

Biology Open (BiO) – making life easier for us all

Jordan Raff (Editor-in-Chief)

Sir William Dunn School of Pathology, University of Oxford, South Parks Road, Oxford, OX1 3RE, UK; e-mail: bio.editor@biologists.com

Biology Open doi: 10.1242/bio.2011002, 1

© 2011. Published by The Company of Biologists Ltd. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the

Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial Share Alike License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0>).

Proud as I am to be introducing this first issue of the newest journal from the Company of Biologists, many friends and colleagues said that I was crazy when I told them I had agreed to become its Editor-in-Chief — ‘why do we need another journal?’ they asked. This is a good question, but from the time of my very first discussions with the Company of Biologists and my fellow Editors about this journal, I have been convinced that *Biology Open* (BiO) has the potential to be something special. Let me explain why.

For many years now, it has been a general rule in the biological sciences that only a relatively small fraction of our total research effort ever gets published. Traditionally, scientists have viewed this as a good thing, with journals acting as ‘gatekeepers’ to save us from having to wade through large numbers of papers that either are scientifically flawed or contain little information of value. With the advent of online publishing and ever-more sophisticated search tools, however, we need to rethink the present publishing system. Is it right that so much publicly funded work is never published? How much does science really gain from the current protracted publication process, with reviewers stringently enforcing the journal’s quest for impact, and authors dutifully performing long lists of additional experiments to satisfy reviewers? Can we justify putting so much of our time and energy into this ‘arms race’, particularly for papers that are never destined to be published in the most prestigious journals?

The aim of *BiO* is to publish good-quality, sound research, without attempting to judge impact or novelty. It will be up to the scientific community to decide, after publication, on the importance of each paper. *PLoS One* and other similar journals have already led the way with this model and have shown that it works: sound articles that add to a scientific story, rather than changing it, are widely read by scientists who follow that story. An advantage of this model is that it allows peer reviewers to concentrate on what is most important — assessing whether the science is technically sound and the conclusions are fully supported by the data; they do not have to make a more arbitrary assessment of the perceived importance of the findings. Moreover, reviewers will be asked not to suggest additional experiments unless these are absolutely necessary to support the

main conclusions of the paper. These review procedures will be fast, simple and rigorous. The *BiO* Editors are united in their commitment to make editorial decisions within 10 days; the average time from submission to editorial decision is currently on target at 10.1. This figure will be constantly updated on our web site to let you see how we are doing.

BiO will also offer an easy online transfer system to authors whose paper was originally submitted to one of the company’s other journals — *Development*, *Disease Models & Mechanisms*, *Journal of Cell Science* and *The Journal of Experimental Biology*. Transfer will not require reformatting, and we encourage authors to pass on the peer review reports from these journals to the *BiO* Editors, even if they are negative. Our editorial policies are distinct from those of the other journals, and this system will speed up editorial decisions and potentially reduce the number of referees involved in the reviewing of such papers.

Although other new journals are currently being launched based on the *PLoS One* model (or variations of it), the ethos at *BiO* will reflect the ethos of the Company of Biologists — a not-for-profit publisher with a long history of funding a wide range of charitable activities that support the community of scientists in the areas covered by its journals. The Company has promoted open-access publishing, and its two newest journals, *Disease Models & Mechanisms* and now *BiO*, are fully open access. Importantly, all of the Editors of *BiO* are practising scientists and are committed to establishing a strong sense of community with our authors and readers, as has been the case with the other Company journals. I will discuss in more detail some of our other hopes and aspirations for *BiO* in future editorials.

Will I still submit papers to *Science*, *Cell* and *Nature*? Of course I will, and I advise you to do the same. I am convinced, however, that times are changing: as a community, we are becoming more interested in the impact of an individual paper rather than in the impact of the journal it is published in. The ways of measuring this impact are improving all the time, making it more acceptable for ambitious students and post-docs not to publish all their research in only the highest impact journals. In this way, I am optimistic that *BiO* will help make publishing good science both less painful and less time consuming for us all.