

‘Getting paid to review is justice’: journal pays peer reviewers in cryptocurrency

***ResearchHub Journal* launches latest attempt to compensate referees for their labour.**

By [Holly Else](#)

[Save article](#)

[View saved research](#) >

You have full access to this article via **TEXAS MEDICAL CENTER LIBRARY**.



Cryptocurrency will be used to reward peer reviewers for an experimental title called *ResearchHub*

An experimental journal is paying [peer reviewers](#) the equivalent of US\$150 per review in a specially developed cryptocurrency. The publication is hosted on a platform aiming to make science more open and efficient, and rewards users with a token called ResearchCoin for engaging with content.

The platform, called [ResearchHub](#), launched in 2020 and is backed by billionaire entrepreneur Brian Armstrong, who developed Coinbase, the largest cryptocurrency exchange in the United States.

“It’s a strange oddity of history that peer reviewers don’t get paid. It’s a valuable thing that they do and we should recognize, reward it,” Armstrong said last month at the launch of the *ResearchHub Journal* in San Francisco, California. The move came as Bitcoin – the world’s most established cryptocurrency – reached an all-time-high value of US\$100,000, fuelling renewed fervour for the notoriously volatile sector.

Experts say ResearchHub addresses some of the issues in science but might struggle to gain a foothold in research publishing because of its radical nature.

Open-source science

Armstrong first floated the idea for ResearchHub in a [2019 blogpost](#) in which he expressed frustration at the speed and quality of scientific research. He suggested that science should operate in a similar way to open-source software, where users build on each other’s work, with elements of successful online platforms such as social-media site Reddit, the code repository GitHub and crowd-funding website Kickstarter. As part of his plan, he wanted to provide a viable alternative to conventional journals.

The *ResearchHub Journal* promises that preprints uploaded to the site will be peer reviewed within 14 days and a publication decision will be made in seven days after that. Authors pay a \$1,000 article-processing charge (APC), and papers and the accompanying peer reviews are published under a liberal CC-BY licence. The journal is yet to publish a paper and is not indexed on bibliometric databases such as Web of Science or Scopus.

Authors can also earn ResearchCoin as a reward for using good research practices, such as preregistering studies and sharing data openly. Users of ResearchHub can already earn ResearchCoin for uploading preprints and papers to the site, and commenting on or voting for these uploads. Users can also tip each other for good work or pay others to complete research-related tasks, such as

generating data for a review. Currently, ResearchHub takes a 7% cut of any ResearchCoin transactions on the site, 2% of which is ploughed back into the community.



Brian Armstrong, chief executive of the Coinbase cryptocurrency exchange, set up the ResearchHub platform that combines elements of sites such as Reddit and GitHub. Credit: Michael Nagle/Bloomberg via Getty

Alex Holcombe, a metascientist and psychologist at the University of Sydney, Australia, likes the idea of experimenting with the credit economy of science. “Currently, we just get credit for publishing papers, but there is so much more to science, including great forms of evaluation, such as peer review,” he says.

But he cautions that most radical initiatives in science publishing fail. “It’s so hard to break out of the tyranny of impact factors,” he says.

Cash or credit

Paying researchers for peer review is not a new idea. Economics journals have done it in the past, and some medical journals pay certain reviewers. *PeerJ*, an open-access mega-journal launched in 2012, uses a token system to reward reviewers. Reviewers earn ten tokens for reviewing an article; these can be redeemed against the APCs for publishing in *PeerJ*. The website says that “tokens are fair, flexible and the future of peer review”.

Some researchers are finding that reviewing for ResearchHub is lucrative. Although the site launched its journal only last month, it has been paying referees to review uploaded preprints since May 2023.

Pedro Paulo Gattai Gomes, an independent molecular-biology consultant in São Paulo, Brazil, says that he now earns more money reviewing for ResearchHub than he did in his professorial roles at academic institutions. He reviews an average of 15 papers a month, accounting for 70% of his income.

“Getting paid to review is justice, because in my opinion it is very unfair to work voluntarily and not even receive a thank you,” he says.

Cashing in ResearchCoin for ordinary money is possible but complicated. The ‘decentralized’ cryptocurrency exchange Uniswap allows ResearchCoin to be traded for other cryptocurrencies, such as Bitcoin, Ethereum or USD Coin, which can be converted into some conventional currencies. ResearchCoin is currently trading at around \$1. ResearchHub co-founder Patrick Joyce says that his team is in talks to get ResearchCoin listed on a centralized exchange that is more straightforward to access.

James Butcher, a publishing consultant in Liverpool, UK, says that the use of a cryptocurrency could make it difficult for the site to gain traction, because these systems have been exploited by scammers. “Academics are a conservative group of people,” he says.

doi: <https://doi.org/10.1038/d41586-024-04027-4>

[Reprints and permissions](#)

Latest on:

[Publishing](#) Peer review



How and when to use artificial intelligence in your science job application



This AI tool claims to pick the top 1% of preprints. Should researchers trust it?



James Bond, not Bond James: why scientific publishing must respect name order