

## Acta B meeting

### Euroforum Infantes, San Lorenzo de El Escorial, Spain

20 August, 11:30-13:00, Sala11 (Editors are encouraged to join the Acta B/C/E meeting before this meeting)

#### CHAIR: Carol Brock

Attendees: Dave Billing, Elena Boldyreva, Pierre Bordet, Gervais Chapuis, T. Guru Row, Chris Howard, Jim Kaduk, Gernot Kostorz, Keiichiro Ogawa, Urszula Rychlewska, Mark Spackman, Richard Welberry

IUCr staff attending: Jill Bradshaw

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Carol opened the meeting by saying that she felt that the checking of structures for Acta C/E was having a knock-on effect and discouraging authors for Acta B. Acta B authors should be able to comment on why a structure does not pass the validation checks and still be able to publish. Note this is related to small molecule structures rather than incommensurate structures or powder studies. The question is why would an author submit to Acta B if they envisage problems with checks? How can we reduce the hassle for authors? Is there any hope of this situation changing?

In response to this it was noted that people could name many authors who would not be deterred from publishing in Acta B due to validation checks. The question is how to keep these authors as well as attract new authors. Authors will publish papers on the hottest topics in journals that will reward their scientific progression and thus finance their research. Unfortunately, Acta B is not among these journals so many papers are lost to other competing high-ranking journals. We need to identify authors who are discouraged from submitting to B. Where a paper appears is very competitive – some authors are told to only submit papers to journals with an impact factor greater than 4. The journal needs to be more visible amongst chemists and should be aiming towards a higher impact factor.

It was noted that the major competitors, Crystal Growth and Design and CrystEngComm, could be seen as very political journals and we do not want to compete with that. It is important that authors should be able to write freely. However, it was felt that Co-editors, authors and readers are not necessarily aware of the politics of publishing in certain journals. It was felt that there were certain strengths in Acta B and the journal would benefit from publishing more papers in hot topics such as aperiodic systems. Some Co-editors struggled with the distinction between an Acta B paper and a C or E submission. It was felt, however, that Acta E is a quick publication platform that was seen by many as a database-type publication. Frank Allen created the idea for Acta E so that there was information available on citable structures. So whilst Acta E was not necessarily a good platform for publication it was better than nothing at all. The distinction between B, C and E papers was discussed in more detail later in the meeting.

One Co-editor who is also on the board for CrystEngComm stated that they are receiving more submissions than Acta B simply because the process of publishing is much easier and quicker. Certainly in relation to powder papers it was felt that the current policy of only submitting one CIF containing all the data was a problem and that one CIF per structure would be easier for authors. There also seems to be a perception amongst chemists that crystallography is not a science so a pure crystallography journal is not necessarily that attractive to authors. It seems to be the authors of papers reporting small molecules that we are currently losing. As noted in the B/C/E meeting earlier, the readership of the journals is larger than the authorship. So maybe we need to focus our attention on the readership and how to encourage them to write papers for Acta B.

It was also commented that Acta B should be more flexible with titles, although this was not thought to be a problem by everyone. It was suggested that we should publish certain topics together in one issue and maybe a section on difficult structures to explain why they are different to standard structures but it was generally felt that Acta B does this already. Problem structures are not currently rejected. However, it was agreed that maybe papers such as these are disregarded by authors as a result of the checkCIF report and so authors look to publish their work elsewhere. The simple fact is that Acta B is currently not receiving enough submissions. The problem has become more apparent over the last year but perhaps this is related to more than one factor. In the US absolute submission rates in institutions are down due to financial and time constraints. This may be helping journals such as Acta C and E more as publication is quicker and easier than in B. However, this is a problem that we have no control over so we should instead focus on what can be done to improve the current submission rates.

The subject of review articles was raised but it was noted that a decision had previously been made that the journals would not publish review articles. However, Feature Articles and Lead Articles are published instead and it was

generally agreed that we should publish more of these types of papers as they are consistently cited the most. Everyone was encouraged to actively seek authors to write Feature Articles and maybe even try for such a paper to appear in each issue.

