



Russian scientists are being frozen out of international collaborations.

# JOURNALS UNDER PRESSURE TO BOYCOTT RUSSIAN AUTHORS

Most publications are still considering manuscripts irrespective of researchers' nationalities.

By Holly Else

Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, many research organizations cut funding and collaboration ties with Russia. The moves have sparked debate over whether Russian scientists should be able to publish in international journals. Some argue that a boycott is morally correct, but many journals say that isolating Russia's scientists would do more harm than good. In response, the Russian authorities seem to be planning to drop a requirement that government-funded scientists publish in recognized foreign journals. That move could further harm the country's science, say some Russian researchers.

Ukrainian scientists have issued the strongest calls for banning Russian researchers from journals. "Russian scientists have no moral right to retransmit any messages to the world scientific community," says Olesia Vashchuk, the head of Ukraine's Young Scientists Council at the Ministry of Education and Science, in two letters dated 1 March. The letters, to publisher Elsevier and citation database Clarivate, call for Russian journals to be removed from databases and for Russian scientists to be taken off journal editorial boards.

Those opposed to a ban – in Russia and elsewhere – say that it would penalize scientists who oppose their government's actions, and that science can act as a diplomatic channel. "You have to ask what this will achieve. Is it about sending a signal? If so, there are better ways," says Richard Sever, co-founder of the preprint servers bioRxiv and medRxiv.

## Scholarly exchange

Few journals have so far banned Russian scientists. Titles including *Nature* and *Science* have condemned Russia's actions in editorials, but have also spoken out against indiscriminately isolating its scientists. In its 4 March editorial, *Nature* said that a publishing boycott against researchers in Russia "would divide the global research community and restrict the exchange of scholarly knowledge" (see *Nature* 603, 201; 2022).

At least one title, the *Journal of Molecular Structure*, published by Elsevier, has said that it will no longer consider manuscripts written by scientists at Russian institutions. The invasion violates international law, says editor Rui Fausto, a chemist at the University of Coimbra in Portugal. "Our decision will be in force until international legality is restored."

Elsevier told *Nature* that it couldn't give a

figure for how many of its journals had taken a similar position, but that it was "very low". The publisher has not introduced restrictions on accepting papers that include Russian authors.

By contrast, in response to Russia's invasion, Clarivate, which runs the citation database Web of Science, announced on 11 March that it would cease all commercial activity in Russia and immediately close an office there. It had previously suspended the evaluation of any new journals from Russia and Belarus – which has supported Russia's war – that are seeking to be included in the Web of Science.

Ukrainian scientists welcome such moves. By "rejecting manuscripts written by Russian authors and excluding the Russian journals from [Elsevier's database] Scopus and Web of Science, Elsevier and Clarivate can contribute to the end of this war", says Myroslava Hladchenko, who studies higher-education policy at the National University of Life and Environmental Sciences of Ukraine in Kyiv. Hladchenko says that Russia has bombed more than 60 educational institutions in Ukraine, which highlights their "attitude towards science and education".

## Policy change

Many researchers in Russia have spoken out against a publishing boycott. Most scholars there who strive to be part of the global scientific community oppose the war, says a political scientist at a Russian university who asked not to be named because of fears about their safety. "Many take personal risks to protest it," says the researcher, who says they narrowly escaped arrest in an anti-war demonstration.

But Hladchenko feels that Russian scientists should be doing more to stop the war. Excluding Russian authors and journals will force those academics to "reassess their activity and to make a contribution to the development of civil society in their own country", she says.

For its part, Russia seems to have responded to its growing isolation by the international community. On 7 March, the office of the Russian deputy prime minister Dmitry Chernyshenko announced that it plans to cancel existing requirements for scientists to publish in journals indexed in Web of Science or Scopus, according to Russian news reports. Chernyshenko has also asked the Russian Ministry of Science and Higher Education to introduce its own system for evaluating research.

The requirements to publish in international journals have helped to stimulate the best research groups and increased the quality of research in Russia, says Andrey Kulbachinskiy, a molecular geneticist at the Institute of Molecular Genetics in Moscow. He adds that although removing these requirements might relieve the pressure to publish for many groups, it will probably lead to a "rapid decline in the quality of publications" and "make doing science senseless".