



**Vicky Johnson**, of Wiley-Blackwell tells us how she worked her way towards her current position as Journal Publishing Manager

## careers

### background introduction

Each of the SfAM journals is run and managed by a team of people, starting with Arthur Gilmour, Jean-Yves Maillard, Ken Timmis and the editorial assistants, and continuing with the Blackwell Production Editors (who are responsible for seeing the folios of accepted manuscripts transformed into copyedited, typeset and corrected pages that are published in print and online), the Marketer (who works across a range of titles in the subject, aiming to increase readership and circulation of the journals via promotional campaigns), the Journal Publishing Assistant and Journal Publishing Manager. The Journal Publishing Manager is responsible for the care and development of the SfAM journals and, as such, acts as the focus and the fulcrum of each title's team, ensuring that all our obligations as the Society's publisher are properly fulfilled.



# Scientific Publishing

**G**etting into Scientific Publishing can be quite a challenge, although it is far from impossible. There are many different types of publishing, but it is probably true to say that all are highly competitive and international industries. The Life Sciences division of Wiley-Blackwell specialises in earth and atmospheric sciences, whole organism biology, molecular and cell biology and, of course, microbiology. Within these subject clusters, there is much inevitable overlap with colleagues working at the more (bio)medical ends of the spectrum and those who concentrate on the physical sciences.

Fundamentally, the publishing process is the same whether you are working with books or journals, but there are some important differences. Book publishing is longer term process where successful publication of a book depends primarily on a strong working relationship between the author / compiling editor and the publisher's developing / commissioning editor.

Book publishing is neither less nor more pressurised than journals publishing, but it is certainly built around a very different calendar. Journals are published at regular intervals, usually on a fortnightly, monthly, bi-monthly or, more often in the humanities and social sciences, quarterly or yearly basis. Increasingly, journal articles are made available to readers ahead of their inclusion in an issue, either in their final, polished form, lacking only volume and page numbers, and / or as the accepted (but unedited or set) manuscript. There isn't much room for slippage in an environment where every detail is visible to the clients, that is, the authors, the readers, the reviewers. Standards are set high, and the bar moves higher every day. Journal publishing is fast-paced environment and the liaison between publishing and the SfAM never stops.

In addition to this 'external' responsibility, the Journal Publishing Manager provides a central point of

contact within the company for journals in a given subject and enables essential communication with the wider global teams (Berlin, Boston, Chichester, Copenhagen, Hoboken, Melbourne, Oxford, Singapore, Shanghai, Tokyo, Weinheim). It is precisely this collaboration that enables the SfAM journals to benefit from first-hand knowledge of market abroad, but it also fosters the germination of new ideas for projects, be they book or journal based. Projects such as the *Best Practice Guidelines on Publication Ethics* come into being as a direct result of this process.

### Career progression and training

A first job in publishing does not necessarily determine a given career path, but it does allow real insight into the process and may aid future decision-making. For example, it is not unusual for new starters in Journal Publishing or Production Assistant roles to move on to jobs within Marketing, or

even more operational departments, such as Finance or Central Purchasing, and it is also possible to follow opportunities that may present themselves at other offices within the company. What the 'title team' have in common, is the independent organisation of daily and ongoing work requirements and the management of conflicting priorities to ensure that our activities are orchestrated simultaneously and that the other members of our team know what we're doing and why! Attention to detail is paramount to our success, as is the ability to identify and meet our customers' needs effectively and efficiently in order to ensure that they take away a positive view of both the SfAM journals and the Wiley-Blackwell organisation. In publishing we pride ourselves on being able to build strong, ongoing relationships with everyone that we work with.