## **2. JOURNAL DEVELOPMENT**

It was noted that the Executive Committee had discussed publishing keynote lectures in the journals, but it was felt that this would not be a way forward for Acta B at the moment. It was also mentioned that Crystallography Reviews currently targets these papers so once again we would be competing with another journal rather than playing to the strengths of our own journals. The possibility of publishing a paper summarizing a number of reviews rather than publishing the reviews themselves was also mentioned. Of course this would mean accepting papers which would in effect be a longer version of something that had already been published.

It was suggested that we need to appeal to the vanity of authors more, *e.g.* giving authors a cover picture and selling inside and outside back covers. CrystEngComm currently sells two pages per issue by offering authors the cover illustration and the inside front cover. Even though the journal has no print copy this has proven to be popular with authors and of course creates more revenue. With the decline of the print copy in Acta journals this may become more important to consider in the future for the electronic journals. Graphical abstracts were also mentioned as appealing to authors. However, it was noted that we already publish graphics on the online contents pages of the journals.

It was also noted that it was fair to expect each Co-editor to publish at least one good paper in their own journal per year. The author community notices such things and it would certainly improve the appeal of the journal.

Everyone was reminded, however, that Acta B is not in such bad shape at the moment and these suggestions should be considered for the future. One Co-editor noted that he had never had to persuade anyone to start publishing in Acta B but maybe some arm-twisting was appropriate now to secure the future of the journal.

## **3. SPECIAL ISSUES**

It was questioned as whether it was difficult to find people willing to do special issues. However, it was generally agreed that this has been a problem in the past. Carol had experienced such problems recently when trying to set up two special issues. One idea for a special issue was a crystal engineering issue but that had failed to drum up enough enthusiasm. An update of the Database special issue was also looked at but that also failed. Dave Billing mentioned that he had an idea for a special issue on non-ambient crystallography and asked who to approach with how to proceed further with the idea. Carol replied that the Section Editor and Chester would need to be consulted; Gernot added that the Editor-in-Chief and the Executive Committee would also need to agree to the proposal. T. Guru Row commented that he could ask Phil Coppens to do a special issue on electron density and Carol suggested that Guru discuss this with the new Section Editor at the Congress.

It was noted though that CrystEngComm is very aggressive in their approach to special issues so we would be competing with them if we headed down this route. Perhaps we should be concentrating our efforts away from the strengths of our competitors and focusing more on our own strengths. Acta B is still publishing excellent papers and we should be proud of the work being published in areas such as phase transitions, electron density, diffuse scattering and incommensurate structures. This is where our strengths lie and we should be actively seeking the papers that we are best at publishing. Themed issues may help to attract these authors whilst still maintaining those already on board.

However, it was pointed out that authors who had been invited to do a special issue for a journal would be more likely to submit papers to that journal in the future. It was commented that Acta B is publishing well in the area of mineral studies so perhaps we could find someone in the field of molecular structures who would be willing to do a special issue. All the Co-editors could collectively help the new Section Editor in seeking topics and people willing to oversee special issues rather than everyone looking independently.

It was again reiterated though that maybe more Feature Articles would be a more realistic target than more special issues because of the difficulty in retrieving papers from authors for special issues. It was suggested that at the Congress each Co-editor actively seeks at least one person to write a Feature Article for Acta B as a starting point.

#### **4. SUBMISSION AND REVIEW**

There was a discussion on review times as it was noted that the review times for Acta B were far too long and this was discouraging authors from publishing. There was a suggestion that a quick review time of 1-2 weeks should be the maximum but it was noted that this was not possible to enforce unless there was a full-time reviewer employed in Chester. Maybe a quick initial review decision say within a few days with the full review following a week or so later would be possible. However, this was not generally accepted as a good way forward. It was also suggested that automatic reminders to reviewers should be considered, say after a period of two weeks. Many were against this proposal – some journals have implemented this but it was irritating to referees and we run the risk of alienating reviewers making it harder to find people willing to act as referees. Jill Bradshaw noted that she does regularly check the status of papers and will send reminders to Co-editors on an informal basis if a paper seems to have been in review for a long period of time. Chester will look into improving this and perhaps chasing papers under review much sooner. However, it was noted that plenty of other journals do not have particularly fast review times, such as Dalton Transactions, but that it was not considered to be a problem.

