Editorial

Evolution

by **Bernd Pulverer**, Chief Editor of *The EMBO Journal* and Head of Scientific Publications, EMBO. E-mail: bernd.pulverer@embo.org

The EMBO Journal (2010) 29, 1. doi:10.1038/emboj.2009.393

The publishing landscape has changed dramatically over *The EMBO Journal*'s 28-year history. The rate of research continues to increase as molecular and cell biology have grown into truly global activities, mirrored by a rise in publications and journal numbers. At the same time, the spectrum of research in this arena has broadened considerably beyond hypothesis-driven work focused on a defined set of molecules and genetic screens to include systems approaches encompassing a wide range of genomic and proteomic approaches, chemical and synthetic biology, quantitative cell biology, and a diversified set of model organisms. The dramatic technological advances of the last decade have set the scene for a golden age over the next decade, during which the traditionally separate fields of developmental, cell and molecular biology, and biochemistry will intercalate to generate quantitative data at the cellular and organismal levels, which will inform systems biology as much as medical science. A broad remit journal such as *The EMBO Journal* serves an important role in facilitating the synergies between these previously often disparate areas, and we are evaluating carefully how to reflect this multidisciplinary without becoming diffuse.

The publishing landscape has also changed as printed journals rediscover themselves in an online world with new modes of access and reading. Having just emerged from a year of celebration to mark the bicentenary of the theory of evolution, it is not entirely without merit to consider scientific publishing as an ecosystem under selection. It is fair to assume that variants of the peer-reviewed scholarly publication, composed of data assembled into logical units embedded in explanatory notes and an author's view of the context and significance of the findings, will survive as the main vessel for the dissemination of research. This is largely because the generally successful system of community self-assessment relies on it. As research output balloons and as science becomes more complex and specialized, the scientific community and funders will continue to rely on peer-reviewed units of publication and bibliometric measures to aid in the assessment of research and researchers. However, the shape of the vessel is free to adapt to new requirements and to incorporate online technologies and modes of communication. With this in mind, we are currently redesigning the online presentation and functionality of the journal's content to transform it from a static rendering of the printed paper into a dynamic knowledge environment built on rich text that interacts with databases and other resources. We aim to transform papers from passive documents of achievement into useful research tools and will elaborate on specific developments elsewhere.

This is also an exciting time from a publishing perspective, as print copies are replaced by online access and subscription models by site licences, and as the community increasingly demands open access to their data. EMBO is an organization run by scientists for scientists and the overriding goal of its publications is to serve its constituents as best as possible. We are continuously exploring ways to enhance the accessibility to

the journal's content while preserving its financial viability—it bears repeating that a highly selective journal with high publication standards has to be supported by a sizeable professional editorial and production staff, and also that financial surpluses are reinvested into supporting EMBO's other programmes, such as the Young Investigator Programme (<http://www.embo.org/programmes/yip.html>). The journal's 'hybrid model' provides flexibility to authors and readers with a diverse set of requirements and preferences. Currently about 13% of the authors have opted to pay for immediate open access to their work. This in return has translated, for the 2010 subscription year, into a 9% reduction on the 2009 site licence list price. Going forward, site licence prices and author fees will be adjusted depending on community requirements and uptake of the open access option and we aim to be as transparent as possible about these costs. See also: http://www.nature.com/press_releases/emboopen.html.

We are eager to see *The EMBO Journal* evolve on all these fronts, to provide a platform that provides the best possible support for research. This process will be informed by feedback from our advisory boards, but also the scientific community at large. Do get in touch!

Finally, the journal is evolving in terms of the editorial process and staff. A team of seven editors continues to appreciate the support of the journal's advisory editorial board, which has seen some turnover to better distribute research expertise. Editors now handle specific subject areas, as detailed on the journal website, so that it is clearer whom to approach. With the end of the year the journal's executive editor of 5 years, Pernille Rørth, retired to focus on her research on cell migration. Besides running a successful lab, Pernille was engaged with the journal in a very hands-on manner and her invariably insightful editorial guidance on the around 3000 annual submissions was much appreciated by editors and authors alike. During Pernille's tenure, the journal established the 'Have You Seen?' format and focus issues, and important policies were instituted such as requiring citation of the primary literature where appropriate, and notably the 'editorial process files', which add unprecedented transparency to the editorial process (*The EMBO Journal* (2009) 28, 1–3. doi:10.1038/emboj.2008.250).

Hermann Bujard, a proactive EMBO member since the early seventies, acted as director of EMBO following Frank Gannon, while also pursuing a promising malaria vaccine programme. With characteristic dynamism he developed the organization on many fronts. The considerable momentum of Hermann's directorship extended his tenure to an eventful 3 years and he leaves a rich legacy. In the name of the editorial team, the advisory editorial board and all EMBO employees, I thank Pernille and Hermann for their invaluable contributions. We look forward to work with EMBO's new director, developmental biologist Maria Leptin, to ensure that EMBO best serves the molecular biology community and European science in these exciting times.