

## A fresh start – but business as usual

It is a new year, a time to make new resolutions and look to the future. It is also a time to thank Fiona Watt who, as Editor-in-Chief for nearly 20 years, worked hard and tirelessly to make the *Journal of Cell Science* the respected journal it is today. However, we should also not forget everyone else involved with JCS, from the editorial staff to the reviewers who, although not always finding favour with every study, have strived to maintain the quality and impact of the work we publish. Thanks are also owed to the editors who, with help from our outstanding Editorial Board, handle in excess of 100 papers that are submitted to JCS each month, while at the same time running their own research programmes, writing grants and teaching. JCS has been, and always will be, a journal run by active research scientists for scientists. So what of the future? Well for me, it is a time to start writing an odd short editorial or two but, more importantly, it is a time to build on the journal's success.



It is an exciting time for cell biology, which in its broadest sense, aims to understand how a cell, the basic unit of life, over time converts the information stored within its genome into form and function. This includes understanding not only the inner workings of individual cells, but also how they respond and react to one another and their immediate environment. Cell biology has come a long way since the 1660s, when Antonie van Leeuwenhoek and Robert Hooke began to use their microscopes to look at cells. Microscopy still has a central role in what we do, but cell biology today is so much more than just looking. Today's average cell biology group is as likely to tackle their problem from a biochemical, biophysical, computational, developmental, genetic, molecular and/or systems biology perspective, in addition to staring down the eyepiece of an advanced microscope. Indeed, for someone who trained as a protein chemist in the Structural Studies division at the MRC Laboratory of Molecular Biology in Cambridge, I never expected I would end up being considered a cell biologist, let alone become the Editor-in-Chief of a cell biology journal!

In recent years, spectacular advances in microscopy, combined with computational and image-processing approaches have truly revolutionised the way we can interrogate cellular processes, as well as how cells behave and communicate with each other. At one end of the scale, we can now examine the activity, dynamics and interactions of proteins at single-molecule level, whereas at the other we can follow the behaviour and function of individual and/or groups of cells in a living organism. Cell biology has also become increasingly quantitative – a science of dynamics, numbers, rates and forces. Not surprisingly, there is an increasing awareness of the need for computational approaches that make full use of available data to generate predictive models that guide our future experiments and help us unravel the regulation and function of complex cellular processes and networks. Yes, it is a very exciting time for cell biology, and JCS.

In light of the changing landscape of cell biology, there will be some turnover in our Editorial Board in the coming year as we appoint new members to ensure JCS keeps up with technical developments and emerging areas of research. There will also be new editors to increase the breadth and depth of our scientific portfolio.

Two key issues on everyone's mind are the difficulty and speed of publishing. By that I mean receiving a fair and fast decision – whether it be positive or negative – rather than being asked for endless additional experiments that will not change the message or impact of the study. Let's be honest: how many of us just skim, rather than really study, all those additional supplementary data

in depth? JCS currently receives far more scientifically sound manuscripts than it has capacity to publish. Consequently, the editors frequently have to make difficult decisions regarding which papers to send for peer review – including those from close colleagues, friends and even other editors. This decision often involves consultation with our Editorial Board, which is why it is important that the Board consists of experts who can cover the full variety of research areas in which JCS publishes. We have all been editorially rejected at some point, so the editors understand how disappointing this decision is after the elation of submitting a paper a few days earlier. However, by continuing this practice in as fast and fair a manner as possible, we can ensure that authors are able to submit their manuscripts to another journal quickly when we feel a paper will not make it through our stringent review process.

As for the review process itself, we aim to be fast and efficient, but it is not always easy to obtain a report when a reviewer is distracted by teaching duties, grant deadlines or travelling to meetings. Nevertheless, we will endeavour to improve the speed of peer review by emphasizing to reviewers their responsibility to authors and, ultimately, the wider scientific community when they agree to review a paper – regardless of whether it is finally published. We will also be investigating ways to improve the transparency of the review process, and have already put in place procedures to allow accepted papers to be published on our website as quickly as possible. Finally, I think it is important that we all provide more-succinct referee reports that only request experiments to clarify or address the central research finding of a study; rather than asking for the kitchen sink and another six months of work – which is slowing down the progress of science, as well as damaging people's scientific careers.

With the standard of submissions continually improving, the competition for space in a journal is getting harder and harder. So why bother submitting your paper to JCS instead of going straight to an open-access journal? First, publishing in JCS is free – and this does include those lovely colour images collected on that expensive microscope. Second, in submitting to JCS, you know that you will receive an informed decision by an active research scientist who understands what it takes to publish a paper. Third, a paper published in JCS is an achievement that stands the test of time and one that, I think, people are proud of – even if our impact factor (whatever that truly means) is not in double figures (yet). I see evidence of this at conferences as JCS papers feature on the speakers' slides as much as any other journal publishing similar research. Combined with our new 'publish on acceptance' policy I think you will agree that JCS is still an excellent place to submit your work to.

The first immunofluorescence image I ever recorded ended up on the cover of JCS, so it is particularly exciting to be asked to become Editor-in-Chief. It is a position with big responsibilities and challenges in the rapidly evolving world of scientific publishing. However, it is one I have taken on because I believe JCS, and its role in promoting and supporting the cell biology community, can only go from strength to strength over the coming years.

**Michael Way (Editor-in-Chief)**

*Journal of Cell Science 125, 1–2*  
© 2012. Published by The Company of Biologists Ltd  
*doi:10.1242/jcs.105999*