

# Strategic Report

2020

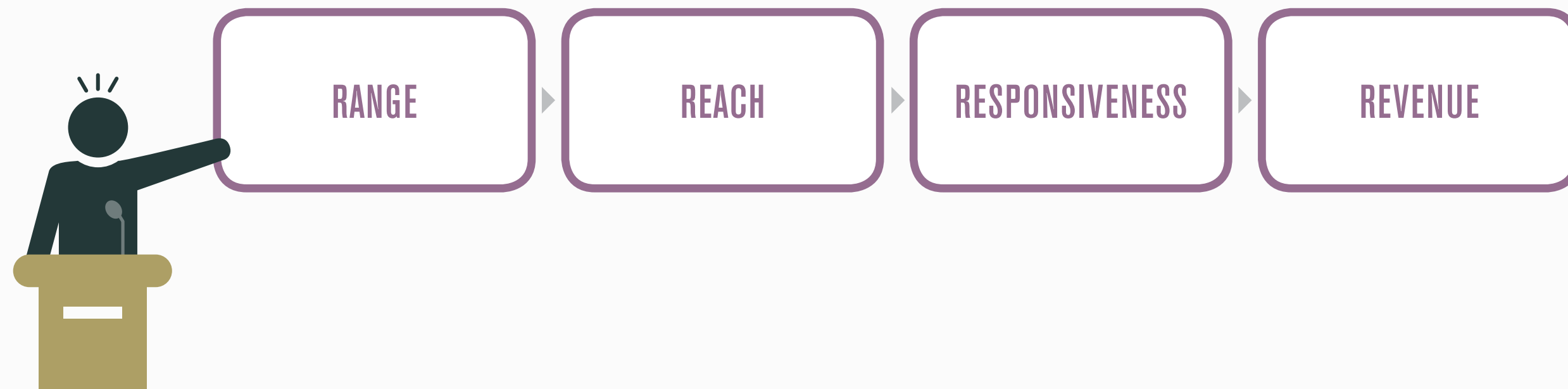
[publicationethics.org](https://publicationethics.org)

## INTRODUCTION

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**COPE Council held a strategic meeting in September 2019 and discussed the direction that COPE should take for the next strategic period (2020-2023).**

Based on formal research of our members and the environment we operate in, we agreed that we needed to do more to **REACH** out to our existing members, as well as attract new members in disciplines and regions that are under represented in the **COPE** membership; increase the **RANGE** of our resources to meet the needs of existing and new members, in particular new University members and producers of products such as books and conference proceedings; be more **RESPONSIVE** to ethical issues as they arise, helping to support and advise our members quickly; and do more to secure the financial stability of **COPE** by establishing more sources of **REVENUE** by 2023.



## INTRODUCTION

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When making these plans for **COPE** at the end of 2019, none of us could have foreseen the global pandemic that was to come in 2020. As it spread across the globe, with many national lockdowns, it had an impact on many aspects for everyone associated with **COPE**: our team of employed and freelance staff; volunteer Trustees and Council; **COPE** members; collaborators and partners. Childcare responsibilities, health concerns, additional work responsibilities, ‘zoom fatigue’ as all meetings and teaching moved online, and the general anxiety and worry, has seen us all stretched beyond measure.

Nonetheless, as a virtual organisation, **COPE** already had good systems in place to continue to operate ‘business as usual’ as much as possible and, although some of the activities we had intended for 2020 were cancelled, postponed, or have been slower to materialise owing to the extra pressures on resources as described above, we have continued to provide support and advice to our members—which is our core remit. We have also continued to work on developing new or updating existing resources; provided new online education opportunities via

virtual workshops; and built strong foundations ‘behind the scenes’ across our website and throughout many of our processes and procedures. All of this has put the strategic building blocks in place to enable us to forge ahead in 2021 and beyond.

It is a testament to the commitment of the volunteer and employed team at **COPE** that we achieved as much as we did in difficult circumstances. Highlighted below is some of the work that we undertook during 2020: both member facing activity and internal work that have enabled us to put building blocks in place for even more activity in 2021.

We thank our Trustees and Council Members for all the work they continue to do, as volunteers, in such challenging times. We also thank our fantastic team: Linda Gough, Sarah Gillmore, Bonnie Jacobs, Christina McGuire, Sabah Moran, Iratxe Puebla, David Summers and Cynthia Clerk. They have worked tirelessly and with great commitment to continue to support and drive forward the activities of **COPE** throughout 2020, while juggling many of the additional responsibilities described earlier.

**Thank you.**

## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE: RANGE

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We will extend the range of our resources to meet the needs of all members, irrespective of discipline, and develop new resources to meet the needs of universities and producers of non-journal scholarly products.

**RANGE**

## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE: RANGE

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**A number of initiatives have taken place this year to extend the range of our resources.**

### University membership

One of **COPE**'s main initiatives of the next strategic period is opening membership to universities and research institutions. **COPE** Trustees and Council Members, Charon Pierson (past **COPE** Officer and Trustee), Kelly Cobey from the University of Ottawa, and Cary Moskowitz and David Hansen from Duke University met to determine the publication ethics resource needs of universities and the type of educational material needed. An RFP was circulated and **COPE** is pleased to announce that we will be working with Cambridge University Press to develop this material. We anticipate a first draft of one university resource by the first quarter of 2021, ready for testing. **COPE** is also in the process of developing the framework to enable us to fully implement university membership within **COPE**. [#universities](#)

### Book publishing and producers of non-journal scholarly products

To review the needs of producers of books and conference proceedings, **COPE** Trustees and Council Members, with external members from Cambridge University Press, Springer Nature, and Ubiquity Press, have met to review how best we can support the needs of these products. Our first step towards this will be to hold a Forum discussion on 23 March 2021 to discuss the support and guidance needs of book publishers [#books](#)

## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE: RANGE

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### COPE resources

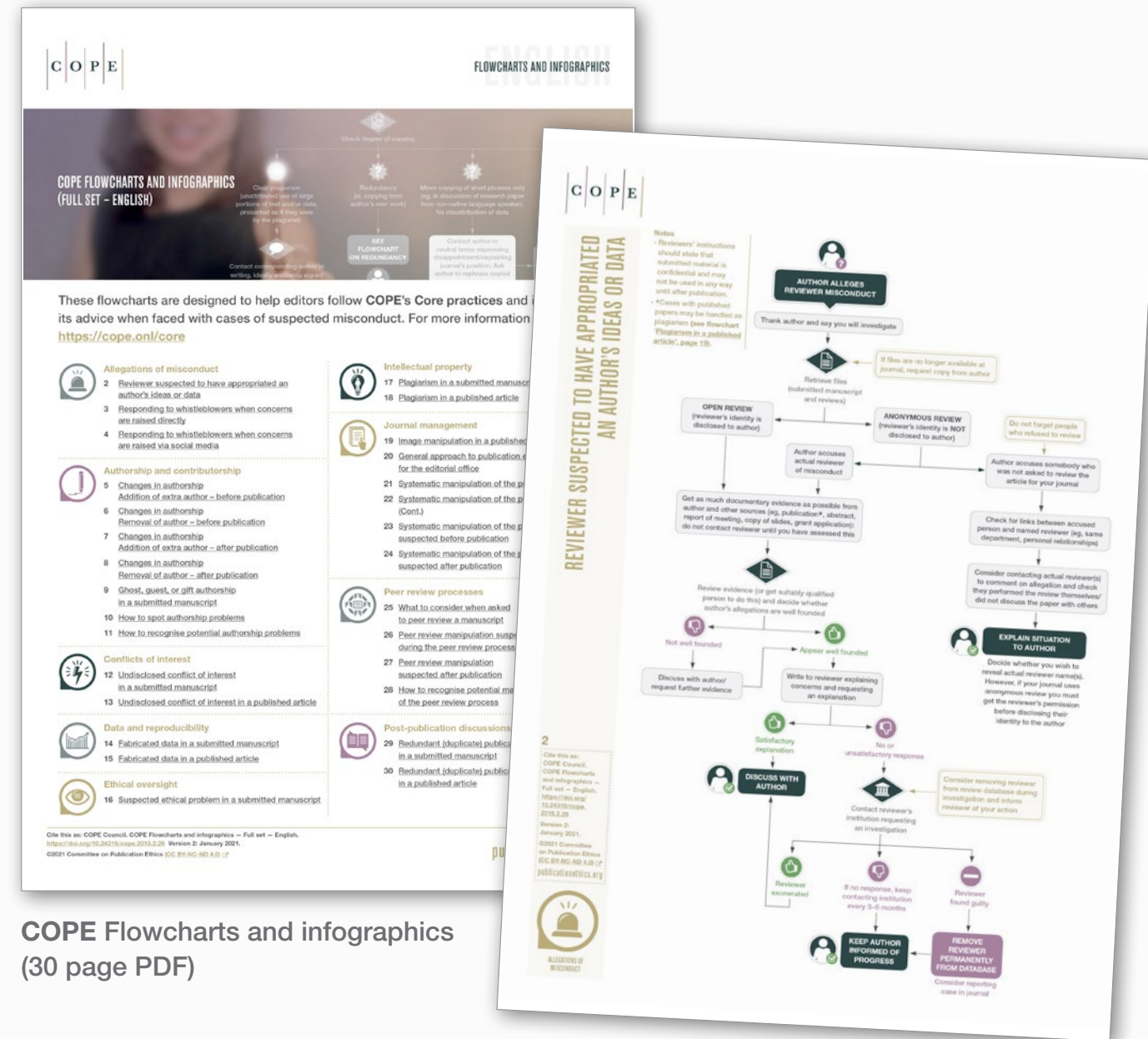
We have worked steadily over the year to extend the range of our resources, and to update existing resources, to meet the needs of all of our members. A list of guidelines, discussion documents, flowcharts and other materials is given below.

