

## Editorial

### *PNS* – still sparkling after 60 years

‘Just before the outbreak of war a suggestion was made by several people interested in research on nutrition that a Nutrition Society should be formed. Owing to the outbreak of war the idea was abandoned. The question has, however, been raised and there are a considerable number of research workers and others in favour of holding meetings to discuss nutritional problems. Such meetings would serve a useful purpose, especially in enabling workers studying different aspects of the same problem in agricultural and medical institutions to meet and help each other with information and constructive criticism.’ This is an extract from a letter, signed by a number of eminent scientists, and circulated in 1941 to people from different disciplines involved in work in nutrition (Anonymous, 1944*a*; Widdowson & Mathers, 1992). The letter met with ‘an enthusiastic response’ (Widdowson & Mathers, 1992) and a preliminary business meeting was held in London in July 1941. It was agreed that a Nutrition Society should be formed along the lines of the Physiological and Biochemical Societies. The main objective ‘was to provide a common meeting place for workers in the varied fields of nutrition, e.g. physiological, biochemical, agricultural, medical, sociological, economic and public health’. It was emphasised that: membership should be limited to those actively engaged in work relating to nutrition; the Committee to be formed should have the power to assess the qualifications of would-be members; and that collaboration wherever possible with existing societies having related aims was advisable (Anonymous, 1944*a*).

The Nutrition Society celebrated its Diamond Jubilee in 2001, and over the years, at the same time as adhering to its original remit, has seen many changes and advances in its scope, particularly the expansion of education and professional activities (Williams, 2001). *PNS* is 60 years old this year, although its original format and circulation was very different in the early days. The first scientific meeting of the Nutrition Society, a symposium on ‘The evaluation of nutritional status’, was held in Cambridge in October 1941. The proceedings of this meeting, printed in 1942, were circulated only to the Society’s members. However, ‘The Nutrition Society had not been founded long when it became apparent that the value of its proceedings would be enhanced by their reaching a wider audience than that which actually participated in its meetings’ (Anonymous, 1944*b*). Vol. 1 of the *Proceedings of the Nutrition Society* was published in 1944 and included accounts of the first eight scientific meetings, which all took the form of symposia

with invited speakers. The first ‘ordinary’ meeting of the Society, and the 39th Scientific meeting, was held in London in February 1947, and the very first Abstract of Communications (OC; Fraenkel & Blewett, 1947), together with abstracts presented by seven other researchers, were published in vol. 1 of *BJN* later that year. Abstracts of OC joined the symposia papers in *PNS* in 1953.

From the beginning, the authors of articles published in *PNS* read like a ‘Who’s Who?’ in nutrition. Pick up any issue and spot the names of authors that were not just familiar to their colleagues and some contemporaries, but who went on to become international names. Many eminent nutritionists can be traced from their early graduate and postgraduate years on OC through to symposia and plenary papers and medal lectures. Their names also eventually reappear on these same kinds of articles in their roles as supervisors, collaborators and mentors.

*PNS* has always provided an official record of the scientific meetings held by the Society. Publication of the final version of articles is often eagerly awaited, and as a result of the many developments in recent years (Younger, 2000, 2001) subscribers and other readers now only need wait a few months to read and use the contents of *PNS*. However, for many people the official proceedings extends beyond the actual papers and abstracts that are published. *PNS* acts as an aide memoir for those who were present at a given meeting. It gives members and guests of the Society, and the organisers the opportunity to recall the venues, weather, scheduled and unscheduled social events, international football matches and much else. It enables those who chaired symposia and OC sessions, and those in the audience, to recall particular presentations, speakers and questions that may have made a lasting impression. A Nutrition Society meeting and publication of the papers it generates also represents the culmination of many months, indeed years, of mostly behind-the-scenes activities carried out by the Programmes Committee (the Editorial Board of *PNS*), the Meetings Administrator, staff in the Publications Office, and our publishers.

