

EDITORIAL

Introduction

This is only the second time in its 35-year existence that the Managing Editors of *Biochimica et Biophysica Acta* have taken up space in its columns to address the readers in the form of an Editorial. The first occasion was 'A statement of policy by the Managing Editors of *Biochimica et Biophysica Acta*' published in 1966 [1].

This statement was occasioned by the rapid increase of the size of BBA since its inception, with a uniform doubling time of 4 years between 1947 and 1966. A simple calculation showed that, if this rate of increase were maintained, we would by 1983 be bringing out 512 volumes per year, say one every morning and one every afternoon in a 5-day working week. The purpose of this 'statement of policy' was to announce steps that had been decided upon in an attempt to reduce the rate of growth. These were to ask the authors to write more concisely and to announce that we would not publish "uninteresting", although competent, papers or those belonging to fields covered by journals devoted to related disciplines.

In this 1966 Editorial we stated:

'The very rapid growth of biochemical literature is, most likely, simply caused by a corresponding increase in the number of biochemists. This means that every biochemist has more and more to read. Since the working day remains of the same length, the proportion of the world's biochemical literature that he reads is declining. He makes use of other methods of keeping himself informed of developments in his own field, for example by attending specialist symposia or through an information-exchange group where one exists in his field. As a consequence, he tends to know less and less about developments in fields outside his own particular interest. This is particularly regrettable in a subject such as biochemistry, where developments in one field may have a direct impact on another.

'As in other branches of science, a communication crisis is developing in biochemistry. This will no doubt be solved eventually by making use of recent technical advances, but the nature of the solution is at present difficult to foresee. In the meantime the biochemist will continue to report his work in scientific journals. He should realize, however, that it is in his

own interest, because he wants his papers to be read, to write as concisely as possible. The average biochemical paper is often longer than those customary in many other branches of chemistry.

'Conciseness should not be achieved, of course, by omitting details essential for the understanding of the work or for repeating it. Nor should reference to preceding work on the subject be omitted. Much can be done at the paragraph level simply by removing repetitions. The greatest saving in space can be brought about by restricting the paper to the most significant results achieved in the research. The essential features of confirmatory or control experiments can often be given in a few sentences in the text.

'For some time now, the Editorial Board has been giving special consideration to the length of papers, and many requests have been made to authors drastically to shorten their papers, even to the extent of resubmitting the paper as a Short Communication. In our opinion, this policy has not only relieved the pressure on space in the journal but has greatly improved the readability of the papers and, thereby, increased their impact on the reader.'

We believe that this statement is still appropriate.

In the event, of course, just as in biological systems, the growth of BBA slowed down, as is clear from Fig. 1. The steps that we announced in 1966 had probably only a marginal effect, although we believe that our efforts to persuade authors to write more concisely did meet with some success and articles in BBA are on the average significantly shorter than those in comparable journals. The main reasons for the (fortunate) slowing down in the growth of BBA (although we are still the largest biochemical journal) are probably: (1) a slowing down in the growth of the number of biochemists; (2) the establishment of a few other major biochemical journals but, more important, of a large number of specialist journals in biochemistry and biophysics. In 1965, the total number of pages published by 12 major journals (about 50 000 BBA pages—see Table I in Ref. 1) was a reasonable measure of the world biochemical literature. In 1980, the number of pages published by the major journals (one had been added

