It is an immense pleasure and honour to take over as the Editor of Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B. I am particularly fortunate to assume stewardship of this flagship publication when it has thrived under the superb leadership of my colleague and friend Georgina Mace, who has done so much to develop the journal and to keep it safe through what have been turbulent times for scientific publishing. It is somewhat daunting to have such a predecessor to emulate, but I hope and intend to develop the journal and to maintain its position as a world leading publication in the life sciences.

I have not previously been a member of the Editorial Board of the journal, and my role has been confined mainly to the academic editing of proceedings of Royal Society Discussion Meetings. I will therefore need more time with the journal to comment with confidence on its remit, organization and procedures, but have reached some preliminary conclusions. The remit of the journal seems well set to last for at least my term as editor. The journal has cleverly avoided entering direct competition with the many excellent scientific review journals and has also, wisely in my view, retained its niche as a general journal in the biological sciences. The format of themed issues across the full range of the biological sciences gives the journal a unique placement in scientific publishing, and allows it to explore its topics in real breadth and depth. The proceedings of the Royal Society Discussion Meetings provide an excellent backbone, while the flexibility both to commission issues and to accept suggestions from the scientific community for topics provides ample opportunity to ensure breadth and balance. It is important that the journal is free to commission in topical and developing areas, and the organization of the journal is well adapted to do this. The four main subject areas, namely cell and development, health and disease, environment and evolution, and neuroscience and cognition, are sufficiently diverse and broad that they allow us to cover pretty well any aspect of life sciences, while providing subject area foci to guide discussion and planning. At the moment, the balance of the issues across these four areas could be more even, and the journal is looking into the possibility of more rapid publication, to attract more interest from those areas of science that move more rapidly.

The journal is doing well in terms of impact, especially as it has recently expanded the number of issues from 12 to 24 per annum, a development greatly aided by increased use of electronic submission, review and editorial work. This success comes from the careful choice of topics, which include both cutting-edge fundamental science and the application of science to public policy and the challenges faced by human societies. If anyone reading this Editorial is stimulated to suggest such a theme, please contact me, a member of the Editorial Board or the journal itself. We are always happy to work with potential guest editors to develop their ideas and, if the theme issue is accepted, the guest editors will benefit from considerable logistical support from the editorial office.

I look forward to working with both the Editorial Board and the editorial office over the next few years.

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