



## EDITORIAL

Taking over a journal editorship from Nick Parkhouse is a mixed blessing. On the one hand he left a tidy ship with plenty of helpful advice and instruction. On the other he and Anne Borchers are a hard act to follow. Not knowing fully what is expected of an editor did not help. What do editors do? That was the first question that I faced and which you might think would have been more appropriately considered before I stood for the post. That I did not know the answer was far from comforting.

Luckily instruction came from an unexpected source: a publisher's weekend conference on new horizons in publishing, centring particularly on Elsevier's own experience in electronic publishing. The venue was Lisbon and thankfully a wide range of science journals was represented. This meant that I could ask stupid questions and not be exposed to sniggering scorn from other surgical editors. I duly tackled the editor of *The Lichenologist* (who probably has a north-facing office) on circulation matters, questioned the editor of a journal devoted to *Estuarine Shellfish* on reviewers as he selected crab and prawns from the buffet, and quizzed the editor of the *Journal of Comparative Pathology* as he inspected his plate of mixed meats with a professional eye.

The overall impression was reassuring: we all face similar problems, and none of us has all the answers. Here are some distillations, however: impact factors are not everything (but ours is good in our field), circulation needs to be above 300, (so we are OK there), and our authors and reviewers are our most important people.

Having written and reviewed for several journals over the years I can understand the motives of authors, but reviewers are saints in my church. They get nagged and harassed by editors and assistants, perform a taxing task for no tangible reward and give freely their valuable expertise. If I took one clear message away it was that reviewers are our most valuable asset and I start my tenure as editor by acknowledging that. The journal will publish a list of reviewers each year: small thanks but at least recognition.

Of course we also learnt a lot about electronic-publishing-according-to-Elsevier. They publish 1500 titles and all these titles are available on-line in full text via

Science Direct. Even more impressive evidence of our publisher's commitment to the electronic format is that the whole list is being back-entered so that by the end of 2004 all Elsevier's titles will be complete on-line. Even the *Lancet* will be available back to 1825 with full electronic search capability. This is very impressive but must give some anxiety about the future for paper titles and for library purchasing: more of this in a future editorial perhaps.

We remain committed to electronic submission and reviewing but for the foreseeable future will maintain a parallel paper based alternative. Electronic submissions now have a shorter time to review, decision and publication, so naturally we hope more authors will use this facility. Electronic reviewing has a similar patchy take-up in our journal and many others. Most reviewers prefer to print the article out rather than reviewing on screen but the number accepting electronic format for review has increased, and as the journal moves into an increasingly international reviewing arena so the value of this will become more and more apparent.

On all these areas we intend to solicit opinions from readers, but if in the meantime you have a suggestion for our journal, or simply wish to make an observation or feedback, please do so. I will always be glad to hear from potential peer reviewers, and they should include electronic contact details if available, as well as indicating their position and area of specialist knowledge.

Lastly, I have not mentioned that well known foible of editors, semantic pedantry. At the breakout sessions in Lisbon we were collectively posed important questions to discuss and report upon. I was not surprised to find that most of the time in one session was devoted to semantic clarification of the question and its' rephrasing, rather than to answering it. All editors have their pet hates; one chap I knew would be reduced to apoplexy by the phrase 'track record' (track being redundant). My own? Utilise. There. Now I feel like an editor.

### Simon Kay

Department of Plastic Reconstructive Surgery, St James University Hospital, Chancellors Wing, Beckett Street, Leeds LS9 7TF, UK