

Editorial

The first issue of FEBS Letters appeared in July 1968

Thirty years, it is said, is the bloom of age. It is also the age when one can look back to the past and, at the same time, plan for the future.

The beginnings of the Federation of European Biochemical Societies (FEBS) and of FEBS Letters have been described on earlier occasions [1–5], and I can do no better now. The journal has been a scientific success from the beginning, and subsequently a financial success, undoubtedly due to a number of reasons – not the least the all-pervasive spirit of European collaboration within FEBS itself. A prime example of this spirit was the Managing Editor, S. Prakash Datta, with his ‘insatiable energy and enthusiasm’, his far-sighted management and ‘the way in which his engaging personality has made friends of everybody’ (to use the words of W. Whelan [1]).

When I took over from Prakash (1986) I tried to follow his path [6], as I fully shared, and still share, his European spirit. Running this journal, we all know, is one of the ways of fostering biochemistry in Europe. But, as all Editors of a quality journal know all too well, we have to take, along with popular decisions, also unpopular and unpleasant ones: rejecting a paper is unpleasant both for us and for the authors – even if, *in principle*, everybody agrees with Beaumarchais that ‘sans la liberté de blâmer il n'existe pas d'éloge flatteur’.

FEBS Letters continues to thrive in all aspects, however imprecise each of these may individually be. The (often maligned, but always used) impact factor keeps increasing (Fig. 1) and, if corrected for the length of the papers, brings FEBS Letters at the level of *J. Biol. Chem.*, i.e., ahead of most international biochemical and molecular-biological journals. Our citation half-life also is essentially the same as that of *J. Biol. Chem.* As compared to last year, we have stepped up four levels in the impact factor list of biochemical and biological periodicals. Other criteria also concur in showing that FEBS Letters is healthy: among others, we receive more and more papers, which unfortunately forces us to ‘approve but not publish’ even some sound papers. The journal cannot grow indefinitely in size – and in costs!

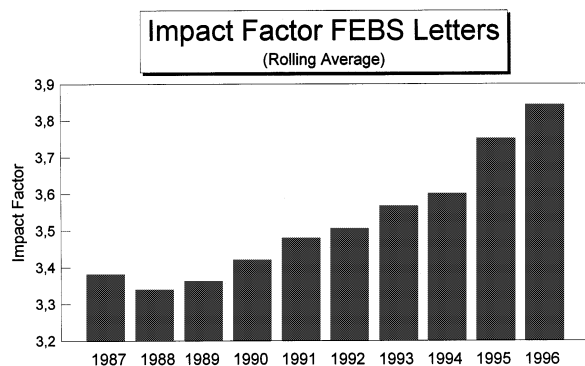


Fig. 1. Development Impact Factor FEBS Letters: rolling average 1987 to 1996.

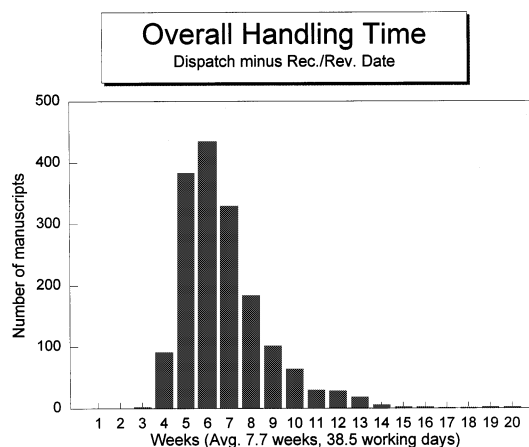


Fig. 2. Overall publication time of all communications published in 1997 (volumes 400–420): date of dispatch from warehouse minus date of receipt of revised manuscript or first editor's date of receipt when no revision was involved. Average publication time: 38.5 working days; 7.7 weeks.

Undoubtedly, among the reasons for our journal's success are: **fast publication time (7.7 weeks, or 38.5 working days**, date of dispatch minus the date of receipt of the manuscript, or its revised version, if applicable; Fig. 2); serious reviewing and editing processes, quality of printing, etc. Combining speed with quality is not an easy matter and it takes dedication and hard work of **all** parties involved: editors, secretaries, publishers, printers, etc. Last but not least, the co-operation of the authors is essential for a smooth operation; their manuscripts should not only be of good scientific quality, but also follow as closely as possible our ‘Notes to authors’ and conform to our editorial policy, as reported on cover page 2 of each issue.

Technically, also, we have improved the speed by which we reach our scientific audience. The Tables of Contents, Abstracts, and general information on our journal have now been available for some time cost-free via the Internet. This means that the abstracts of accepted papers are available approximately one week before publication, or 5–6 weeks after the date of receipt of the accepted manuscript. The address for this service is <http://www.elsevier.nl/locate/febslet> (for North America, <http://www.elsevier.com/locate/febslet>).

In addition, as of November 1997 the **full text** of FEBS Letters articles can be found in PDF format at the same URL addresses. Access, however, is restricted to individuals working at organizations which subscribe to FEBS Letters. This service is strictly for personal use. Still, we hope that you will find it useful. We have plans to develop this service further. As soon as it becomes technically feasible, this will be done.

