Promoting integrity in research publication
Introduction

COPE has over 11,000 members worldwide from Australia to Zimbabwe as well as from all academic fields. We provide advice to editors, publishers and increasingly authors, reviewers and institutions. COPE is committed to providing leadership in thinking in publication ethics; practical resources to educate and support its members; as well as a neutral, professional voice in the wider community.

COPE has identified particular issues from member research conducted late in 2015 as well as developments in publication ethics more widely, to produce our strategic plan. We used an independent market research consultancy to conduct the research, who undertook qualitative interviews with a small sample group and an online quantitative survey emailed to all members.

In this report we summarise the key issues with details of how COPE is, or intends to, respond to the concerns to improve the experience of members and all who are involved in publication ethics issues.

We have listened to our members and developed our 2016-2018 initiatives to improve engagement with members and ensure COPE remains at the forefront of publication ethics

Dr Virginia Barbour, Chair
Overall performance of COPE is strong

COPE is viewed positively by the majority of its members and users who responded to our survey:

- 85% see COPE as a **credible authority** in publication ethics
- 82% say COPE is **fair and objective** in considering ethics issues
- 78% regard COPE as a **leading voice that sets the agenda** in publication ethics

Our research among publishers has also found a strong perception of COPE as a leading voice in publication ethics and a valuable resource in assisting with issues and case handling.

Use of COPE

Our research has found that Publishers use COPE membership as a kite mark to demonstrate high ethical standards in scholarly publications, and turn to COPE when they need assistance in cases that cannot be resolved internally. The efficacy of COPE here is assured, as our research finds that the more COPE is used, particularly for case handling, the more positive the perception of COPE.

- 89% rated COPE overall as ‘Excellent’, ‘Very good’ or ‘Good’
- 81% would recommend COPE to peers and colleagues
- 95% rate COPE’s content and information as ‘Excellent’, ‘Very good’ or ‘Good’
- 92% rate COPE’s range of information and services as ‘Excellent’, ‘Very good’ or ‘Good’
- 85% say they will turn to COPE for their next publication ethics issue
Overall satisfaction measures - service aspects

Although eLearning is the least utilised service among those measured it attracts the highest overall satisfaction ratings. Query handling and case handling are important aspects of service which also score highly.

- **We are improving our communication to members through email, website and face-to-face meetings/workshops**
- **We continue to develop and update resources**
- **We have developed a new member guide to COPE resources**
- **We are working to improve usability of our website**

The more COPE’s services and products are used, the more satisfied and loyal members and users become.
Our research confirms that COPE’s case handling service remains at the heart of its role. For those rare occasions when advice is needed on a particular case, those who turn to COPE tend to become more closely involved with COPE and their overall satisfaction with COPE rises substantially too.

85% have handled a publication ethics issue in the past three years

68% of cases were handled alone or with the help of a colleague

78% of those who have submitted a case to COPE rated their overall satisfaction with Case Handling as ‘Excellent’ or ‘Very good’

Our research revealed a need for speedier resolution of cases and clearer explanation of the case handling process at the outset and during the ‘lifetime’ of a case.

✔ We have cut down the turn-around time from submission to response to 5-7 days

Number of cases seen annually by respondents to our research

- Medicine and Veterinary Science: 121
- Life Sciences: 45
- Other Sciences: 27
- Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences: 24
- Engineering, Maths and Technology: 18
- Economics, Finance, Business and Industry: 15
Only one in five of survey respondents hold the view that COPE pays sufficient attention to social sciences and humanities journals.

Only one in five of those in the arts, humanities and social sciences cite COPE as their first port of call for publication ethics issues. This compares to one in three among the medical and life science fields.

We recognise that our existing guidelines and case studies may not always be relevant where ethical decisions are less clear-cut and perhaps more reliant on judgement and a case-specific analysis. This is an important issue for COPE and therefore we are taking the following steps to ensure greater inclusivity across the full range of academic disciplines:

- We now have a higher representation on COPE Council of those in non-scientific and technical fields and are working to increase that further.
- We are working on ensuring our resources meet the needs of arts, humanities and social sciences.
- We are reviewing resources to support specific disciplines that are currently under-represented.
An important part of our research was to identify and confirm what members and publishers think are the most pressing issues in publication ethics today. We found that a lack of training and education in publication ethics is seen as the most important current issue, followed by the same in research ethics.

Publishers in particular highlighted a desire for COPE to become more proactive in bringing potential issues to their attention, for example, alerts to new ethical issues and the production of guidelines and flowcharts for dealing with them. There is little appetite for the organisation to become an arbiter, intermediary or regulator.

**Trends in publication ethics**

We are working collaboratively with COPE Council and members to identify emerging issues and guidance.

**Issues of importance in publication ethics today (multi-choice)**

Lack of training and education in publication ethics is seen as the most important current issue, followed by that in research ethics. The international angle features highly as a perceived source of errors in publication ethics.

- **Lack of training and education in publication ethics among authors/reviewers**: 72%
- **Lack of training and education in research ethics among authors/reviewers**: 62%
- **Lack of understanding about the publication ethics standards of international journals**: 59%
- **Increase in plagiarism**: 55%
- **There are not enough peer reviewers**: 50%
- **Increase in online publication**: 43%
- **Too many papers being submitted to journals**: 36%
- **Decline in quality of papers submitted**: 34%
A key challenge highlighted by our research is the application of global ethical standards where regional and cultural differences need to be recognised. These differences may arise for a number of reasons, for example:

Cultural differences that challenge ‘traditional Western’ views eg ‘gifting’ authorship to others.

