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Prestige and Gatekeeping in Postgraduate Journals

The Case of Postgraduate English

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**ALISTAIR BROWN, ANNA-ROSE SHACK
AND DOUGLASS VIRDEE**

**PRESTIGE AND
GATEKEEPING IN
POSTGRADUATE
JOURNALS:**

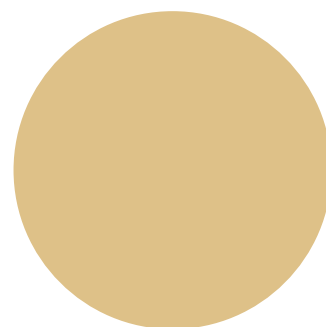
The Case of Postgraduate
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ABSTRACT

Relatively little has been said about the opportunities and challenges of digital, open access publishing as it pertains to postgraduate-led journals catering to postgraduate researchers. This paper draws on the authors' experiences with *Postgraduate English*, one of the longest-running, born-digital journals for postgraduate researchers in English studies. It makes the case for the benefit of such publications within the prestige economy and describes the ways in which quality can be assured, challenging those who might see postgraduate publications as further diluting the pool of high-quality research. At the same time, the paper raises critical questions about who really wins in postgraduate publishing. While those who publish and edit can benefit from the prestige indication of these activities, ultimately host institutions may gain more from the relationship via the hidden labour costs behind them.



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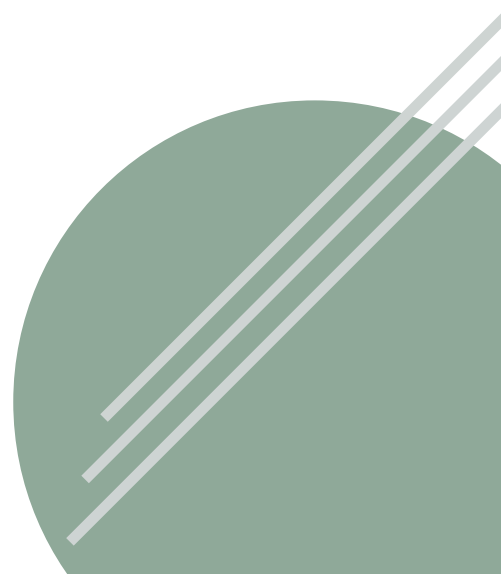
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Douglass Virdee is an Honorary Fellow in the Department of English Studies, Durham University. He has co-edited *Postgraduate English* and peer reviewed for De Gruyter's *Cognitive Linguistics*. His current research focuses on communicating risk and probability. More broadly, his work continues to explore understandings of time, and how these interact with our senses of self and morality.

FULL ARTICLE

1 INTRODUCTION

Although the concept of open access has been dated back to the 1980s,¹ even at the turn of the millennium the field was nascent. When it was established in 2000, the journal *Postgraduate English* anticipated developments that would only later be fully realised; it has since become one of the longest-running born-digital journals publishing postgraduate researchers' scholarship in English literature.² Over this period *Postgraduate English* has evolved in response to wider publishing practices and technological opportunities, such as the advent of Creative Commons licences or the development of Open Journal Systems. At the same time, common principles have remained. The journal has always been edited by PhD students, rotating every two issues, but peer reviewed by academics employed by a university faculty.³ *Postgraduate English* is typical of digital journals – specifically those published with Open Journal Systems – in having editors with no prior journal editing experience, while drawing on a professional peer review pool.⁴ Despite an increasing tendency towards journals specialising by language, region, or sub-disciplinary area in the era of digital publishing,⁵ *Postgraduate English* has always incorporated submissions from across the discipline of English, with no limitation as to period, genre, or media. It has always accommodated discussion of world literature, and over time it has moved from accepting submissions from researchers in UK and European institutions, to global submissions. In this paper, we draw on the experiences surrounding this representative journal to debate the opportunities and challenges of digital, open access publishing as it pertains to postgraduate-led journals, catering to postgraduate researchers.

We begin by summarising the journal's 20-year history, setting it against the changing publishing landscape. We then situate the journal within wider debates around open access, especially the contention that open access and online publishing dilutes

1 'Early OA Journals', in *Open Access Directory* <http://oad.simmons.edu/oadwiki/Early_OA_journals> [Accessed 18 February, 2021].

2 In this paper, we generally use the term 'postgraduate' to refer to the principal contributors, editors, and promotional strategy of journals such as these, but 'early career researcher' when reflecting issues that affect postgraduates and those shortly post-PhD. However, the distinction between postgraduate researcher, unattached and independent PhD-holder, those in fixed-term postdoctoral positions, and permanent but early-stage academics is not clear cut. Contributors to *Postgraduate English* range from MA students who submit during their taught year but are then published once they have commenced their PhD, to PhD researchers, and some post-PhD contributors, whether in an academic post or not. For a discussion of the unrooted nature of the postgraduate/ECR see Heather Griffiths, 'Am I a PhD ECR? What is an early-career researcher?' *Jobs.ac.uk* <<https://blog.jobs.ac.uk/all-things-research/phd-ecr/>> [Accessed 2 March 2021].

3 'About the Journal: People', *Postgraduate English* <<http://community.dur.ac.uk/postgraduate.english/ojs/index.php/pgenglish/about/displayMembership/4>> [Accessed 24 May 2021].

4 Brian D. Edgar and John Willinsky, 'A Survey of Scholarly Journals Using Open Journal Systems', *Scholarly and Research Communication*, 1.2 (2010) <<https://doi.org/10.22230/src.2010v1n2a24>> [accessed 28 Feb 2021].

