15 minutes to develop your research career

Podcast Transcript
Episode 7: Making your research open

Claire Doffegnies: This is the Taylor & Francis and Vitae podcast on developing your research career. I'm Claire Doffegnies, from Taylor & Francis.

Kate Jones: And I'm Kate Jones, from Vitae.

Claire Doffegnies: Today, we'll be talking about the what, the why, and the how of open research. We'll be asking, what is open research?

Carolyn Sutter: Considering how the whole research workflow can be opened up.

Kate Jones: What are some of the different ways in which research can be made more open?

Charlotte Tate: They can start sharing information with their colleagues.

Claire Doffegnies: How might open scholarship benefit you and your research?

Charlotte Tate: I think it allows us to really just double-check the work that's been done.

Kate Jones: What are the biggest opportunities and challenges?

Rosarri Griffin: Who owns material, and under what circumstances can it be used?

Claire Doffegnies: And what support is available for researchers?

Kate Jones: Earlier this year, Vitae went to the EuroScience Open Forum, otherwise known as ESOF, in Toulouse, France. And asked people their views on open research. What are the key issues, the opportunities and challenges? What's it all about?

Katie Hornby: My name's Katie Hornby, and I'm based here in Toulouse, in the [foreign language 00:01:04]. I'm really passionate about the fact that science has to ultimately, impact on society. You have to be open, in order to engage with the general public that can help co-create that material, comment on it, evaluate it. Give feedback on that, as the general public, to say whether it really resonates with them. And also, so that they can see how they can then tap into the benefits of that science.

Gordon Dalton: I'm Gordon Dalton from Cork, in Ireland. I'm a researcher in marine and maritime renewable energy. Traditionally, when a researcher does a scientific paper, the paper is based on a collection of data sets. And the conclusion is made from the data set, and the paper is written.

Up until now, it's hardly ever that the data set is being made open. As a result, it's very difficult to

continue that research, or someone to recreating the wheel and doing the exact same experiment, or learning from the data sets. They have to start all over again.

From the person that's created the data set, there is a certain amount of years of work, of collections. So there might be a reluctance to hand over that data set. In the responsibility of society, all researchers should make their data sets available. Particularly, for societies that are unable to afford the expensive collection of that original data set. They may be able to use it, and do some modifications and advancements.

Rosarii Griffin: My name is Rosarii Griffin. I work at University College Cork. There is always a downside to open access, and that is, you will always have questions around IP, intellectual property. Who owns material, and under what circumstances can it be used? Can they be misused? Can you be misrepresented? And these are a lot of very serious questions, I guess, that we need to consider. Especially, in the context of a world of globalization, where everything is available.

But we also need to think about sustainable development, sustainable science. And what is the impact, for instance, of your discovery or your research on the environment, on people, on society?

Karen Stroobants: My name is Karen Stroobants. I'm at Royal Society doing an internship to train actually, how science policy is done. The first thing I think that's important, particularly on this ESOF, is that researchers are responsible to be transparent and open. And not only when they have the results, but throughout the process.

Talk to each other about methodology, about why you're doing a project, what your outcomes are, who you want to help, what impact you want to make? Because people can give feedback already, on all those steps throughout your research program.

Claire Doffegnies: This helped illustrate some of the questions and issues that surround open research. And to help us understand these further, we asked Carolyn Sutter to talk us through the basics.

Carolyn is Head of Editorial Development at Taylor & Francis. Previous founder of Co-Action, and past president of the Open-access Scholarly Publishers Association. We asked her to start by telling us what open research is.

Carolyn Sutter: I think open scholarship, open science, open research are often used interchangeably. Or one tends to be used in some communities, while another term is used in another. To think more about what open science, open scholarship, open research actually means and what it entails, if you think about open access, that's something that we've been talking about and developing for, I guess, almost two decades now.

While open access focuses on unrestricted access to, and reuse of the research article, conversations around open scholarship or open science reach beyond this, to considering how the whole research workflow can be opened up. That is, how can researchers and scholars share the input, and the different outputs that are involved in the process of carrying out their research, or

their scholarly analyses?