I have a postgraduate diploma in Publishing and I'd worked on both books and journals in a variety of disciplines, from business and finance to area studies and development, for four years before I joined what was then Blackwell Publishing as Journal Publishing Manager at the start of 2004. Whilst my diploma undoubtedly helped me to understand production processes, technical standards and marketing theory, it isn't a pre-requisite for a career in publishing. Perhaps the single most important qualification is simply some work experience within an office environment. Similarly, it is not necessary to work in the academic subject in which you yourself are qualified (after all, it's the authors who write the papers, the referees who dissect them and the editors who decide whether or not to publish them), but you will need to be able to demonstrate knowledge of the industry.

### Duties / 'Typical day'

The role of a Journal Publishing Manager is less than glamorous (dinners at the Palace of Westminster are a notable exception to the rule!), but it is certainly stimulating. The defined, cyclical nature of the 'journal year' makes it tricky to describe anything like a 'typical day', although they almost all start with a cup of tea and a torrent of emails.

The spring season brings spreadsheets, during which I spend

much of my time liaising with the Accountants to finalise figures for the previous calendar year. Once the historical numbers are confirmed and contextualised, the crystal ball comes out and it's time to prepare budgets and forecasts for the future years. At the same time, other members of the title team are busily preparing data on actual publication times and quantities, plus circulation and readership figures for presentation to, and discussion with SfAM and the editors. Despite the frequent emails and telephone conversations that take place, it is extremely important to find time for the editors, the society and the publishing team to meet at least once a year, in order to take stock of where we are and where we're going. The clash of issues like the increased availability of journals that came about via initiatives such as the Big Deal, the growth of R&D spending in many parts of the world, and the continuing pressure on budgets conspire to ensure that it is impossible for a journal to thrive just by 'doing what it's always done'; it's essential to keep looking for the next threat and the next opportunity.

As spring moves into summer, it's the ideal time to research, agree and implement ideas for developing the content and / or raising the profile of the journals in identified subject or geographical areas. Conferences are not just useful for distributing sample copies of journals, giving away freebies and showing display materials, they are also very useful in terms of networking. Often casual conversations at conferences have helped me gain a deeper understanding of the subject communities and define emerging and connected subject areas, which in turn can inform and inspire the strategic growth and / or development of the journals as undertaken by the editors, the society and the publisher. It's very useful to ask researchers simply and directly, what journals they use and why and what they particularly like or dislike about them — so please do be generous in sharing your thoughts!

It is often said that everyone has a book inside them and it can sometimes seem as though every researcher has an idea for a new journal; the difficulty for the publisher is matching the inspiration with the evidence. Launching a new journal into today's library market always carries an

element of risk; the key is in the calculation. Once you have the spark, the next stage is to identify your proposed market and then to look at the journals that are already occupying that niche. It is easy to get swept up in the excitement of the next big idea, but it's important to that you can truthfully answer several hard questions, such as: What are existing journals offering? How successful are they? What is happening to the funding in that area? Is there room for another competitor? What will this new journal offer that isn't already available? Getting a new launch wrong is not just expensive, it is also embarrassing and may tarnish the image of the established journals in your list. I'm pretty sure we've got it right with Ken Timmis' new project, *Microbial Biotechnology*, but I'd be delighted to hear your first impressions.

Interwoven between all of the 'events' in the calendar is the rest of my job, that is, the consultation service that I provide on a range of publishing issues, such as pricing and financial management, online initiatives, editorial office best practice and peer review, emerging and continuing market trends, citations and impact factors, maximising circulation and readership, copyright and licensing and, of course, open access. My aim is to ensure that I steer my journals so that they're best placed to thrive, in terms of citations, readers, submissions and of course financial return.

After three years and goodness knows how many hours spent in airport lounges, squinting at a Blackberry screen, wrestling with spreadsheets and wading through data on ISI, I am just as enthusiastic as I was when offered the job and I simply cannot imagine doing anything else. The pace is relentless and there is no such thing as a 'quiet time', but that's part of what makes this fun.

### further information

Information about careers in scientific publishing:

- <http://www.thesyp.org.uk/>
- <http://www.alpsp.org/>

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