



**COALITION FOR
RESPONSIBLE SHARING**

Status Report

April 8, 2018

Update on ResearchGate's copyright compliance status and progress towards a viable long-term solution for hosting and distributing articles on its site, ensuring that no unauthorized content is displayed at any time.



Top Level Summary

- ResearchGate provides access to millions of copyrighted research articles in contravention of agreements between publishers and authors, taking no responsibility for this illicit activity.
 - The *Coalition for Responsible Sharing*, representing 12 society, not-for-profit, and commercial publishers and information analytics businesses, has taken action to eventually negotiate a copyright-compliant resolution with ResearchGate.
 - Over several years, ResearchGate has resisted adhering to the [STM Voluntary Principles of Article Sharing on Scholarly Collaboration Networks](#) or implementing other viable solutions.
 - Consequently, the *Coalition for Responsible Sharing* has taken action which has helped to significantly reduce the number of copyrighted articles that are publicly accessible on ResearchGate's site (in contrast to publishers that are not part of the *Coalition for Responsible Sharing*).
 - The *Coalition for Responsible Sharing* has also offered an easy-to-use, automated system that determines whether an article can be shared publicly on a commercial site. ResearchGate is resisting such a solution.
 - Instead, ResearchGate propagates a process by which publishers and societies issue take-down notices whenever they identify unauthorized content on its site. Under this process, researchers would upload content to the site only for it to be taken down again shortly afterwards if the public hosting of the article is in breach of copyright. It is an unsustainable system that is disruptive to researchers, detrimental to ResearchGate's own user experience and one that forces publishers to monitor any site anywhere in perpetuity.
 - The *Coalition for Responsible Sharing* has received neutral and balanced PR for the activities it has undertaken, and is committed to open and proactive communications with all stakeholders.
 - ResearchGate is a for profit business backed by venture capital. Its business model depends on the illicit distribution of these in-copyright articles to generate traffic to its site, which is then commercialized through the sale of targeted advertising.
- **Further action is required to resolve ResearchGate's illicit activity that continues to undermine scholarly communication and the researcher ecosystem.**
 - **An effective solution, proposed by the *Coalition for Responsible Sharing*, would identify unauthorized copyrighted content and make it available only to private research groups before public posting on ResearchGate.**

We encourage publishers to consider these important issues and to join the *Coalition for Responsible Sharing* and support the principles of protecting copyrighted material for the benefit of curated and certified science in the future.



Background

An analysis undertaken during 2017 indicated that ResearchGate was making approximately 7.7 million copyright infringing articles available on its site. In addition, ResearchGate adds a total average of 150,000 articles with a publisher DOI to its site every month. Studies have indicated that most of the articles available through ResearchGate are likely distributed in breach of copyright.¹

Since 2015, numerous attempts to agree with ResearchGate on amicable solutions, including signing up to the [STM Voluntary Principles of Article Sharing on Scholarly Collaboration Networks](#) and implementing a user-friendly technical solution, remained unsuccessful. Therefore, a coalition of (initially) five publishers joined together to take collective action against ResearchGate. The *Coalition for Responsible Sharing* formed in October 2017, with the [express goal of helping ResearchGate to become fully copyright-compliant](#).

Left with no other choice, members of the *Coalition* started to issue takedown notices to ResearchGate and two publishers asked the courts to clarify ResearchGate's copyright responsibility.

Since its inception, the *Coalition for Responsible Sharing* has grown to represent 12 societies, not-for-profit and commercial publishers, and information analytics businesses.

Progress and on-going concerns

Data shows the *Coalition for Responsible Sharing* has made progress. ResearchGate has reduced the number of infringing articles that it illicitly hosts from *Coalition for Responsible Sharing* members:

- PDFs published by *Coalition* members originally made up 17% of ResearchGate's total articles (June 2017), out of which approximately 57% were known to be illicitly hosted.
- ResearchGate has removed **approximately 1.4 million – or 92%** – of illicitly distributed articles published by *Coalition* members from being publicly accessible.
- For publishers outside the *Coalition*, in contrast, only **20% of their content that ResearchGate illicitly distributed** was moved from being publicly accessible. Hence, approximately **80% of their articles** remain openly and publicly accessible worldwide via the site.

Despite this progress, the problem with illicitly distributed content on ResearchGate persists: ResearchGate has told the *Coalition for Responsible Sharing* that the removal of its papers from public display was a one-off action that will not be repeated. This means the estimated **4 million infringing articles on the site continue to grow by the day**.²

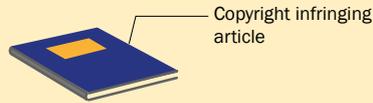
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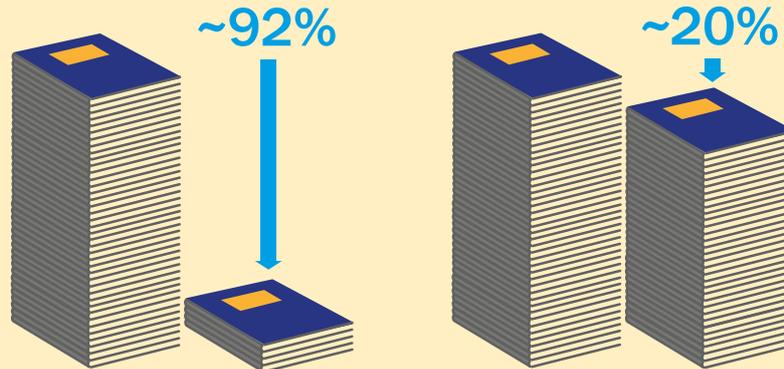
Percentage of copyright infringing articles removed by ResearchGate after the *Coalition for Responsible Sharing* announced legal action



COALITION FOR RESPONSIBLE SHARING



OTHER PUBLISHERS AND LEARNED SOCIETIES



In October 2017, ResearchGate removed around 1.4 million copyright infringing articles (~92%) from initial *Coalition* members from public availability.

