

Letter to the Editor

The *BIOJ*: Evolution or revolution?

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Whilst undertaking a descriptive study comparing the content of the *BIOJ* with two other clinical journals, a number of differences between the professional publications were observed.¹ Some of these have been outlined; however, we feel other differences warrant further discussion amongst BIOS members.

What is the purpose of the *BIOJ*?

During our study we were unable to find any clear statement of the journal's aims and objectives. We believe now should be the time to consider and decide upon these, as we look towards the future of the journal.

Accessibility

Orthoptics is a small profession, but that should not mean we have small ambitions! If the profile and international reputation of our profession is to be built upon, then our research output should be available for all to see. By restricting *BIOJ* access to fee-paying members and purchasers of individual issues, and by having no facility for searching the content of the *BIOJ*, all we do is limit its impact. We are restricting who can read and cite our research and therefore the journal has very few submissions from outside the BIOS. If the ultimate goal is to achieve Medline status, then further progress is needed for this to be achieved. We suggest that we should aim to improve our international standing and the number of international submissions to the *BIOJ*, as well as make the *BIOJ* more available to non-BIOS members.

If the *BIOJ* were archived elsewhere (such as through Elsevier) then the accessibility and profile of the journal would be improved. We believe there are a number of options that could be explored. These include:

- External archiving: free access to all.
- External archiving: members have full access, non-members pay to view the full journal.
- External archiving: members have full access, non-members pay to view individual articles.

Whilst we acknowledge there would be a cost to external archiving, members' benefits could still be maintained and the publication costs of providing BIOS members

with a hard copy could be reduced or eliminated altogether.

Journal format and reporting standards

We believe positive changes could easily be made regarding access to information about the *BIOJ*. The *BIOJ* has a structured format for submissions, but the instructions for authors are only available to BIOS members within the journal. If our aim is to encourage submissions from orthoptists outside the BIOS and the wider ophthalmic community, then we have to declare this and share the information publicly. For example, 'Instructions to Authors' could be displayed clearly on the public access area of the BIOS website.

In undertaking our study, we noted that *Physiotherapy* had a detailed structured abstract. The information was clear, easy to understand and specified the type of research, which makes the reader think more about study design and methodology. As evidence-based practitioners we need to be familiar with study terminology and perhaps this should be included in our publications? To help with this, a list of definitions could be available on the BIOS website. Categorising study design is not always easy; however, we found the guidance from the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics useful.² To improve the quality of the standard of reporting research, the *BIOJ* should support the initiatives available through the EQUATOR Network (Enhancing the Quality And Transparency Of health Research).³ These include guidelines such as PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses). Statements of adherence to such guidelines should be included within manuscripts.

As our review demonstrated, recent issues of the *BIOJ* have contained a large number of narrative reviews and case studies.¹ Different sections within the *BIOJ* already exist (such as editorial, original articles, review articles, case reports, and correspondence), but should we consider including an audit and service evaluation section? It is clear from Branch Meetings and Special Interest Group meetings that BIOS members carry out high-quality audit and service evaluation on a regular basis. The *BIOJ* could be a forum for the findings of these to be available to other members. We wish to make it clear, however, that audit and service evaluation should not be at the expense of original research articles and the quality of the *BIOJ*. Increasing the number of original research articles is imperative if the journal is ever to achieve Medline indexing.

The review process

Peer review is essential if journal standards are to be maintained. The peer review process allows for improvements to be made in the scientific content and standard of a manuscript. Many journals use a standardised form or set of guidelines to be used by

reviewers, and the *BIOJ* has recently introduced this. Some journals now provide feedback to reviewers too, and this should be considered by the *BIOJ* to ensure the review process is clear and transparent. This would demonstrate that the journal strives to maintain standards, in terms of both submissions to the *BIOJ* and the quality of the review given.

We appreciate that much effort goes into producing the *BIOJ* at every stage, from conducting the research, producing a manuscript, peer review, the editorial process, and finally production itself. Furthermore, efforts of the current and past editors should not go unmentioned. However, evidence-based practice and knowledge is not 'static', and the *BIOJ* should be no exception to that: we must constantly evaluate our aims and objectives. The way in which we access and provide information has changed vastly over recent years, and it would appear that the *BIOJ* has not been able to keep up with such changes as well as the journals of other professions. There are many reasons for this, which have affected us all in some way. 'Agenda for Change', financial pressures and efficiency measures have all taken precedence, and have often taken up any slack there once was in the system. However, there has to come a point when the *BIOJ* stops slipping down our list of priorities. We feel now should be the time for discussion amongst BIOS members: what do we want from the journal, both now and in the future? Improvement is a two-way process, and may well be guided by the Editor and Council, but BIOS members should ultimately drive it. We all have responsibility for the *BIOJ* and now may be the time to evolve. We hope that this letter promotes discussion amongst members, and that an agreed strategy for the future of the *BIOJ* can be reached and acted upon.

References

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Editor's Response to 'The *BIOJ*: Evolution or Revolution?'

(Jill Carlton, Gemma E. Arblaster and Lindsey A. Hughes)

I would like to thank the authors for the points raised within their letter.

Accessibility is something that I wished to address as soon as I became Editor in August 2012. This issue was raised at the BIOS Council Meeting in October 2012. At the meeting I suggested that we need to develop a specific web page for the journal; also an archive system for searching and purchasing PDF files of individual articles, for both non-members and those outside the profession. Following another meeting to discuss the logistics in January 2013, these developments are currently in progress. As discussed in the Editorial, visibility, profile and accessibility of the papers are key if we are to attract more submissions and increase the proportion of original research articles.

Journal format, reporting standards, instructions and adherence to guidelines are all aspects that will be reviewed and put in place for the 2014 edition. The composition of the sections of the journal will also be reviewed for the 2014 edition and I welcome feedback on any aspects members would like to see included or removed.

I have already implemented some changes in the review process, with the introduction of a structured review template. Feedback to the reviewers is also now in place, both in terms of the final decision and also details of the other reviewers' comments, which provides useful information for the reviewers in terms of the robustness of their own critique.

Evolution of the journal is a continuous process and I agree that we must not only keep up with (and surpass if possible) our counterparts, but also strive to be innovative and not be afraid to think out of the box. The journal needs to move forward to become more widely internationally respected and valued, and to move up the ranking of the decision process when authors ask themselves the question 'Where shall we submit our research?' Support, marketing, publicity, accessibility and the contribution of members to the journal will be necessary if we are to succeed.