

Economics Bulletin:

An effort to return control of the publication process to the academy

Readers will know that the Newsletter does not accept advertising. This article, by Myrna Wooders at Warwick¹ about the Economics Bulletin and the thinking behind it, however, raises important issues of principle to the academic community, issues which have been raised before in these pages.²

THROUGHOUT THE academy, researchers are questioning the high cost of commercially published print journals. A good summary of these concerns may be found on Ted Bergstrom's web page at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Our experience of editing the *Journal of Public Economic Theory* encouraged John Conley and me to think about how we, as academics, might respond. With the help and support of many others in the economics research community, this ultimately led us to develop and launch a completely electronic, refereed journal called *Economics Bulletin*. *EB* is meant to compete with *Economics Letters* and publishes original notes, comments, and preliminary results in all areas of economics. In addition to our refereed content, we also publish nonrefereed research and conference announcements and letters to the editor.

Our two founding principles are open access and a commitment to speeding up the process of scholarly communication. To this end, we do not charge either individuals or libraries for access, nor will we in the future. Since our launch a few months ago, we have published more than thirty papers from authors at such places as Cambridge, Universidad del Pais Vasco, Princeton, Tilburg, Oklahoma, Université Catholique de Louvain, Kiel, Australian National University, and Boston College to name a few. We are happy to say that editorial turnaround so far averages less than 20 days. We encourage you to have a look at this new publication and hope that you will consider making a submission of your own.

We feel that it is important that scholars begin to reassert control of the research dissemination process. We are strongly supported in this by the University of Illinois Library, which has guaranteed that it will archive the contents of the *Economics Bulletin* and undertake to make research published in *EB* publicly available on a permanent basis. As an aside, since papers published in *EB* are both refereed and archived, we believe that they should meet the criteria required for consideration in the Research Assessment Exercise.

Why is there a need for a web-based letters journal?

The objective of a letters journal is to generate wide and rapid circulation of timely research. Unfortunately, both the business model and the technology employed by almost all commercial publishers make it very difficult for them to satisfy this objective. We see the major problems with the current approach as the following:

Cost: The academic publishing industry has become more and more concentrated and journal prices have risen dramatically in recent years. An institutional subscription to *Economics Letters*, for example, costs \$1592. The strain this puts on the budgets of major universities in the industrialised world is bad enough. The consequences for scholars at smaller universities and colleges, especially in the developing world, are even more serious. High journal prices diminish the access of such scholars to current research and place them at risk of becoming intellectually disenfranchised. Traditional commercial publishers must make a priority of restricting access to information to those who have paid for the privilege. This necessarily puts them in conflict with the interests of researchers who benefit from the widest possible dissemination of their work. In contrast, at the *Economics Bulletin* we see our primary mission as supporting the research community. Since subscription fees serve to exclude people from access, *EB* is available completely free of charge to all users.

Publication delays: Paper journals are inherently limited in how fast they can get new research into the hands of interested readers. Simply mailing a manuscript from author to editor to associate editor to referee and then back up the chain can easily take months by itself. Typesetting and sending proofs back and forth to authors, correcting proofs, and then printing, binding, sending, and cataloguing a physical journal can also take months. All told, this process builds in an overhead of a four to six month delay in addition to the time it takes a referee to provide a review and an editor to make a decision. Add to this the lags resulting from backlogs and periodic publication schedules, and it is easy to see why a typical article can take years to appear in print. Even at *Economics Letters*, the submission date on a manuscript is generally eight to twelve months prior to the publication date of the issue. In contrast, since it is entirely electronic approach, *EB* is subject only to refereeing delays. Our objective is to make decisions within eight weeks. So far we have exceeded this goal by a very wide margin.

Content: Many journals, including *Economics Letters*, publish notes and comments. The norm that seems to have emerged, however, is that such articles should be short, complete papers. In contrast, one of the major missions of letters journals in other fields is to keep their research communities up-to-date on current and on-going work. Although *EB* will also publish refereed notes and comments, we see our major contribution as providing a place for economists to communicate cutting edge research that is still at a preliminary stage. We strongly urge authors to submit such preliminary results and will make a spe-

cial effort to referee such manuscripts as quickly as possible.