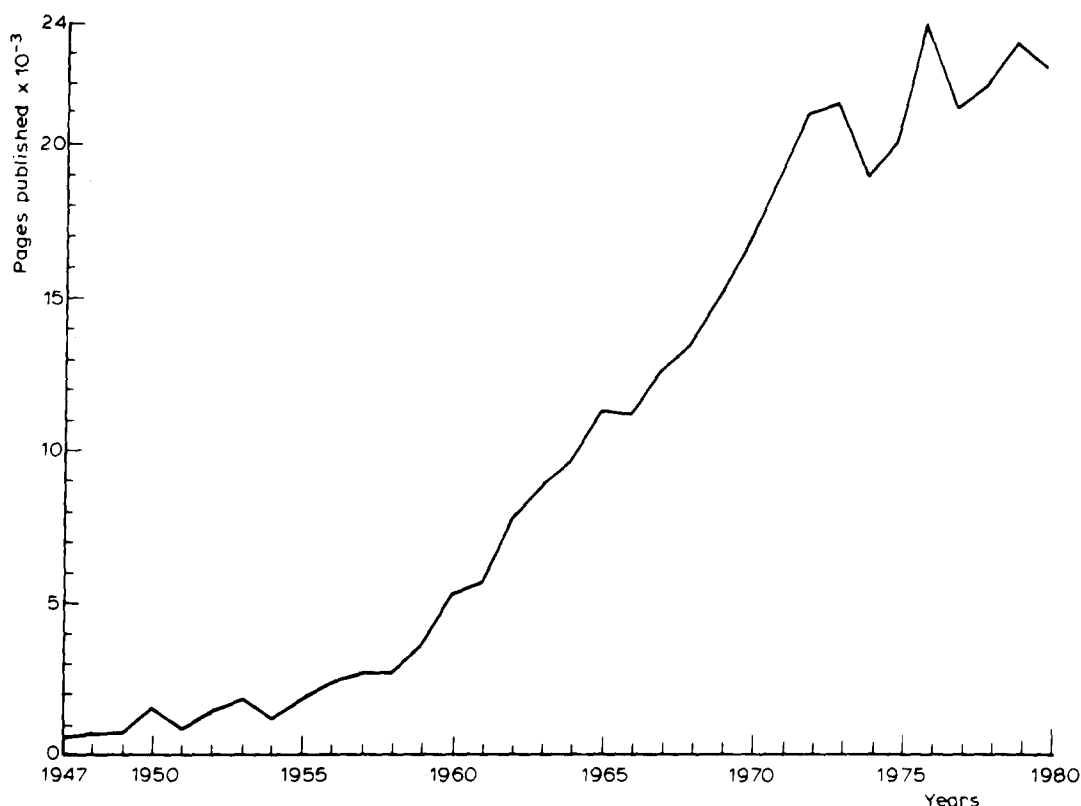


Fig. 1. Growth of BBA. Pages published 1947–1980.

to the list), had increased to about 110000 BBA pages, but the growth of the world biochemical literature has been considerably greater than this.

When BBA was founded, it was intended that it should cover the whole field of biochemistry and biophysics, and this is still, in principle, the aim. In practice, however, only that part of biophysics more closely related to biochemistry—molecular biophysics—has appeared in BBA and we accept that the more physiologically and medically oriented biophysics is better published elsewhere.

Sectionalization of BBA

In 1962, when it became clear that BBA was going to develop into a large (and expensive) journal, it was decided that it would be a convenience to the reader to sectionalize BBA and to give subscribers the option of purchasing only certain sections. In that year, two of the 11 volumes were

specialized sections on *Nucleic Acids and Related Subjects*. In 1963, sections on *Enzymological Subjects* and *Lipids and Related Subjects*, and in 1964 on *Biophysical Subjects*, *Mucoproteins and Mucopolysaccharides* and *General Subjects* were added. In 1965, sections appeared under the names *Nucleic Acids and Protein Synthesis*, *Biophysics including Photosynthesis, Enzymology and Biological Oxidations*, *General Subjects*, *Lipids and Lipid Metabolism* and *Mucoproteins and Mucopolysaccharides*. The following year, however, once again saw changes. *Mucoproteins and Mucopolysaccharides* and *Biophysics* were dropped, *Biological Oxidations* taken away from *Enzymology* and three new sections, *Protein Structure*, *Bioenergetics* and *Biomembranes* were added.

After the hectic years of 1963–1966, quiet descended on BBA, so far as the naming of the sections was concerned. Now, after 15 years, changes are once more to be made, and this is the

main reason for our second editorial.

These changes are partly the result of an extensive survey carried out in 1979 by Elsevier/North-Holland Biomedical Press. More than 750 of BBA's editors, referees and readers who were asked their opinion about its functioning and how it could be improved replied and many valuable suggestions were received. As will be mentioned below, one has already been put into effect.

For some time, the Managing Editors had considered reorganizing and renaming the sections of BBA but had decided to await the analysis of the survey before coming to a final decision. Starting in 1982, the following changes are being made.