#### **5. DISTINCTION BETWEEN PAPERS FOR SECTIONS B AND C**

A discussion was initiated on borderline papers for Acta B and C and how each Co-editor decides if the paper is better suited to B or C. Carol considers a paper is suitable for Acta B if it meets the following criteria: (1) a significant proportion of the material is related to structure; (2) the paper contains basically correct data; (3) the paper is referenced correctly; and (4) the style and grammar are reasonable! Carol gave a few borderline cases for discussion, including a paper containing 1-2 routine structures with straightforward DFT and gas-phase calculations. Mark Spackman said he would direct such a paper to Section C rather than B. A discussion then began about the merits of publishing in Acta C and E. It was noted that few people actually read Acta C – they are more likely to just quickly scan it. Some said that Section C was still interesting and they always read the abstracts, but noted that they would not look at Section E. It was also noted that some Co-editors would not publish in Section C as they thought that any E paper could be upgraded to a C paper. It was agreed that it did not make sense to pay to publish in Acta E when you could publish for free in C with just a little more effort. Of course this is an important consideration when authors are experiencing more financial constraints. It was also noted that some authors are trying to 'upgrade' their articles by submitting to Acta B rather than C. It was finally agreed that papers with three or more structures are more appropriate for B, however, we should not disregard borderline cases and we should still allow publication of these in B. Consideration should also be given to certain authors – if the paper involved a new upcoming group we should help them rather than just reject the paper. A good referee would give positive feedback which can help authors, but it was right that 'factory-style' papers were rejected.

With regard to powder papers it was commented that routine powder papers can now be prepared quite easily so this type of paper is often rejected. The data validation programs often do not run well for powder papers so we should focus on attracting this type of paper to B over C.

Mark Spackman commented that he thought it should be made clearer to authors that they can appeal against a decision if they are unhappy. Currently very few authors actually do appeal against the rejection of their article. Jim Kaduk asked how often everyone saw papers that were quite obviously written in the style of a different journal. Everyone agreed this happened more often now and was an increasing problem.

Carol commented that she was irritated by papers that were longer than they needed to be and often suggested to authors that the paper would be accepted if they cut it by 30%. Papers should be kept as short and as concise as possible. Carol mentioned Martin Stiles who was a mentor to her and when she first started working on journals he told her that it was more important to get the good papers rather than keep out the bad. So if a paper is borderline we should try and keep them in the journal.

#### **6. MARKETING LEAFLET**

This was not discussed but a comment was made that it was strange that the cover illustration of the leaflet did not relate to any topic listed within the leaflet. Perhaps this should be considered for the next leaflet.

## **7. COMMUNICATION BETWEEN CO-EDITORS**

The question was asked if there was much correspondence between Co-editors and should they perhaps meet more often as today's discussion was proving to be very useful. Carol mentioned that she does correspond with Co-editors where necessary and everyone agreed that they would be happy to help if approached by another Co-editor on any problems. The possibility of setting up a journal forum where everyone can discuss certain issues has already been mentioned at a previous meeting. However, it was important to stress that Co-editors should be allowed to be flexible in the way they work and even if a forum was set up Co-editors may still feel happier communicating directly with individuals rather than collectively via a forum. Co-editors attending their first JComm meeting commented that the meeting was proving to be very useful and that they had benefitted more from talking and meeting people rather than emailing for advice. This was welcome news as it will help in the fight for financial backing for future JComm meetings.

## **8. FUTURE OF THE JOURNAL**

Carol closed the meeting by saying that we should all be proud of the journal and we should not finish on too much of a negative note. The journal still publishes excellent papers and hopefully will continue to do so for many more years.