EDITORIAL

A Few Words From The Editor

“Our Vision, Our Mission And The Values We Stand For”

“Building the vision”

The well known science popularizer Carl Sagan once said: “A central lesson of science is that to understand complex issues (or even simple ones), we must try to free our minds of dogma and to guarantee the freedom to publish, to contradict, and to experiment.”[1] This “freedom to publish” is a cornerstone of the Open Science movement, and sums up one of the core values which we aim to promote. Yet, if we take a look at the list of open access journals now, we see that among the thousands of journals present, none is dedicated to nurturing the newest generations of scientists in the good practices of academic publishing. Thus, the idea to promote an open access journal aimed at early stage researchers (ESR) was born, and became the ESR journal you now have before you. ESR are researchers, usually PhD students and Post-Docs, who are at the beginning of their research careers. We believe that early stage researchers should be given the opportunity to get involved in the academic publishing process from the very beginning of their research to better prepare them to thrive in their future academic careers.

After many talks with colleagues active in the Open Science movement and policy advocates for young researchers, it became clear there exists a niche that is still unfilled. Summer 2015 was the starting point. We slowly made plans, contacted relevant people in the community, and devised the framework of what has now become the ESR journal. Our vision is science publishing where all authors, including early stage researchers, are provided support and recognition for their work, while making science freely available to a global audience. Our mission is to provide resources, support and advice for early stage researchers as well as more advance researchers in the process of publishing their scientific papers, while at the same time offering free public access to scientific research. This is a daunting task which we hope to advance in the years to come. Thus, in the sections to follow, we would like to share and elaborate the core elements that constitute this journal.
ESR Journal Core Values

To support our vision, we first defined a set of core values upon which we wanted to build the identity of the ESR journal. Our values are those which we find lacking in leading journals in many scientific fields:

Get your research results out fast. We are aiming to meet agile review process standards - to reach an initial decision of paper publishability within one week and to reach an editorial decision (Accept, Minor Revision, Major Revision, Reject) for the majority of submissions within one month.

We support early stage researchers. The ESR Journal Editorial Board is willing to provide resources, support and advice for early stage researchers in their journey from writing to publishing their scientific papers.

We have a supportive review process. ESR Journal editors and reviewers are focused on providing support and high quality feedback for all authors who submit their manuscript to the ESR Journal. Each author will receive constructive and fair feedback. If revision is necessary we want our comments to help you to make the edits and improvements needed to get your work published.

We shall help you reach the furthest with your research. We believe that research articles should primarily be judged on their individual merits rather than on the basis of the journal in which they were published. Soon we shall implement a program to provide Article-Level Metrics (ALM) on every article. ALM capture the manifold ways in which research is disseminated and can help users determine the value of an article to them and to their scientific community.

We promote your work. We shall use the power of social media and blogs to get your research out to a wider audience. And we shall apply for indexing on PubMed, PubMed Central, Scopus and Web of Science as soon as we are eligible after the launch of the journal.

ESR Journal publishing standards and procedures

After building our vision, mission and core values, our next step was to decide what publishing standards and procedures to follow. We analyzed the resources from the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE)[3] and Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association (OASPA)[4], as well as the good practice employed by many Open Access journals and Open Access publishers. What followed was the decision to implement the publishing standards and procedures set by the Public Library of Science (PLoS)[5] and eLife[6]. This would not be possible if PLoS had not developed good standards and procedures and made
them freely available and reusable under a CC-BY[7] license, for which we are grateful.

Building the ESR Journal team

No project is possible without building a good team that is capable of implementing it. The Editorial Board consists of Advisory Editors members and Academic Editors who are supported by Junior Editors. Special care has been taken in filling the Advisory Editorial Board with senior researchers with extensive experience in both publishing and with experience with research policy aimed toward early stage researchers. We believe the involvement of advisory board members in science policy is important in order to stay up-to-date with the latest policy developments and to have an impact in the community.

After establishing the Advisory Editorial Board our attention turned to Academic Editors. They are the most important part of every journal as they are responsible for the day to day operations and consequently the quality of the publications. To ensure the journal maintains a high quality, a fast response to authors and an efficient relationship with external reviewers, we shall continuously be expanding the number of Academic Editors. Most of the present editors are early stage researchers with extensive experience in their scientific fields and experience in leading organizations in which young scientists are represented. The reason why we focused on ESRs as academic editors is our belief that ESRs are motivated to provide high quality feedback to the target audience of authors because they are, or have recently been, at a similar stage in their careers. To secure good quality feedback and high peer review standards, Academic Editors will work together with two or more external peer reviewers, usually senior researchers who are recognized experts in their scientific fields. Many Academic Editors are active in Open Access and Open Science movements and initiatives which gives us confidence that we shall remain on the best track, following the latest developments in open access publishing.