(i) The sections *Protein Structure* and *Enzymology* are combined under the name *Protein Structure and Molecular Enzymology*. The new name is more in keeping with developments in these fields in which we hope to attract more papers. Many papers dealing with the isolation of (new) enzymes and enzyme kinetics (except when closely related to the mechanism at the molecular level) will appear in the section *General Subjects*.

(ii) It has been clear for some time that the name *Nucleic Acids and Protein Synthesis*, that dates from 1965, no longer describes the most interesting developments in this field which deal with the gene and its structure, expression and regulation. By changing the name to *Gene Structure and Expression*, we hope to attract more papers in this field than we have in recent years.

(iii) A new section called *Molecular Cell Research* is being started. This section will cover papers dealing with the investigation of cell biology at the molecular level, making use of non-invasive probes of intact cells. The structure and function of isolated cells will belong to this section, as will cell secretion and uptake of material into the cell, and cell-cell interaction. The criterion will be that the results of the investigation have significantly contributed to our insight into molecular mechanisms. Biochemistry has gone through a long and successful period of reconstructing events in the intact cell from observations with broken cells and cell extracts. This knowledge must, however, eventually be integrated by studies of the intact cell in which the control mechanisms are intact. New methods of studying isolated cells or

even intact organs now make this possible. BBA would like to attract good articles in this field.

The three sections *Bioenergetics*, *Biomembranes* and *Lipids and Lipid Metabolism* will continue to cover the same fields as at present. As its name implies, the section *General Subjects* covers those papers not falling into one of the specialized sections. Some fields that have until now appeared in this section may be more appropriately placed in the section *Molecular Cell Research*. On the other hand, some papers that have until now appeared in *Enzymology* will be transferred to *General Subjects*.

Format

Many of those consulted in the survey suggested that we increase the format or page size of BBA to make it more easily readable and to improve the layout of tables and figures. Readers (and before them authors who have received proofs) will have noticed that since June BBA has appeared with a larger page and with a more up-to-date cover. We hope that our readers and authors are satisfied with this change, and that the librarians accept any inconvenience, for which we apologise.

Publication time

Not surprisingly, because this is a matter that the authors feel keenly, many comments have been received relating to the publication time. Although, in fact, in comparison with comparable journals, BBA publishes reasonably quickly, it is clear that greater speed would be appreciated. To meet this request, the publishers have changed their internal handling procedure so that papers are now being published 3 months after acceptance. The total publication time, including that required for editorial handling, is now about 5 months.

Editors

Editorial policy is decided and the day-to-day decisions concerning papers submitted to BBA are taken by a Board of Managing Editors, assisted by

an Editorial Secretariat. These decisions are based on reports made by one or more Editors (numbering about 90) or by referees. In 1980, 3680 papers were processed, each of which was read on the average by 2.2 reviewers.

BBA was founded in 1947 by H.G.K. Westenbrink, who remained Managing Editor until his death in 1964. At this time, E.C. Slater, who had joined Westenbrink in 1957 with special responsibilities for Preliminary Notes and Short Communications, took over as Managing Editor, with L.L.M. van Deenen and M. Gruber as Associate Managing Editors. Soon after, the team was strengthened by the addition of A. Neuberger (1966) and C. Weissmann (1968). No further changes were made until 1977, when G.K. Radda joined.

During the past year, R.A. Flavell has replaced C. Weissmann, who resigned owing to pressure of other duties, and P. Cohen has replaced A. Neuberger who retired at the end of 1981. Beginning 1982, a structural change has been introduced. A Board consisting of one Managing Editor with a number of Associate Managing Editors has been replaced by a Board of Managing Editors, one of whom is Chairman, which conforms with the de facto structure as it has operated from the beginning of BBA. E.C. Slater will be the first Chairman of the new Board.

Processing of manuscripts

In the beginning, BBA was managed by Westenbrink and later Slater from their laboratories, assisted by a part-time secretary. The correspondence address for letters to and from authors even moved with the Managing Editor when he was on vacation. (Preliminary Notes and Short Communications were once managed for a month from Arcadia Post Office, Magnetic Island, Queensland, Australia.) When BBA exploded in the sixties, this was no longer feasible, and a BBA Secretariat was set up, housed within the publishers, but working under the direction of the Managing Editors. Gradually, most authors came to realize that Jonas Daniel Meijerplein 3, Amsterdam (now a hole in the ground) and Vondellaan 24A, Utrecht were no longer the addresses to which papers should be

submitted. Since 1965, the Editorial Secretariat has become an essential feature of BBA, and the names of its members are probably better known to authors than are those of the Managing Editors.

