

Journal of Applied Crystallography turns forty

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With this issue, the *Journal of Applied Crystallography* (*JAC*) enters its fortieth year of existence. This is a good reason for looking back at its development and for speculating a little about the future.

Since 1968, an impressive array of Editors and Co-editors have contributed to the high visibility and reputation that the journal enjoys today. The founding Editor, André Guinier, was succeeded by Ray A. Young in 1970, Michael Hart from 1978, Michel Schlenker from 1984, and A. Michael Glazer from 1990 to 1999 assured consolidation and further success. They all deserve our gratitude. Although ‘applied’ will always remain a somewhat ambivalent term, these outstanding colleagues have succeeded in establishing a clear profile for the journal, thus assuring its well defined place in the world of scientific publishing.

Our Research Papers section covers all areas of science where crystallographic methods are used. Today, we must constantly stress that the ingredient ‘crystallography’ must be predominant for manuscripts to be considered. We also have a very successful Computer Programs section and are certainly the prime source for such information. Owing to the broad scientific scope covered by *JAC*, the ‘outreach’ of the journal is extraordinary, *i.e.* most of the citations of *JAC* articles are found in other journals.

The size of the journal, six issues per year with a total of about 1000 printed pages per year, has remained almost constant over the last 15 years, although the number of submissions has increased. This implies increasing rejection rates. If impact factors are a sign of quality, we can be quite content with recent figures – a healthy increase during the last four years, with a current value of 5.25.

The most important change during the last decade concerns publication times. The impact of electronic handling and processing of manuscripts has been almost negligible for the duration of editorial work (the average of less than four months from submission to acceptance seems to leave little further compressibility except if manuscripts requiring severe changes are flatly rejected), but technical editing and production are now down to less than two months. We have a dependable, competent, and dedicated staff at Chester, and Peter Strickland, the Managing Editor of all the IUCr journals (and personally looking after *JAC*) is to be congratulated.

I hope that this good performance will continue. Almost all scientific journals have suffered over the years from a steady attrition of direct subscriptions (though the IUCr journals are a bit less affected than the average). If a sensible level of scientific publishing is to be maintained, ‘open access’ – a valid goal *per se* – must be accompanied by new methods of financing the necessary related work. ‘Package deals’, site licenses, access charges, page charges *etc.* are possible solutions, and there are currently many discussions on many levels to reach a viable balance. We must all contribute with our skills so that peer reviewed and technically satisfactory publishing will remain feasible – to continue providing active scientists with intelligible information and to the benefit of science in general. Good papers and good refereeing have established our current reputation, and the good work of our authors and referees will assure future success.

It is a pleasure, but also a challenge, to offer a modest contribution toward the well-being of this journal.