5 Mu-hsuan Huang and Yu-wei Chang, 'Characteristics of Research Output in Social Sciences and Humanities: From a Research Evaluation Perspective', *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, 59.11 (2008), 1819–28 <<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1002/asi.20885>> [accessed 1 March 2021].

quality by facilitating lower-quality journals and research, a challenge that might be especially (but incorrectly) levelled at early-career publishing.⁶ On the other hand, such journals fulfil an important function in postgraduate career development. We contend that postgraduate journals can attain a degree of prestige through their editorial and peer review practices, as well as longevity; such outlets may enable postgraduate researchers to acquire 'symbolic capital' indicated by publications, which is now necessary for academic careers.⁷ We then consider the effects of sustaining this balancing act upon the individual journal editors. Postgraduate editors operate at a point of tension: supporting a community of peers, but also acting as gatekeepers responsible for maintaining the journal's quality, such as by directing calls for papers to appropriate audiences and sifting out work not viable to proceed to review by professional academics.

We write from the perspective of former postgraduate editors and academic staff serving in an editorial role. Our varied experiences enable us to acknowledge the value of such postgraduate journals within the scholarly publishing ecosystem, while also reflecting critically on some of the hidden costs of postgraduate publishing.

While postgraduate journals manifest some of the same difficulties as those which obtain in the wider academic marketplace, such as the perceived credibility deficit of emergent open access publications,⁸ discussions of the financial and cultural capital of open access publishing often do not consider the values in circulation at the postgraduate level, where such journals serve a distinct purpose. In one rare reflective article that does cover this, the editors, librarians and academics involved in the establishment of the multidisciplinary, graduate-run journal *Meeting of the Minds* identify the training benefits of such publications but recognise the challenges of achieving sustainability as editorial teams rotate to maximise opportunity.⁹ We note similar career-development benefits, but also consider how the two decades' presence of a journal like *Postgraduate English* serves as a reminder that its stability is inversely proportional to the precarity of postgraduates. Bluntly, postgraduates donate their labour and receive training in the short term, but the only guaranteed long-term prestige accrues to the host institution. A second longevity-precarity tension exists in terms of authorial copyright and the mobility of postgraduate authors, which we discuss in detail below. O'Donnell et al. review the technical challenges and appropriate platforms for

6 Martin Paul Eve, *Open Access and the Humanities: Contexts, Controversies and the Future* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

7 Paul Blackmore and Camille B Kandiko, 'Motivation in Academic Life: A Prestige Economy', *Research in Post-Compulsory Education*, 16.4 (2011), 399–411 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/13596748.2011.626971>> [accessed 20 Feb 2021].

8 Ana Bocanegra-Valle, 'How Credible Are Open Access Emerging Journals?', in *Publishing Research in English as an Additional Language: Practices, Pathways and Potentials*, ed. by Margaret Cargill and Sally Burgess, (Adelaide: University of Adelaide Press, 2017), pp. 121–50.

9 Paul Esau, Carey Viejou, Elaine Toth, Kayla Ueland, Rumi Graham, Daniel Paul O'Donnell, and others, "'Let's Start a Journal!': The Multidisciplinary Graduate Student Journal as Educational Opportunity', *The Journal of Electronic Publishing*, 21 (2018) <<https://doi.org/10.3998/3336451.0021.109>> [accessed 3 March 2021]. The article's comment on the challenge of sustainability appears to have been prescient; the journal website ulgsajournal.com is no longer functional, and the journal appears to have been discontinued around 2019.

postgraduate publications, but only in parenthesis note that permanent identifiers like Orcid 'might have been a beneficial policy assisting students in establishing themselves in academia'.¹⁰ We unpack the implications of copyright and authorship as they relate to postgraduates. We also call for further research into postgraduate practices, and for the training gap to be acknowledged.

2 JOURNAL HISTORY

Postgraduate English was established in 2000 by Professor Timothy Clark at Durham University. At the time, the peer review process was seen as beneficial primarily because it enabled researchers to receive external commentary on work excerpted as part of the developing PhD. However, since then, the need for publications as a proxy measure for a candidate's quality in the academic job market – which may be more significant than the PhD itself – has likely shifted the motivations of many contributors.¹¹ Across 40 biannual issues between 2000-2020, *Postgraduate English* has published a total of 177 different researchers. Although it publishes far fewer than the mean 31 articles per year of open access journals at large,¹² these figures highlight the diversity of authorship in a postgraduate journal, which opens opportunities to a wider field, but perhaps invite questions about whether – and, if so, what – these contributors went on to publish elsewhere.

Reflecting the need to support postgraduate scholars, the journal has always operated with two submission cut-offs per year, and with a standard, open call for papers that recognises that English 'can be interpreted fairly widely, not excluding, for instance, work in cultural studies'.¹³ In recent years, *Postgraduate English* has published research ranging from Old Norse poetry to global fantasy writing to analysis of medieval song lyrics, as well as emergent fields such as cognitive humanities and ecocriticism.

The journal has always been managed by postgraduate research students within Durham University's Department of English Studies, usually in pairs covering two issues per year before handing over. Editors are responsible for issuing a standard call for papers, allocating peer reviewers, liaising with authors, and copy editing. As others have observed, graduate journals offer important educational opportunities for their editorial teams, giving insight into the process which may

10 O'Donnell, Daniel, Carey Viejou, Sylvia Chow, Kimberly Dohms, Paul Esau, Steve Firth, and others, 'Zombie Journals: Designing a Technological Infrastructure for a Precarious Graduate Student Journal', *Scholarly and Research Communication*, 9 (2018), 20 <<https://doi.org/10.22230/src.2018v9n2a296>> [accessed 3 March 2021].

