

Speeding up peer review and manuscript publication during COVID19 : can collaboration work?

"The research community quickly became flooded with preprints and journal articles submissions of highly variable quality. We needed to work collectively to help ensure research articles were filtered, assessed and published quickly. The open letter helped galvanise the community into reviewing and publishing COVID-19 work more efficiently."
 Phil Hurst, The Royal Society

In early 2020 academics and publishers were overwhelmed with volumes of COVID-19 submissions and requests to peer review. The C19 Rapid Review initiative was created by 6 publishers and 3 industry experts (endorsed by OASPA) to determine if collaboration could speed up peer review and increase manuscript transfers to try and reduce this burden.

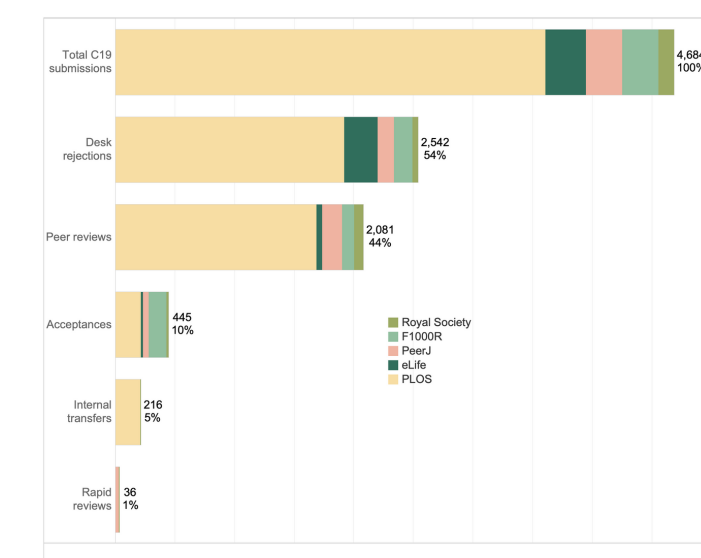


Academics might want to be rapid reviewers but they haven't yet been used in high numbers

So far only 10% of the RR pool have been invited to review and out of those 2% have submitted a report.

But the Publishers are able to fast track C19 papers for publication

All publishers and journals in the collaboration have seen a rapid increase in C19 manuscript submissions - with most desk rejecting these submissions at a higher rate compared to other submissions. The turnaround times on papers in peer review are also quicker than other submissions at this time.



However authors are not keen to transfer their papers to other journals

There have not been any manuscript transfers between publishers either before or after peer review. The Royal Society has seen a small percentage of papers transferred to other titles in their portfolio but at similar rates to those seen previously.

So has the collaboration worked and what next?

- Academics were galvanised to sign up and look to be strongly influenced by incidence of C19 in their own countries - but publishers and editors haven't used them in the volumes we expected.
- Authors also seem reluctant to transfer their manuscripts to other publishers in the group.
- Volumes of papers keep increasing but all publishers are able to turn around C19 papers quicker than non-C19 submissions and are rejecting more before peer review.

The group is committed to improving the transfer options for authors, using the rapid reviewers to help close the loop between preprints and research papers via PRereview and collecting more data on turnaround times of C19 papers.

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 Ian Caswell, UCL & the C19 Rapid Reviewer Publisher Collaboration**

The collaboration has grown rapidly

The collaboration is now 11 publishers, 3 industry experts, and 7 endorsers with the journals involved in the initiative increasing from 54 to 65. The group has worked closely with PRereview which has seen rapid increases in C19 preprints.

Academics have signed up to become rapid reviewers

There are now over 1800 rapid reviewers signed up from around the globe. The geographical distribution of sign-ups aligns with the incidence of C19 with most reviewers joining from the USA, Brazil and Italy.

