

Academic Publishing:

A Potential Career In Communication

My Career So Far...

What is it like to work in Academic Publishing?

Why Work In Academic Publishing?

How to Work in Academic Publishing?

Dr Mike Page

Managing Editor, Journal of Experimental Botany (JXB)



My Career So Far...

- Started back in the last century with a brilliant Biology teacher during my A-levels.
- Applied to study Biology at various UK universities.
- Ended up at the University of Bath – undergraduate Masters degree in Biological Sciences (2001 - 2005).
 - Realised that my areas of interest were Plant Science and Molecular Biology
 - Industrial placement year – great insight into an industrial research environment.



My Career So Far...

- Stayed on at the University of Bath to do a PhD (2005 – 2009).
- Project funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, working to improve the shelf-life of cassava once harvested – combined Plant Science & Molecular Biology.
- Provided the perfect experience of working in academic research, which I preferred.
- Began interacting with journals to disseminate my research data – my first encounter with academic publishing.



My Career So Far...

- On being awarded my PhD, I decided to continue my career in academic research.
- Obtained a postdoctoral ('postdoc') position at the University of Exeter (2009 – 2012).
- Studied how vitamin C production in plants is controlled by light intensity.
- More experience of interacting with plant science journals when publishing.
- Enjoyed lab work, but also travelling to conferences and meeting other researchers.



My Career So Far...

- Moved to the University of Southampton for another postdoc (2012 – 2016).
- Studied how chloroplasts were able to control gene expression in the nucleus.
- My son was born during this position, began questioning whether academic research was the right career choice.
- Long hours, tenure highly competitive, often stressful
- However...



My Career So Far...

- ...the perfect postdoc came up at Lancaster University (2016 – 2019).
- Aiming to recreate a carboxysome from cyanobacteria in rice chloroplasts – a way to concentrate carbon dioxide around the carbon-fixing enzyme of photosynthesis.
- In collaboration with a group from Shanghai.
- Near the Lake District...great for trail running!
- Loved this project, but still felt unsure about a long-term career in academic research (getting old!)



My Career So Far...

- Began volunteering for the ASPB's Plantae online platform (other topic areas will have equivalent resource or society).
- Writing short summaries of exciting plant science research papers in my specialist area.
- Opportunities to work in new ways with journals and their content.
- Excellent way of starting to work in science communication.
- Self promotion.
- Performed this work alongside my postdoc.



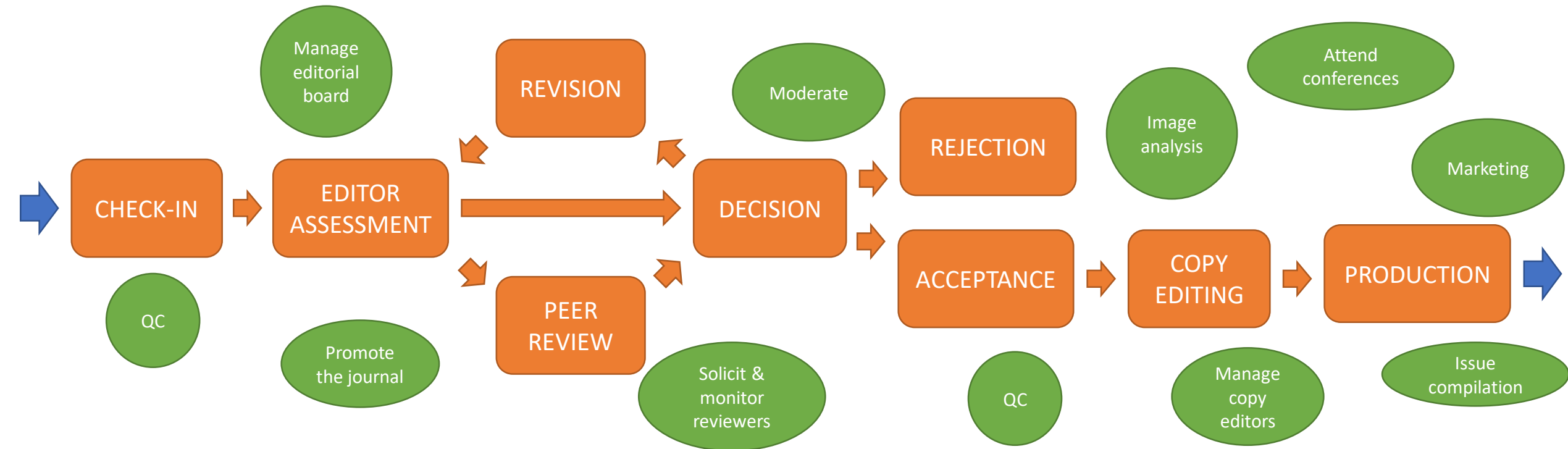
My Career So Far...