11 Chris Park, *Redefining the Doctorate* (York: Higher Education Academy, 2007) <<https://eprints.lancs.ac.uk/id/eprint/435/>> [accessed 25 Feb. 2021].

12 Edgar and Willinsky, p.9.

13 'Editorial Policies', *Postgraduate English*, <<http://community.dur.ac.uk/postgraduate.english/ojs/index.php/pgenglish/about/editorialPolicies#focusAndScope>> [accessed 12 Feb. 2021].

in turn make submitting their own work to peer-reviewed journals less daunting.¹⁴ Editors are supported by two members of academic staff: a Technical Editor, responsible for maintenance of the IT infrastructure and ensuring journal policies and processes align with emerging contexts such as data protection laws; and an Advisory Editor, who offers guidance on submission policies, academic content, and editorial methods.

Initially the journal was maintained as a static HTML website developed on Microsoft Publisher. In 2012, owing to the bloatedness of this file system, it was migrated to an Open Journal Systems (OJS) install. Due to the rotating editorship and the difficulty of mastering the complexity of a particular challenge for precarious journals with a high editorial turnover¹⁵ – the journal does not operate a workflow solely within OJS; rather, all peer review, copy editing, correspondence, and typesetting is handled in ways agreed by each editorial team, such as shared documents and cloud folders. A plugin is used to upload final PDFs to Open Journal Systems, and to add appropriate metadata. Throughout, *Postgraduate English* has been hosted on a server provided by Durham University for ad hoc personal and institutional research projects.

Contemporary publishing is marked by the increasing use of social media as an enhancement to journal activity, with attached blogs, Twitter feeds, or discussion boards.¹⁶ These can raise the journal's profile and citation rates, as well as building a community of scholarship. Examples might include the *Journal of Victorian Culture* or the *British Association of Romantic Studies Review*, each with a linked blog, as well as crossover innovations such as *Alluvium* which is a blog-inspired journal hosted on WordPress. *Alluvium* submissions are also subject to post-publication peer review with message boards for each article. To reduce editors' social media management workload, *Postgraduate English* is supported by the English department's social media brand, READ: Research English At Durham.¹⁷ Journal contributors are invited to publish blog posts or other forms of dissemination, with the support of the READ editor, a member of permanent academic staff. This forms another part of the journal's offer of practise and training in public engagement and dissemination. Both are increasingly vital for arts and humanities researchers who, in the UK context at least, must demonstrate the wider social impact of their work under the Research Excellence Framework.¹⁸

We now consider the possible tension between this career-development role played by postgraduate publications and the contribution of such publications to the wider knowledge economy.

14 Esau et. al.

15 O'Donnell et. al.

16 Aravind Sesagiri Raamkumar and others, 'Understanding the Twitter Usage of Humanities and Social Sciences Academic Journals', *Proceedings of the Association for Information Science and Technology*, 55.1 (2018), 430–39 <<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1002/pr2.2018.14505501047>> [accessed 12 Feb. 2021].

17 READ: Research English At Durham <<http://readdurhamenglish.wordpress.com>> [accessed 4 March 2021].

18 Mark Carrigan, *Social Media for Academics*, 2nd edn (London: Sage, 2019).

3 POSTGRADUATE JOURNALS IN THE PRESTIGE ECONOMY

Publishers, like academics, are keen to garner prestige. The greater the reputation of the publisher, the more high-profile its reviewers and, so the argument runs, the better the submissions. In practice, both relationships can be a bit chicken and egg.¹⁹ To attract better submissions, a publisher needs prestige, but to gain prestige, it must publish great research. This means it must take something from the intellectual establishment. Engaging well-established expert reviewers and publishing material that resembles an existing tradition of 'proper' research, for example, are activities that contribute to elite publishers remaining in essence conservative institutions. Not that big commercial publishers have a vested interest in avoiding provocative output. It might even be argued that such organisations are better placed to take risks than their smaller counterparts. However, the rewards may be higher, and the costs lower, for risk-taking in postgraduate publishing.

A common argument against open access is that it dilutes the quality of academic publishing by broadening participation. This, as Peter Suber points out, is predicated on an ill-founded assumption that prestige and impact are effective measures of quality.²⁰ On this view, a concentrated elite vetting research is better than a wider pool of peer reviewers, editors, and journals. There is a reason some are excluded: they are not good enough. From this perspective, postgraduate journals thin the quality of research further by elevating those with no credentials to editorial status and publishing unproven researchers.²¹

Yet dilution occurs even within the elite apparatus, while many aspects of academic publishing continue to rely on 'good will' and other hidden costs. James English identifies a 'prestige economy' in which authors and reviewers expect indirect payment in the shape of salaried positions recognising 'indicators of esteem' – tokens pointing to legitimate cultural capital. Peer reviewed publications are especially valuable esteem indicators for authors, as is the reflected prestige of being invited to take part in the publication process for reviewers, signifying that they are recognised as experts in their field. But there is a problem. The number of publications, particularly academic journals, has increased in the digital age. English claims this has worsened an existing imbalance

19 While blind peer review means the status of individual reviewers is invisible, it is understood that top journals can call upon reviewers who are authorities in their field.

