

# Author survey data reveals changing perceptions of scholarly communication and wider participation in open access.

 [blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2015/08/28/author-insights-publishing-humanities-social-sciences/](https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2015/08/28/author-insights-publishing-humanities-social-sciences/)

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**Dan Penny**, Head of Insights at Nature Publishing Group and Palgrave Macmillan, shares findings from the recent Author Insights Survey. The survey data is openly available and offers an extensive look into researcher perceptions and understandings of academic publishing. Few researchers are now unaware of open access. But perceptions of quality still remain a significant barrier to further OA involvement.



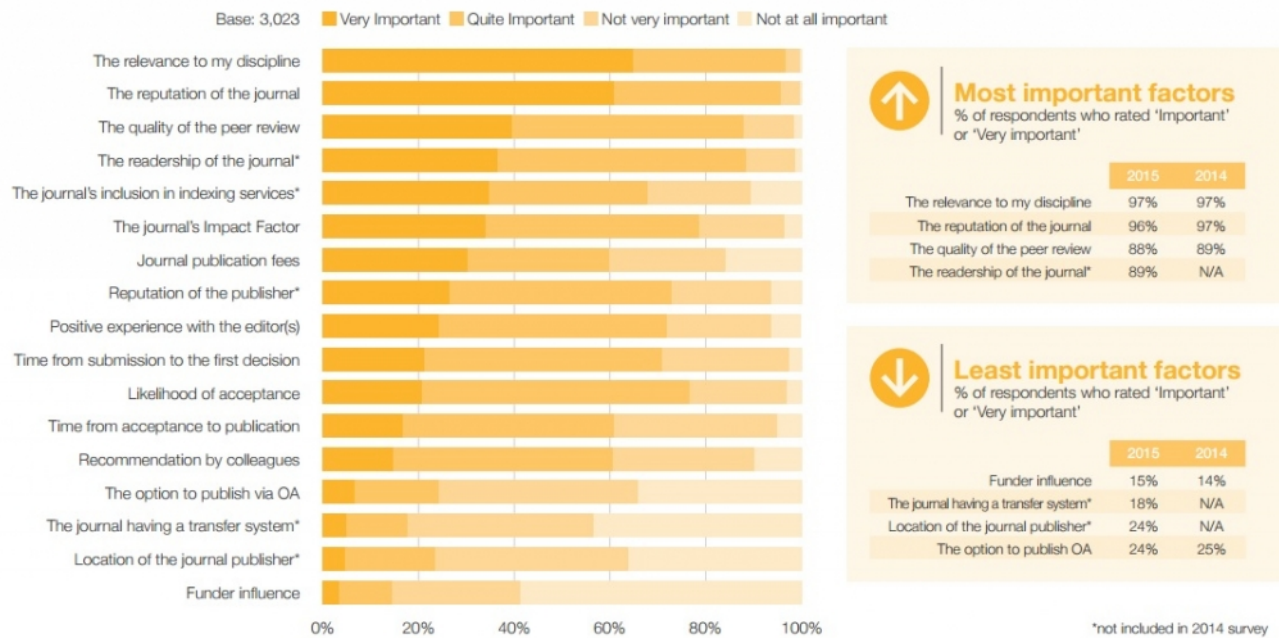
From Chinese neuroscientists to British sociologists, academics are at the heart of research publishing. Researchers want publishers to understand their (often very different) needs, and this is important to publishers too. Most publishers conduct quantitative and qualitative research for this purpose, but to our knowledge Nature Publishing Group (NPG) and Palgrave Macmillan are the only ones to make the data open access for anyone to examine and interpret.

Our [Author Insights Survey 2015](#) is the latest iteration of a survey that was originally carried out for internal research purposes. This year, the data includes responses from 22,000 academics, 3,023 of which work in the humanities and social sciences (HSS). For the second year running, the anonymised data from this survey is [available on Figshare](#) under a CC BY license, in order to achieve greater understanding between authors, funders and publishers.

Some of our main findings included:

**The four most important factors for author when choosing where to publish were the reputation of a journal, the relevance of journal content, the quality of peer review and journal readership.**

Authors in the HSS disciplines placed more importance on journal readership than Impact Factor. The term 'author readership' needs further clarification and investigation, however – does it mean that an author is looking for a journal with a specific and narrow readership, or for a broad, multidisciplinary set of readers? We are aiming to follow up on this.



