

# Community Consultation for CoP Release 5.1: summary of feedback

## Background

During summer 2022 we sent out a community consultation for Release 5.1 of the COUNTER Code of Practice (CoP). The Project Director offered three public webinars, scheduled to allow maximum participation across all time zones, as well as a wrap-up video offering the same content plus responses to all of the questions raised during the webinars and by email. We offered three routes for providing feedback on the consultation, namely a Google Forms survey, email to the Project Director, and finally GitHub. Where respondents provided their feedback by email, the Project Director copied the information into the Google Form for ease of analysis.

Key aspects of the CoP remain unchanged from R5: the Platform, Database, Title and Item Reports and their derivative Views remain in place, and the metrics themselves (Investigations, Requests, Searches, and Denials) are similarly unaffected.

The primary changes we proposed to the community were: introducing a more consistent focus on Items (chapters, articles) as the unit of reporting in place of the traditional focus on Title-level (book) metrics (though these will remain available); improved definitions of access types (open versus controlled); and some significant upgrades to the SUSHI protocol and associated JSON report structures.

## How this feedback is structured

The consultation was split into sections, and we have followed the same structure in this summary of the feedback. As with the original consultation the document includes the headline describing the key change we're proposing for each section, as well as the associated impacts and the specific question(s) we had for our community. In all cases, the full list of comments received both through the Google Form and via email have been pasted into the [GitHub repository for R5.1](#), in the appropriate Discussion topic.

## Demographics

The majority of 54 respondents - 81% - were report consumers (librarians or consortium managers), with the other 19% of respondents being report producers (publishers, aggregators, and specialist organisations providing COUNTER reports).

While the bulk of respondents were located in the US (22%) or UK (33%), we did see participation in the consultation from a wide geographical spread including Canada, France, Germany, Norway, South Africa, Switzerland, and the Netherlands, as well as multi-national organisations.

## Required changes affecting implementation

### 1. Item becoming the unit of reporting

*We are making it clear that the Item is the unit of reporting, rather than the Title.*

Impact: By making the item (e.g. an article or chapter) the reporting unit, we are making usage metrics for all Data\_Types more comparable, while removing the need for Section\_Types. In most cases this will have no impact on metrics. Those content providers offering full book downloads, however, will find that their Item counts will increase, though their Title metrics remain unaffected.

#### 1. Do you agree with the proposal to make items the unit of reporting?

61% of respondents agreed with the proposal, with only 6% disagreeing outright.

Comments can be summarised broadly into three categories:

- Requests for reassurance that Title metrics will remain available.
- Associated with that, a concern about potential inflation of metrics.
- Technical questions about implementation.

We can confirm that the proposal to make the item the unit of reporting will not affect Title metrics: Unique\_Title\_Investigations and Unique\_Title\_Requests will remain in place, and the way these metrics are tracked will not be affected by the change.

Taking a scenario where a user has elected to download a full book of 20 chapters, we can see that the number of Unique\_Title\_Requests - the metric most commonly cited by librarian respondents as being their primary concern - remains the same under the changed rules as it is today, ensuring comparability across publishers and over time:

	Current CoP	R5.1
Count of Unique_Item_Requests	1	20 (1 per chapter)
Count of Unique_Title_Requests	1	1

From a technical perspective, the main question was about how to handle books that do not have chapters or other sub-units (i.e. are only available as a single file). In this instance, we recommend that report providers continue to count the book as one item.

The secondary question was about how to handle extremely large books with hundreds of chapters: this question has been reverted to the Technical Advisory Group (TAG) for consideration.

### 2. Updating the list of Data\_Types

*We are expanding and clarifying Data\_Types and including this element in Reports.*

Impact: By expanding the list of Data\_Types we are making it easier for publishers to report granular usage information, while the inclusion of Data\_Type in the Platform Report, Title Report, Database Report, and Item Report will simplify comparison across publishers and over time. However, this expansion may result in changes in usage metrics in some reports (e.g. conference proceedings will no longer be included in TR\_J1).

#### 2. Is the list of Data\_Types comprehensive?

54% of respondents agreed with the updated list, with only 4% disagreeing.

Comments were predominantly positive, mostly requesting the following additions to the list: Magazine, Patent, Primary\_Source, Reference (covering reference works and encyclopaedias),

Textbook. We did receive some queries about whether the new Conference and Proceeding Data\_Types would be mandatory: where the publisher prefers to continue classifying conference information as Book or Journal they are of course free to do so.

There was confusion about how to use Data\_Types in conjunction with Parent\_Data\_Type, so the TAG has been asked to clarify this in the CoP.

