Editorial

For the times they are a-changin’

It is now one year since the new editorial team took charge. There have been considerable strides made towards achieving our key goal, which is to provide a high quality journal with rapid decision making and publication.

We received in excess of 800 submissions during the year, and we have achieved our target of making a first decision in 90% of cases within 6 weeks of submission, with the majority of submissions receiving a decision within 4 weeks. This target has only been reached with the help of our reviewers, who have been very co-operative in providing reviews on time, and we are grateful to them. The increasing submission rate means that the acceptance rate for new manuscripts has decreased to 30%.

The journal remains at the forefront of introducing new technologies. Online submission and reviewing has now been operating for nearly two years and is generally widely accepted. During the past year we introduced electronic Advance Access publication ahead of print, which has successfully reduced the time from acceptance to publication to around 6–8 weeks. We hope to reduce this further still by increasing the frequency of uploads to the website to weekly. However, the production team can only achieve so much on its own and it is also up to authors to rapidly correct and return their page proofs to help minimise the time for publication. For papers of high interest we have introduced a fast track system with online publication within 4 weeks of acceptance. This will be a fully copyedited typeset proofread paper that will be identical to the final paper version. Advance Access can be accessed via the journal website (www.rheumatology.oupjournals.org). Online publication also permits the publication of extra material such as: additional data and figures, colour illustrations and multimedia adjuncts.

The introduction of new technologies also poses challenges for academic journals, in particular open access and open archive initiatives that challenge the traditional business models of journal publishing (e.g. [1–5]). We are already doing much to ensure the wide availability of the journal and will continue to develop the journal to secure its future and ensure its continuing value to our authors, readers and the members of the BSR. For example, all papers become free online after two years and all Editorials are freely available from publication. The number of institutes with access to the journal has increased over 2.5 times in the past 4 years through a combination of traditional subscriptions, consortia sales to groups of libraries and also free/reduced price online access for not-for-profit institutes in developing/middle income countries. I am delighted that so far there are over 700 institutions accessing the journal online through these offers to developing and middle-income countries. All of these developments contribute towards the journal’s success and profitability. Profits from the journal are crucial for enabling the British Society of Rheumatology to continue to promote research to advance rheumatology in practice, through funding and organising scientific meetings, special interest groups, education courses and prizes. In addition, because Rheumatology is published in partnership with Oxford University Press (a not-for-profit publisher), a proportion of our profits are also directed towards funding journal developments and a wide range of other Oxford University academic projects.

I believe that despite the changing nature of academic journal publishing there is a place for peer-reviewed journals – the peer review process, although widely acknowledged to have its faults [6], does provide a level of quality assurance to the reader. With increasing open access the readership will not remain confined to the professional but will increasingly include the lay public. It is therefore vitally important that material of a clinical nature is reviewed before publication to provide quality assurance to the public.

The traditional paper journal will continue and has not been neglected; from this issue you can see that we have redesigned the contents pages to improve navigation of the content and we have introduced logos to highlight ‘hot papers’, paediatric papers and papers that contain supplementary material in the online journal.

The journal has benefited from an increase to two full-time editorial staff, to cope with the increased workload to achieve the turnaround targets and the increasing demands that an ethically run journal requires. It is now the responsibility of journal publishers and editors to collect not only authorship consent, but also details of potential conflicts of interest, ethical approval, volunteer and patient informed consent to participate in studies, and for case reports patient consent for publication. As part of this process the journal is also a member of COPE (Committee On Publication Ethics). COPE exists to promote high ethical standards in journal publishing. Whilst this may appear bureaucratic it is unfortunately necessary to protect both our authorship and ourselves. At present this documentation must be provided as signed hard copy.

We welcome comment, criticisms or even praise and endeavour to provide you with a journal that is held in high regard by both readership and authors.

Finally the Editorial Board is grateful to all the reviewers (597) who have provided timely and helpful criticisms of manuscripts.

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SERENA CUBIE

References
1. Adam D. Scientists take on the publisher in an experiment to make research free for all. The Guardian 6 October, 2003.

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