As indicated above, the *raison d'être* of FEBS is that of fostering biochemistry, particularly in Europe. A major goal is that of helping and promoting young biochemists. The income of FEBS, which is a ‘charity’, is generated essentially by its two journals, FEBS Letters and the European Journal of

Table 1
Geographical Distribution FEBS Letters Vol. 400–420 (1997)

Country	Origin of papers		Journal distribution	
	No.	%	No.*	%
Austria	17	1.0	11	0.7
Belgium	37	2.2	10	0.7
Bulgaria	2	0.1		
Croatia			1	0.1
Czech Republic	8	0.5	2	0.1
Denmark	29	1.7	10	0.7
Estonia			1	0.1
Finland	15	0.9	9	0.6
France	137	8.2	68	4.6
Germany	218	13.0	135	9.2
Greece			6	0.4
Hungary	6	0.4	7	0.5
Ireland	2	0.1	2	0.1
Israel	24	1.4	10	0.7
Italy	101	6.0	60	4.1
Lithuania			1	0.1
Malta			1	0.1
the Netherlands	44	2.6	40	2.7
Norway	8	0.5	8	0.5
Poland	5	0.3	7	0.5
Portugal	3	0.2	3	0.2
Russia	77	4.6	2	0.1
Slovak Republic	5	0.3	1	0.1
Slovenia	2	0.1	1	0.1
Spain	56	3.3	30	2.0
Sweden	41	2.5	18	1.2
Switzerland	53	3.2	24	1.6
Turkey			2	0.1
UK	167	10.0	99	6.7
Ukraine	2	0.1		
EUROPE TOTAL	1059	63.2	570	38.8
Algeria			1	0.1
South Africa			5	0.3
Tunisia	1	0.1	1	0.1
AFRICA TOTAL	1	0.1	7	0.5
Hong Kong	2	0.1	3	0.2
India	19	1.1	13	0.9
Iran			3	0.2
Japan	266	15.9	302	20.5
Jordan			1	0.1
Kuwait			2	0.1
Malaysia			4	0.3
Pakistan			1	0.1
P. Rep. China	12	0.7	6	0.4
Singapore	1	0.1	2	0.1
South Korea	11	0.7	24	1.6
Taiwan	8	0.5	10	0.7
Thailand			1	0.1
ASIA TOTAL	319	19.1	372	25.3
Argentina	3	0.2	2	0.1
Brazil	6	0.4	18	1.2
Chile	3	0.2	3	0.2
Colombia			1	0.1
Mexico	7	0.4	6	0.4
Puerto Rico			3	0.2
Trinidad and Tobago			1	0.1
Venezuela	1	0.1	1	0.1
Canada	32	1.9	39	2.7
USA	212	12.7	420	28.6
AMERICA TOTAL	264	15.8	493	33.5
Australia	27	1.6	22	1.5
New Zealand	4	0.2	6	0.4
AUSTRALASIA TOTAL	31	1.8	28	1.9
WORLD TOTAL	1674	100%	1470	100%
Free subscriptions			54	

*Includes direct subscriptions plus subscriptions placed through an agent in that country (possibly for distribution elsewhere)

Biochemistry. It is used for fellowships, Advanced Courses, etc. (see at the end of this issue). In this spirit we try to be as co-operative as possible with authors and libraries alike; we levy no page charges, offer 50 free off-prints, ask no charge for half-tone figures; our charge for color reproduction is moderate, and so is whatever increase in subscription rate we may have to ask for.

Consistently for the past thirty years, we have tried to be at the **leading edge** of modern biochemistry, which presently includes, for example, the borderline towards molecular and cell biology, and the impressive amount of biochemical and biological knowledge which total genome sequencing is making available. (Readers may have noticed that we have published both research letters and minireviews in this expanding area in 1997 and 1998.) Naturally, in doing so, we do not forget, and do not want to forget, the other areas of biochemistry.

We have the unique luck of living in an exciting period of unprecedented expansion and deepening of our knowledge in the life sciences. Our journal – and all of us who invest so much time and effort into making it an efficient vehicle for disseminating some part of this fascinating knowledge – thank the authors who have actually generated it. They, indeed more than anyone else, deserve the credit for the success that FEBS Letters has been for the past thirty years – and hopefully will be for the next 300!

Let me draw to a close by quoting an American poet, Steven Crane [7], who happened to be the granduncle of a respected biochemist:

I saw a man pursuing the horizon;
Round and round they sped.
I accosted the man.
'It is futile', I said,
'You can never –'
'You lie' – he cried
And ran on.
Will we reach the horizon?

Zürich, June 1998

Giorgio Semenza

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- [3] Datta, S.P. (1974) FEBS Lett. 40, Suppl. 174.
- [4] Whelan, W.J. (1986) FEBS Lett. 194, v–vii.
- [5] Arnstein, H.R.V. (1986) FEBS Lett. 194, viii.
- [6] Semenza, G. (1986) FEBS Lett. 194, ix.
- [7] quoted by Crane, R.K. (1983) in 'Comprehensive Biochemistry' (Vol. 35), 'Personal Recollections, I', (Semenza, G., Ed.) Elsevier, Amsterdam, pp. 43–67.