- Guidelines for the ‘Editing of reviewer comments’ is due in 2021. This followed a [discussion held at the Forum](#), and a [follow-up survey](#) from COPE. [#peerreview](#)
- Guidelines are being developed around the issue of ‘Expressions of concern’ and these should be ready during 2021. [#eoc](#)
- A new guidance document containing best practice principles and recommendations on ‘Name and identity changes’ is in process. A number of external editors are contributing to these discussions (see January 2021 Digest for more information). [#diversityandinclusion](#) [#ahss](#)
- A new discussion document on the use of ‘Artificial intelligence (AI) in decision making’ is in the drafting stage. This followed [a Forum](#) at the end of 2019. [#AI](#)
- A discussion document on diversity and inclusivity will be published this year. [#ahss](#)
- The second revision of the preprints discussion document is near to being finalised. [#preprints](#)
- A revision of the ‘Text recycling’ and ‘What constitutes plagiarism’ discussion documents will be worked on in 2021. [#textrecycling](#) [#plagiarism](#)
- Other resources planned for revision include: ‘Handling of competing interests’; ‘Responding to anonymous whistleblowers’; ‘Addressing ethics complaints from complainants’; and ‘How to handle authorship disputes’, among others. [#resources](#)

## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE: RANGE

### Flowcharts

- The **‘All flowcharts’ PDF** has been updated with a brand new look, and includes all **COPE** flowcharts and infographics in one document. Updated to reflect **COPE’s** style and brand, the PDF has a new cover page and has been organised by Core Practice, allowing for easier viewing and navigation (to be published shortly). **#flowcharts #infographics #brand**
- A new flowchart on **‘Handling post-publication rebuttals/commentary’** has been drafted in collaboration with Wiley and will be ready for publication in 2021. **#flowcharts #postpublication**
- The **‘Systematic manipulation of the publication process’** flowchart is being updated to reflect the recent **Forum discussion on papermills**. **#flowcharts #manipulation**



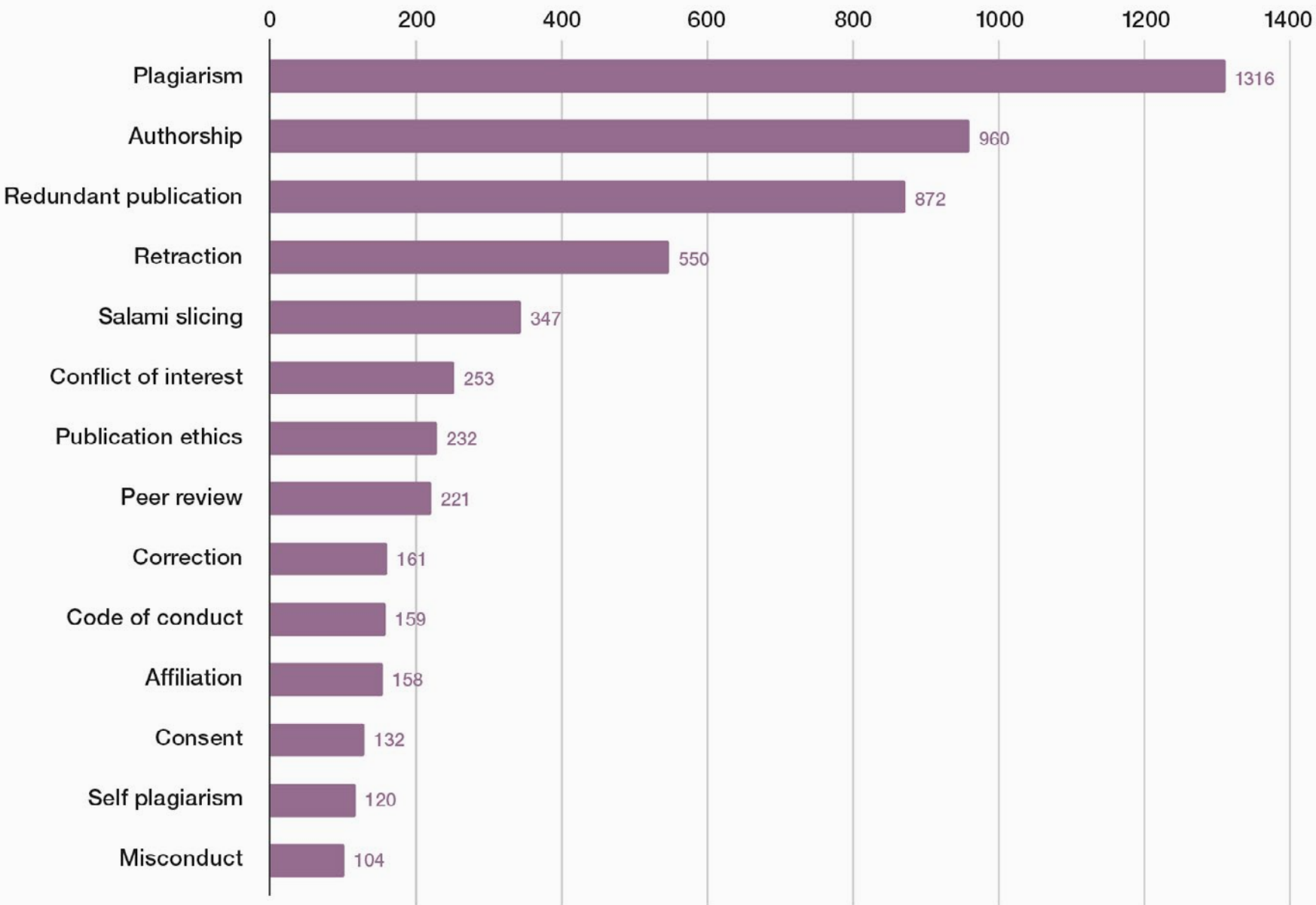


STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE: RANGE

Use of existing resources

To ensure we understand the issues of concern for our members and for the community at large, we reviewed Google Analytics to see what terms our members/ users are using to search our website. Figure 1 shows the search terms most consistently used. This indicates that issues around plagiarism, authorship, and redundant publication continue to remain areas of concern. Our discussion document on ‘What constitutes plagiarism’ is scheduled for revision, in parallel with the ‘text recycling guidelines’. A review of the ‘How to handle authorship disputes’ document is also planned. #plagiarism #authorship #redundantpublication #text-recycling