**3. Do you agree with the proposal to make Data\_Type a mandatory field in the Platform, Database, Title and Item Reports, and in the PR\_P1?**

81% of respondents agreed with the idea of including Data\_Type in the reports, with only 2% disagreeing. 4% of respondents left this question unanswered.

The comments received on this question suggested a need for education about when to use the TR, versus when the TR\_B and TR\_J suite of Standard Views might be more appropriate.

### 3. Access\_Types

*We're making it easier to report on OA usage with clearer, simpler Access\_Type definitions.*

Impact: the introduction of Free\_To\_Read, and the clarification of Open, means that TR\_J1 and TR\_B1 reports are likely to show decreased usage of Controlled content, as report providers will be able to more accurately report on usage of materials they have made freely available. This may make it challenging to compare between Release 5.0 and Release 5.1 reports.

**4. We introduced a principle that Access\_Type relates to access on the platform where the usage occurs. Does this make sense to you?**

94% of respondents agreed with the new principle, with only 2% disagreeing. The remaining 4% of respondents left comments that more properly apply to the questions defining Open and Free\_To\_Read.

5. **Access\_Type=Controlled, "At the time of the Request or Investigation the content item was restricted to authorized users (e.g. behind a paywall) on this platform. This includes free content that is only available to authorized (registered) users"**
6. **Access\_Type=Open, "At the time of the Request or Investigation the content item was available to all users on this platform, regardless of authorization status, under an Open Access model. Open applies where the content provider asserts that the content is Open Access, irrespective of the license associated with the content item (that is, while the content item may be under a Creative Commons license this is not essential). Open content items may be in hybrid or fully Open Access publications. Open content items may have been Open from the day of publication, or after expiry of an embargo, but it is not intended to return to Controlled status"**
7. **Access\_Type=Free\_To\_Read, "At the time of the Request or Investigation the content item was available to all users on this platform, regardless of authorization status, but was not Open. The content item may or may not have been Controlled at some point in the past, and may or may not return to Controlled status in the future (e.g. promotional materials where these can be tracked by the platform, or archival content a publisher has made free to read)"**

85% of respondents agreed with the definition of Controlled, 85% of respondents agreed with the definition of Open, and 74% of respondents agreed with the definition of Free\_To\_Read. There were no outright disagreements for Controlled or Open (though we did receive comments), and 6% disagreed with the definition of Free\_To\_Read.

Comments for these three questions overlapped to a large extent, so for the purposes of this document they are being treated collectively. The classifications are as follows:

- Report consumer respondents appreciated the separation of Controlled from Free\_To\_Read.
- Questions
  - How publishers/report providers might assert that content is Open or Free\_To\_Read given that COUNTER does not wish to use licenses to create the distinction. There was a suggestion that COUNTER provide a checklist for publishers to help them determine the appropriate Access\_Type.
  - How to categorise trial access or usage of materials that are free to registered users. In both instances, this would be Access\_Type Controlled.
  - Whether our definition of Open includes all types of OA content, regardless of funding/business model.

TAG will be addressing these issues during development of the CoP in preparation for release, and they will also be tackled through our education and outreach initiatives.

**8. The new definitions mean that so-called “Bronze” open access materials, which previously fell under Access\_Type=Controlled, will be reported instead under Access\_Type=Open.**

25 participants responded to this question, mostly stating that in the view of the respondent Bronze OA (i.e. content that becomes freely available under an embargo) should fall under Access\_Type Free\_To\_Read. This was a matter that was extensively debated by the TAG during development of the consultation, and is one of the primary drivers of the distinction between Open and Free\_To\_Read in which Open states that content “is not intended to return to Controlled status”, while Free\_To\_Read content “may or may not return to Controlled status in the future”. Where a publisher commits to keeping content openly available (e.g. some Bronze content), it falls within our definition of Open. As we said during the consultation itself, we are aware that this is not a perfect solution but we believe it to be the best compromise available to us.

**9. Will introducing these new Access\_Type definitions help you to better report on and understand usage of different types of content?**

72% of respondents said this would be a helpful change, with a further 11% saying it would possibly be helpful. Only 8% thought it would not be helpful.

Comments suggested, again, that more education is needed about when to use TR versus TR\_B or TR\_J Standard Views.

There was a further desire to be able to include license information in COUNTER reports, with an acknowledgement that the sheer variability of license language would make this a very significant challenge both for report providers to produce, and for report consumers to interpret.

## 4. Components

*“Components” will become optional.*

Impact: Item Reports may become less granular, but we hope that making Components optional will encourage more publishers to offer these useful reports.

**10. As a publisher / report provider, will removing Components make you more likely to offer an Item Report?**

Excluding report consumer responses (i.e. librarians and consortium managers) reveals that 20% already offer an IR. Making Components an optional aspect of IR will encourage a further 20% of respondents to offer the IR, with another 30% considering it.