The impact that Nutrition Society meetings have on presenters and their colleagues should not be forgotten either. For many people, giving an OC at a Nutrition Society meeting is their first public presentation, and/or the abstract subsequently published in the *Proceedings* will be the first time authors will see their name in print in a scientific journal. As a result Nutrition Society meetings can be stressful, enjoyable and exciting occasions. For the

presenters, their co-authors and supervisors of an OC, the meeting is the culmination of weeks of activities. This activity begins with submitting the abstract, followed by preparing oral or poster presentations and then actually delivering the papers and, finally, dealing with the dreaded questions and queries from the audience, and also more recently at the Editorial Desk. The contributions of invited speakers also should not be forgotten. They put a lot of effort into delivering a good presentation and writing a full paper. There can be no doubt that Nutrition Society meetings allow the full range of activities encompassed by the scientific process and all forms of communication skills to be tested and honed, and do indeed 'provide a common meeting place for workers in the varied fields of nutrition...' and enable workers 'to meet and help each other with information and constructive criticism.' (Anonymous, 1944a).

The OC presented at the Diamond Jubilee in Sheffield in July 2001 were published in the OCB Autumn 2001 issue, and eleven of the symposia and plenary papers are published in the present issue of *PNS*. Others are scheduled for publication in forthcoming issues this year. In the next two volumes of *PNS* we can look forward to reading full papers about 'Achieving a balanced diet in the developing world', 'Evolving attitudes to food and nutrition', 'Dietary fat: how low should we go?', 'Endocrine and nutritional modulators of metabolic responses to stress'; all reflecting the programme of meetings, held in 2001 in Sheffield and Harrogate. This year's programme of meetings and subsequent papers to be published in 2002 and 2003 will include: 'Nutrition in the post-genomic era', 'Perspectives in the study of food intake', 'The influence of social and cultural events on nutrition', 'The food chain: plants, animals, man'; 'Energy metabolism and obesity'. No-one yet knows of course what diverse topics this year's OC will be covering. Full details of the Society's meeting programme can be found on the website (<http://www.nutsoc.org.uk/Meetings/meetings>) and an indication of when the OC and invited papers are scheduled to be published can be found before the Editorial in this issue of *PNS*.

Way back in 1941 the importance of collaboration with other societies was recognised, and in recent years at least one of the Society's meetings each year is held with another scientific organisation or another European nutrition society. These collaborations have taken the Society to France, Spain and the Netherlands; Italy will be added to the list in 2004. The first meeting this year on 'Nutrition in the post-genomic era' is being held jointly with The Association Française de Nutrition and the Société Nutrition et de Diététique de Langue Française (these two societies combine to form the Société Française de Nutrition from January

2002). This year's summer meeting in Leeds will include a meeting held jointly with the British Society for Animal Science, and the Clinical Metabolism and Nutrition Group's symposium will take place at the European Society of Parenteral and Enteral Nutrition (ESPEN) meeting in Glasgow. Papers from all these meetings will be published in *PNS*, and because of the high regard with which the journal is held we also expect to publish symposium papers presented at other meetings.

The increasingly international nature of the Society's meetings, the participation of internationally renowned scientists, and the quality of their papers are all reflected in *PNS*. There can be no doubt that the *Proceedings* is indeed 'enhanced by their reaching a wider audience than that which actually participated in its meetings' (Anonymous, 1944b). The meetings programmes that are drawn up and organised by the Programmes Committee, the quality of the full papers and OC, and the speed with which these can now be published, all played a major part in the journal achieving an impact factor for 2000 of 2.33, bringing it into 10th place among Nutrition and Dietetics journals. All-in-all this provides a great incentive to present work at Nutrition Society meetings and for speakers to accept invitations to both present and publish, and is a very encouraging position for *PNS* to be in as it reaches its Diamond Anniversary.

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*Proceedings of the Nutrition Society*

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