**Elsevier Research without Borders Programme**

**Report of a visit to *Annals of African Surgery***

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**1. Background**

**1.1 History**

The *Annals of African Surgery* is a biannual society journal published by the Surgical Society of Kenya (SSK), based in Nairobi. Previously known as the *Journal of the Surgical Society of Kenya*, the journal has been running since 2007 under the leadership of Professor Hassan Saidi. The journal joined the African Journal Partnership Program (AJPP) in 2016.

**1.2 Editorial staff**

As well as the Editor-in-Chief, Prof Saidi, the journal has an Associate Editor, four Assistant Editors, and two interns. The editors are all working doctors and receive no salary for their editorial roles; the interns are medical students who receive a small sum for their (mainly administrative) work. There are 13 Editorial Advisers (six from outside Africa) and around 70 reviewers. It is my understanding that the journal will shortly be in a position to apply to the African Journals Partnership Program for funding for a part-time Managing Editor.

**1.3 Publishing model**

The journal is published open access, although it retains the copyright. There is no article processing charge because the Editors feel that the journal is not currently in a position to attract authors who are willing to pay. The journal is printed and made available to society members at the society’s annual conference. It is also available online via a new website (<http://annalsofafricansurgery.com/>) and via the portal African Journals Online (AJOL). At the time of my visit, the editorial team were in the process of transferring the past issues of the journal onto the new website from its previous home within the SSK website. A previously unsuccessful application to Medline had pointed out the necessity of having a dedicated website. The previous Elsevier volunteer, EJ van Lanen, had facilitated the new website’s development. The website is hosted by a local company called Solvit Solutions.

**1.4 Workflow**

Until recently, submissions, reviewer reports, and proofs were handled by email. As part of his visit, EJ van Lanen arranged for the journal to start using the ScholarOne manuscript submission system. This has improved the interns’ workload considerably, although some regular (senior) authors have been reluctant to, as they see it, jump through the hoops required of the system.

**2. Journal needs**

**2.1 Previous volunteer’s recommendations**

In his debriefing report dated Jan 24, 2017, EJ van Lanen wrote: “Though AAS has some visibility through African Journals Online, and through its newly-launched website, indexing remains a priority for the journal. First steps should be getting the journals on Thomson Reuters Emerging Sources and the Directory of Open Access Journals.”

**2.2 Editors’ priorities**

In my meetings with EiC Hassan Saidi, Associate Editor James Kigera, and intern Brian Kariuki, this priority was reiterated. Indexing was felt to be key to improving the journal’s visibility to both readers and potential authors, and thereby increasing the quality of the content and credibility of the journal. I therefore concentrated my work on examining the requirements of the various indexing systems, advising on which ones could be realistically applied to at this stage, and on identifying any missing features of the journal website necessary to a successful application. The Editors also expressed a wish to develop a sustainable business model. With limited experience in the publishing side of the business, I did not focus on this element, although I have provided some brief recommendations in the table on page 4.

**2.3 Findings**

In examining the requirements of Medline, PubMed Central, Scopus, Thomson Reuters (Clarivate) Emerging Sources Citation Index (ESCI) and the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), and after liaising with colleagues responsible for aiding in the application processes for Elsevier journals, I came to the same conclusion as EJ that the latter two were the most feasible options at this stage. The scientific quality of current articles is not likely to be high enough for indexes that reject >75% of applications (Medline and Scopus) and PubMed Central is problematic in that it requires journals to deliver XML files in a very specific format. The journal is currently not equipped to do this (it only publishes PDFs). However, once the archive issues are loaded onto the website, the journal will meet the basic requirements of ESCI and DOAJ and, in my assessment, would only need minor additions to the website to enable an application. DOAJ has a strong preference for Creative Commons licensing, and I recommend a switch to this model unless there is a good reason not to.

**2.4 Recommendations**

The prioritised targets and actions I recommend in pursuit of the goals of increasing journal visibility and credibility, and adopting a sustainable business model are set out in the table on page 4.

**3. Goals, targets, and actions for the next 12 months**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Goals** | **Targets** | **Priority level** | **Actions** | **Timescale** | **Responsible person** |
| **Increase journal visibility and credibility** | Have website ready for indexing applications | Very high | Load all issue archives | End Q1 2017 | Interns |
| Switch to Creative Commons licensing | End Q1 2017 | Editors to agree, interns to implement |
| Complete website edits listed on page 5\* | End Q1 2017 | Interns |
| Apply for indexing in Emerging Sources Citation Index | High | Fill in and submit application form at <http://ip-science.thomsonreuters.com/info/journalsubmission2/?x=32&y=8> | End Q2 2017 | Zoë on behalf of Saidi (or Saidi himself) |
| Apply for indexing in Directory of Open Access Journals | High | Fill in and submit application form at <https://doaj.org/application/new> | End Q2 2017 | Zoë on behalf of Saidi (or Saidi himself) |
| Apply for COPE membership | High | Fill in and submit application form at <http://publicationethics.org/journal-membership-application-form-0> | End Q2 2017 | Saidi |
| Enable readers to sign up for table of contents alerts | Medium | Liaise with website hosts to find out what is possible | End Q3 2017 | Interns |
| **Adopt a sustainable business model** | Engage part-time Managing Editor | Medium | Investigate how AJPP will facilitate this | End Q3 2017 | Saidi via AJPP partner |
| Develop job description | End Q3 2017 | Saidi/James |
| Begin charging small amount for accepted articles | Low | Keep this in mind as the likely main revenue source when visibility/credibility increases | 2018+ | Editors |

\***Website edits to ensure professional look and capture all elements needed for indexing**- Add section on your process for identification and dealing with allegations of research misconduct (example [here](https://www.biomedcentral.com/getpublished/editorial-policies#misconduct)). This could be added to the Ethics Policies section.  
- Add Editorial Office contact to “About the journal” page, or “Contact us” link at the bottom of the homepage  
- Add separate “Current issue” and “Past issue” tabs across top (ie, alongside “Submit your manuscript”)  
- Be more specific about location of Editors (ie, city and country)  
- Correct spelling of Elsevier on “partner” section of website  
- Suggest moving the copyright information on Guide for Authors further down the page. Does not seem right to start section with a statement on “surrendering copyright”.  
- A search facility is commonplace on journal websites and should be included if feasible

**4. Conclusions**

The Editors of *Annals of African Surgery* are ambitious and motivated and have a good team dynamic under the leadership of Prof Saidi. With the assistance of fellow AJPP partners and future Elsevier volunteers, I have no doubt that the journal will quickly advance its goals. It was a privilege and a pleasure to spend time with the team and I wish to thank them for their welcome and hospitality. I hope to return!