The comments on this question all suggested that Components becoming optional will make delivering IR an easier process.

### **11. Is reporting on Components valuable to you?**

56% of respondents to this question indicated that they do not find Components useful, with only 5% disagreeing.

Of the comments received, a theme that came through very strongly was that Components have the potential to add value, but that if making them optional means more report providers delivering an IR then the change is beneficial.

## **5. Report headers**

*Report headers will include a link to the COUNTER Registry.*

Impact: adding a Registry link will make it easy to see whether report providers have been audited as COUNTER-compliant.

### **12. Are you aware of the Registry?**

Most respondents (63%) were aware of the COUNTER Registry prior to the consultation. 20% of respondents indicated that the Registry was new to them and that they would like to know more, in addition to several comments suggesting a need for education about how to use it. COUNTER's Project Director will plan a Media Library video on the subject.

Note that while we did not ask whether respondents wished to see a Registry link in report headers, the sentiment seen in comments suggests it would be seen as valuable.

## **SUSHI and JSON changes affecting implementation**

### **6. JSON reports**

*We're reducing the size, improving the readability and simplifying the processing of JSON reports.*

Impact: this will require some re-work by both report providers and consumers, but the new report structure is significantly easier to produce and to work with.

### **13. Having viewed the sample files, do you have any concerns about the proposed new JSON structure?**

41% of respondents had no concerns about the proposed new JSON structure, and 31% of respondents left this question unanswered. Of the remainder, comments on this question fell into the following categories:

- Lack of familiarity with or knowledge of JSON.
- Concerns about the impact of these changes when drawing reports from multiple sources, which may make the transition to the new format at different times (i.e. compatibility / comparability issues).
- Concerns about the amount of time and effort required by all parties, report providers and report consumers, to make the recommended changes.
- Specific technical comments, which have been passed to TAG for a response.

The TAG will be producing guidance for the transition period as part of the work on R5.1. We are aware that any transition can be challenging, but believe the benefits of an updated Code of Practice will outweigh the difficulties.

### **14. Will removing the differences between the JSON and tabular Item Reports be beneficial for you?**

35% of respondents left this question unanswered, while 41% said the change would be helpful or possibly helpful. The comments were positive, but typically stated that the respondent did not themselves have sufficient technical expertise to answer fully.

**15. Do you have any concerns about removing Customer\_ID from the JSON report header?**

While 31% of respondents did not have concerns about the removal of Customer\_ID from the header, many respondents did not agree. There were many comments indicating that the Customer\_ID remains important to users, particularly in identifying for whom the report has been processed when an institution has multiple IDs with a single publisher, or when a consortium is aggregating reports for multiple institutions. The Customer\_ID will of course remain available in the body of the JSON report as the proprietary Institution\_ID, but TAG has been asked to reconsider this proposal pending further feedback from respondents who indicated concern.

## 7. SUSHI

*We're making SUSHI more secure and easier to use.*

Impact: this will require some re-work by both report providers and consumers, but the new services for delivering and collecting JSON reports through the SUSHI protocol will be more robust.

**16. Do you have any concerns about removing IP-based authentication as an option for SUSHI services?**

**17. As a publisher / report provider, do you think you will implement APIKey as an authentication mechanism?**

80% of report provider respondents were in favour of removing IP-based authentication for SUSHI services, as well as 66% of report consumers.

20% of report providers already use APIKey, with a further 50% considering introducing it once IP-based authentication is deprecated. Please note that as only a small number of report providers use IP-based authentication at present, the impact of this change is likely to be minimal.

One caveat that was raised by a report consumer respondent was that some publishers require API keys to be renewed at regular intervals. In their view SUSHI should “be a ‘set it and forget’ thing”, so TAG have been asked to consider whether to include recommendations about key renewals in the Code of Practice.

**18. Will information about the dates for which reports are available through the extended /reports endpoint be useful to you?**

63% of respondents said that the extension of /reports would be helpful or possibly helpful, with only 6% disagreeing. While some respondents provided comments, they were non-substantive.

**19. What challenges do these proposed SUSHI changes present you with?**

21 respondents provided comments. The primary concerns relate to the length of time it is likely to take providers to update their SUSHI services, the complexity of updating library systems to reflect the new services, and the lag between the first vendor adopting the new system to the last one launching - that is, similar compatibility / comparability issues to those raised in response to Q13. As noted, TAG will be producing guidance for the transition period as part of the work on R5.1.

## Optional changes affecting implementation

### 8. Global reporting

We recommend that publishers / report providers offer global reports.

Impact: global reports facilitate Open Access reporting.

## **20. Should COUNTER introduce a standard Customer ID for requesting global usage reports?**

48% of respondents were keen for COUNTER to include an optional standard customer ID for requesting global usage, with 11% disagreeing.