Figure 1 Top search terms on COPE website

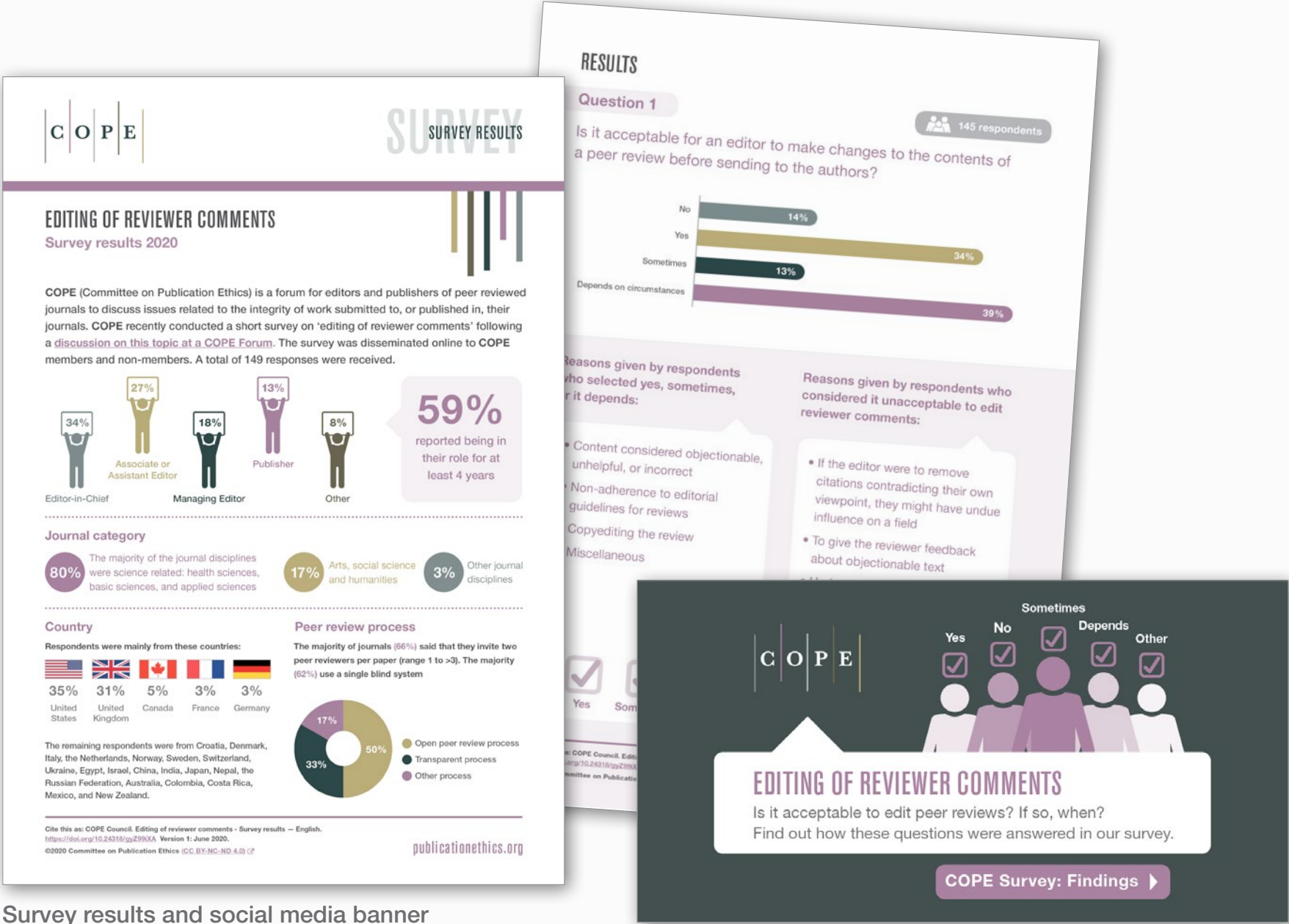




STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE: RANGE

Forum discussions

The Forum discussions are often the first step in developing any new resource and there were four discussion topics in 2020: (1) Editing of reviewer comments (guidance is in development); (2) What does peer review mean in the arts, humanities and social sciences; (3) Systematic manipulation of the publishing process via ‘paper mills’ (revisions to existing flowchart in development); and (4) Predatory publishing: next steps and where do we go from here? More on this topic to follow.



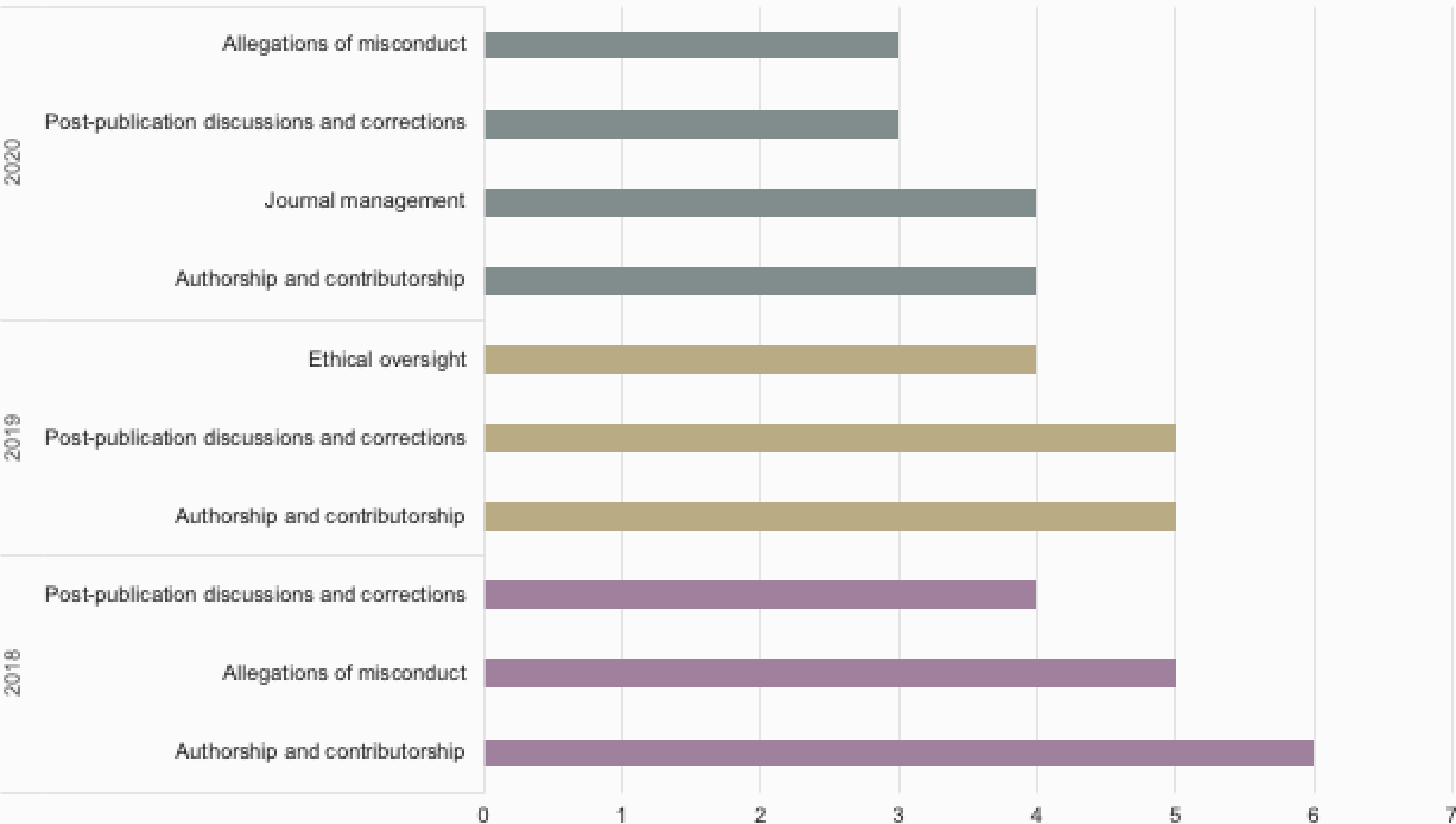
Survey results and social media banner

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE: RANGE

Cases

- Fifteen cases were discussed at the **COPE** Forum in 2020, covering issues such as: sharing by a reviewer on social media; institution refuses to investigate scientific issues; simultaneous submission without aiming at duplicate publication; and a number of authorship issues.
- The cases submitted to the Forum over the past three years have tended to cover similar issues. Figure 2 shows that authorship and post-publication discussions and corrections featured as the most presented issues over the past three years.

Figure 2 Top issues raised at the Forum



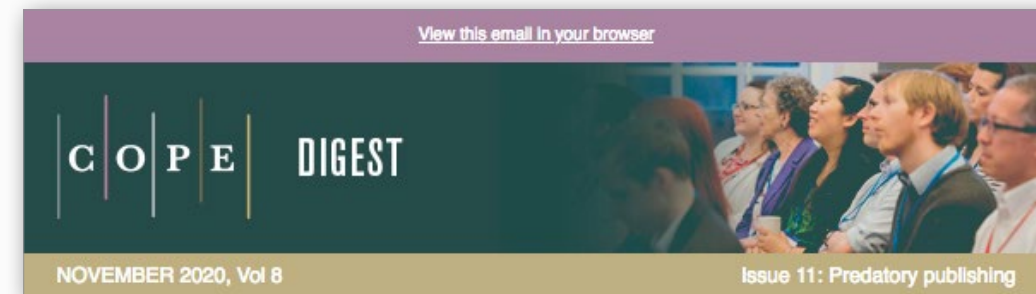
## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE: RANGE

### Case discussions

- Case discussions are published each month in Digest and focus on a specific case, usually one that relates to the general theme of the issue. The advice from the Forum is shared, and a Council Member elaborates on the discussion, with in depth analysis of the issue with links to related resources. The [case discussions](#) are a great resource for our members and we intend to use this content more in 2021. Topics covered this year included: self-plagiarism, text recycling, salami publication, reviewer misconduct, trial registration, ethics approval, and peer review. [#casediscussions](#)

### Translations

- We have started a programme of translating many of our resources to increase the range we offer, particularly for those regions highlighted in our strategy plan: China, India, and South America. Translations of the ‘Retraction guidelines’ and ‘Authorship discussion document’ will be published in 2021. The [translations currently available](#) on our website include Spanish, Chinese, and Portuguese, with the flowcharts being translated into many other languages. [#translations](#)



### DISCUSSION TOPIC

#### How to respond to a reader's repeated concerns

In this case, a reader contacted a journal, making several criticisms about a recently published meta-analysis. However, the editorial team and statistical editor concluded that the overall meta-analysis results were unaffected. Of the criticisms made, one pointed to an error in the article, but the others seemed more subjective. When invited to write a Letter to the Editor, the reader declined and recommended a correction or retraction. In response, the journal prepared an Editorial Comment that included issues raised by the reader, who offered feedback and agreed to be acknowledged. After being shown the comment, the authors of the meta-analysis submitted a formal response and a re-analysis as the basis for a correction.

As advised by the journal, the reader also directly contacted the authors, but then raised new issues and demanded a second correction. The reader subsequently asked the journal to involve its publisher's ethics committee and told the authors that their university, colleagues, and funder would be informed of the purported errors. The editor was concerned that the reader would continue complaining until the journal agreed to a retraction.

Questions for the Forum:

- What is a journal's responsibility to minimise potential reputational damage to authors, when a reader disagrees on whether an error has been made versus a difference in opinion?
- How can a journal respond to (unreasonable) requests from readers for a retraction if the editorial team considers retraction to be unwarranted?

In this case discussion Trevor Lane, COPE Council Member, shares the advice given by fellow COPE members and adds to the discussion with further analysis of this and similar issues.

