It is a great privilege to take over as the Editor of Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B, a delight to benefit from the excellent leadership of my predecessor Sir Brian Heap, but also slightly daunting to be responsible for this long-established and prestigious journal during a period of some uncertainty and change for scientific publishing. Of course, as in any enterprise, the key to success is to continue to survey the scene and to adapt and grow accordingly. In discussions with Sir Brian Heap, the Editorial Board and the staff at the Royal Society, we have been doing this over the past year, and I am confident that we have a strategy for this journal that will maintain its place among the world’s leading biological journals.

As Sir Brian Heap recounted (Heap 2007), the current model for this journal is of themed issues, each focusing on an emerging and relevant topic in biology where guest editors organize an issue containing related papers, all addressing the chosen theme. This approach arose from the Society’s Discussion meetings, and this journal still does and will continue to publish issues derived from these meetings. However, the format can be equally successful, arguably more so sometimes, without there having been a meeting. We have many recent issues addressing important and fascinating areas of science, where the impact of the volume as a whole is greater than the sum of the papers that it contains. We are keen to continue and to expand this publication model in the coming years, and have made a few changes to this journal to accommodate growth around this model.

First, we need to ensure the effective peer review of issues and the papers that they contain. Consequently, we have increased the size of the Editorial Board and attempted to identify people with expertise across four central areas of focus: neuroscience and cognition; organismal and evolutionary biology; molecular, cellular and developmental biology; and health and disease. Members of the Editorial Board oversee the review of theme issue outlines submitted by prospective guest editors and we are always happy to discuss potential ideas for themed issues and to work with guest editors to develop those ideas. We hope that the feedback from this process helps guest editors refine the content and focus of the issue, though they retain the right to choose the authors and titles of papers as they see fit. Following the review process, we will make an editorial decision on whether or not to proceed with a prospective proposal. Once the proposed issue is accepted, the editorial office works with guest editors to guide the effective commissioning, development, submission and review of the papers in each issue.

We are confident that across the wide range of the biological sciences, there are many potential theme issues and so we are expanding the number of issues from 12 to 24 per year in 2008. The editorial process will be facilitated by electronic proposal submission and review through our online manuscript processing systems (see: publishing.royalsoc.ac.uk/philtransb for more details). One corollary of this change is that we will cease publishing stand-alone review papers, as it is difficult to accommodate these in the commissioning and review process around the theme issues.

We have reviewed the cluster areas (neuroscience and cognition; organismal and evolutionary biology; molecular, cellular and developmental biology; and health and disease), and feel that they continue to meet the needs for topics that might be included in this journal. Most importantly, we are reassured that each of these has the potential to include issues that cover cutting edge topics in fundamental science as well as the potential application of excellent science to key issues in public policy, especially those affecting people and the environment. Recent issues that exemplify this spread focused on the artificial heart (Solé et al. 2007), bioengineering the heart (Yacoub & Nerem 2007), human genetic variation and disease (Stumpf et al. 2005), the future of fisheries (Beddington & Kirkwood 2005) and measuring biodiversity (Balmford et al. 2005). Reading the introductory editorials for these recent themed issues across the range of topics we cover illustrates clearly how the process of putting together an issue can refocus the questions, solidify where advances are really being made and open up new avenues of enquiry.

Along with the members of the Editorial Board and the very able editorial office headed by James Joseph, I look forward to receiving your ideas and inputs over the coming years. Thanks to the leadership of my predecessor Sir Brian Heap, we already have a very exciting set of issues lined up for the coming year and beyond, but we encourage the continuing submission of new ideas and topics that can fully exploit the publishing model we are adopting. I am greatly looking forward to my term as Editor and to working with many new people and topics in the years to come.

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REFERENCES