- In the middle of my postdoc, I saw a job opportunity to work as an Assistant Editor at a plant science journal located on the Lancaster University campus.
- Reduction in salary, a more junior position, possibly wasting my experience to date.
- However, very interesting work behind the scenes at a society-owned journal.
- Lucky enough to be offered the position, and hesitantly accepted (2018...)



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What is academic publishing?



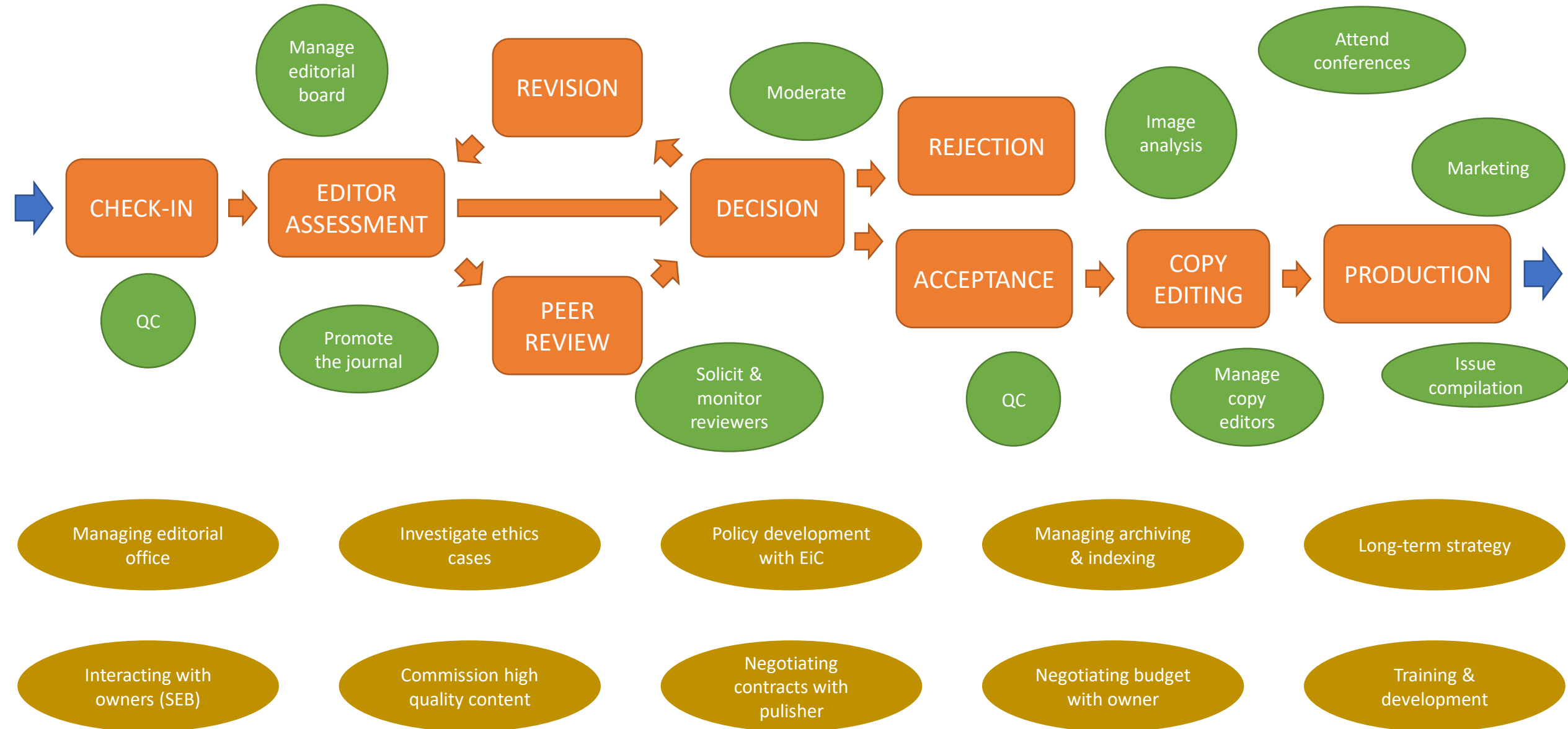
My Career So Far...