Differing levels of:
• publication ethics education
• resources, namely a shortage of reviewers in some regions

Papers submitted for review may be rejected at a higher rate in regions where cultural differences between the author and journal exist and/or where ethics training and resource constraints are heightened. Coupled with a generally observed global trend in ‘pressure to publish’, there is a clear need for action and assistance.

To foster greater awareness and understanding of cultural differences, COPE is taking the following steps:

✔ We intend to establish in-country “champions” of publication ethics in regions that are still developing their publication ethics infrastructure and where cultural issues play a part in publishing

✔ We are working on providing greater support and guidance on a regional basis

✔ We have a greater representation of Council members across the globe
Geographical diversity of Trustee and Council Members

Key:
- Chair
- Co-Vice-Chair
- Secretary
- Treasurer
- Council Member
- Trustee

1. London, UK
2. Lausanne, Switzerland
3. British Columbia, Canada
4. New York, USA
5. Washington DC, USA
6. Tehran, Iran
7. Peshawar, Pakistan
8. Tokyo, Japan
9. Chile
10. Beijing, China
11. Madrid, Spain
12. Arizona, USA
13. Shanghai, China
15. Zoe Mullan
16. Michael Wise
17. Allison Taylor
18. Heather Tierney
19. Helena Wang
20. Trevor Lane
21. Adrian Ziderman
22. Ira del Rio
23. Nancy Chescher
24. Rachel Safer
25. Jason Hu
26. Deborah Kahn
27. Daniel Kulp
28. Sally Weatherall
29. Vienne Bachelet
30. Patrick Barron
31. Mirjam Curno
32. Tara Heke
33. Muhammad Abdollahi
34. Elizabeth Moylan
35. Chris Graf
36. Geraldine Pearson
37. Charon Pfoertnert
38. Deborah Poff
39. Mohammad Abolhadi
40. David Ginley
While COPE will continue to provide a credible, fair and objective voice in upholding ethical standards, there is recognition that more can be done to be more inclusive in formulating and communicating guidance and expertise.

We have a growing number of enquiries from academic institutions and other key bodies who wish to develop publication ethics education among their researchers and authors. This complements our current members’ feedback that we promote publication ethics principles at ‘grass roots’.

COPE has launched a pilot initiative with academic institutions to develop a suite of educational resources aimed at the researcher, author and reviewer.
Global accessibility of COPE online forums

Our regular online Forums where we discuss ethics cases and provide advice on members’ cases are popular with our most active members.

75% of those who have attended our online Forums rate them as ‘Excellent’ or ‘Very good’

However, 62% rate the timing of these forums as ‘Excellent’ or ‘Very good’ and given their importance in communicating the latest practical decisions in publication ethics we are committed to improving on this.

✔ We now hold our online Forums twice in one day to make them more globally accessible

✔ We are also working on raising awareness of the Forums among Editors-in-Chief

✔ We now include Ask Me Anything sessions to discuss general issues

Forums are held twice in one day
Our range of guidance information and educational resources is very popular, however we want to do more to ensure that we reach the widest possible audience, including publishing staff at all levels, journal editors, authors and reviewers.

Future service preferences (respondents selected up to 3 items)

- Guidelines for Research Ethics: 63%
- Education in publication ethics for university students: 53%
- More flow charts to help with publication ethics decisions: 40%
- Online live-streaming of seminars: 24%
- Funding more research into publication ethics: 22%
- Accreditation for eLearning modules: 19%
- More in-person seminars and workshops: 13%
- More materials translated into different languages: 13%
- Social events and networking with other COPE members: 10%

We are taking wide-ranging action to update our range of resources and encourage their use.

- ✔ We now have a content plan to raise awareness of COPE resources and to engage in the publication ethics debate across media
- ✔ We are revising our flowcharts and guidelines and developing new resources to further support our members
- ✔ We now liaise with a named Ethics Specialist at publishers to help us reach out to Editors-in-Chief

Future education and training format preferences

- Online eLearning courses: 53%
- Educational webinars (online seminars): 42%
- eBooks: 31%
- Online discussion forums: 27%
- Podcasts (audio seminars): 20%
The COPE Digest newsletter enjoys wide readership, with 90% of readers using it to keep up to date on publication ethics. The majority of members want to receive our newsletter each month (62%), but our research shows we needed to increase our relevance to currently under-represented disciplines and improve ease of navigation.

Why read COPE Digest?

- 90% to keep up to date on publication ethics
- 45% read about ethics cases
- 37% to find out about COPE events

✅ Our Newsletter has been re-designed to focus on the issues that matter most to our readers, and is hopefully easier to navigate

Although an impressive 60% of respondents rated the COPE website as ‘Excellent’ or ‘Very good’ our research revealed the necessity of further improvements.

Specifically, our research found that to be most effective, the COPE website needs to have a clearer layout and design, with comprehensive and lucid articles.

✅ A research project is underway to understand needs and improve the usability and content of our website

✅ We have recruited staff to develop our online communications and website usability
Satisfaction with information products

Flowcharts are the most valued information products, followed by all COPE guidelines.

Flow charts to help with ethics decisions (315)

COPE (general) guidelines (272)

International standards for editors and authors (292)

Research into publication ethics topics (122)

Discussion Documents (152)

Database of past ethics cases (241)

Sample letters (111)

COPE Audit (33)

KEY

- Excellent
- Very Good
- Good
- Fair
- Poor

Base: All who have ever used/accesed with an opinion ( )
Key changes we have made as a result of our research include a programme of direct engagement with academic institutions, changes to our website to improve navigation, more timely online Forums and more which we reflect in our Strategic Plan link. The Strategic Plan has been formed following a period of consultation with the Trustees, COPE Council and feedback from our members through this research.

Further information

COPE Strategic Plan 2016-2018

COPE Annual Trustees Report
http://publicationethics.org/about/trustees-reports-and-financial-statements

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