

Development in 2005 and beyond

These are interesting days for scientific journals, with the widespread adoption of electronic publishing being followed by 'open access' – an 'author pays' model in which the costs of publication are covered by the author and the work is made available free of charge on publication to anyone around the world. This is not the place to discuss the pros and cons of the open access system, but there is no doubt that it has caught the imagination of many, especially those within the fields of genomics and systems biology. As Jane Alfred and I discussed here last year, *Development* and the other journals published by The Company of Biologists responded to this mood by introducing a hybrid system in which authors could opt for open access if they so wished. As we explained, optional open access for *Development* was (and still is) an experiment: as a small publisher, The Company of Biologists cannot switch overnight to open access without jeopardising our subscription base, and it is essential to discover the views of our readers and authors before taking such a step. As with most experiments published in *Development*, the results so far have proved interesting, with ~10% of authors opting in. This does suggest that given the choice between paying £1350 and having their paper available immediately, and paying nothing and having their paper available free of charge in 6 months, most authors opt for the latter! Of course, and as I remind authors below, *Development* is unusual in that it offers free reprints and does not levy page or colour charges. It would be very interesting to know how authors would choose between paying a fee for immediate open access and paying the same fee for page charges and only having their papers made available to all 6 months or later (if at all).

For now, at least, *Development* and the other journals published by the Company of Biologists will continue this open access experiment, certainly until the funding mechanisms for open access publication become clearer. Throughout this process, I welcome comments on this subject from *Development's* readers and authors.

Meanwhile, the editors of *Development* and the staff of The Company of Biologists continue to work hard to maintain *Development* as the most influential journal for developmental biologists [a position we infer from the number of citations to the journal in the Faculty of 1000 for 2003 and 2004 (for details, see Wets et al., 2003)]. One recent innovation to the online version of the journal has been the addition of a tool that allows high resolution figures in our full-text articles to be downloaded as PowerPoint files: a boon for teachers and lecturers. As far as the journal itself is concerned, one small but significant change in 2005 is that we now require authors to deposit microarray data in a public repository, such as ArrayExpress or Gene Expression Omnibus (see our website for more details).

But more important than this, of course, are the papers we publish, and here there are two comments to make. First, as the number of papers submitted to *Development* increases, it has become necessary to decrease our acceptance rate so that the journal is kept to a manageable size and a reasonable cost. This is good news for readers, we hope, because we will only be publishing the very best in developmental biology. I do know it might make life harder for authors, but the editors and I will work hard to continue to make decisions that are fair and consistent.

In this regard it is important to note that *Development's* editors are active scientists who understand publishing from the authors' point of view.

The other comment concerns *Development and Disease*. In this section of the journal, Ken Chien and Stuart Orkin publish papers in which developmental approaches are used to elucidate the aetiology of different syndromes and disorders, and to help find treatments for them. This is a burgeoning field, and *Development and Disease* is the perfect place to publish such work. Scrutiny of the papers published in 2004 reveals the extent, scope and promise of this part of the journal. Let me give just three examples: one paper has used mouse embryos to identify mutations that cause cardiovascular abnormalities (Yu et al., 2004); another has used zebrafish embryos to study polycystic kidney disease (Sun et al., 2004); and, in a third, *Drosophila* embryos have helped identify a putative drug target for intervention in β -catenin-dependent cancer progression (Hoffmans and Basler, 2004). Our hope is that *Development and Disease* will continue to publish papers such as these, which provide new insights into disease and its treatment, and will also provide a forum for research on topics such as stem cells and nuclear reprogramming. In this way we can highlight this very important area of developmental biology, one in which our research can significantly improve the human condition.

Finally, let me end by returning to the point that *Development* is published by The Company of Biologists, a non-profit organisation dedicated to the advancement of biology. One of the ways in which the Company advances science is by eschewing page charges and colour charges, and by providing authors with 50 free reprints. Unlike other journals, and unless you opt for open access, authors don't receive a bill for publication costs along with their letter of acceptance! The Company's charitable activities also include grants to scientific societies, the sponsorship of meetings and the award of Travelling Fellowships. Importantly, The Company of Biologists also recognises the contributions made by referees to the success of the journal by providing them with a small fee of £15 (\$25) if they return their reports on time. Some of our referees kindly decline their fees, suggesting that they are donated to the Travelling Fellowship scheme instead. We greatly appreciate this gesture, and reviewers might like to know that the Company now matches this donation, thereby increasing the funds available for the Fellowships. I do hope this brief summary of the Company's charitable activities provides another reason to publish your best work in *Development*.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank everyone associated with *Development*, including the editors, the production team and the staff at The Company of Biologists for a successful year. But most of all, I should like to thank our authors, referees and readers for their support. Do write to me with any suggestions you might have for the journal.

Jim Smith
Editor in Chief

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