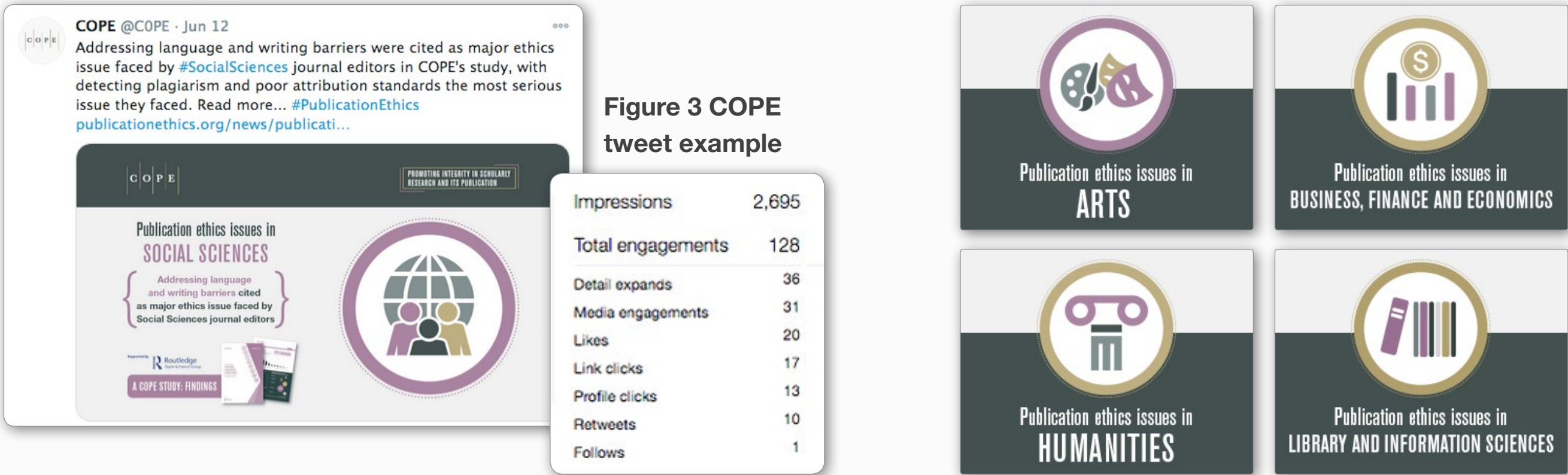
[READ MORE >](#)



# STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE: RANGE

## Other content

- **COPE** has expanded the range of support and guidance we offer in other ways too. We have appointed a freelance writer to enable us to add more detail and context to the content we publish.
- We collaborated with a number of publishers, and Elisabeth Bik - a scientific research integrity consultant - in October 2020 in a discussion on the issue of ‘paper mills’, with representatives from some of our publisher members.
- We conducted a social media campaign to raise awareness of the issues facing eight subject areas within the arts, humanities, and social sciences, as raised in the **COPE** and Taylor & Francis 2019 [AHSS Study](#) (fig 3).



## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE: REACH

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We will carry out a targeted campaign to increase and extend awareness of **COPE** across all sectors, disciplines and geographical areas, in particular those where we are currently underrepresented, as well as within our current membership.

REACH

## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE: REACH

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### Research

- One of the objectives for 2020 was to appoint an external organisation to conduct research on our behalf to review the research and publishing culture, current views of publication ethics, and support needs in the disciplines and regions highlighted in our [strategic plan](#). TBI Communications were employed to conduct this research, and detailed analysis of their final report will feed into a targeted campaign throughout 2021 to increase and extend awareness for existing and new members of **COPE**.

### Extend awareness across all sectors

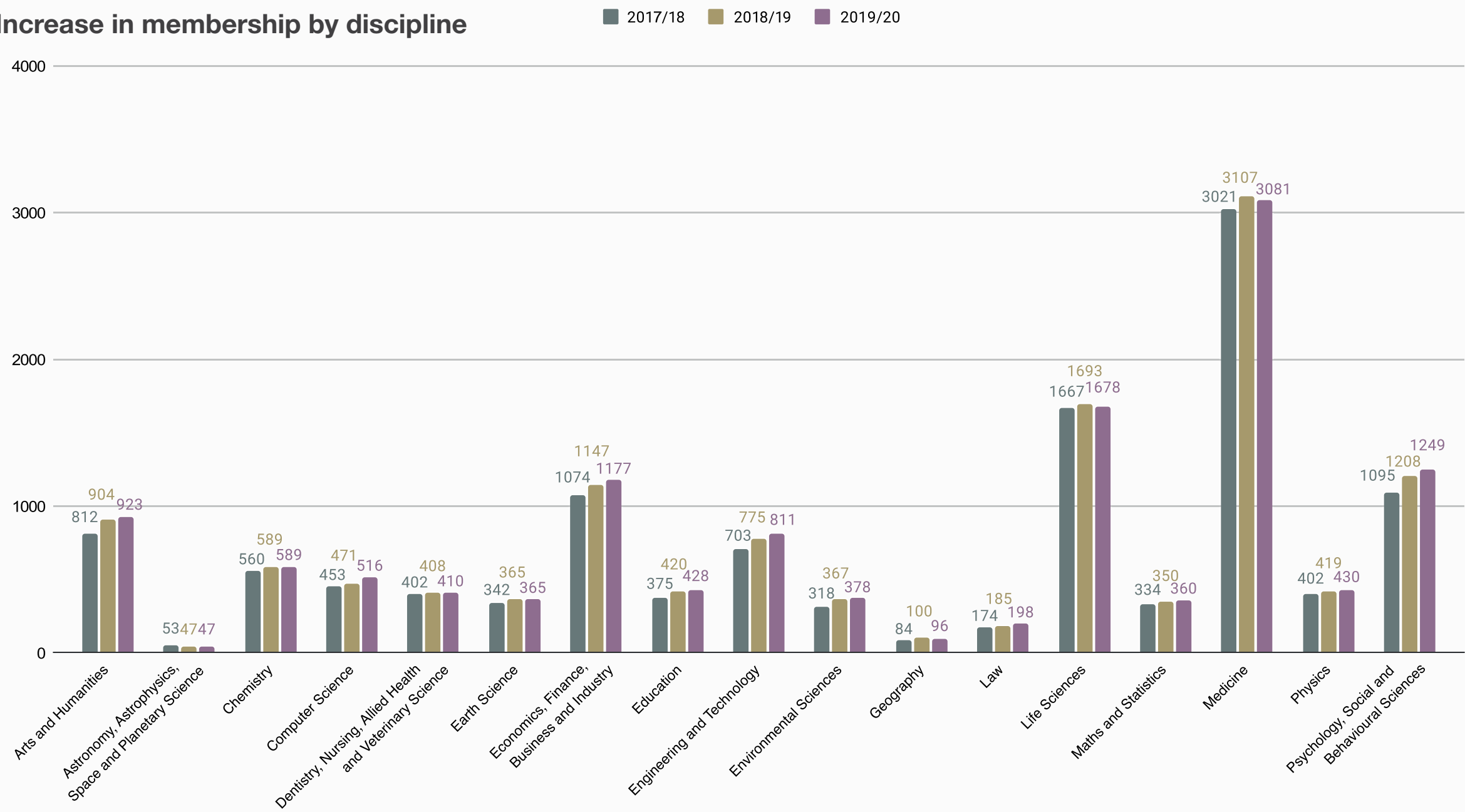
While we review the research which will enable us to develop more targeted campaigns for 2021, some of the activities that we have been undertaking have seen some results in this area.

- In the past two years, **COPE** membership has increased in previously underrepresented disciplines.
  - > Arts and humanities, 12% increase
  - > Economics and finance, 8% increase
  - > Engineering & technology, 13% increase
  - > Psychology, social and behavioural sciences, 12% increase

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE: REACH

Extend awareness across all sectors (cont.)

Figure 4 Increase in membership by discipline





## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE: REACH

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### Total members



## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE: REACH

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### Events

Although we had to postpone or cancel our in person events this year, we have continued with, and expanded upon, our virtual offerings.

### Forum

- Forum discussion topics throughout 2020 included topics as diverse as:
  - > [Editing of reviewer comments](#) [#peerreview](#)
  - > [What does peer review mean in the arts, humanities and social sciences](#) [#peerreview](#) [#ahss](#)
  - > [Systematic manipulation of the publishing process via “paper mills”](#) [#papermills](#) [#systematicmanipulation](#)
  - > [‘Predatory publishing: next steps and where do we go from here?’](#). [#predatorypublishing](#)
- Most attendees at the Forum come from the UK and USA, but participation has been seen from across 22 different countries, including Australia, Brazil, Cameroon, Chile, Egypt, Finland, India, Peru, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, and South Korea.

