

Unusual times

The severity of the COVID-19 emergency has forced society to adopt drastic containment measures. In this Editorial we discuss some of their implications for the publishing sector and for our journal.

The beginning of 2020 will certainly enter history books as a period of global disruption. For the first time after the Second World War, the lives of billions of people have been simultaneously affected by the same event — the spreading of the COVID-19 pandemic. A steep rise in the infection curve has in fact forced many countries to enforce physical distancing as the only actual large-scale measure to contain the virus and prevent the collapse of their respective national health systems. The application of such measures has been a literal matter of life or death. Unfortunately, it is also coming with far-reaching side effects on the economy and on many supply chains.

The science and technology sector is certainly no exception. Universities worldwide have been confronted with the sudden lockdown of campuses and entire departments have had to suspend their activities. This has been accompanied by travel restrictions, essentially freezing the whole scientific endeavour as we know it. With remote working becoming the rule for professors, researchers and students, the attention has been shifted towards virtual meetings and online teaching¹. Reorganizing the semester in just a few days, however, is not child's play, and has required a serious effort from both teaching personnel and students. At the same time, experimental work has been placed on hold in most cases — researchers have suddenly experienced an unusual amount of free time that, in the best case, could be used to revise ongoing projects, perform data analysis and, eventually, write reports².

Publishing has also been impacted by the current emergency. On one side, research areas that are relevant to the fight against the pandemic have been placed under the spotlight. Therefore, major scientific publishers have agreed to provide free access to the relevant peer reviewed literature, while prioritizing on the publication of new

studies in these areas. Springer Nature, for instance, has created a landing page that provides rapid access to the latest studies and data on COVID-19. The availability of literature is important for the development of diagnostics and therapeutics, but also to inform news media and prevent misinformation from spreading in such critical times. Everyone is probably familiar with some sort of conspiracy theory about the origin of the virus, but the opinion of experts in this area can help to set the record straight³.

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As for *Nature Catalysis*, we are also confronted with a rapidly changing environment. First of all, we would like to thank all our reviewers who, despite the difficulties of the current times, are making an amazing effort to sustain the peer review process. Additionally, the editorial office is trying to deal with the journal's workflow while considering the special situations researchers are currently facing. We realize, for instance, that dealing with revise decisions can be challenging at the moment. Very frequently, reviewers request additional experiments to better validate the claims of a study. Considering that many labs are in lockdown, fulfilling such requests may require more time than usual. As mentioned previously⁴, we typically do not set strict deadlines for revisions and we intend to be even more flexible in light of the current emergency. Here, communication plays a crucial role. Therefore, we encourage all our authors to reach out to the editors if more time is needed to finalise a study, or to discuss relevant issues.

Ultimately, we should all get ready to face some delays. Nevertheless, there are useful tools that may help authors to compensate for such delays, for instance, preprints and repositories, which represent a swift solution for sharing results with the community. As we discussed in a recent Editorial⁵, we fully support the deposition of the non-peer-reviewed version of a manuscript into open repositories, in line with other Nature Research journals.

Finally, in these unusual times we also have news relating to our editorial team. As of April, Enda Bergin has stepped down from being the Chief Editor of *Nature Catalysis* to take a new role as Chief Physical Sciences Editor of *Nature Communications*. Enda guided *Nature Catalysis* throughout its launching phase and established it as a leading journal in the field of catalysis. While wishing him all the best for his further professional development, we would like to thank Enda for the fantastic work done here at the journal. Davide Esposito — formerly a Senior Editor at the journal — succeeds Enda as the Chief Editor of *Nature Catalysis*. Together with Senior Editors Marçal Capdevila-Cortada and Jan-Stefan Völler he will continue to drive the journal's development while exploring new areas of interest for the catalysis community.

So, stay tuned for news; but for the moment, stay home and stay safe. □

Published online: 20 April 2020
<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41929-020-0458-5>

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