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Introduction

The process of transferring a journal between publishers is common and yet surprisingly complex. Data need to be transferred accurately and rapidly, systems have to be updated, access for subscribers must be maintained, and customers should be told exactly what is happening and when. Many publishers are well aware of the issues, and navigate these challenges seamlessly. But some are not, and things can go wrong – two of the reasons why, in 2006, a small group of publishers, librarians, and other publishing stakeholders formed the Transfer Working Group. Its aim was to provide some simple guidance for publishers, an initiative that is now known as the Transfer Code of Practice.

With support from UKSG¹ the Transfer Working Group released the first iteration of the Code in 2008.² Following a period of consultation, the Code was updated to Version 2 shortly afterwards, but has remained effectively unchanged since then.

The Transfer Code is intended to be more than a set of guidelines. It is a way for publishers to show that, during the journal transfer process, they will adhere to the standards of quality and performance that the Code embodies. Publishers can publicly endorse the Code, and they are then expected to follow the recommendations within it. Instances of non-compliance can be reported to the Transfer Working Group, which provides support and guidance for publishers, librarians, and other relevant stakeholders in the publishing process.

Reasons for change

The Transfer Working Group has worked hard over the past few years to raise the profile of the Transfer Code and to encourage publishers to follow the guidelines. During this time the pace of change in academic publishing has, if anything, accelerated. Online and digital have replaced print as the primary publishing formats for most disciplines, leading to useful new ways of presenting (and allowing users to engage with) research. However, these innovations – such as podcasts, videos, interactive figures and PDFs, commenting functionalities, and blogs – all bring

INDUSTRY UPDATE

Evolution of the Transfer Code of Practice

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ABSTRACT. *The Transfer Code of Practice was launched in 2008 as a set of best-practice guidelines to be followed when a journal changes publisher, with the aim of ensuring uninterrupted access to content for subscribers. The Code has now been updated to reflect the continued evolution of the academic publishing process driven by new technologies, policies, and publishing practices.*



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extra complexity when considering whether and how to translate them to a new publisher's platform.

The ascendancy of the online product has also changed the publishing process itself – papers are routinely published 'ahead of print' (a term that will surely become obsolete in future years), so the cut-off date for the transfer of content is more blurred than previously. Digital preservation arrangements with third parties such as LOCKSS³ or Portico⁴ need to be considered, and the rise of various different usage metrics (such as so-called 'altmetrics' or even online usage data) means that the information available for transfer now stretches well beyond the research paper itself.

And finally there is open access, which is offered in some flavour by almost all publishers. Here it is especially important that the correct rights information accompanies all transferred content – particularly where a title is 'hybrid', with some open and some subscription content. The advent of open access has greatly increased the number of possible licensing options, and the terms of these need to be preserved as the content changes hands.

With such rapid and significant changes to the way in which research information is presented and accessed, the Transfer Working Group realized that the Transfer Code needed to evolve, to acknowledge and reflect these developments. A new draft – Version 3 – of the Code was released for public consultation between July and September 2013, and, after the feedback was incorporated, formally adopted in March 2014.

In this article we set out some of the changes that have been introduced in the latest version of the Transfer Code, as well as the reasoning behind them, and outline some of the Transfer Working Group's other initiatives to extend the reach and impact of the Code.

Changes in Version 3 of the Transfer Code

It is important to say at the outset that the original intentions that inspired Transfer – making best-practice recommendations to avoid interrupted service to customers – remain unchanged. With this in mind, the modifications that the Working Group has introduced in Version 3 the Code are all in the spirit of improving and extending Transfer's provisions, rather than taking it in an entirely new direction.

The lifecycle of digital content

In this digital age journals are dynamic entities, with articles at any particular time likely to be spread over a range of pre-publication and published stages, not to mention digital published materials that have subsequently been preserved by one or many agencies.