However, although correspondence with authors has usually been carried out by the Editorial Secretariat, this has been done on behalf of the Managing Editors who remain responsible for the decisions taken.

BBA is a truly international journal. The distribution of papers received (see Table I) roughly reflects the distribution of the world's biochemists. Partly in order to reflect the international character of BBA, but especially with the aim of reduc-

TABLE I
COUNTRY OF ORIGIN OF PAPERS SUBMITTED TO
BBA 1976-1980

Country	Number of papers	Percentage of total
U.S.A.	7447	38.5
Japan	2078	10.7
U.K.	1369	7.1
France	1143	5.9
F.R.G.	893	4.6
Canada	801	4.1
The Netherlands	766	4.0
Italy	470	2.4
Israel	428	2.2
Sweden	420	2.2
India	418	2.2
Australia	354	1.8
U.S.S.R.	336	1.7
Switzerland	264	1.4
Central and Southern America	238	1.2
Belgium	212	1.1
Poland	195	1.0
Denmark	189	1.0
Norway	183	0.9
Finland	179	0.9
Spain	162	0.8
Africa	127	0.7
Czechoslovakia	113	0.6
Hungary	99	0.5
Asia (not India/Japan)	91	0.5
New Zealand	64	0.3
G.D.R.	64	0.3
Yugoslavia	53	0.3
Other countries ^a	179	0.9

^a Austria; Bulgaria; Greece; Iceland; Ireland; Portugal; Rumania; Turkey; Malta.

ing handling times, improving the selection of referees and bringing the Managing Editors in more direct contact with Editors, referees and authors, it has been decided to experiment with a more decentralized handling of papers. The main office will still be in Amsterdam, but each of the Managing Editors outside the Netherlands will also maintain an office. A computer terminal in each of these offices linked to the central computer in Amsterdam will ensure the necessary co-ordination.

Authors should send their papers direct to one of the Managing Editors at the following addresses:

Dr. P. Cohen
Department of Biochemistry
Medical Sciences Institute
University of Dundee
Dundee
Scotland DD1 4HN
U.K.

Dr. L.L.M. van Deenen
c/o BBA Editorial Secretariat
P.O. Box 1345
1000 BH Amsterdam
The Netherlands

Dr. R.A. Flavell
c/o BBA Editorial Secretariat
P.O. Box 1345
1000 BH Amsterdam
The Netherlands

Dr. M. Gruber
c/o BBA Editorial Secretariat
P.O. Box 1345
1000 BH Amsterdam
The Netherlands

Dr. G.K. Radda
Department of Biochemistry
University of Oxford
South Parks Road
Oxford OX1 3QU
U.K.

Dr. E.C. Slater
c/o BBA Editorial Secretariat
P.O. Box 1345
1000 BH Amsterdam
The Netherlands

BBA Reviews

The BBA Reviews (on *Biomembranes*, *Bioenergetics* and *Cancer*) differ from the issues that publish the results of original research in that most of the reviews have been personally invited by one of the Editors responsible for the volume in question. However, despite the fact that they are invited reviews, they are subjected to the same refereeing procedure as normal papers. It is indeed not uncommon that the Editor must ask for extensive revision of an invited review, and he does not hesitate to refuse it if, in his opinion, it does not meet the desired standard.

The Editors of BBA Reviews, beginning in 1982, are:

BBA Reviews on Biomembranes:

Dr. L.L.M. van Deenen (Utrecht)

BBA Reviews on Bioenergetics:

Dr. P.L. Dutton (Philadelphia) and Dr. M.K.F. Wikström (Helsinki)

BBA Reviews on Cancer:

Dr. R. Pollack (New York)

Authors are also free to submit reviews for consideration for publication. These should be sent to the appropriate Editor, c/o BBA Editorial Secretariat. Readers are also invited to submit topics for review and/or the names of reviewers. These should also be sent to the appropriate Editor, c/o BBA Editorial Secretariat.

Reference

- 1 A statement of policy by the Managing Editors of *Biochimica et Biophysica Acta* (1966) *Biochim. Biophys. Acta* 121, 223–227