Copyright: Commercial publishers generally insist that authors transfer the copyrights of accepted papers as a condition of publication. In some cases, even making published articles available on one's own website may contravene such transfer agreements. Many people find it extremely troubling that we write the papers, referee the papers, edit the papers (usually all for free), and then are forced to give up all commercial interest in our work if we want it published. At *EB*, our goal is disseminate information as widely and quickly as possible. Our copyright agreement simply asks that you give us permission to do so when you submit a paper, but allows the author to retain all other rights.

Other features

Research announcements: One of the most important things we can do as scholars is to make sure that the relevant research community is aware of our recently completed work. To foster this *EB*, publishes research announcements that include a paper's title, abstract, author's contact information, and the current status of the paper (submitted, recently accepted, available from the author, etc.). In addition to publishing these on the site, notifications go out to interested researchers both through our own email notification service, and through the IDEAS network. We hope that this will be especially useful both to young researchers and to senior researchers venturing into areas that are new to them.

Conference announcements: These are also published on the site and disseminated through our automatic notification service.

Directory of research economists: Our directory is meant to make easier to keep in touch with colleagues. We hope that you will register and include a short profile of yourself.

Automatic e-mail notification service: When you join the directory of research economists, you may also request periodic notification of newly published work in your areas of interest.

Scholarly communication is in the process of dramatic change. The *Economics Bulletin* is an effort to push it in the direction of open access and control by the scholars who actually produce the research. We hope for support for these goals and thank the RES for its interest in this endeavour.

The *Economics Bulletin website* is: www.economicsbulletin.com

Ted Bergstrom's website is: www.econ.ucsb.edu/~tedb/

Notes:

1. The author is grateful to John Conley, University of Illinois, for comments in the preparation of this article.

2. *Editor's note:* The issues of cost and of control of published work by academics have been raised before in these pages - by Manfredi la Manna and his ELSSS project. An update on this project appears on p. 7, above. Interested readers might also recall Professor Yew-Kwang Ng's article in the July *Newsletter*, no.114

New research- on teenage mothers

The UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre in Florence, Italy has just published the first league table showing the rate of 'teenage births' across 28 countries of the OECD. Korea, Japan, Switzerland, the Netherlands and Sweden occupy the top places with fewer than seven per 1,000. AT the bottom come the USA and UK with over 50/1000 and 30/1000 respectively. The countries at the bottom of the table, also have the highest rate of births amongst 'young' teenagers, aged 15-17. With a few exceptions, the countries with high rates of teenage motherhood are countries with relatively high income inequality and low proportions of 15 to 19 year olds in education.

Births to teenage mothers are declining, with a corresponding rise in average age of the mother at first birth. But this still means that 1.25 million teenage girls across the industrialised nations will become pregnant this year and approximately half a million will seek abortions. Furthermore, while the numbers may be declining, the problems associated with teenage motherhood are, if anything, increasing.

Research commissioned by UNICEF from the Institute of Social and Economic Research at Essex, and based upon 13 EU countries, shows that women who have their first child in their teenage years are much more likely to experience poverty and other disadvantages, than those women who have their first child in their twenties or later. Other disadvantages include lower educational attainment, a higher probability of being a single parent and a lower probability of employment (for themselves and their partner). The disadvantages vary in their severity across countries, but taking the disadvantages together, the UK ranked third from the top. Combining the 'severity' of these disadvantages with the fact that the UK's rate of teenage pregnancy is by far the highest in Europe puts the UK way out front.

More information can be found at:

www.unicef-icdc.org and at www.iser.essex.ac.uk/epag/pubs

...and on child poverty

Another research project sponsored by UNICEF shows that the standard way of measuring child poverty understates its extent by large amounts. The usual practice is to quote rates of child poverty by taking a snapshot of the fraction of children 'in poverty' at a particular time. In the UK, this typically gives a figure of about 17 percent. But Bruce Bradbury, Stephen Jenkins and John Micklewright show that if the experience of a cohort of children is monitored over time, then a much higher proportion will experience poverty for a period of time. Over a five year period the percentage for the UK more than doubles to 39 per cent. Looking at just a two year period increases the recorded rate in Ireland by a third and in Spain by 50 per cent.

The standard measure also ignores the incidence of prolonged child poverty - those who poor from one year to the next. Across the countries studied, between five and nine per cent of all children in the poorest fifth, stay there for at least five years.

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