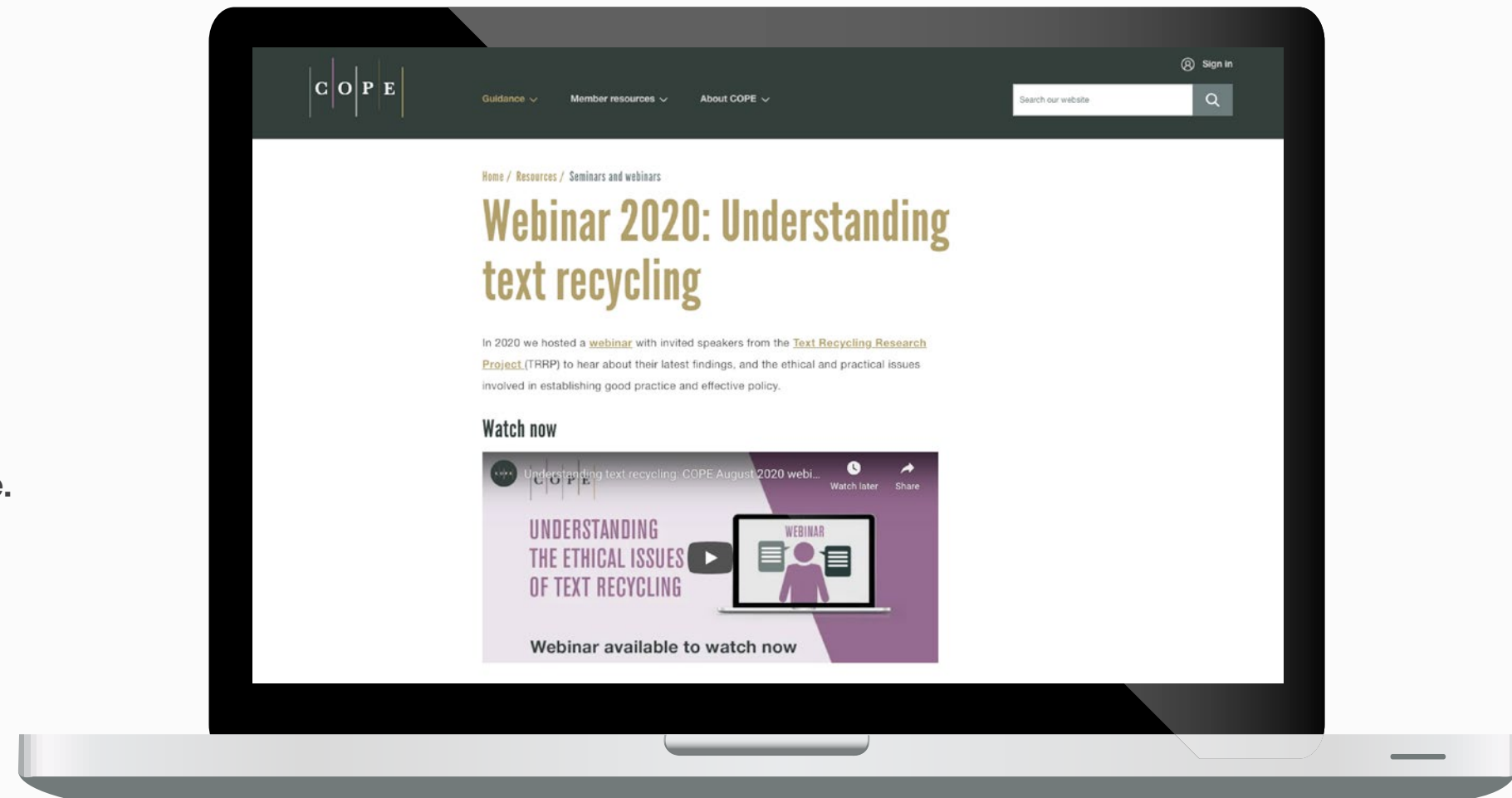
## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE: REACH

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### Events (cont.)

#### Webinar

- We held a webinar on [Understanding text recycling](#) (video) in August, with Cary Moskowitz (lead PI) and David Hanson, Duke University, and Michael Pemberton, Georgia Southern University, members of the [Text Recycling Research Project](#). Cary, Michael, and David presented on this topic at our 2019 [European Seminar in Leiden](#), and this webinar updated participants on their latest findings. This was one of our most attended events (161 attendees from 24 countries) and feedback from participants was very positive.
- We followed the webinar with a survey circulated in Digest and on social media, which will feed into a revision of the existing ‘text recycling discussion document’.



## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE: REACH

### Events (cont.)

#### Virtual workshops

- We held COPE's first virtual workshop during [Peer Review Week](#). The theme of Peer Review Week was 'trust in peer review', and we discussed relevant peer review cases in our workshop. Because of the success of the event we repeated the event on 19 November at a time more suited to Australian and Asian audiences. Following the popularity of the virtual workshops we plan to run a number of workshops in 2021 with the first, scheduled for February, on the topic of authorship.
- We have translated the materials for the workshop into Chinese and Spanish, and are developing an online 'workshop in a box' so our members in those regions can hold their own case workshops. We hope this will be a well received resource by members in these regions.



Social media banners

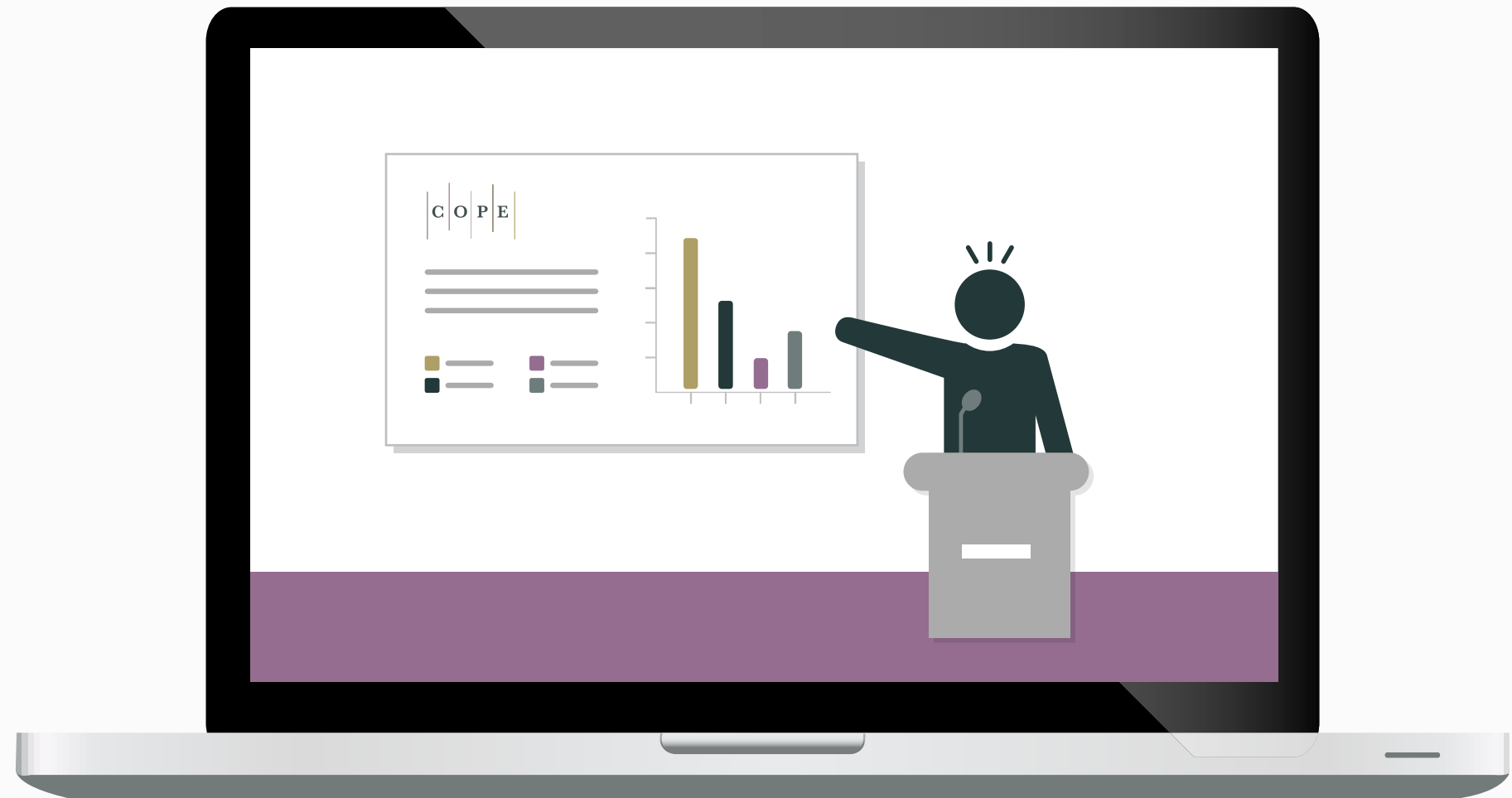
## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE: REACH

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### Events (cont.)

#### Events in 2021

- We very much hope to hold **COPE's** annual retreat for Trustees and Council Members in 2021 to facilitate the work of **COPE**. However, it is unlikely that we will be able to hold any in person seminars for our members. We plan to offer a programme of virtual events, including case workshops, webinars, and a virtual seminar.



## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE: REACH

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### Communicating with our members and potential new members

- We have revised and updated the [member handbook](#). This helps members understand the benefits of their **COPE** membership and how to make the most of the support and guidance we offer.
- We will be reviewing our options for the implementation of a new member management database during 2021. The primary objective is to enable the upkeep of our membership records in a more streamlined way.
- **COPE** will also be developing a dedicated member email which will be published six times a year. This communication will focus more on the needs of our members and provide more in depth guidance and support. We intend to publish this in the second quarter of 2021.
- A non-member guide to applying for **COPE** membership is in development. This will help potential new members ensure their policies and procedures are in place before they apply for membership of **COPE**.
- We have also revised and updated the membership pages on the website: a new page with a series of [FAQ to help potential new members navigate the application process](#); and [membership subscription fee page](#) has been moved online (from a PDF) to make it easier for new members to view and understand the cost of membership.
- A new membership application system will be launched early in 2021. This will improve the management and processing of applications, and also improve the speed and efficiency for potential members applying. In tandem with this, we have also streamlined the journal and publisher application forms to make them more user friendly.



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE: REACH

Communicating with our members and potential new members (cont.)

- The [About COPE](#) pages on the website have been updated and a refreshed, with a cleaner layout. A [table of contents](#) has been added (where applicable) to facilitate ease of use and new visuals added where able. The COPE history timeline in particular has a fresh new look in two different versions: a [PDF](#) and in [html](#) text.





## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE: REACH

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### Website, design and branding

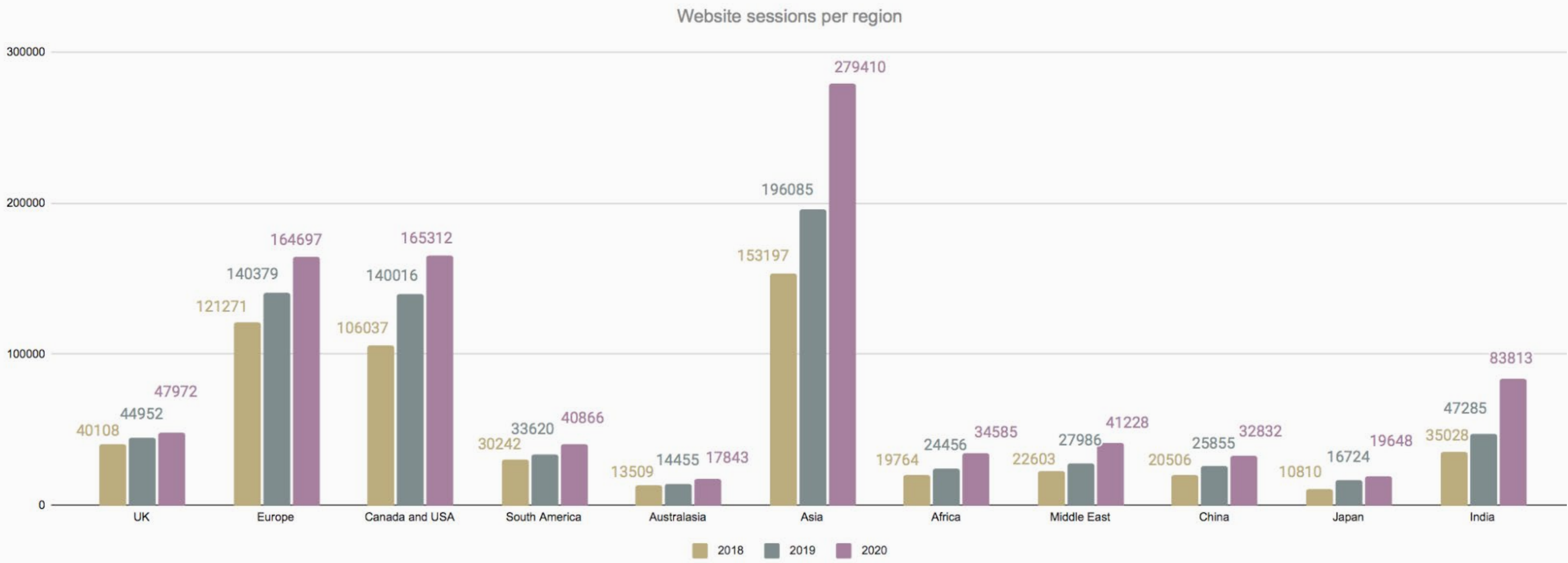
We have done a huge amount of work on the **COPE** website, both behind the scenes as well as more visibly with our branding.

- We are in the middle of reviewing the website infrastructure to improve the user experience, standards and best practice, and Google search optimisation.
- **COPE's** freelance designer, Bonita (Bonnie) Jacobs, has been working steadily to improve the style and consistency of our resources.
- Figure 5 shows how we are reaching more of our members, measured by how many are visiting our website and from which regions.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE: REACH

Website, design and branding (cont.)

Figure 5 Total number of website sessions by region



## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE: REACH

### Resources as a PDF

- We have reviewed COPE's existing online PDFs - guidelines, discussion documents, flowcharts etc. - to improve findability and usability. New COPE standards for online PDFs have been agreed and adopted. These include:
  - > having a web page as well as a PDF where appropriate, or a summary page that links to the PDF, providing better support for mobile users and for accessibility
  - > adding custom metadata to the PDF to support how it appears in Google search, resulting in a higher ranking in Google Search
  - > setting up redirects for out of date resources or previous versions and watermarking them to identify them as out of date while directing users to the newer resource, ensuring they are able to easily access the most up to date version.

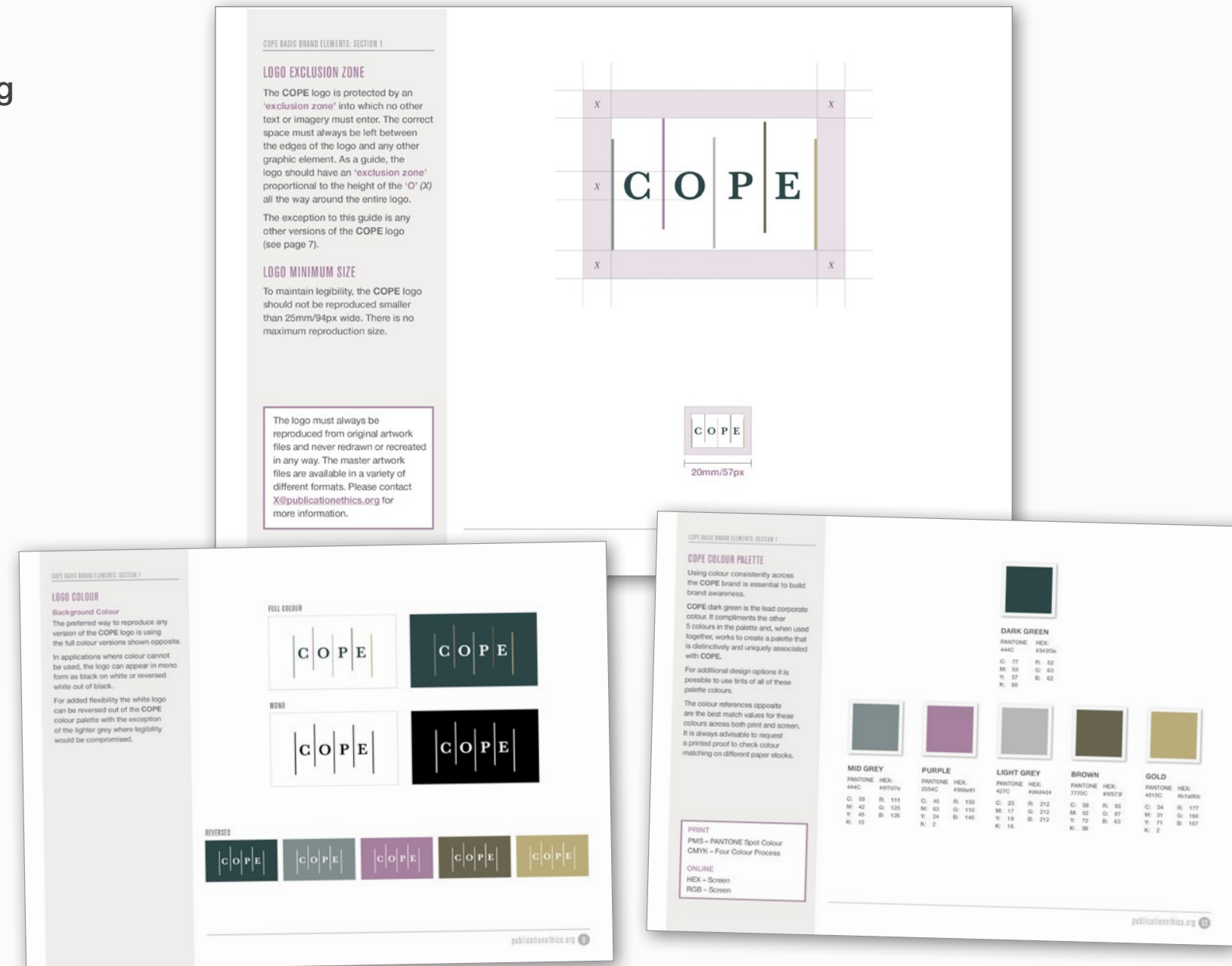


COPE guidelines

## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE: REACH

### Design and branding

- As well as the **COPE** resources, we have been working steadily to develop the **COPE** brand identity and to apply it to the many different online and offline applications. It is important that all **COPE** materials communicate what **COPE** represents through consistent brand identity. This helps with brand recognition for those who come into contact with **COPE**, and sets the standard for those discovering **COPE** for the first time.
- Items that have been designed this year include:
  - > [branding across all social media profiles](#)
  - > [social media promotional banners](#)
  - > powerpoint presentation templates
  - > development of materials including:  
member handbook, survey/research documents  
styling, trustee and council member literature



