

## EDITORIAL

### Reflections on an editorial year

It is now a year since I took over the Chairmanship of the Editorial Board and this seemed a good opportunity to reflect on my experiences over the past year. My reasons for doing this are two-fold: firstly, because one of the requirements of the Nutrition Society is that I report to the Council of the Society every year about this time to reflect on the past year; and secondly, because we, that is myself and the Assistant Editor, have had to deal with many queries from authors regarding the progress of their papers, therefore a comment to all authors and readers seems appropriate. This editorial is, if you like, a report to the authors and readers of the Journal who are not members of the Nutrition Society. I am sure that the Executive Secretary of the Society would wish me to add at this stage the question 'Have you considered joining the Society?'

Changing the Chairman of the Editorial Board is always a rather difficult time for a Journal because the new Chairman has to learn the complex, and sometimes apparently Byzantine, routines that the Journal has evolved over the years concerning the way it reviews papers. Added to these routines are the requirements of preparing the papers for the press, dealing with proofs and making-up the successive numbers of the Journal. The Editorial Office has to track the progress of each paper through the network of paths it takes from editor to referee to editor to Editorial Office to the Chairman and to the author and back, sometimes several times. The Journal receives approximately five new papers a week and at any one time there may be five or six times this number passing through the office en route to author or editor. This is the reason why the tracking procedures are so complex and have to be backed-up by meticulous record keeping. We do occasionally lose track of a paper and sometimes one gets temporarily lost, usually in the strata on an editor's desk, and of course the vagaries of the postal services can add to delays.

All previous changes of Chairman have been accompanied by the upheaval of moving the Editorial Office and often changing or moving staff. This time the office did not move and so was therefore about 140 miles from the Chairman. In addition, Mrs Margot Skipper who has been the Editorial Assistant under the last three Chairmen also wished to leave. The first few months were, therefore, very difficult because we had to find a new Editorial Assistant and I had to learn the tasks of Chairman from a distance. Fortunately, Professor Gurr and his wife assisted me during this time and we managed to keep the work of the office going with Margot delaying her departure to maintain continuity. In the autumn I was fortunate in recruiting Dr Ian Sambrook to the post of Assistant Editor.

After a brief training period we began to plan the move of the Editorial Office to the offices of the Nutrition Society in London; a move which took place in January this year. Packing up an Editorial Office has the effect of making the processing of papers impossible, so backlogs became inevitable. This move marked a very important stage in the Journal's history because it involved a permanent move from Reading, the place if not the actual office where the Journal started and spent the first formative nineteen years under the Chairmanship of Dr S. K. Kon.

We have now evolved a reasonable working routine and I and the Editorial staff are addressing our attention to reducing the time between submission and acceptance of a

paper, while maintaining the standards of reviewing which the Journal has set during its existence.

There are difficulties in having the Chairman at a distance from the Editorial Office, as some of you will have noted when trying to ask me about the progress of a paper on the telephone. We do not have a duplicated paper tracking system and the Editorial Office is the only certain point of contact, unless you wish to discuss an editorial report with me personally, although even this can be difficult at times because I do not usually have all the correspondence available.

However, I hope that I have explained or excused the delays over the past year.

I would now like to turn away from explaining the mechanics of the operation of the Journal and turn my attention to the more pleasant task of talking a little about the papers we have published. I do not want to go over the statistics of the number of papers received, the number rejected and the time taken to accept or reject papers, but to express some comments on the scientific aspects of the Journal over the past year; after all, that is why we publish the Journal. When I planned this editorial I had thought that I would emulate the editor of my favourite motoring magazine and review all the papers we have published over the year and pick out my top ten. In the event I decided that this would be rather biased because all the papers we have published are worthy of mention. There are three points that I would like to make that are relevant because they illustrate some important aspects of the current state of the nutritional sciences.

First, the international origins of the papers we receive. When I take the folders from the box that I receive regularly it is rare to have two consecutive papers from the same country. One of my Dutch colleagues remarked that our title was inappropriate.

Secondly, the range of disciplines that contribute their techniques and science to the material presented in the papers emphasizes the multidisciplinary nature of present-day nutritional studies.

Finally, the range of species that the studies cover – fortunately my early career introduced me to the fascination of comparative nutrition and showed me how much can be gained scientifically in this way.

I believe that virtually all the papers in the Journal contain material that can be read with benefit by all nutritionists, and I hope that we can foster a style of paper that will make anyone who picks up the Journal want to read most, if not all, of the papers in it. I have to read all the papers; I would urge you to do the same.

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