resign,” an Elsevier spokesperson told *Nature*. “Since hearing of their concerns, we have explained our position and made a number of concrete proposals to attempt to bridge our differences.” Elsevier will appoint new editorial board members, the spokesperson confirmed.

In its 9 October letter, Elsevier states that it already makes basic metadata for citation records available through its database Scopus, but that the publisher cannot make all of the related data available for free, because it says that it has added value to such data using its citation extraction technology.

“Elsevier needs to be able to continue investing in ways that add value to the research process, which it cannot do if it gives this value away for free,” it says.

## Fresh start

On 14 January, the same researchers launched a free-to-read journal called *Quantitative Science Studies (QSS)*, which has the same editorial board and is published by MIT Press of Cambridge, Massachusetts, under the banner of the International Society for Scientometrics and Informetrics (ISSI).

The researchers have secured independent funding to set up *QSS* and will adopt open-access and transparency guidelines, and they say that this arrangement means they can stop publishing with MIT Press if the relationship ever violates their principles.

Sugimoto, who is also the president of ISSI, says that the journal’s ‘flip’ to open access was inspired by a similar move in 2015 by the editorial board members of the linguistics journal *Lingua* – another Elsevier title – who then formed the open-access journal *Glossa*.

The German National Library of Science and Technology in Hanover has invested more than €100,000 (US\$115,000) to waive article-processing charges for authors submitting to *QSS* in the

next three years, and to assist with other journal costs. The journal's publication fee is \$600 per paper for ISSI members and \$800 for non-members.

## Open relationship

Johan Rooryck, the president of the Fair Open Access Alliance, which helped *QSS* to secure funding for the transition, says: "What we are doing today with the *Journal of Informetrics* is something we want to do with any journal that is interested if we can find funding."

"What Elsevier keeps in this case is just the name, but it's an empty shell," says Vincent Larivière, an information scientist at the University of Montreal, Canada, who is the interim editor-in-chief of *QSS* and a former *JOI* associate editor. "Researchers can decide whether to use that shell or not, but that shell becomes quite expensive at some point."

Sugimoto says that she and her colleagues will discourage researchers from submitting papers to *JOI*.

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