Version 3 of the Transfer Code addresses this situation by presenting advice on content as it moves through the editorial/publishing workflow. Thus, there are new sections dealing with 'online editorial systems', 'content in production (pre-publication)', and 'ahead of paginated issue' content. There is now also provision for communicating details of any digital preservation arrangements in place at the time of the transfer. The new publisher (known in the Code as the 'receiving publisher') is encouraged to continue with existing (or equivalent) arrangements after the effective transfer date and required not to remove any content that has previously been deposited in preservation archives.

Content beyond the basic journal article

Several additional content types are identified in Version 3, recognizing that journal articles are now frequently supported by supplemental data, such as related datasets and multimedia files. The Code now also stipulates that the transferring and receiving publishers need to agree whether title-specific apps or audio/visual archives will be transferred, and who will be responsible for curating any existing journal-specific social media sites (e.g. Twitter or Facebook pages).

Online entitlements

A key aspect of successful transfers is clarity on 'who is entitled to receive what'. At its most basic level this involves accurate communication of up-to-date and complete subscriber lists. However, Version 3 of the Code now includes clauses covering institutions that have been receiving access to the transferred journal via deeply discounted or 'big deal' collections, as well as various types of gratis subscription that are frequently encountered.

Identifying and locating content

The Working Group took the opportunity in Version 3 to extend the Code's coverage of considerations around the identification and location of content. Two new sections highlight pro-

cedures and best practice surrounding the communication and updating of ISSN information. These stipulate that the transferring publisher should communicate the ISSNs of all current versions of the journal (for both print and online versions), as well as the linking ISSN or 'ISSN-L' where this is known. In turn, the receiving publisher is asked to notify the appropriate national ISSN centre of the transfer.

Another new paragraph provides practical and robust guidance on transitional journal URL links and permanent redirects. To ensure that the journal remains easily discoverable and accessible to subscribers, title-specific domain names should be transferred to the receiving publisher. Alternatively, if the title home page is part of the transferring publisher's domain, the Code requires the transferring publisher to provide URL links or redirects directly to relevant pages on the receiving publisher's site for at least 12 months after the effective transfer date.

Licensing terms

Clarity on licensing terms for digital content is regarded as increasingly important, whilst with the evolution of perpetual access rights, open access publication, and other models, there is a wide variety in the actual usage terms allowed. Transfer is itself agnostic on specific licensing models, but recognizes the criticality of communicating usage rights or restrictions at the time of transfer. From Version 3 the Code clearly indicates the responsibilities of both the transferring and receiving publishers in this regard. Transferring publishers are expected to indicate to receiving publishers the terms under which all content was originally published; receiving publishers should ensure that any content previously published under licence without charge to users will continue to be made available under the existing terms.

A Transfer Glossary of Terms

Alongside the changes described above, a Transfer Glossary of Terms is now available to complement the Code – so that readers can understand the ways in which terminology (such as 'big deals', 'perpetual access', 'supplemental data', and so on) has been used. Various editorial changes in Version 3 improve the clarity of the Code. For example, tightened descriptions, restyling 'customers' as 'subscribers', and other such changes have been introduced to make the Code as accessible and clear as possible.

Improved communications

Such accessibility – enabling clear communication to librarians, readers, and third-party services – is critical if the Code is successfully to meet its aims of ensuring content remains easily accessible and that journal transfers occur with minimum disruption. To this end, alongside the Code itself, Transfer has also provided an alerting service specifically for these stakeholders and other interested parties to sign-up for information on transitioning titles.

In its original incarnation, the alerting service comprised a simple form and email notification. Publishers were asked to provide basic information about the transitioning journal, including its title and ISSN, the effective transfer date, and the transferring and receiving publishers – with named contacts for both wherever possible. Email alerts containing these details were then generated and sent to registered subscribers. This provided a flag for recipients that a particular title might need their attention due to a forthcoming transfer and encouraged direct communication with the listed transferring and receiving publishers if there were any queries or concerns. In particular, the alerts were intended to prompt librarians to check and update title holdings and links in their catalogue.