COPE brand guidelines

# STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE: REACH

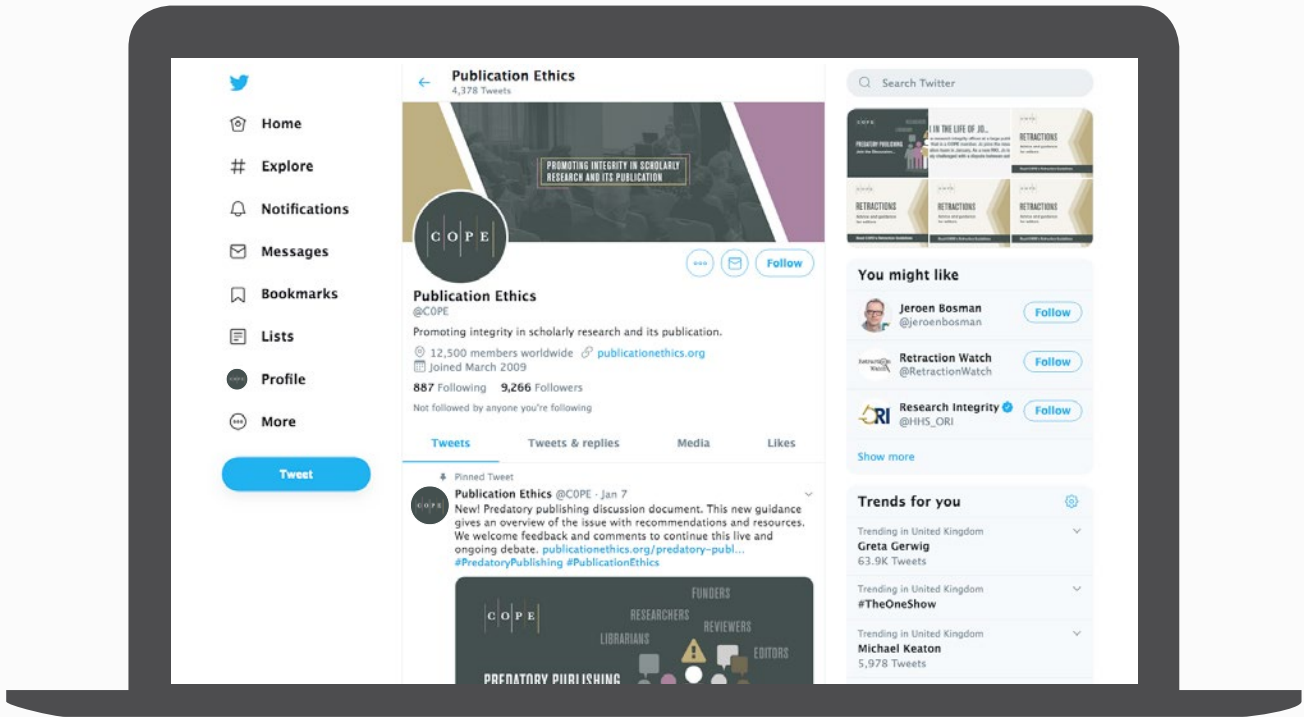
## Design and branding (cont.)



Twitter Cover Image 1500 x 500



Twitter Profile Image  
500 x 500



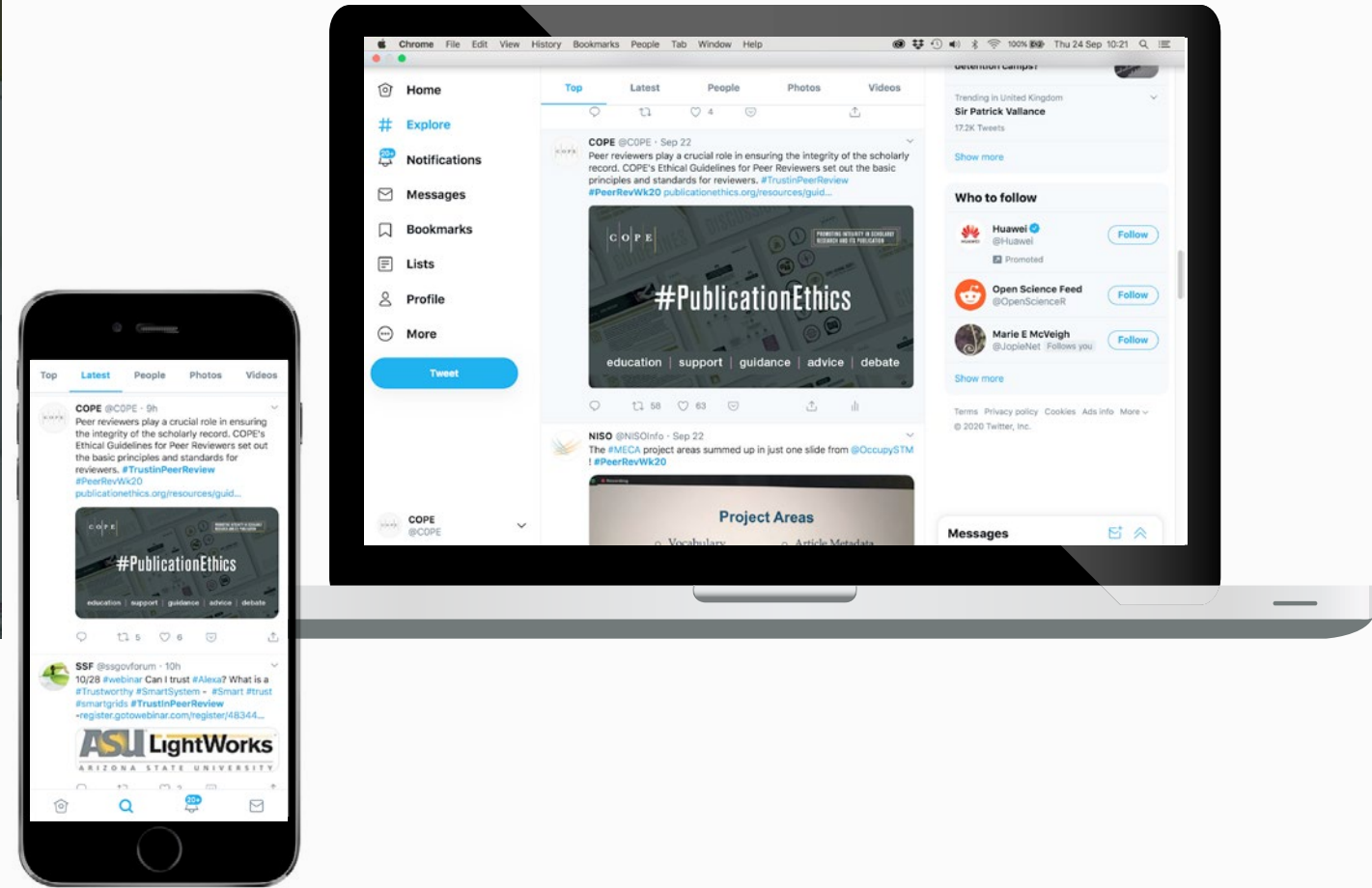


STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE: REACH

Design and branding (cont.)



Generic Twitter banners



## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE: RESPONSIVENESS

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Similar to REACH, we have been undertaking lots of work behind the scenes to help improve how responsive we are to issues that arise within **COPE** itself, the community we work in, or in response to member requests.

RESPONSIVENESS



## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE: RESPONSIVENESS

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### Responding to our members

- The paper mills discussion is a good example of how we can respond to support our members. This came to **COPE** as a joint query from five publishers, we arranged a Forum discussion on the topic, we published a publisher's response to the issue, and we are now working to update our existing guidance to include this topic.
- We responded to a request from Wiley to create a panel to review their investigation into a case arising from a paper that was published, and then subsequently withdrawn, from one of their journals. **COPE** formed a panel of **COPE** Trustees plus three external members. The scope of the review was to consider the process which Wiley followed in their investigations and produce a final report for Wiley with their conclusions and any recommendations for improvement (if appropriate). The panel has met to discuss Wiley's investigation and are currently producing a final report into the investigation.
- We are currently working on reviewing and revising all communications that are sent to members from the website. There are a number of elements to this:
  - > ensure members are receiving appropriate communications that are relevant and easily digestible.
  - > develop specific, targeted communications for regions and disciplines.
  - > develop branded and designed emails to be more visually appealing and increase engagement.