In contrast, ResearchGate removed just a fifth (~20%) of the total infringing articles for all publishers outside the *Coalition*.

As the removal was a one-off action that will not be repeated, around 4 million copyright infringing articles remain publicly available on the site and continue to grow by the day.

Only viable solution: Determining articles' copyright status before being made publicly available on ResearchGate

The *Coalition for Responsible Sharing* has offered ResearchGate an easy, viable long-term solution that would bring its site into copyright compliance. This would also enable and improve the sharing experience for both researchers and for ResearchGate. The *Coalition's* proposal is based on the fundamental principle that **illicitly hosted content must not be made public on the site at any time:**

- An easy-to-use automated system determines whether an article can be shared publicly on a commercial site (e.g. OA articles with a cc-by license can be uploaded legitimately).
- This determination can take place during the upload process, or at any other point in time before the article is publicly posted on ResearchGate.
- This approach takes the burden off the researcher and ResearchGate. The system would direct uploads either to be publicly available or, where an article is subject to restrictions, limit access to co-authors or other private research groups.
- The *Coalition* can start such a pilot project with ResearchGate within 30 days' notice.

This system would provide an easy and seamless uploading experience for ResearchGate users while ensuring that no new content is posted on the site in contravention of agreements between authors and publishers. The *Coalition* believes this approach, as adopted by other media sites, is an acceptable and positive solution that ResearchGate can and should embrace.



ResearchGate's preferred approach is disruptive for the research community

Researchers want clarity on how to share their work publicly.

Instead of providing this, ResearchGate insists that publishers and societies issue takedown notices whenever they identify unauthorized content on its site. This system means researchers upload content to the site, only for it to be taken down again shortly afterwards if the public hosting of the article is in breach of copyright. Establishing this as a standard operating procedure is both inefficient and disruptive to the research community.

It will lead to more confusion and does not solve the fundamental problem of ResearchGate illicitly distributing copyrighted content.

ResearchGate's preferred approach means it continues to add thousands of new infringing articles to its site every month in addition to the estimated 4 million existing articles it still hosts illicitly.

ResearchGate has also not yet addressed the fact that it is altering final published articles for its own gain, changing their metadata, putting articles into its own format and adding its company logo.

ResearchGate's preferred approach is unsustainable

Under ResearchGate's preferred approach of perpetual takedown notices, publishers must constantly check the version of each article uploaded to understand if it can be made available by ResearchGate. While publishers identify and verify these articles, content may get scraped and appear elsewhere, such as on pirate sites. This means publishers and societies will need to

monitor the rest of the web for these articles too – no trivial task.

Added to this, publishers will then be under pressure to apply the same rules to other sharing sites. Each request, if granted, may well require a different technical approach by publishers.

What's happening now

The *Coalition for Responsible Sharing* is committed to open and transparent communication with all stakeholders. The *Coalition's* success and resolve to tackle these remaining issues has seen its membership more than double to currently 12 members since its formation in October last year.

Members are issuing takedown notices to ResearchGate as a short-term measure to address illicit content growing on ResearchGate. To deliver a long-term solution, Elsevier and ACS are also pursuing litigation. These activities seek to convince ResearchGate to engage in meaningful discussions and find a true solution to its problem.

The *Coalition for Responsible Sharing* continues to be in close dialogue with ResearchGate. Our primary goal is to reach a negotiated settlement that satisfies our fundamental principles and expectations.

The *Coalition* is a negotiating group, representing a strong and significant cross section of society, not-for-profit and commercial publishers, and information analytics businesses.

We encourage other publishers to consider the issues they are facing with ResearchGate, and to join the *Coalition for Responsible Sharing* and support its principles regarding copyrighted material.

The inaugural group of *Coalition* for Responsible Sharing members consisted of five publishers and societies: the American Chemical Society, Brill, Elsevier, Wiley and Wolters Kluwer. In early

December 2017, the American Medical Association, the American Physiological Society, Portland Press (wholly-owned by the Biochemical Society) and World Scientific Publishing joined the *Coalition for Responsible Sharing*. Since January 2018, BMJ, IWA Publishing and Future Science Group have also become members of the *Coalition for Responsible Sharing*, bringing the total number of members to 12.

Members of the *Coalition for Responsible Sharing* as of April 8, 2018



1 Copyright compliance and infringement in ResearchGate full text journals articles, Jamali, 2016 <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11192-017-2291-4>

2 The *Coalition for Responsible Sharing* believes 1.4 million articles were removed proactively, and believes 4 million illicit articles remain on ResearchGate (based on a statistically relevant sample of over 150,000 articles).