And so, open scholarship involves those practices, but also a number of tools and techniques that are being developed today, and different perspectives. Some of them are focused quite a bit on trying to enhance the transparency, and the overall robustness of this research. It also encapsulates a shift in the way that research is being undertaken and shared.

Claire Doffegnies: We then asked, what are the biggest myths that surround open access?

Carolyn Sutter: An obvious myth that springs to mind, is the notion that open access journals are of lower quality. It is true, that we see a number of scam journals out there. We do see some entities that are trying to take advantage of scholars.

However, regardless of the business model a journal is based on, and regardless of the copyright, or licensing policy that authors may be asked to sign, serious publishers ensure that content is subjected to sound peer review. And that the editors and the editorial teams adhere to best practice, with respect to ethics and research integrity.

Claire Doffegnies: And thinking beyond open access, what are some of the different ways in which research can be made more open?

Carolyn Sutter: Well, one starting point that is talked about a lot today, and that I think most researchers will have heard about, is sharing their data. Early this year, Taylor & Francis launched a suite of data sharing policies. Most of our titles now apply at least the basic policy, which encourages authors to share their data, when this is possible. We do recognize that there are instances and cases, where one shouldn't share data. For example, if there is personally identifying information that is in that data.

But there's lots of other ways that researchers can be more open with their research. In general, I would say, for yourself, if you think back through the process that you've engaged in and you think, what would have been helpful for me to have been able to see an example of, or another case of, while I was doing my work? For instance, if you're carrying out some qualitative interviews, would it have been useful to see someone else's interview guide on a similar topic?

If you can think about those things, those are the types of things that you actually can share. And by sharing them, you can actually have a permanent identifier associated with them, and people then can cite that they've actually used your work. In this sense, there's a real benefit there because it makes your work more visible. And in time, we can start getting credit for more of the work that we're doing, than just that final article.

Kate Jones: Making your research open can also benefit your career, as we found after ESOF.

Karen Stroobants: I think that the training of PhDs is not resulting in one career path, anymore. And I think open science will be helpful in the way that people perceive collaboration, communication, transparency. Which will also help them, I think, in finding other careers. Because

many of these concepts are important in any career, I would say. And actually, also an academic one.

One takeaway from the career perspective of the sessions, I would say, is that people need to take in their own hands, their careers. Because sometimes, their priorities will not be the same ones as their boss's priorities.

Rosarri Griffin: The opportunities are enormous, because I suppose, one of the indices at the moment of good quality research, or indeed, universities, are the number of citations. Now, obviously, if research is published freely, it would probably be cited more. So in a way, it's good to keep your research open, and the flow of information.

The downside of that, of course, is that you may not get quality research, if everybody's citing everybody, as research is just freely available. There are a lot of ethical questions that arise then, about what constitutes quality research, and who is publishing quality research, and what are the factors that determine quality research.

But there are a lot of positives for researchers, to build their careers, research careers in this respect. But then also, you have to ask the question, about these international indices about citations. Is that the limits of good quality research? Are there not other considerations?

Claire Doffegnies: Next, we speak to Charlotte Tate, Professor of Psychology, to hear the researcher perspective on open research, to find out more about sharing research data.

Charlotte Tate: I'm a professor of psychology at San Francisco State University, and I've been interested in open science for quite a long time. I really did, in the past and when I started, but also still now, believe that transparency is the essence of good science. I think it allows us as a scientific community, to evaluate all of the decisions that have been made for any particular research study, to also see exactly what happened.

It also stops people from cutting corners, to use that colloquial phrase. Leaving out pertinent details. Sometimes, those details are left out on purpose, and the researchers know that they're doing that. There's some idea that it's not going to make their story as exciting. But sometimes, implicitly it's left out. There's just word count limits and things like this, so they just cut information. Which actually, would be really good for us to have, but it's just cut out of that.

And so, I think having open research exist and now, having even a groundswell of interest in it, really allows us to make sure that people aren't cutting these corners. And then, I would say finally, I think it allows us to really just double-check the work that's been done.

