

EDITORIAL

Developing new associations

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Developmental biology is an ever-shifting field; new discoveries open up new avenues of research and new technologies allow us to analyse developmental processes in new ways. In recent years, the pace of change has been exceptionally rapid. Several commentaries have spoken eloquently about why this means that now is the most exciting time to be a developmental biologist (Wallingford, 2019; Gilbert, 2017; St Johnston, 2015). We wholeheartedly subscribe to this view and it is reflected in the pages of this journal. In the last year, for example, we have published papers that combine experimental and theoretical work to understand eyespot patterning in the butterfly wing (Connahs et al., 2019) and that use micropatterning in tissue culture to model the earliest stages of human development (Martyn et al., 2019), and have compiled a Special Issue featuring cutting-edge single cell approaches to developmental biology (see Klein and Treutlein, 2019). As the field expands in these and other directions, it's important that we – as a community journal – welcome and support the changes. To this end, we're delighted to announce that we have recruited five 'Associate Editors' to cover new and growing areas of developmental biology. They are: Paul François (McGill University, Canada), providing expertise on the physics of developmental biology and computational modelling; Matthias Lutolf (EPFL, Switzerland), focusing on bioengineering; Irene Miguel-Aliaga (Imperial College London, UK), covering the intersection between metabolism and development; Samantha Morris (Washington University in St. Louis, USA), focusing on single cell approaches in developmental and stem cell biology; and Ken Poss (Duke University, USA), covering the field of regeneration. We'll be publishing interviews with all five over coming issues, so do look out for these.

The Associate Editors will help us to better assess and handle papers in these areas and, perhaps more importantly, to signal our enthusiasm for these fields. We encourage those of you working in these areas to consider *Development* for your next paper. Paul, Matthias, Irene, Sam and Ken will be handling papers in the same way that our other Editors do and will work on submissions directly in their fields of expertise. Publishing in *Development* will introduce your work to a new and receptive audience. If you are unsure whether *Development* is the appropriate venue for your study, or you have any questions about the process, please do get in touch.

By appointing Associate Editors, we aim to broaden, not redirect, the scope of *Development*. We remain as passionate as ever about the areas of developmental and stem cell biology we already cover. Moreover, alongside studies reporting primary research findings, we continue to encourage submissions describing methods and resources that are of interest to the field. Do let us know if we seem

to be neglecting your favourite topic or overlooking an emerging theme.

Scientific publishing is changing almost as rapidly as developmental biology and, for many scientists, the business side of publishing can seem opaque and confusing. Making the publication processes more transparent is an aim of Plan S, the Open Access initiative promoted by an international consortium of research funders. To this end, The Company of Biologists is one of a group of publishers piloting a new framework to report the costs and services (see <https://www.informationpower.co.uk/recommendations-for-transparent-communication-of-open-access-prices-and-services/> for more details). This work is still at a very early stage, but some of the metrics required for this framework are data we already analyse on an annual basis. In the spirit of transparent reporting, we are sharing here some key metrics relating to our editorial processes in Box 1. It goes without saying that, like every journal, we strive towards more efficient manuscript handling and quicker turnaround times, but these numbers reflect the reality of performing quality peer review at a journal such as *Development*.

In another step towards greater transparency, we've recently started to publish peer review history files (comprising editorial correspondence, referee reports, author responses and a timeline of the process) alongside published articles. You can find these files in the 'Info & metrics' tab of a paper online. We're delighted that most authors (over 85%) have agreed to have these files published alongside their articles – we hope that over time this will become standard for papers in the journal. It's also reassuring that there has been no effect on our ability to secure appropriate referees for a paper: the proportion of individuals accepting our invitation to review a paper (see Box 1) was very similar prior to and after introducing the policy. Given how overburdened many researchers are with requests to review, it's a sign of how well *Development* is supported by the community that around half our requests are accepted. As editors, we always try to identify the most suitable referees and we only ask you to review a paper if we think you have relevant expertise and an interest in the topic. We are very grateful for the time and effort contributed by all our referees.

Clearly, though, there's more we can do to reduce the reviewer burden and make publishing more efficient. Of course, all authors hope that their paper will be accepted at the first journal they submit to, but the reality is that many manuscripts go through the review process at multiple journals before being published. And while we hope that the comments received from each set of reviewers is helpful to the authors, we recognise that this can be a frustrating process in which authors effectively have to start from scratch with each new submission. It's also frustrating for referees, who might be invited to review the same paper for several journals over the course of many months. Like many publishers, we are working on various ways of combating these issues.

Firstly, we offer authors whose papers are not deemed appropriate for *Development* the option to transfer to our sister journal *Biology Open* (BiO), and use the *Development* reviewer reports to make a more efficient decision on the suitability of the work for BiO.

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Box 1. Key journal statistics

All numbers refer to manuscripts submitted in the calendar year 2018 (as many manuscripts submitted in 2019 are still under consideration, we do not yet have full 2019 statistics).

Overall acceptance rate: 37%
 Acceptance rate for papers for which we invited revision: 94%
 Editorial rejection rate: 28%
 Median time to editorial rejection: 4 days
 Percentage of invited reviewers that accept the request to review: 48%
 Median time to first decision for peer-reviewed papers: 35 days
 Median time for initial revision by authors: 86 days
 Median time from submission to acceptance: 151 days

Authors can now opt to receive input from a BiO editor about the likely outcome of transfer before they commit to transferring. It should be stressed that opting into this route at submission does not in any way influence the outcome of your submission to *Development*, nor does it commit you to choosing the transfer option. We recognise that authors may have venues other than BiO in mind should their submission to *Development* be unsuccessful. We simply wish to help those authors considering transfer to BiO to do so efficiently and (hopefully!) painlessly.

Secondly, we will consider papers with reviewer reports from other journals and try to use those reports to aid our decision-making. This is not always straightforward, particularly where we do not know the identity of the reviewers, and so cannot judge their expertise. In some cases, we are able to receive the reports (and reviewer names) directly from the upstream journal, which can be very helpful. If you are interested in this option, please contact us in advance so we can discuss the best way forwards. We are also trialling a system of passing reports and reviewer identity (with permission) to downstream journals – again, please contact us to discuss this.

Finally, we're excited to be an affiliate journal for Review Commons (<https://www.reviewcommons.org/>), a new journal-agnostic peer review platform. Manuscripts submitted to Review Commons are peer reviewed in a way that focusses on the science rather than the potential suitability for any particular journal. Authors are then able to send the manuscript, reviews and author response to any of the affiliate journals, who commit to using those reviews to make a decision on the paper. Review Commons also provides the option for authors to upload the manuscript and the reviews to bioRxiv in the form of a 'refereed preprint'. Although it's still early days for the project, we hope that Review Commons will help authors avoid the multiple rounds of peer review that too often blight the publication process.

We hope that these new initiatives contribute towards reducing reviewer fatigue and to ensuring that every paper receives constructive input from appropriate experts. We believe that *Development* is the premier journal for our field, and we are committed to publishing and promoting the best contemporary developmental biology. We hope that the changes offer further reasons to submit to *Development*, review for *Development* and read *Development* papers. As ever, we welcome your feedback on any of these issues.

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