- In the middle of the first UK lockdown in 2020, I was promoted to manage the journal after the last Managing Editor retired (2020...)



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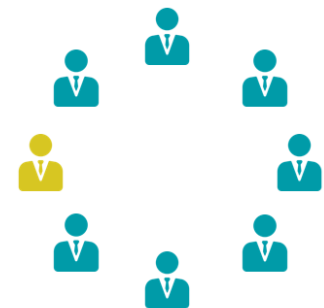
What is academic publishing?



What is it like to work in Academic Publishing?

- The structure of our editorial office (Lancaster salary):
 - Managing Editor (£50k+)
 - Deputy Managing Editor (Production) (£40k+)
 - Assistant Editor (Ethics & Science Writing) (£25-35k)
 - Assistant Editor (Commissioning) (£25-35k)
 - Assistant Editor (Data Management) (£25-35k)

- Opportunity for further career progression at larger publishers.
- However, it hopefully doesn't feel like a structured environment.



Why work in Academic Publishing?

- It is the initial arena for communicating peer-reviewed science
- Help maintain the accuracy and reliability of the scientific record
- Extensive opportunities to travel (normally)
- Maintain links with the academic research community
- As part of a society-owned journal, help fund the work of a society to benefit the research community
- I would describe the work as:

Rewarding, varied, interesting, personal, challenging, dynamic



Giving Back To The Community



How to work in Academic Publishing?

- Extensive opportunities, from large multinational publishers (Elsevier, Wiley), through medium science publishers (Oxford University Press), to small independent publishers.
- In the UK, distributed around the country but focussed in London, Oxford, Cambridge.
- Required qualifications:
 - A degree in a relevant subject (relative to the journal)
[PhD desirable, but not essential]
- Soft-skills (many similar to research):
 - Exceptional organisation & attention to detail
 - Excellent written English
 - Creativity
 - Ability to work well with others
 - Empathy
- Can be hard to get relevant experience...



How to work in Academic Publishing?

- Getting experience (aka showing an interest):
 - Take any science-writing opportunities (check relevant societies)
 - Get involved with public engagement & outreach
 - PhD students & postdocs – ask your supervisor to help peer review manuscripts
 - PhD students & postdocs – offer to write commentaries for journals
 - Work experience in an editorial office or with a publisher
 - Check job adverts for required skills/experience
 - Check publisher websites – OUP, CUP, Wiley, Elsevier, F1000, Frontiers, Springer-Nature
 - Jobs.ac.uk
 - Publishing bodies – e.g. ALPSP
 - Social media



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Happy to answer any questions

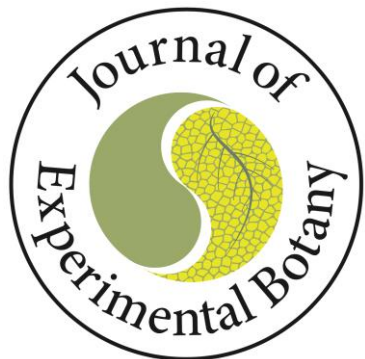
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