Comments from the new Editor

John Pickett

It is a tremendous pleasure and honour to take over as the Editor of Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B from my colleague and friend of long-standing, Dame Linda Partridge. I am particularly fortunate to assume stewardship of this flagship publication which has thrived under the superb leadership of Linda, who has done so much to develop the journal and to keep it safe through recent dramatic changes in scientific publishing. It is daunting to have such a distinguished predecessor and also to contemplate on the origins of Philosophical Transactions in 1665, but I hope and intend to maintain and develop the journal in its position as a world-leading publication in the life sciences.

I have not previously been a member of the Editorial Board of this journal, however, I have been involved in organizing Royal Society discussion meetings (and their associated publications) and authored papers published in the journal over the last 30 years. Indeed in 1985, I published a paper in the journal [1] upon which much of my subsequent work has been based including that presented in my Croonian Prize Lecture, ‘Plant and Animal Communication’ (2008). I have also been involved in various Royal Society committees so am very familiar with the Society’s goals and how the publishing programme ties into its work.

The journal’s unusual publishing format, which allows a topic to be explored in depth from different angles, still gives the journal a unique position within the scientific publishing environment, despite ever-increasing competition. The flexibility in article type and the breadth of the subject coverage really allows our guest editors to be inventive and ambitious, and I would like to encourage this even further during my term as Editor. The publication of issues linked to the Royal Society discussion meetings continue to provide an excellent backbone, while the flexibility both to commission issues and to accept applications from the scientific community for topics provides ample opportunity to ensure breadth and balance. I am very much looking forward to see the range of topics that we cover over the next few years, and hope to use my broad scientific interests to branch out into some new areas. I am also keen to ensure that we represent the whole scientific research community, including increasing the number of authors and editors from developing countries.

The journal is doing very well in terms of impact and readership, with its highest impact factor to date, and usage growing every year. We continue to attract more high-quality issue proposals than we can fit into our annual schedule of 26 theme issues. There are always new developments within scientific publishing that we need to consider and adapt to, such as the trend towards open access and open data, and the ongoing discussions more generally about pre- and post-publication peer review, and I am looking forward to engaging with the Editorial Office and our scientific guest editors to continue to ensure that we are providing the best possible service to our authors and readers.

If anyone reading this Editorial is stimulated to suggest a theme, or has any comments on the journal, 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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