

## When Open Access and Open Source Mean More: A Case Study on the Transfer of Publisher to Ju[ Ubiquity Press, from a Long-established Journal

*In the summer of 2022, international journal “Perspectives on Medical Education” (PME) decided to take the leap and leave their large, traditional publisher with which they had a relationship for 40 odd years, for the smaller, open access, and open source-based Ju[ Ubiquity Press. In this case study, Erik Driessen (Editor-in-Chief) and Lauren Maggio (Deputy Editor-in-Chief) share their experience of transferring publishers in the hopes that their insight will prove valuable to other journals hoping to do the same.*

Uprooting a journal and changing publishers is no small feat, especially when you’ve been publishing for as long and on such a scale as *PME*. Founded in 1982 by the Netherlands Association of Medical Education (NVMO), *PME* received 941 submissions in 2021 alone, and as of 2022 has an impact factor of 4.113 and a five-year impact factor of 4.086.

Until 2012, *PME* was a Dutch-language journal named the *Netherlands Journal of Medical Education*. From its inception, the journal sought to fuel innovation in its research area by standing at the intersection of education research and clinical education, encouraging collaboration between the two fields. It was in this spirit that in 2012 the journal became *PME* - an English-language journal that could appeal to a wider audience of researchers and readers. A decade later, in 2022, the editors felt that it was time to join a publisher that was 100% dedicated to open access; it was this decision that ultimately led them to make the move to Ju[ Ubiquity Press, a fully open access publisher.



### What were the motivations for changing publishers?

Erik, Lauren and the entire editorial team strongly believe in the value of open access. They believe that making research as widely and equitably available as possible is crucial to the future of scholarship, particularly in the medical field. Thus, they felt it was time to align *PME* fully with the open access model, by moving to a publisher that *only* published in open access. Several other factors contributed to their decision to look for a new publisher. The editors wanted easy access to the journal’s own data and analytics. They also wanted to be able to innovate, and update the journal to keep it current.

Their primary reason for moving, however, was financial. *PME* was previously a diamond journal, meaning the article charges levied by the publisher were paid by the NVMO. Due to these charges being high, and the inevitable limits on NVMO’s funding, the editors were very limited in the amount of papers they could accept, meaning that they had a 95% rejection rate. The editors were keen to switch to an author-facing article processing charge (APC) funding model, and therefore wanted to move to a publisher that could offer lower APCs, in order to make space for article acceptances whilst keeping publishing attainable for authors.

## Why ]u[ Ubiquity Press?

### Openness Alignment

]u[ Ubiquity hit all of the key points that *PME*'s editors were looking for in a new publisher. Firstly, the editors saw an alignment between ]u[ Ubiquity's open access values and their own vision for the future of both *PME* and academic publishing in general. From the very start, it was clear that ]u[ Ubiquity was 100% dedicated not only to open access, open data and open source infrastructure, but to open scholarship in general. Moreover, the fact that ]u[ Ubiquity uses open source software to underpin all their core services, and actively contributes to the open source community, also demonstrated that this truly was a publisher that fostered openness in all aspects.

### Transparency, time and cost efficiency

This sense of openness fed into the practical proceedings of the transfer. Lauren noted that ]u[ Ubiquity's transparency around costs and processes was a decisive factor in the selection process; alongside providing a full breakdown of costs for the editors, ]u[ Ubiquity were also able to halve the APCs from the previous publisher, a prospect that was very attractive to the editors.

Moreover, ]u[ Ubiquity took the time to explain how the practical workflows on the transfer would take place, and how long they would take. This quoted time frame was notably shorter than any of the other publishers under consideration, and this ability to be agile and efficient was something that the editors were excited by. The relatively small size of ]u[ Ubiquity allowed for it to be reactive and work to shorter time frames than *PME* were used to, one of the main problems they faced at their previous publisher being that its large size meant it was often slow to act.

### ]u[ Ubiquity's Expertise

]u[ Ubiquity was a name that had come recommended to *PME* by others within the scholarly community. Both Erik and Lauren liked the idea that ]u[ Ubiquity was founded by scholars, and that it continues to be run by a team that includes many members with a research background. This element really came through in the work of Imogen Clarke, *PME*'s new editorial manager at ]u[ Ubiquity. Her research background in combination with her extensive publishing expertise gave her a greater understanding of how both sides of the publishing process work in order to perfectly customise the platform according to *PME*'s needs.

