

## Editorial

# *FEBS Letters* – The First 25 Years

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### 1. BEGINNINGS

During the Second FEBS Meeting in Vienna in April 1965 W.J. Whelan, then International Secretary of The Biochemical Society, suggested that FEBS should venture into the field of publication. He had in mind a journal for the rapid publication of short communications along the lines of *Biochemical and Biophysical Research Communications*. At the Third FEBS Council Meeting, held in Vienna, a Sub-committee was set up to consider the matter. In the event the Sub-committee decided to recommend the publication of a journal of the conventional type containing full-length papers. This recommendation was subsequently realised in the form of the *European Journal of Biochemistry*, the history of which has been described by Liébecq [1].

In July 1967 at the Fourth FEBS Meeting in Oslo Bill Whelan, now FEBS Secretary-General, again suggested to the Publications Sub-committee that the publication of a *BBRC*-like journal should be considered. The Sub-committee passed on the suggestion to publish *FEBS Letters* to Council without much enthusiasm and Council showed itself to be less than elated by the proposal. The main objection raised was that it would be impossible to assemble an Editorial Board, and Council more or less indicated that unless a satisfactory potential Editorial Board could be recruited in the two or three days before the next Council meeting the idea of such a journal would be rejected. Whelan used his not inconsiderable powers of persuasion on the many prominent biochemists present in Oslo and persuaded ten of them to agree to become Editors, these were: Th. Bücher, J.-P. Changeux, S.P. Datta, J.P. Ebel, B. Hess, H.A. Krebs, A.P. Mathias, A. Pihl, F. Sanger, W.J. Whelan, and Th. Wieland. One incident during that frantic time remains clearly with me; one night Bill Whelan, Bernie Horecker, Brenda Ryman and I were discussing how far we had got when Horecker said that as *BBRC* had Jacques Monod as one of its Editors so *FEBS Letters* might try to recruit Jean-Pierre Changeux who was known to be in Oslo. Whelan at once set off to find Changeux, and in a little while Bill reappeared with a

sleepy, pyjama-clad Changeux in tow. It was not long before Changeux was persuaded to join the Editors and allowed to return to bed. I must also record with gratitude the enthusiasm shown for the project by Alex Pihl, then FEBS Chairman, who insisted that the first meeting of the potential Editors should be held in his house. To counter the charge that short papers were ephemeral, it was decided at this meeting that *FEBS Letters* would only publish short, complete papers in final form which would not be republished elsewhere.

The next Council meeting did not resolve the issue but referred the proposal to the individual Constituent Societies and replies were to be brought to an unofficial Council meeting held during the International Biochemical Congress in Tokyo in August 1967. There a clear majority was in favour although there was not unanimity. So planning went ahead. Bill Whelan was going to leave Europe for the United States and I was appointed Managing Editor. This early history has been described in greater detail by Whelan [2] from whose article I have drawn extensively.

### 2. PUBLISHER

Since the decision to set up *European Journal of Biochemistry*, FEBS had been in touch with a number of publishers so contacts were renewed for this new project. The most attractive proposition came from the North-Holland Publishing Company represented by the two principals, M.D. Frank and E. (Bart) van Tongeren. This company offered a retyping facility and a rapid photo-offset process, retyping being thought necessary because at that time many colleagues in Europe did not have access to state-of-the-art typing facilities and would not therefore have been able to make their papers suitable for direct reproduction. The *modus operandi* for the Editors was set up in discussions between Bart van Tongeren, Whelan and myself, a method which with minor modifications has survived to this day. The arrangements with North-Holland ensured that the copyright of *FEBS Letters* was retained by FEBS, an arrangement that has continued. *FEBS Let-*

ters was published under the North-Holland imprint from 1968 until 1 January 1978 when it was changed to Elsevier-North-Holland, then in January 1982 it was changed again to Elsevier Biomedical, and, finally, in April 1983 the imprint became Elsevier. I should like to record here my personal gratitude to Bart van Tongeren for all he did in the early days to ensure the success of the journal.

### 3. EDITORS

Apart from the ten Editors recruited in Oslo as mentioned above, S. Cohen and B. Keil joined them before the first number appeared in July 1968. Over the years Editors have come and gone and the following have served (or are still serving) the journal: H.R.V. Arnstein, B.A. Askonas, M. Avron, M. Baggiolini, H. Betz, E. Bock, J.E. Celis, P. Chambon, B. Chance, F. Chapeville, P. Cohen, P.L. Dutton, G.L. Farkas, J.M. Gancedo, H. Gutfreund, A.-L. Haenni, B. Halliwell, J. Hanoune, P.M. Harrison, M. Hatanaka, E. Helmreich, G. Hauska, H. Holzer, S. Jard, N.K. Jerne, L.N. Johnson, P. Jollès, C. Klee, D.G. Knorre, J.R. Knowles, H.L. Kornberg, A. Kotyk, H.A. Lardy, L.E. Leloir, B.G. Malmström, N. Mantei, P. Mathis, A. Mirzabekov, Sh. Mizushima, T. Murachi, Y. Nishizuka, J. Nunez, Yu.A. Ovchinnikov, M.J. Owen, O.B. Ptitsyn, P.J. Randle, T.A. Rapoport, G.C.K. Roberts, M.L. Salas, M. Saraste, R. Sato, G. Schatz, G. Semenza, S. Shaltiel, N. Sharon, V.P. Skulachev, A.V. Somlyo, A.S. Spirin, F.B. Straub, G. Tettamanti, A. Trebst, M. Van Montagu, I.M. Verma, G. Wagner, J.H. Weil, O. Wieland, M. Wikström, B. Witkop, and T. Yonetani. I remained Managing Editor until October 1985 when I was succeeded by Giorgio Semenza. No journal can succeed without good editors and FEBS as a whole and myself personally owe a great debt of gratitude to all of them.

### 4. SPECIAL PROJECTS

#### 4.1. *Index of Biochemical Reviews*

This Index, listing review articles in Biochemistry, was started on the initiative of H.R.V. Arnstein and was issued in annual separate issues covering the years 1971–72 until 1990 when it was thought that modern information retrieval methods had rendered it otiose. There is no doubt that many, particularly those engaged in teaching, found this publication most useful.

#### 4.2. *Review Letters*

I tried to encourage the submission of Review Letters but the flow of such papers did not take off until Arnstein undertook the work of commissioning them. He was succeeded in this task by M. Saraste in 1991.

#### 4.3. *Book Reviews and Book Lists*

These, another initiative of Henry Arnstein's, have appeared regularly since July 1975.

#### 4.4. *Special Issues*

A number of Special Issues have appeared, not only to mark a FEBS Meeting, when issues containing a number of Review Articles have been prepared, but also to mark other events, for instance: *Enzymes: One Hundred Years*, edited by H. Gutfreund appeared in February 1976 (Volume 62, Supplement) to mark the centenary of the first use of the word 'enzyme' by W.F. Kühne in 1876, and in 1980 (Volume 117, Supplement) *Aspects of Metabolic Regulation*, edited by Hans Kornberg, to mark the 80th birthday of Sir Hans Krebs.

### REFERENCES

- [1] Liébecq, C. (1992) Eur. J. Biochem. 204, 421–432.
- [2] Whelan, W.J. (1974) FEBS Lett. 40, Suppl. S154–S159.