



Ethical research and scholarly publication in the mining and metallurgical community – A new era dawns



This commentary provides an overview of an important meeting between the SAIMM, ASSAf, and SciELO held during February 2020. The meeting arose as a result of new initiatives to ensure *integrity in 'research and scholarly publication'*, which have been agreed globally and have now been adopted by the departments of Science and Innovation and Higher Education, the National Foundation for Research, and the group representing the universities of South Africa, among others. The purpose of the meeting was to ensure that the SAIMM, and all South African scientific and professional institutions in general, will meet the global principles of ethical research and scholarly publication (ERSP) as adopted by South Africa.

The Institute is aware of these new ERSP 'rules of engagement', and as such, the relevant committees are now starting to work through the issues. Such matters will be published in due course. By way of example in the interim, two issues of direct relevance to the SAIMM include (i) the inability to publish papers that have previously been published in formal refereed conference proceedings, and (ii) a strict limit to the proportion of papers (and authors) sourced from any one institution in any specific journal edition. Such rules will undoubtedly impact upon the manner in which papers presented at conferences will be published in future, and on specific themed editions that include papers from a specific source or specific authors. For these reasons, the Publication and Technical Programme Committees are likely to enter into something akin to a new era of operation in order to meet these new principles while still continuing to provide enhanced knowledge and intellectual services to the mining and metallurgical industries and all the major allied disciplines.

Against the background above, it may be of interest to note that the SAIMM Journal is currently a proven and sought-after global publication. Investigations over the past two years have shown that approximately 70% of the papers submitted for publication arise from international sources and from universities and research institutions as geographically widespread as the USA, China, Japan, India, Russia, Pakistan, Turkey, Germany, the UK, Egypt, and Iran. Approximately 300–400 highly qualified and experienced academics and industrial practitioners, both local and international, are active on the panel of reviewers. Approximately 40 to 45 papers are submitted per month, all of which are pre-reviewed monthly prior to the selected ones entering the review process. Twelve journal editions (one each month) are published annually, with editorial and typesetting undertaken in-house.

In these matters, the Journal would appear to be meeting its current goals and the needs of many of its readers. This is best reflected by the *resolutions factor i.e.* the number of times a paper is electronically opened and read, known colloquially as the 'hits' on a paper. Such data is captured monthly by ASSAf and SciELO for all accredited journals in South Africa. Of specific interest to the SAIMM community is the fact that between 15 000 and 16 000 'hits' (*i.e.* opening and/or reading of papers) are being recorded for the SAIMM Journal per month, with the next accredited journal on the ASSAf list recording 7 000 hits and the remaining accredited journals recording hits in the mid- to lower hundreds. Such results suggest that the SAIMM Journal is widely read and is therefore of significant relevance to its professional community.

However, what remains to be done is to enhance the standing of the Journal to an even higher intellectual status by improving its *Impact Factor* (IF – *a measure reflecting the average number of citations to articles published in science and social journals*). This step would lead to enhanced accreditation for those in academe who, by having their research published and cited in the SAIMM Journal, would earn personal academic accreditation as well as acquire funds for their universities (approximately R120 000 per single Journal paper). It is this that the SAIMM seeks to improve in the short term – in addition to implementing the longer-term goals set by ASSAf and SciELO for proven integrity in research and scholarly publishing currently, as is currently being instituted in the country at present. There is much to be discussed and done in the near future. All will be reported in due course.

R.M.S. Falcon