This basic service existed alongside Version 2 of the Code. However, although it fulfilled the core requirements, it had only the limited functionality outlined above and was not readily scalable. To coincide with work to update the Code to Version 3, the Working Group reviewed the alerting service and proposed that enhancements were necessary in order to provide both the scalability required and also a more functional record of journal transfers. This was envisaged as providing more comprehensive information, being easier for publishers to complete with the relevant details, and allowing users to search for a specific transfer. Jisc funding was subsequently approved to create an Enhanced Transfer Alerting Service (ETAS),⁵ hosted and run by Mimas (a nationally designated data centre based at the University of Manchester) as part of the Journal Usage Statistics Portal (JUSP).⁶ Programming resource for the new service was provided by Cranfield University.

ETAS has been designed around a database, as opposed to a mailing list, with the details taken from a more comprehensive submission form than existed with the previous service. As well as the basic information required in the past, new details requested include information

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on archiving and perpetual access arrangements. However, to keep the barriers to use low for publishers, a revised form layout introduces tick-boxes or buttons in place of free-text fields as far as possible, and also provides boxes with information on how to complete each section.

As well as email alerts and a blog recording these transfer details (both of which existed with the previous alerting service), ETAS provides an RSS feed and a straightforward search interface for the underlying database. This allows users to search for previous transfers, rather than having to store and sort through emails. All fields recorded in the submission form are covered, allowing users to search by, for example, journal name, publisher involved, and ISSNs. The inclusion of 'and', 'or', and 'not', plus phrase and wildcard search terms means this is a flexible search tool as an increasing number of transitions are recorded in the database. Search results can also be exported in the CSV file format, allowing them to be opened, searched, and sorted in Excel or other spreadsheet programs.

ETAS went live in March 2012, allowing the old alerting service to be retired and details to be migrated across. The intention of the Working Group is that ETAS will be continually reviewed and improved to ensure that the details recorded and disseminated include the most pertinent information for transfer stakeholders. Since ETAS was introduced, new features have been added as a result of user feedback. Specifically:

- the ability for publishers to submit records of multiple title transitions through a spreadsheet upload;
- linking out to The Keepers Registry (a service developed by EDINA, the national data service centre at the University of Edinburgh, and the ISSN International Centre in Paris) from the digital preservation agreements section of the submission form to clarify the details required from Publishers.

Although the Working Group cannot directly measure the success of the system in terms of enabling clear communications, there has been increasing usage of Transfer's alerting services. The number of transitions communicated can be seen in Figure 1, with a significant increase following the introduction of ETAS in 2012. The Working Group's intention is that mandating the use of ETAS in Version 3 of the Code will enable this service to become the key resource for librarians, readers, and third-party services requiring information on journal transfers.

Increasing endorsement

Endorsement of the Transfer Code grew steadily following the release of Version 2 in September 2008. However, with the significance of the planned updates, the Working Group decided to link the release of Version 3 with a proactive drive for new publishers to endorse the Transfer Code. Target publishers were identified by three main methods:

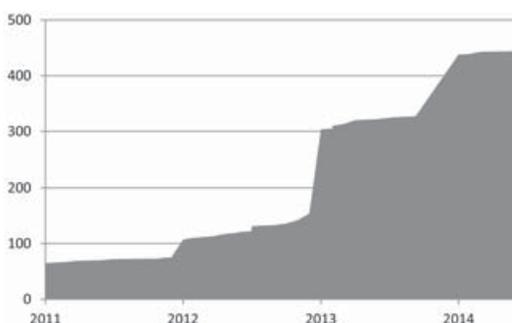
- those listed as a transferring publisher in records on ETAS;
- contacts provided by existing endorsing publishers;
- publishers of large numbers of titles identified by Working Group members.