20 Peter Suber, 'Thinking about prestige, quality, and open access', *SPARC Open Access Newsletter*, 125 (2008) <<http://legacy.eartham.edu/~peters/fos/newsletter/09-02-08.htm#prestige>> [accessed 25 Feb. 2021]. Recent examples of high-impact, high-prestige research challenging this assumption include medical journals shifting to post-publication peer review in an effort to speed up the dissemination of cutting-edge developments in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

21 This may be a matter more of perception than research practice. Those searching for information seem to discriminate mainly on the basis of an article's relevance to their topic, and not on whether a journal is paid versus open access, or published by a scholarly society or university versus dedicated publisher. Ethan J. Allen and Roberta K. Weber, 'The Library and the Web: Graduate Students' Selection of Open Access Journals for Empirical Literature Searches', *Journal of Web Librarianship*, 8.3 (2014), 243–62 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/19322909.2014.927745>>.

as the number of tokens on offer exceeds the number of competent peer reviewers, casting doubt on the legitimacy of the cultural capital indicated by publications even in elite venues.²² Add to that the problematic question of whether the metrics used by publishers to signal venue prestige actually do so and the justification for the elite apparatus starts to wear thin. On its face, the incentive for authors and publishers is to produce quantity, not quality. Individual journals may be incentivised to reduce the quantity of material they publish, thereby elevating the sense that they are 'prestigious' and hard to get into, and so hopefully attracting better submissions. However, it does not necessarily follow that large commercial publishers who own many journals think the same way.

We need not rely on scepticism alone. The overproduction of research in captive markets, where publishers can charge what they like because institutions that want access cannot switch to cheaper alternatives, has left libraries unable to purchase a full range of publications.²³ This limits scope for researchers and reduces the scrutiny to which new research is subjected. Such overproduction may also be the driving force behind 'big deals', in which large publishers package journal subscriptions into bulk purchases, including titles to which institutions might not otherwise subscribe.²⁴ While such deals partially alleviate the problem of libraries struggling to afford a full range of titles, they do so at the cost of distorting the market. Such distortion may result, if it has not already, in publications that are ultimately not worth much crowding out high-quality postgraduate research. If so, government attempts to make academics more accountable by introducing research assessment exercises (with attendant pressures to increase publication outputs) have the counterproductive effect of obscuring promising new research.²⁵ Postgraduate journals are usually published on an autonomous open access basis to allow editors to experience all aspects of production. They typically have neither the time nor the expertise and partnerships to implement the sophisticated search engine optimisation of large commercial publishers which gives titles included in 'big deals' enhanced algorithmic discoverability. The upshot is that postgraduate research, however meritorious, is often overlooked.

There are signs that the old order is changing. Since the beginning of the digital age the percentage of top-cited articles published outside top journals has been growing, and the lasting contribution of innovative research published in less prestigious open access journals is now increasingly recognised.²⁶ This shift illustrates the potential of postgraduate journals to reduce the distorting effects of the prestige economy by providing a cost-effective means to recognise and develop fresh talent while

22 James English, *The Economy of Prestige* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008) p. 133.

23 Aileen Fyfe, Kelly Coate, Stephen Curry, Stuart Lawson, Noah Moxham and Camilla Mørk Røstvik, 'Untangling Academic Publishing: A history of the relationship between commercial interests, academic prestige and the circulation of research', *Zenodo* (2017) pp. 13-14 <<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.546100>> [accessed 4 March 2021].

24 Peter Suber, *Open Access* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012) p. 32

25 Fyfe et. al. p.11; p. 16.

26 George A. Lozano, Vincent Larivière, and Yves Gingias, 'The Weakening Link Between the Impact Factor and Papers' Citations in the Digital Age', *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, 63 (11) (2012) 2140-2145.

maintaining academic quality. *Postgraduate English*'s running costs are low because it is partially subsidised by university stipends and support-in-kind such as server infrastructure, a rotating postgraduate editorial team, and digital distribution. As a result, notwithstanding hidden costs discussed below, there are no Article Processing Charges (APC), and authors benefit from double-blind academic peer review and a semi-professional editing process. The editors may be postgraduates, but their work is overseen by advisory and technical editors who are salaried university staff, as are the academics in the journal's peer reviewer pool. *Postgraduate English* has built up academic capital over the years, gaining a stock of good will with which it can purchase these experts' services.²⁷ Peer reviewers serve as a check on academic quality, but the incentive of *Postgraduate English* is to foster as many early-career researchers as meet a standard,²⁸ rather than maintaining high rejection rates to convey a sense of the journal's prestigiousness. This and other postgraduate and early-career journals – for example, *CERÆ*, *E-Sharp*, and *Networking Knowledge* – provide a mechanism to raise promising researchers out of prestige poverty by subjecting early research to rigorous scrutiny while avoiding the costs that can deter them from bigger venues,²⁹ and which are sometimes used to exploit early career researchers by 'predatory' open access journals. They do so without artificial valuations: a publication in an autonomous postgraduate journal is an honest, if not elite, indicator of esteem. Such authentic tokens are sorely needed to counteract the 'Matthew effect' in an industry geared towards, but bad at recognising, excellence.³⁰ Without them, power, status, and funding are apt to continue to flow towards already privileged individuals and institutions. With them, postgraduates and ECRs can bootstrap esteem by publishing through high quality peer review processes with a lower prestige tariff.