Comments fell into the following categories:

- Respondents being unsure as to how or if they would use global reports at this time.
- A misunderstanding under which respondents appeared to think that global reports identify usage by individuals and institutions. COUNTER is privacy-protective by design and global reports only include aggregated data. More information about COUNTER and privacy is available in our Media Library video "[Privacy and COUNTER usage data](#)".

## **21. As a publisher / report provider, will global reports be difficult to implement?**

Within the limited number of report providers responding to this question, 10% already offer global reports and a further 30% said that implementing them would not be difficult. Only 20% said they could not or would not provide such reports.

Of the comments received, the typical response indicated that the volume of data in global reports may present an issue to publishers. There was also one respondent who indicated that provision of global reports should be at the discretion of the publisher, which is in line with our recommendation at this time.

## **9. Item Reports**

*We recommend that all publishers / report providers should offer Item Reports for granular usage information.*

Impact: while essential for Open Access, Item Reports can be very large.

## **22. As a publisher / report provider, will Item Reports be difficult to implement?**

Within the limited number of report providers responding to this question, 50% already offer IR and only 20% said they could not or would not provide such reports.

As with global reports, the volume of data and size of reports was raised as one potential blocker to introducing IR more broadly.

## **Changes not affecting implementation**

### **10. Report naming**

*"Master Reports" are being renamed "Reports", and we are considering a new name for "Standard Views".*

Impact: no impact, just a terminology change.

## **23. For the reports that are currently called "Standard Views", which are derived from Reports, please indicate your preferred term.**

Among those who responded to this question, 33% preferred the term Derived Report, 31% Standard View, 20% Summary Report and 16% Report View. Given there was no strong feeling about changing the name, TAG have been asked to consider whether changing the term brings sufficient value to justify the transition effort.

### **11. Audits**

*We're making the audit process simpler and more transparent.*

Impact: we hope these changes will encourage more report providers to undergo an audit and become COUNTER-compliant.

**24. We recommend that reports are run through the COUNTER Validation Tool prior to starting an audit.**

50% of report providers indicated that they use the validation tool in this way; a further 30% said that they deemed this to be the responsibility of the technology partner producing their reports.

**25. Considering the qualification criteria for publishers / report providers to apply for permission to be audited on an alternate-year basis.**

a. **We propose a maximum of 150 books for alternate-year auditing. Is this too high, too low, or about right?**

b. **We propose a maximum of 15 journals for alternate-year auditing. Is this too high, too low, or about right?**

Both questions attracted relatively low response rates but no objections. The comments indicate a desire for as many publishers as possible to be covered by an audit, and that if this means an alternate-year schedule is required then it would be acceptable.

**26. Are you in favour of introducing community validation in place of audits for institutional repositories?**

39% of respondents were in favour of community validation for repositories, with 15% opposed. The comments indicated a need for more detail about the process and how disputes might be resolved; a small audit working group of the TAG will be tasked with developing this detail.

**27. What is your view of COUNTER extending the community verification process to not-for-profit publishers who also meet the criteria for alternate-year audits?**

This question generated rather split answers, with 32% feeling it to be a bad idea against 26% in favour. The idea will be put aside for the time being, and revisited if community validation proves to be popular with and helpful for repositories.

## **12. Versioning**

*The CoP will use Explicit Versioning, in the format Release.Breaking.Feature.Fix.*

Impact: increased transparency about how we manage versioning, and the timelines we expect to follow.

**28. To make the update process less onerous we would like to be able to update the CoP more frequently for "Fix" changes (e.g. typographic errors) and "Feature" changes (both backwards compatible and optional). Would a maximum of once every six months be acceptable?**

72% of respondents were in favour of the six-month timeframe for Fix and Feature releases.

Comments centred mainly on report consumers' need for consistency and comparability over time: we wish to reassure you that these Fix and Feature releases would not affect any core aspects of the Code of Practice. If a potential Fix or Feature were likely to interfere with consistency and comparability, the change would need to be postponed for a Breaking release.

**29. "Breaking" releases require publishers and providers to make changes to their implementations of the CoP. We propose no more than one "Breaking" release every 24 months, which would need to be subject to community consultation, with the existing 18-month implementation timeline. Would this proposed schedule be acceptable?**



With 68% in favour and only 2% against there was broad support for the 24-month timeframe. However, there was some concern that 24 months was too frequent for breaking changes, which may result from a lack of clarity about timelines on our part. To use Release 5.1 as an example:

- R5.1 compliance required month 1
- Consultation opens for R5.2 month 24
- R5.2 live month 30
- R5.2 compliance required month 48 - so a de facto breaking release every 4 years