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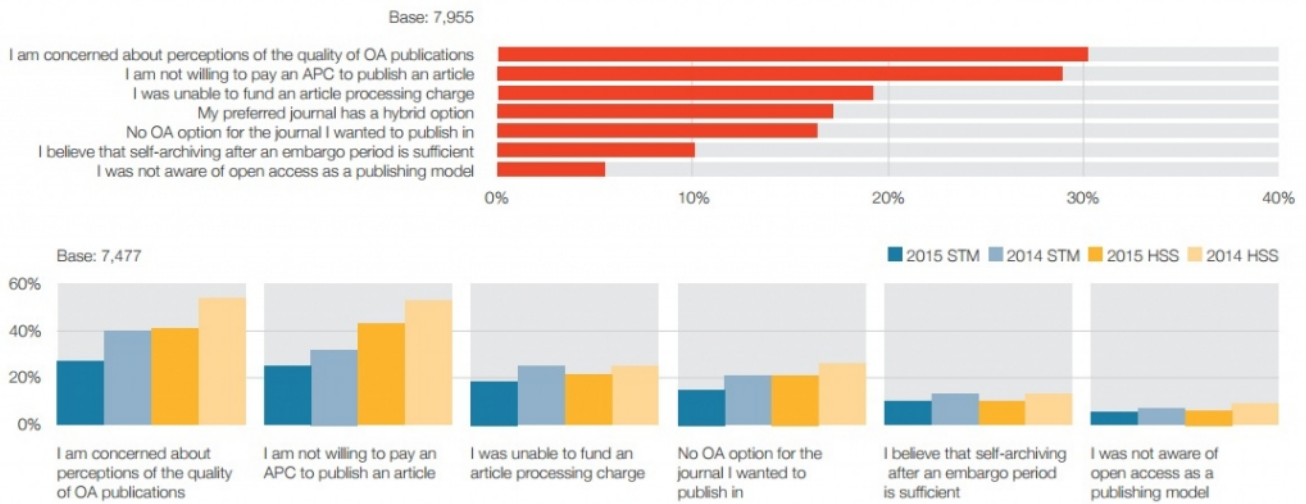
**Source: (NPG), Nature Publishing Group (2015): Author Insights 2015 survey. figshare. <http://dx.doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.1425362> CC-BY**

Another factor that was considered of some importance was the reputation of the publisher. This was a surprise, as anecdotally it's often held that authors don't even know who the journal publisher is – it's supposed to be the journal brand that's important. HSS authors are sometimes thought more sensitive to publisher brands because they are what count for book publishing. For the first time in this survey, we also asked how academics judge reputation. The consistency of quality, and being seen as the best place to publish research, were some of the most popular responses.

**A decreasing number of authors are concerned about perceptions of the quality of open access publications:**

In 2014, 54% of HSS academics said that they were “concerned about the perceptions of the quality of OA publications.” But this year, only 41% did so. There was a similar drop in the sciences, where open access has been a popular business model for longer; from 40% in 2014 to 27% in 2015.

The results also show that there are now very few researchers unaware of open access – this wouldn't have been the case just a few years ago. In HSS, since 2014, the percentage of authors who had not published OA because they were unaware of the model has now dropped from 9% to 7%, the same proportion as in the natural sciences.



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**Source: (NPG), Nature Publishing Group (2015): Author Insights 2015 survey. figshare.**

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On the other hand, open access clearly still has an image problem, as perceptions of quality are still the no.1 reason for not publishing OA, and 58% of HSS academics still aren't publishing via open access models. Looking at the demographics, this concern is greatest in North America, and in more senior researchers.

**We see quite a big difference in reported OA publication between HSS disciplines.**

47% of journal authors in education research reported publishing an OA paper in the last 3 years, the highest proportion of OA for the HSS disciplines where we received more than 100 responses. By contrast, only 29% of politics authors reported publishing OA.

Compared to 2014, there was also a great deal of variance in how much OA publication has grown. Economics saw an increase of 7% year on year in authors publishing via OA, whereas fewer culture and media studies authors reported publishing OA in 2015 than did in 2014.

**An area where HSS authors differed from natural science authors was in the audience they said they wanted to be aware of their published research.**

It is unsurprising that HSS authors were more likely to say that practitioners (e.g. medics, criminologists) were an important audience – around 40% said that they were one of the main groups they wanted their research to inform. In comparison, only 22% of life scientists said the same.

In addition, around a third of scientists in each of the physical sciences, biology, medicine and earth science all said that funders were also an important audience for their research, whereas only 14% of HSS authors said this. This could reflect the role that funders have in the social sciences – in general, for each individual author, the significance of a particular funder is somewhat lower than in the natural sciences.

We're keen to see other interpretations of the data, and hope it will become a useful resource for those interested in the changing perceptions of scholarly communications.

*Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of the Impact of Social Science blog, nor of the London School of Economics. Please review our [Comments Policy](#) if you have any concerns on posting a comment below.*

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## **About the Author**

**Dan Penny** is *Head of Insights at Nature Publishing Group and Palgrave Macmillan*.

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