Despite the capacity of postgraduate journals to provide a corrective in the marketplace, they are not entirely isolated from the forces of the prestige economy. *Postgraduate English*, funded by Durham University, is under implicit pressure to uphold the reputation of the World Top 50 institution with which it is associated. For editors, this can lead to an uncomfortable tension between, on one hand, trying to avoid intellectual snobbery and, on the other, maintaining the prestige of the journal and its host institution with which their own academic credentials are ultimately bound. The latter impulse might be suggested by the journal's authors' affiliations. While publicised widely to an international audience through listservs and social media, *Postgraduate English*

27 It also has a pool of established academic peer reviewers, which add to its research credentials by assuring prospective authors that their work will not be peer reviewed by PhD peers but by professionals.

28 As defined by the journal's current submission information: 'An article should present original insight, strength of argument and critical engagement with its field. The journal aims to publish research that contributes something new to English studies.' 'Submissions', *Postgraduate English* < <http://community.dur.ac.uk/postgraduate.english/ojs/index.php/pgenglish/about/submissions#onlineSubmissions> > [accessed 27 May 2021].

29 Although PhD students funded by Research Council grants, for example, may have APCs paid for.

30 Samuel Moore, Cameron Neylon, Martin Paul Eve, Daniel Paul O'Donnell, and Damien Pattinson, "'Excellence R Us: university research and the fetishization of excellence', *Palgrave Communications* 3.1 (2017) pp.1-13 (pp. 4-6).

has a habit of publishing research from Durham University, with 17 percent of articles by its own postgraduates. Why the apparent parochialism? It might be that researchers accepted to a top 50 institution raise the bar for research publishable in the journal. Or it might be that postgraduates are more likely to publish in a 'home' venue, and others simply look elsewhere. Or it might be that, to editors and peer reviewers, Durham graduates produce work that more closely fits conservative parameters of 'proper' research. Whatever the reason, the bumper crop of homegrown publications feeds the university's self-proclaimed reputation for excellence. Not, however, without raising questions about the rationale for discrimination.

At *Postgraduate English* such discrimination may take several forms. A relatively obvious example might be the editorial decision not to progress an article to the peer review stage for lack of scholarly rigour (though truly original research may not conform to conventional notions of thoroughness). A more troubling example is the decision to exclude a submission for poor English, complicated by the problem of pressure on international researchers to publish in English.³¹ A balance must be struck between the linguistic limits of the journal and its purport to publish high quality studies of English, in English, and the recognition that valuable new angles may be opened by looking at English from the perspective of a non-native speaker. Establishing the threshold beyond which a paper's language is considered too poor to be peer reviewed is a matter for careful judgment. Journals should be open to innovative polyglot research and atypical English scholars to palliate the problem of Western academia's horizon-limiting tendency to accord the status of verified research to that in which it recognises its own characteristics.³²

Yet although *Postgraduate English* shifted its terms from accepting papers from institutions in the UK and Europe to a global scope in 2014, just 12% of papers have been published from institutions outside the UK, and only 4 papers have been published from outside the UK, EU and USA. Historic rejection rates suggest the problem of selecting submissions which clear the benchmark of 'good standard of English' to proceed to peer review is thorny, especially for liminal journals like *Postgraduate English* which seek to develop talent. While funders and host institutions are typically more concerned with the end research than how it is produced, they do not want to subsidise poor writing. The tacit reasoning behind such discrimination seems to be that the less time editors and reviewers spend correcting poor English, the more they can spend improving research. That this completely ignores whether an article makes, or could make, a contribution to knowledge is reason to interrogate our thinking when making such decisions.

31 Ismael Faezel and Joel Heng Hartse, 'Reconsidering 'Predatory' Open Access Journals in an Age of Globalised English-language Academic Publishing' in *Global Academic Publishing: Policies, Perspectives and Pedagogies*, ed. Mary Jane Curry and Theresa Lillis (Bristol: Multilingual Matters, 2017) pp. 200-213.

32 See e.g. A. Suresh Canagarajah's account of a graduate essay relegated to the 'semi-scholarly' *Lanka Guardian* because it did not meet the expected criteria for a 'prestigious research journal', despite anticipating pedagogical research in English Language Teaching that would not appear for another ten years. A. Suresh Canagarajah, *A Geopolitics of Academic Writing* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburg Press, 2002). pp. 234-235.

A further implicit tension between postgraduate authors and the journal's host institution lies in copyright policies. These need to be carefully considered to enable any esteem garnered to benefit precarious researchers, as well as the journal and its institution, over the long term. Managing intellectual property has proven far from straightforward. The history of copyright at *Postgraduate English*, describing a shift from a bespoke copyright agreement to Creative Commons licensing, illustrates difficulties faced by smaller academic publishers in the early years of online publishing. At its inception, *Postgraduate English* assumed authors might wish to republish their work elsewhere as further esteem indicators. According to the now archived public-facing policy, contributors assigned copyright to Durham University on the understanding that copyright would revert 'to the authors on republication elsewhere (e.g., as a book or thesis)'. Written at the frontier of the web in 2000, the same year Napster was served with a lawsuit for alleged music piracy, anxieties around IP may have been behind this unorthodox policy; vesting copyright (in most cases only temporarily, given the reversion on publication in a thesis) in the authoritative institution may have seemed a natural way to discourage copying by other publishers or parties. The journal could assert control over re-use, allowing that 'articles may be quoted, downloaded or printed freely for academic or non-profit-making purposes, providing due acknowledgement is given to authors and copyright holders, and to *Postgraduate English*'.³³ This statement, though evidently confusing, encodes similar intentions to the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial licence established the year after the journal. However, it had the potential to create a legal and ethical peculiarity for postgraduate contributors: since the journal claimed copyright (even if temporarily) any prestigious publisher wanting to republish – such as in an edited collection – may have needed to approach the journal in the first instance. Since precarious early-career researchers' institutional affiliations and email addresses are typically more temporary than those of permanent academic staff, in many cases authors are no longer contactable. In that event, the journal would have to decide whether to permit republication, with copyright reverting to the author without their knowledge, leaving them unable to claim the prestige from having been reproduced elsewhere. While to our knowledge this did not happen in practice, we read into this with hindsight the importance of robust and clearly defined copyright policies to protect the author and journal from unauthorised republication, while maintaining their chances of authorised republication in other scholarly collections even years after original publication.