The Working Group has recognized that endorsement can be a significant step, especially for smaller publishers with potentially fewer staff and resources to enact any process changes required to become compliant. As such, conversations around possible endorsement can take some time to develop into full compliance. Nevertheless, the number of publishers endorsing Transfer has grown significantly: in July 2012, prior to the draft of Version 3 being sent out for wider comment, there were 36 endorsing publishers; in July 2014, following rollout of Version 3, there were 50. This growth has coincided with the endorsement drive, increased activity from the Working Group to promote the Code, and the introduction of Version 3.

The significance of the changes introduced for Version 3 led the Working Group also to confirm re-endorsement of the Code by the publishers already signed up to Version 2. The emphasis of this approach was on flagging the Version 3 changes to endorsing publishers and ensuring that their organizations remained committed to the Code in light of these. As such, although re-endorsement was assumed, currently compliant publishers were contacted separately to the

there is increased use of Transfer's alerting service

Figure 1. Cumulative industry-wide journal transitions communicated, by effective transfer date.



wider distribution of the Code for comment, with the opportunity to raise any specific queries or concerns.

Conclusion – future challenges and next steps for Transfer

The rapid pace of change in academic publishing looks set to continue, if anything accelerating as online and digital innovations supplement or replace print-based processes and enable new models for the dissemination of scholarly research. The flexibility and experimentation brought about by these developments has challenged the existing notions of the content, procedures, and metadata that define an academic journal, and this in turn has resulted in lower uniformity of these elements between publishers. Digital publishing has turned out not to be a temporary phase of disruptive innovation – requiring a ‘shift to digital’ before settling into new, regular patterns – but an evolving landscape of change and experimentation which has become the new normal for academic journals. As such, there are significant challenges for best-practice guidelines seeking agreed principles and broad endorsement against a backdrop of increasingly disparate approaches to journals publishing. These considerations particularly apply to the Transfer Code, where differences in terminology, procedures, data, and systems between publishers must be reconciled to avoid barriers to the continuing availability of content over a journal transfer.

Clear communication remains key, both between the transferring and receiving publishers involved in a transfer, and also to the wider audience of stakeholders. A continuing core objective for Transfer is to promote and enable this. Provision and ongoing development of ETAS is targeted at ensuring that all of the stakeholders who are not involved in a transition but are affected by it (such as librarians, agents and intermediaries) understand what is moving, to where, when, and what this means for them. For interactions between publishers, the Code stipulates timeframes for data confirmations and transfers. The Transfer Working Group also now provides a service for confidential and impartial dispute resolution.

The wider industry audience must also be considered. By publicizing the Code at conferences and industry events, the Working Group seeks to encourage endorsement from the widest possible pool of journal publishers, either directly or by encouraging journal owners to require

compliance with the Code from their publishing partners. Arguably, comprehensive endorsement across the industry is more important now than ever, to cover specialist publishers, established publishers experimenting with new models, and journal owners managing their own publishing arrangements.

Version 3 of the Transfer Code and the introduction of ETAS represent significantly improved coverage of transfer issues and service to key stakeholders. However, in light of the challenges outlined above, Transfer must now maintain this momentum, keeping pace with industry changes, and continuing to provide as comprehensive and relevant guidelines as possible. To this end the Working Group continues to meet regularly to discuss how best to engage the wider communities of stakeholders, potential future discussion points where Transfer can offer guidance, and to capture the concerns arising for consideration in a future Version 4.

As a final chapter to this tale of evolution, at the time of going to press the Transfer Code is in the process of moving to NISO⁷ to become one of its Recommended Practices. The Transfer Working Group will become a NISO Standing Committee and enjoy the support and reach that NISO can offer. It remains for us to thank UKSG for its support over the past eight years, and to look forward to the further evolution and growth of the Transfer Code under the auspices of NISO.

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a landscape of change and experimentation has become the new normal for academic journals