Ultimately, both Erik and Lauren agreed that ]u[ Ubiquity had one very important thing: the human factor. From their very first meetings, the responsiveness, integrity and honesty of the team members they spoke to solidified that ]u[ Ubiquity was the right publisher for *PME*.

## What were the challenges faced?

### Changing submission platforms

The editors were under no illusions that changing publishers wasn't going to require a significant amount of extra work, along with a few challenges. They opted to change workflow systems, moving from Editorial Manager (EM) to Open Journal Systems (OJS) - though Ju[ Ubiquity was flexible, and offered them the option of remaining on EM, the full breakdown of costs proved this would be far less cost effective. Ju[ Ubiquity also offered the editors the chance to trial OJS before committing to it, which allowed the editors to get a feel for the new system and confirm that it was the best option for them.

Moving between the two systems required an adjustment period for the editors, getting used to small changes such as differences in vocabulary (getting used to the term 'reject' instead of decline, for example). Beyond these minor changes, Ju[ Ubiquity also had to adjust for *PME's* specific workflow to be incorporated into the OJS system. Because the journal receives a lot of submissions (~1,000 per year) and has always been forced to reject a high percentage of papers, there are multiple editorial stages, with and without review.

Additionally, it was important to the Editor-in-Chief that the Deputy and Associate Editors weren't going to be burdened with administrative tasks, and could instead focus on applying their expertise to assess submissions. Together with their dedicated Ju[ Ubiquity editorial account manager, *PME's* editorial team had to work out how to best adapt the system for this purpose - OJS being quite customisable was a real benefit here, as it meant that the journal's requirements could be met.

The addition of a dedicated Managing Editor to the *PME* team, arranged by Ju[ Ubiquity, was also a huge help to support the ongoing activities of the journal. Overall, the transition was far smoother than the editors were expecting, thanks to the efficiency, support and flexibility of the Ju[ Ubiquity team.

### A new business model for the journal

The process of moving to a new funding model was another challenge that the editors had anticipated. One of *PME's* main motivations for changing publishers was to be able to accept a greater number of high-quality article submissions. Moving to Ju[ Ubiquity allowed *PME* to halve the journal's APCs; however, this required moving from a Diamond Open Access model to an author-facing funding model, where APCs were no longer fully subsidised by NVMO and instead had to be paid by the author, their institution or funder. The editors anticipated that this decision could potentially cause disagreement within their own scholarly community, as at first glance it appears to be prohibitive for authors.

Both Erik and Lauren believed that there is a general need for greater education and transparency within the scholarly community surrounding how the APC model works and why it is sustainable. Professional, high-quality publishing always requires money and is never truly without costs. Often, these costs aren't visible to the public, especially within the Diamond model where the APCs are immediately subsidised and therefore "hidden" from

authors. Yet, when these subsidised APCs are so high, and are being funded from one source (which will, inevitably, be limited by a budget), the model can become restrictive - such was the case for *PME*.

Therefore, changing funding models seemed the best option to help relieve some of these restrictions, make space for more submission acceptances, and allow the journal to grow moving forwards. Once again, the editors found this challenge to be less difficult than they anticipated; they found the majority of their scholarly community receptive to hearing their reasoning for changing *PME*'s funding model, and ultimately encouraging of the decision.

## How did Ju[ Ubiquity Perform?

### **Efficiency and flexibility**

The transfer of such a significantly sized journal with an extensive back catalogue was never going to be an overnight process. However, *PME*'s editors were impressed with Ju[ Ubiquity's efficiency and agility in the transfer process, and that Ju[ Ubiquity were able to live up to the shorter transfer timeline that had impressed the editors in their initial conversations. This was a quality that was aided by their close-knit, communicative team. Lauren highlighted once again that Ju[ Ubiquity was always quick to respond to any queries or questions and willing to go the extra mile; for instance, by sourcing the new Managing Editor for the journal, something that is not standard to Ju[ Ubiquity's journal service.

### **Excellent communication**

Alongside receiving excellent ongoing communication from Ju[ Ubiquity throughout the transfer process, the communication between Ju[ Ubiquity and *PME*'s previous publisher was also smooth, the two publishers working together efficiently to handle all of the behind-the-scenes processes. Ju[ Ubiquity provided all the necessary documentation, along with clear instructions for the editors, meaning they simply had to fill in and return the relevant paperwork. Ju[ Ubiquity also took care of matters such as indexing, easing the transfer workload for the editorial team and allowing them to focus on other tasks such as improving the journal itself.