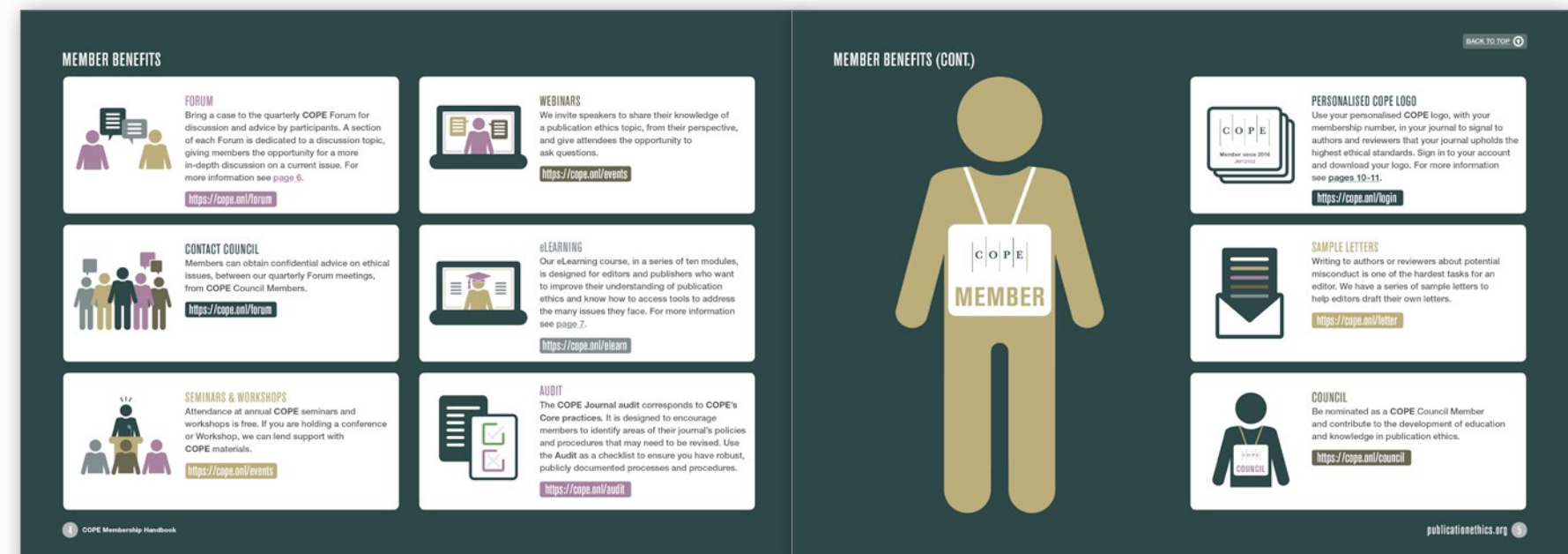
## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE: RESPONSIVENESS

### Supporting our members with their membership of COPE

- We have completely revised and updated the [membership handbook](#). This helps members understand the benefits of their COPE membership and how to make the most of the support and guidance we offer.



Membership handbook



## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE: RESPONSIVENESS

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### Requests for collaboration

**COPE** has received a wide range of requests to collaborate with other organisations in 2020 and into 2021, including:

- Working with a small but diverse group of editors and publishers to establish how journals/publishers handle content containing outdated or offensive text and ideas.
- SOPs4RI (Standard Operating Procedures for Research Integrity) is a four year (2019-2022), multi-partner project funded by the European Commission. The project is seeking to establish an inventory of relevant Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and Guidelines that European Research Performing Organisations and Research Funding Organisations (RPOs and RFOs) can draw on when developing governance arrangements promoting strong research integrity cultures. **COPE** was invited to participate in a series of workshops to help develop the guidelines.
- Collaborating with the [Data Publishing Ethics Working Group from the Force 11](#) group on developing guidelines and flowcharts on data sharing policies.
- A working group arising from a project conducted at the University of Illinois on '[Reducing the inadvertent spread of retracted science: shaping a research and implementation agenda](#)'.

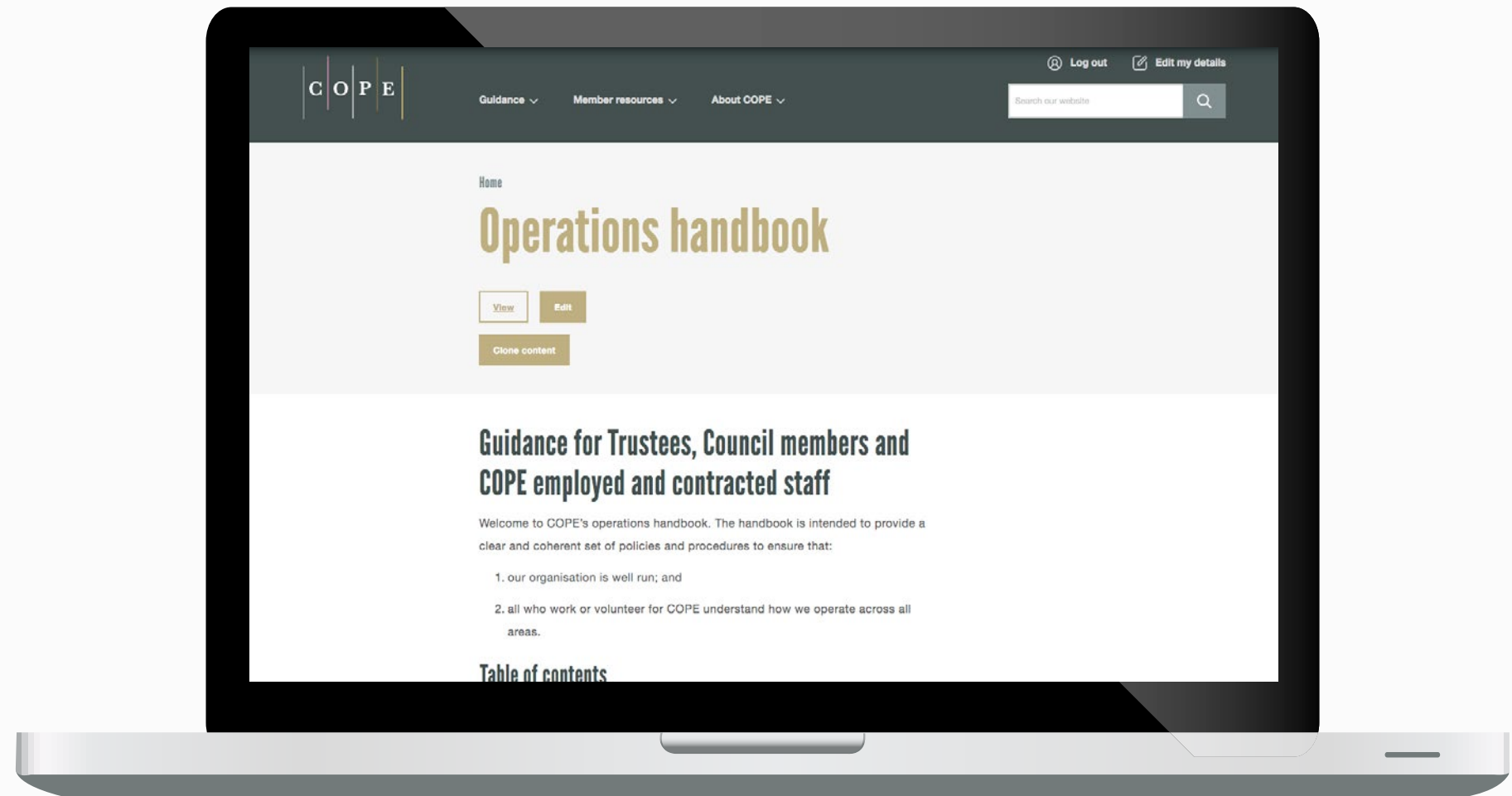
## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE: RESPONSIVENESS

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### Operational activities developing policies, processes and procedures to facilitate COPE being more responsive

#### Governance

- **COPE's** regulations have been revised and are currently in the review phase in the Governance subcommittee. This necessary work aims to bring the regulations in line with the Articles of Association and ensure they contain all of the necessary processes and procedures to enable the smooth running of **COPE** as an organisation.
- A review of all our external policies and procedures.
- A review of **COPE's** GDPR responsibilities.



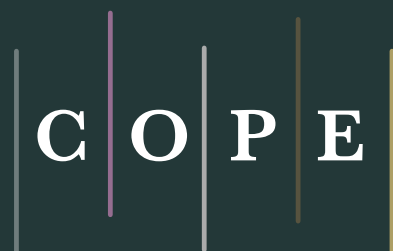
## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE: RESPONSIVENESS

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### COPE Trustee Board, Council and team

- We sadly lost Council Member [Tracey Bretag](#) who passed away in October.
- Chris Graf and Geri Pearson ended their term as Trustee and Past co-Chairs.
- We said goodbye to David Ginley, Seth Leopold and Adrian Ziderman from Council, and welcomed Suzanne Farley and Simon Linacre as Trustees, and Eleanor Gendle, Matt Hodgkinson, Ana Marušić, Jigisha Patel, and Marie Soulière as new Council Members. Early in 2021, we also welcomed Sarah Eaton, Kim Eggleton, Paul Fisher, Stephanie Kinnan, and Siri Lunde Stromme as new Council Members.
- Dan Kulp was elected Chair-elect
- Christina McGuire was appointed as freelance Web Manager
- Bonita Jacobs was appointed as a freelance Designer
- Duncan Nicholas was appointed as a freelance Content Writer.

#universities #books #peerreview #eoc #diversityandinclusion #ahss #AI #language #preprints #textrecycling #plagiarism  
#resources #flowcharts #infographics #brand #postpublication #manipulation #peerreview #retractions #authorship #A  
#publicationethics #predatorypublishing #imagemanipulation #redundantpublication #forums #casediscussions #forums  
#communications #leadingvoice #papermills #systematicmanipulation #universities #books #peerreview #eoc #preprints  
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RESEARCH AND ITS PUBLICATION