The last, but by no means least component of the editorial team are Junior Editors. The Junior Editors’ role is to help early stage researchers gain an understanding of the editorial process by experience from an early stage in their careers. Early stage researchers who apply to be Junior Editors are thoroughly screened by the editorial board. Approved junior editors are expected to conform to the COPE Ethical Guidelines for Peer Reviewers[8] and COPE international standards for editors[9], which we follow. As the journal develops we shall work more intensively on supporting resources for Junior Editors. After ethical guidelines and international standards for editors, the next resource that we shall provide to junior editors is technical guidance for editorial software.

Choosing the right tools for the job

No journal in the 21st century can be successful without the right tools for the job. Due to the core values we wish to promote, we decided that only open
source software solutions are acceptable for a non-profit journal without funding and without charging any fees to authors. The Open Journal Systems (OJS)[10] from the Public Knowledge Project at Simon Fraser University comes as the best solution for the submission process and managing the entire editing process. However, OJS doesn’t offer all features that we would like to have so in parallel with using OJS we plan to start working on our own submission[11] and editorial manager software that will be tailored to our needs. Since developing our own software platform is based on open and voluntary work, we are expecting to use OJS for at least the next 6 to 10 months. Equally or even more important than software for managing the editorial process is the software for publishing. Again, we didn’t have much choice in the open source market, and OJS is by far the most popular and simplest open source solution. However, the limited functionality of OJS when it comes to user interface forced us to push towards an alternative, Ambra[12], which is very powerful but also challenging for implementation and maintenance. Ambra is a PLoS software package that is very robust and with plenty of features that we would like to provide to our readers and authors. It provides features for post-publication annotation and discussion that allow for a "living" document around which further scientific discoveries can be made. We shall not stop working on our software platforms for publishing as we have plans to give opportunities to author’s to use pre-print publishing and open peer review for their manuscripts.

**Initial quality control**

Quality is of utmost importance to the ESR journal. We shall ensure that all submitted articles are of sound academic quality and conform to ethical rules. All manuscripts that we received will be scanned for plagiarism using the free online tool “Plagiatefinder”[13] developed by Jan Tegtmeier, and any plagiarized articles will be refused. Plagiatefinder, even though it is a simple and efficient tool, probably will not be our final choice as our mid-term plans are to subscribe to CrossRef[14] services and to use the CrossCheck[15] plagiarism checker. Until now we have been faced with a couple of plagiarism cases, two of them very serious attempts at “recycled papers”, that were published a month previously in journals of questionable quality. Some minor plagiarism cases turned out to be related to improper referencing, probably caused by a of lack of experience and lack of training in proper scientific writing.

**The peer review process**

The first topic identified by our advisory board was the peer review process. We decided to follow procedures for double blind peer review[16]. However, in the future, we have plans to let all the authors choose the type of peer review: double blind, blind or open peer review[16].

The peer review process is as follows: After we receive a manuscript submission online, within 2-3 working days we conduct an initial quality check
including scanning for plagiarism. The manuscript is then assigned to an
dedicated editor with expertise in a related field who evaluates the manuscript
and assigns it to two external peer reviewers. External peer reviewers must be
experts in the manuscript’s scientific field. Our aim is to complete the first round
of peer review within 10 to 15 working days, so if we do not get feedback from an
external reviewer within 5 days, we shall search for another reviewer to meet our
projected deadlines. After the editor’s decision for either a minor or major
revision, we give 30 days for the author to make corrections and send back the
revised manuscript. After receiving revised manuscripts, those for which a major
revision was requested are sent back to one or more of the original reviewers for
evaluation of the quality of the revisions.

Reaching the public

At the moment of writing this article we have 29 submitted manuscripts, an
excellent start for a new journal that has existed for only 2 months and with
promotional activities yet to start. During mid-January, ESR Journal
announcements were included in newsletters from just a few young researcher
organizations, mostly from the Mediterranean region. In the following months, we
expect to establish partnerships with many early stage researcher organizations.
Working with ESR societies, we shall not only promote our journal and support
for ESR to publish in it, but we will also use the journal to promote scientific
papers from the fields of interest of the ESR societies’ members. Besides ESR
societies and promotion at conferences, we shall pay special attention to building
an online community around the ESR Journal and to make use of the
opportunities afforded by blogs and online social networks. Additionally, the
newsletter list is growing rapidly and will play an important role in promotion
and dissemination of the latest ESR Journal publications. These promotional
channels, in combination with very powerful Google in-kind advertising support
for our journal, ensure that your publication in the ESR Journal will reach the
widest possible audience.

We hope that this text is helpful for all readers and potential authors who would
like to get more insight into how the editorial and administrative processes at
ESR Journal are organized. Further articles related to the development of journal
policies, standards of ethics and our work in the ESR Journal will soon follow.

References

   Metrics: http://article-level-metrics.plos.org/alm-info/
3. COPE. (n.d.). Committee on Publication Ethics. Retrieved February 29, 2016, from Committee
   on Publication Ethics: http://publicationethics.org/
7. CC-BY. (n. d.). Creative Commons. Retrieved February 29, 2016, from Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0): http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/