

ESPL Update

Stuart Lane (Editor), September 2025

The year 2025 is a celebration as the journal ESPL approaches 50 years since its foundation. This is a wonderful achievement and most of all because of the way in which the journal is able to contribute to the ongoing development of the BSG, financially and otherwise. It is particularly special as the BSG Annual Meeting returns to Leeds where it all started under Mike Kirkby's leadership. After 50 years of service to the journal, Mike will step down as Associate Editor and become Editor Emeritus. The society owes him a great debt.

2025 is also a year that has brought to the fore to main challenges. Aside from the 50 year celebration, the main « event » for ESPL has been the transition to a new manuscript management platform, known as Research Exchange. ESPL has transferred relatively early within the Wiley family of journals which has meant that certain functionalities are still being improved. The transfer has very significantly increased the journal workload since June as a result. That said, the platform is an excellent development with definite improvements, notably in relation to reviewer finding; we are getting higher rates of reviewer acceptance at the moment, achieved by a better match between paper focus and the way the platform identifies potential reviewers.

There has also been a very major increase in workload because of challenges around AI. AI is now routinely used to improve writing in English, the result of which is that almost no papers are now flagged as plagiarised (and note, use of AI does not count as plagiarism in legal terms). It is also being used for generation, generally with poor results and leading to papers being rejected before review. However, there is a growing grey area, notably where AI is used to generate literature review or to help discussion. Here, many authors have not realised that whilst AI does find reliable references, it cannot yet match specific arguments to those references. So, we have text that makes claims about what is argued in a source, when the source does not make those claims. We have submissions containing repeated mis-citation. Mis-citation is extremely time consuming to detect yet its failure to do so is serious. We rest upon a model of academic writing in which ideas are attributed to those who generated them. Given the circular nature of AI, in which written content is fed back into AI models, there is a serious risk that widespread mis-citation becomes repeated eventually leading to the collapse of academic scholarship as we know it. These are interesting times, then, but also the most challenging for academic scholarship that I have ever known.