

## Publishing for the community

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The Microbiology Society's mission is to advance the understanding and impact of microbiology, and our publishing activities play an important role in delivering that goal. As a not-for-profit society publisher, we take our responsibility to our membership, to our authors, reviewers, and editors, and to the wider microbiology community very seriously. While the planet is in the grip of a pandemic, caused by one of the very microbes our members spend their careers researching, we knew we had to make it as easy as possible for relevant research to be found, shared and used.

On 23 January 2020, the Microbiology Society team had an initial conversation about making all our Coronavirus content free-to-read. We moved quickly from that point, working with our editors and governance bodies to collate and release the collection, without a paywall, within just four days — as we had previously done for outbreaks of Ebola and Zika. As with those collections, the [Coronavirus collection](#) has been updated as our journals publish new relevant papers — such as the latest thinking on Covid-19 countermeasures from [Tim Inglis](#) — and as we have located others in our extensive archives, including the [first ever images of coronaviruses](#), pictured in 1967.

We remain committed to adding further research in the coming weeks and months, including early reviews of the various methodologies being employed to understand SARS-CoV-2. All of this is in line with our commitment as a signatory to the Wellcome Trust's '[Statement on data sharing in public health emergencies](#)', which says that we ensure:

- all peer-reviewed research publications relevant to the outbreak are made immediately open access, or freely available at least for the duration of the outbreak;
- research findings relevant to the outbreak are shared immediately with the WHO upon journal submission, by the journal and with author knowledge;
- research findings are made available via preprint servers before journal publication, or via platforms that make papers openly accessible before peer review, with clear statements regarding the availability of underlying data;

- researchers share interim and final research data relating to the outbreak, together with protocols and standards used to collect the data, as rapidly and widely as possible — including with public health and research communities and the WHO;
- authors are clear that data or preprints shared ahead of submission will not pre-empt its publication in these journals.

Since January, however, with the extraordinary and global efforts made to curb the spread and impact of SARS-CoV-2, researchers worldwide have been kept away from their workplaces. For many their libraries have provided excellent service and access to e-resources for faculty and students alike. However, with libraries around the world asking us to implement temporary authentication methods such as username/password to make access easier for their home-based researchers, and against the backdrop of a rapidly-spreading, lethal pandemic, we had to reconsider whether the paywall was justified. With the agreement of our officers, the Microbiology Society journals dropped the paywall across all our publications, regardless of scope or subject, from 2 April 2020.

Along with many others in the scholarly communications space, we have opened our content because it is the socially responsible thing to do and we aspire to our publishing being open by default. The [Publish and Read](#) programme we introduced this year allows for cost-neutral, unlimited fee-free OA publishing across all six Society titles, hybrids as well as full OA, as well as unlimited read access to the entire journal archive. Four months into the pilot we have seen an average of 1.4 submissions per signed-up UK institution, and if the trend continues we will be able to demonstrate not just cost neutrality but cost savings to our library partners compared with subscriptions plus APCs.

Early feedback suggests that whilst some libraries have overcome the complexities of internal budgets, many are still struggling with combining their collections budget with grant funding for OA. For the academic year 2020/21 we anticipate that this will only become more challenging, and that the financial pressures arising from the pandemic will be felt keenly across the research ecosystem. It has never been more crucial to work closely with our library partners, which is why we have been pulling together the Society's first ever Library Advisory Board to help us to make the best decisions possible. We know there are no easy answers to questions about when and how to reinstate the paywall, when and how to shift our journals from hybrid to OA, or even when and how to assess costs and pricing. Our duty to the microbiology community requires us to ensure that our publishing activities are sustainable, both financially and by not creating a playwall (pay to publish) in place of the paywall.

These are all questions for the next few months, and if you have any feedback for us we would be very grateful for your insight. At a time when we are counting on many in our community to help find solutions, however, we hope that making the Society's complete journal archive freely available will be seen as a positive contribution to the global research effort. Access will be free to all until further notice.

These views are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect the views of UKSG.



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