

Editorial

To herald its 50th year of publication *Acta Crystallographica* has instituted a number of significant changes to its journals. These were initiated with the appointment of separate Section Editors in Beijing, and will eventually affect most aspects of *Acta*'s operations, from submission procedures to the electronic delivery of publication and data services.

For some readers these changes may be unexpected and, perhaps, unwarranted. After all the *Acta Crystallographica* journals are among the most successful in the scientific/technical publication industry. So why change them now?

There are important scientific reasons for change. The *Acta Crystallographica* journals are, despite the wide diversity of topics they cover, perceived by many scientists as purely *crystallographic*. This perception poses an obstacle to attracting a wider authorship and readership for *Acta Sections*. For example, *Acta C* is aimed primarily at the structural science community, but it has a relatively poor following amongst the chemistry community because of its *crystallographic image*. In the past there has been a tendency to emphasize the similarities of *Acta Sections* rather than their special focus. In today's science, when fields and interests are changing so rapidly, such policies are counter-productive. With *Acta C*, for example, the needs of molecular and solid-state chemists, materials scientists, and other disciplines, must be carefully monitored and catered for.

There are also economic reasons for change. In the first place the publishing industry is increasingly competitive. New journals with overlapping interests are launched every year. Existing rival journals are changing their fields of interest and style to improve their competitiveness with us. And overshadowing all of these factors is a technological revolution in network communications that is providing new avenues for disseminating information. The future viability of scientific journals will depend on their ability to adapt appropriately to these changes, and to cater for an over-served and sometimes volatile reader base. Publication flexibility may hold the key to journal survival in the 21st century! Also, as the budgets of libraries decrease, the journals most likely to succeed will be those that deliver a widely accepted quality product at a reasonable price. Affordability has contributed to the success of *Acta Crystallographica* over the years but it can only be maintained by keeping production costs as low as possible.

What changes are therefore planned for *Acta C*?

It will remain, first and foremost, a journal for rapid publication of accurate but concise reports on crystal and molecular structures. To maintain pre-eminence in this field a number of improvements have been made already

and others are planned. Here is a brief overview of the changes.

Readers will have already noted the redesigned front cover featuring a picture of a current structure. The new *Contents* layout reflects greater emphasis on structural, rather than crystallographic, features. It has been designed for faster and more informative literature scanning in a format suitable for future electronic previewing. These style changes emphasize the role of *Acta C* as a rapid structure communication journal.

The basic format of *Section C* papers, which was adopted two years ago, will remain unchanged. Only this format, and that of an *Addenda and Errata* section will be supported in the future. There are, however, new guidelines for papers and these will be published as *Notes for Authors* in the next issue. In future, two-dimensional chemical diagrams will be mandatory for molecular structures. Additional chemical information on the material studied will be requested, and there will be tighter control over the quality of structure diagrams. Co-editors will insist that the *Comments* section contains only the unique and important aspects of the structure. The primary objective of these recommendations will be to ensure that each paper *encapsulates*, in a clear and concise way, the *essential* structural data and its *raison d'être*. Readers who require additional information will be supported with electronic access to the full set of submitted data.

A fundamental property of a rapid communication journal is *that the information contained is current*. To achieve this, new procedures to reduce publication times have been put in place. As in the past, *Acta C* manuscripts are submitted to the Chester Office for checking and transmittal to Co-editors. An important change is that CIF and hardcopy submissions will be processed in quite separate streams. This means that CIF's, which need not be keyboarded, pass through the checking and typesetting stages at a much faster rate. CIF submissions reduce our production costs significantly. Now that CIF-generating software is widely available, the authors submitting CIF's should be rewarded with faster throughput.

Publication times can also be reduced by streamlining the reviewing process. In future, CIF submissions which pass the initial Chester checks 'without fault' (e.g. no numerical errors or missing data, text or figures) will be reviewed as *fast-track submissions*. Those manuscripts will be sent with full advance proofs to Co-editors for rapid reviewing. If a paper is accepted for publication with minor or no corrections, this proof will be forwarded to the authors for immediate final checking. This will reduce the review and proof times for carefully

prepared submissions significantly. Again, the object of these new procedures is to reward those who place the least strain on the editorial process. In the past there has been a tendency for some authors to rely heavily on the checking process to uncover numerical errors, and on referees to correct the text! The review processes will remain as stringent as before but error-free submissions will pass more rapidly through the system.

In the future we will be delivering published *C* papers and data electronically. These services will include electronic previewing of *Contents* and *Abstracts* on the day of publication. This will be supported by electronic delivery of complete text images and CIF's. These services will be announced in the *IUCr Newsletter* as soon as the necessary computing and software facilities are in place.

All of these changes will enable *Section C* to better fulfil its publication role within the *Acta* family, which extends well beyond that of a data depository. They will provide for a journal which is easier to scan, but suitable for scientists who like to browse, a journal which will contain results that are current, and electronic services which will provide data and text for those who require instant notification of the journal's contents. The new style *Acta C* promises this while preserving those attributes for which it is well known; the most reliable structural results in science, overseen by the strongest peer review system!

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