Creative Commons licensing offers a more recognisable solution to the republishing problems that *Postgraduate English* was attempting to navigate.³⁴ In 2012, with the move to Open Journal Systems, *Postgraduate English* turned to a CC BY-NC 3.0 licence. While maintaining the intentions of the original policy in a clearer

33 The public-facing text from the journal's early policies is contained on an archived version stored on an internal server, not publicly accessible.

34 Lawrence Lessig, 'The Creative Commons', *Montana Law Review*, 65 (2004), 1-14 (p. 8) <<https://scholarship.law.umt.edu/mlr/vol65/iss1/1>> [accessed 19 Feb. 2021].

form, CC is not a panacea to the precarity issue. With Creative Commons non-commercial licences other open access publishers can republish articles in other collections, and although they should attribute the origin, they need not (and in the case of the precariat may be unable to) contact the author to notify them so they may claim credit on a CV, leaving the author dependent on altmetrics or search engines to track where their content has been shared. Furthermore, as discussed above, open access is still generally viewed as less prestigious than paid-for publications. Commercial presses have in recent years sought to reproduce work in edited volumes, which requires permission under the NC criteria.³⁵ While the author is the copyright holder, in practice the journal is the visible presence, or even only active contact, so publishers often approach the journal instead. In such a scenario, the journal editors must not grant a request to republish commercially as the journal does not hold copyright, while knowing that it is likely that scholars would react positively to any request (a signal of esteem) if only they were contactable. From the point of view of individuals forging new careers, Creative Commons may be little better than a proprietary copyright regime.³⁶ While Creative Commons' unifying principle may be its empowerment of authors, it is the longstanding journal hosted at a permanent institution, rather than the precarious and ever-mobile postgraduate author, who has the more stable presence to gain credit from republished work. This is a poignant reminder that copyright is not just a legal essential: it affects wider cultural and intellectual practices. Persistent identifiers like ORCID seem vital if postgraduate journals are to keep track of recent authors, and to enable authors to be made aware of re-publishing opportunities.

4 TRAINING REWARDS AND HIDDEN COSTS IN THE EDITORSHIP OF POSTGRADUATE ENGLISH

Historically, editors have been characterised as gatekeepers who protect the academic integrity of a publication platform or research discipline.³⁷ It is a role that feeds into the perception of academia as exclusionary. Taking this perspective, journals edited by postgraduate students occupy an unusual position in the world of academic publishing by elevating junior researchers to the position of gatekeepers within the hierarchies of academia. The co-editors of *Postgraduate English*, in conjunction with the academics who undertake the blind peer-

35 Republishers over the last 8 years include Leyman Poupard, Edinburgh University Press, and Oxford University Press.

36 Niva Elkin-Koren, 'Creative Commons: A Skeptical View of a Worthy Pursuit', in *The Future of the Public Domain*, ed. by P. Berntz Hugenholtz and Lucie Guibault (Amsterdam: Kluwer Law International, 2006) <<https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=885466>> [accessed 2 March 2021]

37 Summar C. Sparks, 'From Gatekeepers to Facilitators: Understanding the Role of the Journal Editor,' *College English*, 77 (2014), 153-157 <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/24238172>> [accessed 20 Feb. 2021].

review process, function as the gatekeepers who maintain the journal's editorial standards. However, recent scholarship also draws attention to the limitations of the gatekeeping metaphor. Summar C. Sparks argues that while editors do have a role in 'reinscribing scholarly standards', gatekeeping fails to encompass the full scope of their work. Sparks characterises editors as facilitators who are 'intimately involved in and connected to the construction of new knowledge'.³⁸ Whether as gatekeepers or facilitators, postgraduate editors make an atypical intervention in the world of academic journal publishing. The co-editorship of *Postgraduate English* enables postgraduate students (i.e. non-established, often younger, researchers) to shape a publication platform that disseminates original and innovative research in the field of English Studies. However, the annual rotation of the editorial team also emphasises the role as a training opportunity and positions the editors as custodians of a journal that spans far beyond individual contributions.

The editors of *Postgraduate English* are guided by the journal's mission to facilitate the advancement of emerging scholars. *Postgraduate English* has the capacity to respond to the needs of postgraduate students and early career researchers by operating as an intermediary to help develop their work. As has been stated on the journal's website since its inception, '[a]n important aim of the journal is to provide a space in which postgraduates in English studies can place their work and, if accepted for publication, receive feedback from established academics'.³⁹ In keeping with this objective, the co-editors and peer reviewers play a vital role in encouraging and guiding emerging scholars. Authors of rejected submissions are strongly encouraged to revise their work in light of the feedback received and resubmit for a future edition. In addition, recognising that the intensely competitive job market for early-career researchers means that the doctoral degree alone is not sufficient to serve as a passport to an academic career, a key purpose of the co-editorship is also to provide postgraduate students with semi-professional editorial experience to develop their wider academic skill set. However, while the co-editors are paid a £500 stipend, representing an anticipated 32.5 hours work each at spine point 30 in the UK Higher Education pay scale, the actual hours devoted to the role far exceed this remuneration. Although open access publications may be free to view, it is estimated that, excluding peer review, the non-cash cost for publishing one electronic-only journal article is around £2,552. Most of these costs are concealed within academic workload and institutional infrastructure.⁴⁰ There is a clear mismatch between what the editorial role is worth to whom. Although co-editing the journal is certainly a training opportunity, there is no guarantee that the editors will be able to access academic posts more easily.

