As Human Reproduction Update changes its Editor-in-Chief with the first issue of 2013, it is an apt time to reflect on the history of this journal and project plans for a strong future.

Human Reproduction Update is a review journal which is owned by ESHRE, a large professional society, and published by Oxford University Press (OUP), a highly respected academic publisher. As a review journal it aims to provide comprehensive, authoritative, up-to-date and balanced information, primarily for the scientific community. Another task for a review journal which is owned by a professional society is to provide an educational service to its members and other readers. The journal scope covers basic, transitional and clinical topics related to reproduction. This includes all the relevant areas of reproductive genetics, epidemiology, endocrinology and immunology. Reviews on mechanisms of action of hormones and regulatory molecules in female and male reproductive axis functions and pathologies, as well as on diagnostic and therapeutic topics in reproductive medicine, are welcome.

In 2005 the types of reviews in the journal were summarized by two former Editors as follows:

(i) evidence syntheses that can aid scientists and clinicians in their daily work;
(ii) concepts from related disciplines to inform reproductive specialists and
(iii) current basic science knowledge as the basis for future scientific and clinical advancement (Collins and Fauser, 2005).

Any of these types of reviews may, in terms of style, be comprehensive or systematic. Over the years basic and clinical sciences have each accounted for around 50% of all review articles. The journal endeavours to encourage comprehensive reviews and to include systematic reviews where they are most indicated in clinical studies of prevalence, prognosis, diagnosis and treatment. The number of systematic reviews has increased from one or two per year in the early years of the journal to 25% of all reviews, or about half of the clinical reviews, in 2011.

Whether a journal serves its community can be judged by how it meets the needs of readers and how it meets professional standards (Tobin, 2004). How it meets professional standards determines a given journal’s reputation among its peers. The reputation of a journal can be measured in many ways, including the number of submitted manuscripts, fairness to authors, quality of the review process, integrity of the reported biomedical information and, of course, the impact factor.

The needs of readers begin with reader satisfaction. Readers should be satisfied with the journal’s contents and should find the journal’s website easy to navigate. While print subscriptions are decreasing for all journals, website utilization measured as visits and downloads is rising for Human Reproduction Update. Downloads of pdf and html versions of Human Reproduction Update articles increased from an average of 35,000 monthly in 2007 to >65,000 in 2011. The journal tries to provide a reliable service to readers (and authors) by ensuring prompt posting of accepted reviews on a website that is easy to access. Readers also expect the journal to publish clear articles with transparent content, and therefore it is a priority to publish papers that are concise and readable and include sufficient explanatory tables and figures. Many readers are interested in accessible content, especially in light of the recent discussions regarding access to publicly funded research, and to this end we offer Open Access to the authors of all published manuscripts (http://www.oxfordjournals.org/oxfordopen/).

Furthermore with respect to clarity for readers, the journal introduced the In a Nutshell series to provide readers with one page summaries of systematic reviews from other journals and publications such as the Cochrane Collaboration.

Finally, international readers are important and the journal publishes local editions in China and India, and offers free online access through OUP to not-for-profit institutes in 45 developing countries.

The number of submissions to Human Reproduction Update is rising at approximately the same rate as overall PubMed citations with reproduction in the title. The pre-submission review process had almost a 50% increase in 2011.

Fairness to authors involves offering a timely response to authors’ queries and an objective assessment of their submissions. Fairness also should involve an appeal process when authors have reason to question the decision on their manuscript.

To ensure the integrity of the reported biomedical information, journals are now careful to monitor submissions for authenticity and originality. Review journals such as Human Reproduction Update are more likely to encounter plagiarism and self-plagiarism than manipulated or fraudulent data. Human Reproduction Update and other OUP journals make use of software (iThenticate) which detects previously published sentences and paragraphs. To date, no review accepted by Human Reproduction Update has had to be withdrawn because of plagiarism.

The impact factor of Human Reproduction Update has shown a heartening rise throughout the journal’s existence. As a review journal, a higher than average impact factor is expected, of course,
but it is reassuring that the Update curve is a straight line rise throughout the tenure of three editors. It is the top Journal both among Obstetrics and Gynecology Journals as well as among Reproductive Science Journals.

It is not a trivial matter that a successful journal should make a profit because otherwise it could not continue to exist. Although it has no advertising revenue, Human Reproduction Update provides its publisher and owner with a satisfactory net profit each year. The business of scientific journalism also depends on a well-informed and productive relationship among the editors and their publishers and owners. In this case, relations with ESHRE and OUP and among the sister ESHRE journals have always been excellent. Neither ESHRE nor OUP have ever threatened our editorial independence and both have set excellence as a priority over profit.

While the journal is thriving in the best sense of the term, it would be fatal if complacency were to cloud our vision of the future, given the way publishing is changing. The changes include the rapid shift from paper to electronic publishing, surging access by mobile devices and the introduction of many new open access journals. Not least of the future concerns is the accelerated rise in the volume of information which has taken place which must be accessed by readers who have had no compensating rise in the time available for the assimilation of that information.

One new approach for Human Reproduction Update will further ensure the quality of the published reviews; all contributors who wish to publish a review will submit an abstract and an outline of the proposal which will be pre-reviewed by the Editorial team. Proposals that involve original ideas, have high scientific quality and are certain to be of interest to readers will be selected for peer review. The change will increase the efficiency of the review process once the completed manuscript has been submitted. The details for the pre-review and other new procedures will be covered in a revised information for authors on the journal’s website. In another change to help speed up the review process and enhance communication among the editors, there will be more contact within the editorial board. Also planned is an electronic extended abstract, which will provide a more complete summary of the context and meaning of a review, now that such extended abstracts are accepted by PubMed.

A key future challenge for the Editor-in-Chief will be to determine which review subjects readers want: that is, which basic science and clinical subjects are currently most in demand for the conduct of scientific research and clinical practice. Because Human Reproduction Update is a speciality journal, sophisticated topics have to be tailored to meet the needs of readers in each of the growing numbers of sub-interest groups within reproductive medicine. Furthermore, although increasing downloads and citations suggest reader satisfaction, it would be informative to have a content review by focus groups of readers. Only by serving readers will Human Reproduction Update continue its rise in scientific standing; at the same time it must face the economic and readership challenges that face other scientific journals. Readers may be assured that the journal has a willingness to work in a conscientious manner, hoping to satisfy readers and also meet future professional standards.

References