*PME* officially transferred to Ju[ Ubiquity Press on the 11th October, with the back content transfer being completed shortly after. Submission rates remained healthy throughout, with the journal receiving 64 submissions from 8th October to 8th November - the editors are confident that they will continue to grow throughout 2023 and beyond.

## What are the lessons learnt, and what advice would the editors offer?

### Practical considerations

Erik and Lauren both agree that before making the decision to change publishers, there are a number of practical issues that a journal's editorial team should consider.

Firstly, journal editors should consider that depending on who owns the journal, a full transfer may be more or less difficult, potentially even impossible. As *PME* was (and still is) owned by NVMO, the journal's back content was able to be migrated fairly easily, something which may not be possible if a journal is publisher owned. This is something that ]u[ Ubiquity Press guards against, using open, non-proprietary standards for all its content, and making all article XML compliant with the Journal Archiving Tag Suite (JATS) schema. ]u[ Ubiquity Press also adheres to the NISO Transfer Code of Practice, ensuring that if a journal transfers publishers, all librarians, editors and other publishers will be treated fairly in the process. Both of these factors guarantee that ]u[ Ubiquity Press journals can easily transfer in their entirety to an alternate publisher, should they wish to do so.

Secondly, journal editors should keep in mind that moving publishers will require some changes in workflows and systems, and should factor this adjustment period into their transfer timeline. Erik highlighted the need to dedicate time to making sure all editors are comfortable adjusting to any new systems or processes- such as the move from EM to OJS in *PME*'s case- and to accept that a slight slowdown in the workflow in this period is inevitable.

Thirdly, editorial synchronicity is important, and the journal's editorial team should make sure they have a good process for working together. Moving publishers is a hugely collaborative process; both Erik and Lauren agreed that part of what made the move so successful from *PME*'s end was their ability to work effectively together, and recommended that lead editors of journals looking to move ensure their team is able to work together productively.

### Know what you want

Prior to beginning their search for a new publisher, the editors made sure to identify exactly *why* they wanted to move, what they wanted in a new publisher and what the journal's non-negotiables were. Establishing the core values of *PME* and the direction the journal wanted to move in were what eventually allowed the editors to identify ]u[ Ubiquity Press as the right publisher for them. Lauren recommended that editors really take the time to discuss and reach consensus on a clear vision for their journal, so as to make the selection process both easier, and the move overall more beneficial. After all, no journal wants to change publishers, only to find in a year or two that they made the wrong decision!

## Take the opportunity to innovate and improve

The process of taking the time to evaluate *PME* was not only crucial to selecting a new publisher, but also offered a unique opportunity for the editors to pause, take stock of the journal and reorient its future. As the history of *PME* shows, constant innovation is at the very heart of the journal's ethos, and one of the reasons it has been so enduringly successful - naturally, then, the editors seized the move as an opportunity to improve *PME*. On a practical level, this included tasks such as redesigning their submission templates, and generally improving the journal itself. Though all of this took time and energy, both Erik and Lauren would encourage other journals to consider a change of publisher as an exciting opportunity for innovation and improvement.

## Closing Thoughts

Looking to the future, Erik and Lauren are excited about *PME*'s future at ]u[ Ubiquity Press, and about a future that is more closely aligned with the journal's values. They hope that the years to come will see more journals, particularly larger and well-established ones, take the leap to full open access, and that their experience will demonstrate that it is not only possible, but necessary to the future of research.

“]u[ Ubiquity Press is very pleased to partner with the Netherlands Association of Medical Education (NVMO), the society behind the journal, in publishing *Perspectives on Medical Education*. Like the NVMO, we strongly believe that research in this field is of great importance to both medicine and society, and its benefits are greatly magnified through open access. Our goal is to enable researchers to make their work open easily and affordably, and to help them achieve the widest possible audience and impact. ]u[ Ubiquity has now supported over 800 journals, from all disciplines, to become successfully established in open access. We look forward to helping *PME* grow and achieve even more success and impact as a leading OA journal in its field.”

Brian Hole, ]u[ Ubiquity CEO