38 Ibid., p. 154.

39 'Focus and Scope', *Postgraduate English: A Journal and Forum for Postgraduates in English* (2000) <<http://community.dur.ac.uk/postgraduate.english/ojs/index.php/pgenglish/about/editorialPolicies#focusAndScope>> [accessed 1 Feb. 2021].

40 Thomasina Floyd, 'Activities, Costs and Funding Flows in the Scholarly Communications System in the UK', *Research Information Network* (2017) <<https://silo.tips/download/activities-costs-and-funding-flows-in-the-scholarly-communications-system-in-the-3>> [accessed 10 Feb. 2021].

Ultimately, the editorial experience remains attractive to postgraduates as a way to build a more sophisticated academic skill set, develop an awareness of academic processes and initiate professional relationships with peer reviewers and contributors. The co-editorship of *Postgraduate English* is a fundamentally collaborative undertaking that not only divides the substantial workload but also enables healthy debate and encourages the formation of a shared editorial vision. The co-editors are responsible for overseeing the publishing process from advertising the call for submissions and selecting peer reviewers, to proofreading and uploading the finished edition. As such, they have scope to develop their own editorial style. Though time constraints often preclude radical innovation, the call for papers and the inclusion of special features allow editors to shape the journal's content or focus. Transitioning from one editorial team to another inaugurates a new chapter in the journal's history on a yearly basis and spurs the continual recreation of the journal through new editorial styles. While handover meetings and documents attempt to ensure continuity in terms of the journal's standards, presentation and ethos, new editors have the liberty to make their own editorial decisions and contribute to shaping the future of the journal. A potential shortcoming of such a frequent rotation of editors is that it is more difficult to build long-term relationships with peer reviewers, and cumulative knowledge and processes are at repeated risk of being lost. However, each edition also renews collaborative and creative potential, both within the co-editorial team and within wider networks of previous editors and contributing scholars. *Postgraduate English* prioritises this collaborative and training potential over avoiding the risks of a yearly reshuffle. Moreover, the journal's intrinsic 'emphasis on connection as co-creation rather than as limit or constraint' positions the co-editors as joint custodians who facilitate and sustain the journal's publication.⁴¹ Conceptualising the editorship as a custodianship reinforces the idea of the journal as an independent entity that exists beyond editors or editions. The journal's reputation and legacy, though inflected with individual choices and comprised of a multiplicity of voices, exists as an entity that can, and should, be passed to new postgraduate students each year.

The recently published 40th edition (Autumn 2020) paid tribute to the diverse lineage of personalities, approaches and research interests among previous editors by asking a number of them to provide reflections on their experiences working with the journal. Many of these former editors noted the value of the editorial role in developing their broader academic skill set and holistic university experience. As Shane Collins, editor of issues 17 and 18, noted in the anniversary edition special feature, collaborating on the journal was a formative experience; 'on reflection that time and freedom to wander and develop was the making of me...My fondest memories are of time shared with other students doing the same thing, working on

41 Rita Felski, "A Perspective from Actor-Network Theory," *Comparative Studies*, 53 (2016), 747-765 (p. 750) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5325/complstudies.53.4.0747>> [accessed 1 Feb. 2021].

Postgraduate English and other journals, organising readings, and sharing ideas'.⁴² Other former editors emphasised the importance of the journal as a publication medium for postgraduate and early career researchers. Kostas Boyiopoulos, editor of issues 15 and 16, explained that, '[o]ne of the many advantages of *Postgraduate English* is that it is a hotbed of enduring ideas: the work of doctoral researchers it showcases often turns out to be the spark and keynote of their lifelong research path'.⁴³ Sarah Lohmann, editor of issues 30 and 31, reinforced the idea that it is not only 'a great opportunity for [postgraduate students] to hone skills that will be useful in their immediate future...it's also fantastic for the scholarly community to end up with a sample of high-quality postgraduate work that reflects a variety of eras and specialisms within the field of English literature'.⁴⁴ It is evident that many former editors reflect fondly on the editorial role as a formative training experience that both contributes to academic development and adds research value in the field of English studies.

However, the balance of benefits potentially leans towards the host institution. A long-running peer-reviewed journal with a good reputation is not without a certain cachet. In relation to the journal Durham University is more venture capitalist than charitable benefactor, although this stance is not unusual within the UK university sector. *Postgraduate English* might usefully be thought of as a third mission activity, indicating a broader tendency among entrepreneurial universities to transmute human capital into organisational capital and thence into social capital.⁴⁵ A glance at the English Department's web pages and social media accounts reveals how keen the university is to cash in by reminding the academic community of the good it is doing. *Postgraduate English* is cited as a source of pride and opportunity on the department's 'Research & Impact' and 'Postgraduate Life' web pages, while the department's social media brand READ highlights the journal's longevity and global purport.⁴⁶ In short, hosting a successful postgraduate journal establishes a virtuous cycle. The university can leverage intellectual capital by accentuating the benefits of the journal for researchers and the knowledge community at large which helps to secure a steady stream of incoming postgraduates and future editors.⁴⁷ This points to another reason to

42 'Special Feature', *Postgraduate English* 40 (2020) <<http://community.dur.ac.uk/postgraduate.english/ojs/index.php/pgenglish/article/view/247>> [Accessed 20 Feb. 2021].

