Editorial

(from the June 1987 Ljubljana issue, updated)

Dear Reader,

Ever since the journal's inception, the Editors and Publisher of *FEBS Letters* have aimed at maintaining rapid publication and high quality in content. The present scheme of operation, which has remained essentially the same as that originally devised by Prakash Datta of FEBS and Bart van Tongeren of Elsevier, is depicted in fig. 1. As you can see, a single Editor is able to decide independently to accept a particular manuscript, although in practice one or two referees are usually consulted to help in the evaluation. However, in those instances when an Editor considers that a paper should be rejected, the confirming opinion of another Editor will always be obtained before the paper is actually turned down. The decentralization is a key factor in reaching a decision quickly, the result being that the average publication time (i.e. the period between the date of receipt and the date of appearance) of a Research Letter is less than 10 weeks (see fig. 2, overleaf).

As an author, you can help us to keep this publication time as short as possible, indeed reduce it further, in various ways. Do read the *Notes to Authors* carefully and please adhere strictly to the requirements stated therein. Ensure that your text is clearly written and understandable to all English-speaking readers. Prepare all figures as recommended, and so on. Most importantly, submit your article to that member of the
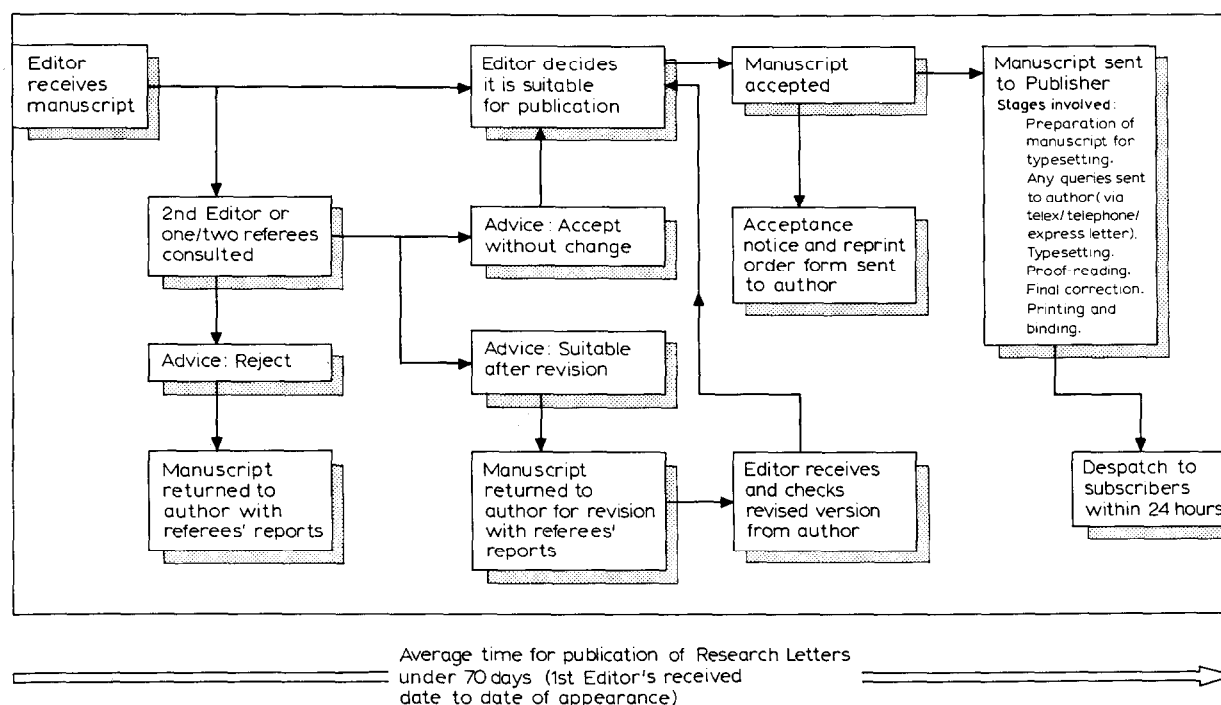

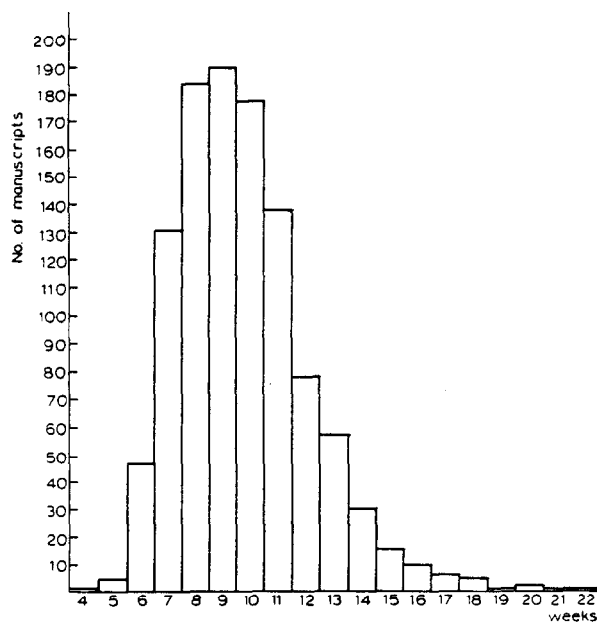Fig.1. Scheme of the editorial/publication procedure.

Fig.2. Overall publication time of all communications published in the second half of 1987 and the first half of 1988 (Volumes 216–230): date of despatch from warehouse minus first editor's received date. Average publication time: 9.7 weeks.

Editorial Board whom you deem to be closest to your field; he/she is in the best position to process your manuscript without delay. Do not send your paper to the address of the Publisher – this will incur a considerable delay!

Decentralization, while necessary for rapid publication, has inherent dangers, the most notable being that occasionally a weak paper may be accepted despite our efforts to the contrary (this, incidentally, is a disservice to the authors of such papers). With this in mind, you can help us again, for example, by drawing our attention to such weak papers and, even better, writing a *Comment*, which we will publish along with the author's rebuttals, if any, in the section, *Correspondence*, which we would like to see utilized more often. This feedback may correct mistakes and hopefully act as a deterrent.

Our Journal continues to increase in size. This cannot go on indefinitely. As the space available is limited, we cannot accept all papers which we consider to be worthy of publication. Much as with grants, you are competing with others for the space available.

Our rejection rate is approximately 50%. The most frequent reason for turning down a paper is that it does not offer a sufficient advance in knowledge. Not everybody appears to realise that we aim at publishing essentially *complete* reports, i.e. we encourage conciseness, not the fragmental publication of observations (which would only make our publication lists longer). If you have little to say, do not try to use *FEBS Letters* for that purpose. Since two Editors are needed for the *rejection* of a manuscript, turning down a paper may take some time, occasionally a couple of months; in this respect we are probably not much faster than other journals. Therefore, do not submit a paper merely in order to 'have a try': the only certain outcome will be that you will lose time.

You may *not* re-submit to other Editorial Board Members a paper that has already been rejected.

Finally, I should like to offer my apologies to those authors whose papers, although good, may have been rejected. *Errare humanum est.* During the period of almost three years of my office as Managing Editor of *FEBS Letters*, I have learned that being in this position is the surest way of losing friends.

Giorgio Semenza