

# In Praise of Peer Review

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# UCL Press – the UK's first fully open access university press

- Launched June 2015 as UK's first fully open access university press
- All books and journals published open access
- Books also published in print for sale
- Publish scholarly monographs, textbooks, edited collections, journals
- All outputs are peer reviewed
- All books and journals go through full editorial process
- Wide dissemination – nearly 500,000 downloads for 40 books in 2 years
- All subject areas – strengths in anthropology, archaeology, architecture, history, environment, languages

# Why peer review?

- Publisher reassurance – publisher is not expert to judge all subject areas
- Author reassurance – rigorous peer review signals a serious publisher
- Confirmation of publisher and author belief in the work
- Helps publisher position the work for marketing purposes and understand it in relation to other books on the subject
- Objective view of the project from external, expert perspective
- Constructive guidance for the author, often from someone more senior
- Editorial development – emphasis, expansion, scope, structure, order, shaping

# Paying reviewers and what they do

- £75 for review of proposal
- £150 for review of a full ms
- Decision taken to reward reviewers because of ill feeling in academia about free labour
- Puts the publisher-peer reviewer relationship on the footing of a business transaction
- We ask reviewers to comment on: scholarship, audience, landscape, suggested improvements, originality, objectivity, timeliness
- Provide endorsements

# Peer review process for monographs

- Peer review process managed by Commissioning Editor
- No submission system – all managed by email to facilitate discussion
- Finding reviewers: desk research, recommendations from Board, author, other reviewers
- Single-blind peer review – reviewer is anonymous
- Getting reviews in: request return within a month for review of proposals, and six weeks for full ms
- Commissioning Editor: liaison between reviewer, Board and author

# Editorial Board role

- Responses from the author submitted to the Board
- Editorial Board discussion – further evidence of changes in line with suggestions may be requested
- Contract offered if approved at the Board on condition that changes made in line with reviews
- Revised ms is submitted to the Press and is reviewed in full by one of the original reviewers who reports to the Commissioning Editor
- Contract clause stating that ms can be rejected and contract cancelled if final ms does not meet standards of proposed book and approved chapters/ms

# Author / reviewer / publisher liaison

- Internal assessment of the review
- How to handle if it's a negative but fair review
- How to handle if it's a negative but unfair review
- How to handle if it's a poor-quality review
- Author reaction in these scenarios
- Guiding the author through the process
- Convey to author the importance of engaging in a rigorous review process

# Challenges of peer review

Some of the challenges that can arise – but rarely do!

- Difficulty finding reviewers – circumstances, time of year, type of project
- Length of time it can take
- Unreliable returns
- Poor quality review ie too short, not constructive, misunderstanding
- Contradictory reviews
- Biased reviews
- Adverse author reaction

When these situations arise, we engage in discussion and tactful negotiation



# Peer review and editorial development

- Working with academic peers and exchanging ideas and opinions is an integral part of academic life – no-one works in isolation
- Peer review can be seen as an extension of that
- Reviewers suggest: alternative structures, query whether titles match the content, inform authors of new literature, query the approach an author has taken
- It is hard for authors to look at a project objectively, and peer review brings that external view

# Example

- Highly regarded author proposed first solo monograph
- Fantastic subject, great expertise and ideas, highly original
- Commissioning Editor, strong belief in the concept (me!)
- Previously published books by same author – close working relationship
- First review was very negative, proposing an entirely different book
- Shock, horror!
- Author understood the reviewer's misunderstanding and took the opportunity to reconsider the approach, with the outcome a better, more focussed new proposal

# Alternatives

- Peer review is often a discussion, an exchange, not simply a report
- Increasingly, the author or the reviewer suggest making contact with each other to discuss further, and we are open to that
- Feedback while writing and general guidance seem to be what authors most want from peer review
- For journals, we are planning to introduce open post-publication peer review
- Pilots for open peer review for monographs eg Palgrave, indicate that it can introduce new challenges and doesn't necessarily solve the problems people experience with the traditional model

# Thank you!

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