43 Ibid.

44 Ibid.

45 Giustina Secundo, Susana Elena Perez, Žilvinas Martinaitis and Karl Heinz Leitner, 'An Intellectual Capital Framework to Measure Universities' Third Mission Activities', *Technological Forecasting and Social Change* 123 (2017) 232.

46 'Research', *Durham University Department of English Studies* <<https://www.durham.ac.uk/departments/academic/english-studies/research/>> [accessed 17 May 2021]; 'Postgraduate Life', *Durham University Department of English Studies* <<https://www.durham.ac.uk/departments/academic/english-studies/postgraduate-study/postgraduate-life/>> [accessed 17 May 2021]; 'Tags: Postgraduate English', *READ: Research English At Durham* <<https://readdurhamenglish.wordpress.com/tag/postgraduate-english/>> [accessed 17 May 2021].

47 Leif Edvinsson and Patrick Sullivan, 'Developing a Model for Managing Intellectual Capital', *European Management Journal*, Vol 14, No. 4 (1996) 356-364.

keep the journal going: it represents a potential draw for well-qualified but choosy student-cum-customers.

Experience – personal and professional – is increasingly foregrounded in the UK higher education sector. This may reflect the rising consumer power of students. Since *Postgraduate English* was established in 2000, tuition fees for UK students studying in England have risen ninefold. Despite this, the profit margin on home students is slim. As a result, universities are incentivised to attract international students, particularly postgraduates, to whom they can charge more lucrative rates, with a Masters in English Studies costing over £20,000 at the most prestigious institutions. Universities which can offer something above their competitors have a better chance of justifying their high fees and cementing their prestige. It is unclear, then, who benefits more from the postgraduate journal. The business case for the university is strong: gains in academic kudos at low operating costs. While the reputational risk might be notionally higher for the university since it has an established academic standing while postgraduates (usually) do not, in practice the level of expectation is lower for a postgraduate publication than for an elite venue, however well run. This means that when a *Postgraduate English* article is not ground-breaking the university does not lose face, while when it is the university can puff out its chest. The deal is quite good for postgraduates too. They gain what respondents to the 40th anniversary survey recalled as positive personal experiences and networking opportunities, along with professional editorial, administrative, and organisational experience (though the value of these experiences and any skills acquired thereby in the academic job market is not clearly defined). Postgraduates working on the journal also benefit from the longevity and reflected prestige of the title pegged to such experiences on their academic CVs but, as discussed above, in the long run this association is likely to be more significant for the university. If the intellectual community at large benefits from the research, so much the better, but both parties seem to enter the bargain largely out of self-interest. Whether they are equally aware of the terms of the deal struck is an open question.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have used *Postgraduate English* to show some of the qualities of open access postgraduate publications that mark them out as valuable even in a crowded publishing field. These include lowering the bar to postgraduate publication while maintaining quality through peer review processes, and the training opportunity afforded to editors. Previous editors also attest to the affective dimension of this sort of academic labour: the ability to work collaboratively (rare in a PhD in a discipline such as English), to share one's early ideas with the world, and to make a modest contribution to advancing knowledge by taking on some of the workload of academic publishing.

At the same time, we recognise that the balance between costs and benefits of such publications may be unequal. Ultimately, a rotating team of postgraduate editors secures the longevity of a publication whose prestige accrues to the permanent institution. As is true of other early-career experiences such as teaching, institutions may remunerate editorial work and recognise its value in a financial sense, but not to the actual hours required, rationalising this on the basis that the researcher is receiving 'training' as a compensatory benefit. Yet institutions are happy to represent the journals they edit as being more than mere 'training' vehicles: they are indicators of their own prestige for potential applicants.

Open access postgraduate publishing continues to inherit dilemmas from existing authority and institutional structures. This inheritance includes, for example, the challenges of copyright and licencing policies that ostensibly encourage or permit researchers to publish peer-reviewed work elsewhere, while not recognising that postgraduates are more likely to lose institutional contact details and, if so, cannot be made aware that republication – an esteem indicator – has taken place. One clear recommendation to emerge is that the benefit of Orcid and equivalent schemes be stressed to early-career researchers, both by their own institutions and by journals seeking to publish their work.

We conclude by recognising that while *Postgraduate English* has survived various changes in the publishing landscape over two decades, the next two decades offer further uncertainty.⁴⁸ For instance, in terms of the importance of publication for raising the visibility of postgraduates, or for networking, a case could be made that blog-based post-publication review – witness *Alluvium*⁴⁹ – offers a more direct means to give early career researchers a profile, or to lower the bar to publishing that comes with pre-publication review by professional academics attached to more elite journals. Even with *Postgraduate English* we observe that the editorial structures attached to pre-publication review may implicitly exclude non-Anglophone submissions, privilege researchers in the host institution, and create tension within editors, who are conscious of their need to support and foster the work of their peers while maintaining the journal's academic quality through a non-zero rejection rate.

48 Martin Paul Eve et al. *Peer Review: PLOS ONE and Institutional Change in Academia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

49 'About', *Alluvium: 21st Century Writing, 21st Century Approaches* (2021) <<https://www.alluvium-journal.org/about-alluvium/>> [accessed 5 March 2021].

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