Claire Doffegnies: We then asked, where can researchers start with using more open research practices?

Charlotte Tate: I think they should start at the beginning. And what I mean by starting at the beginning, is they can start sharing information with their colleagues. Sharing within their lab, and

sharing with incoming graduate students. If they can start with their own colleagues, then they can start to share the information. And their colleagues know best what they're looking for. So when they share with collaborators or other kinds of colleagues, they can start to understand, "Oh, okay, this is the information that I would like to see. These are the things that I would like to know." And it's specific to the research questions. It's specific to the methodologies that are being used in that field.

I think once they do that, and they start to feel more comfortable, they have fewer fears about how they look, they can in a certain sense, get feedback, but in a protected environment. At least, intellectually, they feel like their colleagues can maybe give them critiques, but it doesn't go anywhere. No one sees that. Then they can move to these other platforms that exist, by organizations, because they can already feel comfortable in their ability to share this information, in a certain sentence, internally. And then they can make it external.

Claire Doffegnies: What's the biggest misconceptions about open research?

Charlotte Tate: I think the biggest misconception is that you need to share everything, immediately. I think, why that is a big misconception and then it leads into a fear, is because then folks who have data that they're still trying to analyze parts of, they think that other people will scoop them. If they release all of their data, their big data set, then someone can just go in and analyze some question that these researchers were going to get to eventually, and do it before them.

But I think that that is one. And I'm not just saying, I know it's patently false. There's no reason to... Particularly, if you have a research program using a longitudinal data set, or just a large data set that has multiple questions, you don't have to share everything, immediately. You can share selectively.

Claire Doffegnies: And how can open research practices be used to develop your research career?

Charlotte Tate: I think taking in open science practices, I think just makes everything better. One, it allows for more collaboration, because in part information is out there. It's known, that you're collecting these types of data. You're doing these types of analyses. It makes collaboration easier, because once you've actually shared it in a manner that is accessible to other people, then if someone says to themselves, "Oh, I have data about that, too." Then they can connect with you, a little bit more easily.

Particularly, those folks who are interested in open science, then start to have a common language, that they can actually use with each other. Because the specifics, of course, of the language may be different, but the approach to wanting to share data, allows for much easier collaboration.

And then of course, you can find other people. Networking. Those who are particularly interested in open science, because by its very nature, people are being transparent and open. So you can also figure out where they are, what they're doing. But they're also known to you. It's known to you, who is engaging in these practices.

Claire Doffegnies: We then spoke to Claire Redhead, Executive Director at OASPA, to think about the bigger picture of open research, where open access is today, and how you can get the support.

Claire Redhead: The focus of OASPA is setting standards in open access, and having communication between members, and representing those members that we have, ingrained and here to stay, I think. Although, it may not be the biggest percentage of articles that are published, it's definitely a significant amount.

And we do some tracking of this. We produce an annual report every year, and we do see growth year-on-year. Perhaps, not quite as steeply as eight, nine years ago, when things like BioMed Central and PLOS were just starting up, and there was this huge explosion. But definitely, it's now firmly established in the landscape. It's changed a huge amount.

Claire Doffegnies: And for researchers looking to publish their work, open access, what would be your top tip?

Claire Redhead: Well, one of the things that we look for, is transparency from publishers. They're all doing things differently. I've mentioned a couple of times, we have such a huge variety of members. All their models are different. But what we expect from members, as part of our criteria when they join, is the information is easy to find for researchers, so that they can compare what they're getting from each publisher. What are the processes going to be? What the price is?

My tip for researchers would always be to do your homework. That information should be available to you. Find out what that publisher is offering, as part of the publication process. There are resources. We've been involved in setting up a resource called Think. Check. Submit, which is like a checklist for researchers to use. When you're coming up against unfamiliar or new journals, as well, then that's something that researchers can use to guide them in the things to look for.

Claire Doffegnies: That's all for today. Thank you for listening. We'll see you here, next time.