

Bona Fide Journals - Creating a predatory-free academic publishing environment

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[A recent item in Nature News](#) reports *"Hundreds of 'predatory' journals indexed on leading scholarly database", sub-headed "[...] the analysis highlights how poor-quality science is infiltrating literature."*

A year before, a group of leading scholars and publishers already [warned in a comment in Nature](#), *"So far, disparate attempts to address predatory publishing have been unable to control this ever-multiplying problem. The need will be greater as authors adjust to Plan S and other similar mandates, which will require researchers to publish their work in open-access journals or platforms if they are funded by most European agencies, the World Health Organization, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and others."*

Given the significance of the problem of predatory publishing, [QOAM \(Quality Open Access Market\)](#), in cooperation with CWTs, has started a new initiative to create a predatory-free academic publishing environment: [Bona Fide Journals](#).

The harm

The [fine of \\$50](#) million imposed by a U.S. federal judge to OMICS reflects the material damage this publisher caused over the years 2011 to 2017. Given the [long list of predatory publishers](#), it seems only a modest guess to multiply this \$7 million per year by 3 to have an indication of the harm caused by all of them together, making it roughly \$20 million annually. This figure might be growing under the current publication pressure, while, at the same time, predatory journals simply pass the compliance test of the newly launched [Plan S Journal Checker Tool](#).

On top of that is the immaterial, hard to quantify damage to the reputation of misled authors and falsely advertised editors and reviewers. This affects the authority of the whole fabric of science. *"Publications using such practices may call into question the credibility of the research they report,"* [according to the US National Institutes of Health \(NIH\)](#). Predatory journals contaminate the scientific and scholarly domain with fake news in a period in which the integrity of science may be more important than ever.

Also, niche journals outside the mainstream of the highly branded portfolios of the big publishing houses are at risk. Jan Erik Frantsvåg conducted a thorough analysis of [journals removed from the Directory of Open Access Journals \(DOAJ\)](#) in their 2016 grand cleansing operation. His resonating conclusion is that *"there is nothing [...] that indicates that the journals that were removed were of inferior scholarly quality compared to those remaining."* In such a banished mix the good suffer from the evil and a differentiating service is urgently needed. Till today, this problem continues. See [here](#) and [here](#) and [here](#).

The remedy

Setting up a list of predatory journals has proven problematic (see [here](#) and [here](#)). Conversely, creating a list of trustworthy journals outcasts honest journals that did not make it to the list. Other attempts concern lists of criteria for 'predatory-ness', leaving it to individual researchers to check a specific journal (see [here](#) (paywalled) and [here](#)).

Recently, QOAM in cooperation with CWTS, launched a new initiative: [Bona Fide Journals](#). Starting with all 42,000 journals in QOAM, the idea is to indicate the journals in the list which are deemed non-predatory, either because they are no-fee journals or because they are approved by library professionals. Examples of the second category are journals in [DOAJ](#) and [journals included in institutional deals](#).

However, this still leaves thousands of journals unaddressed. Bona Fide Journals will enable institutional libraries to express their trust in these journals. The expectation is that most libraries are familiar with a number of niche journals from institutions, societies or charities in their own discipline, region, or language.

The only thing libraries have to ascertain is that a journal is not mala fide. In case of doubt, the [Compass to Publish](#) may offer practical guidance. If a journal has gained expressions of trust from three different libraries, it will be included in the list of trustworthy journals. Thus, libraries may resume their role as quality guardians of the academic publishing domain.

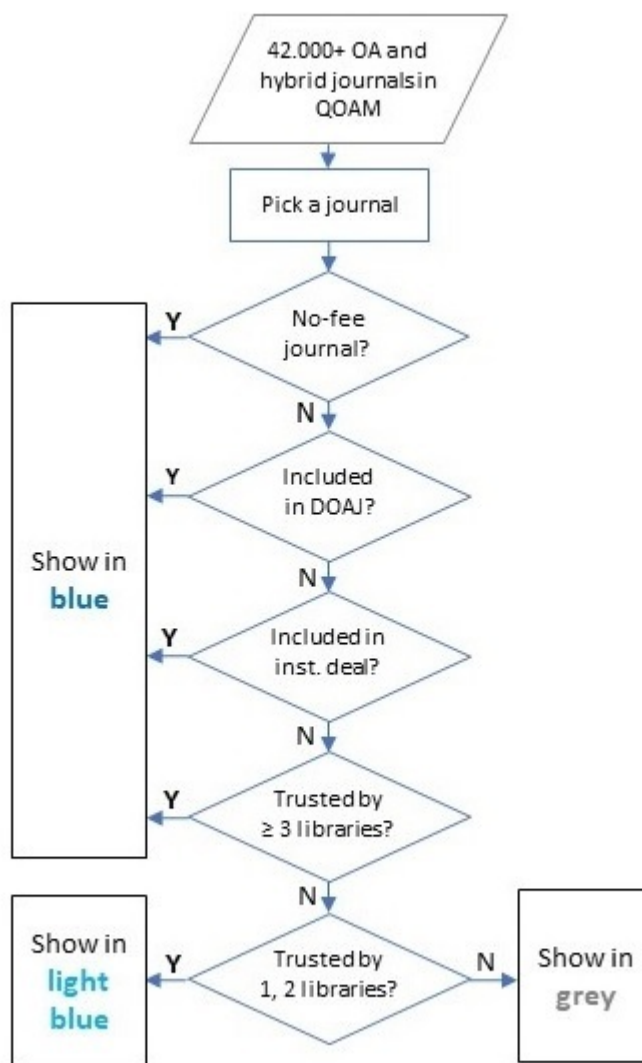


Figure 1. Schematic overview of the selection process for Bona Fide Journals. Colours in the flowchart mark the level of trustworthiness: **blue** sufficient, **light blue** partial, **grey** no.

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Next to DOAJ, other sources may be included in the second diamond of the flowchart (see Figure 1), such as high-profile indexing services or recognized platforms like [Redalyc](#), [SciELO](#), [OpenEdition](#), or [African Journals Online](#).

What is available now?

Today, [Bona Fide Journals](#) is operational as a minimal viable product, soliciting user comments to guide further development. Potential current use cases are:

- A (spammed) researcher checking the trustworthiness of a journal which solicits their article.
- A library suggesting a specific collection of trustworthy journals for a project or an institute.
- An open access publishing service using the list of Bona Fide Journals to filter out predatory journals that may have infiltrated into their journal base.

What is next?

Bona Fide Journals offers basic evidence of the honesty of journals, but journals may still differ a lot when it comes to peer review, editing, data transparency, speed of publication, author evaluation, or publication fee. There are several websites that provide useful information on these aspects, but authors who wish to select a journal in which to publish their article may easily get lost when trying to find the most relevant information. Therefore, a next step that we hope to take is [to develop an infrastructure](#) that brings together the diversity of such services in a more systematic way. Instead of reducing the selection of a journal to a simplistic dichotomy (mainstream vs. unfamiliar) or a questionable one-dimensional ranking (journal impact factor), such an infrastructure offers researchers an informative variety of publishing options and enables the scientific community to optimally benefit from these options.