

Editorial

Taking over the stewardship of *The Plant Journal* is both humbling and daunting for me. It is humbling because Dianna Bowles, my fellow Editors, the management and owners of the journal have entrusted me with this enormous responsibility. It is daunting because *The Plant Journal* has an outstanding reputation among the scientific community. It will be a real challenge to improve the quality and perception of the journal beyond where it is today. *The Plant Journal* has known only one Editor-in-Chief in its 10 years of existence, Dianna Bowles. During Dianna's tenure the journal has shown steady improvement in quality and impact. Dianna has handed me a vibrant product; one in which she is justifiably proud.

What is my vision of *The Plant Journal* for the next several years? Let me start by dismissing the myth that it is a 'European' journal. Appointment of a non-European as Editor-in-Chief is not a shift in policy. *The Plant Journal* serves the world-wide community of plant biologists. Historically, the journal was perceived by many as a European alternative to *The Plant Cell*. This is simply not so. *The Plant Journal* is a journal that prides itself on having a balanced portfolio of Editors, Advisory Board members and authors representative of the plant biology community. What drives this journal is science. We seek to publish the best and most topical science without prejudice to geography, organism or approach. As our instructions state, the science must address fundamental questions in plant biology. Rest assured that this emphasis on fundamental questions in plant biology will only grow stronger. This is and will continue to be the guiding principle of *The Plant Journal*.

I believe that scientists want three things in a journal. First, they want fair treatment of their work. Second, they want papers published as rapidly as is humanly possible. Finally, they want those papers to reach the widest possible audience. No matter what the quality and reputation of a journal, there must be constant effort to improve in every way. Rest assured that we will always strive to reach an ever higher level.

We must provide authors with high-quality reviews. I believe that we already do an excellent job of this. The ultimate goal must always be to help authors publish their work either in *The Plant Journal* or in another journal. We must provide authors with the feedback that they need to achieve this goal. We must clearly communicate the relevant information, and work with authors to achieve a positive outcome. If a paper is unacceptable, we must communicate what is missing. The hardest job an Editor faces is to tell an author that a paper is unsuitable for publication. While some journals opt to keep a rejecting Editor's identity anonymous, thus protecting them, I feel *The Plant Journal's* approach of identifying the Editor is far superior. When my name is on the letter, I have a strong incentive to provide fair and useful feedback. We have an outstanding, committed group of Editors who are doing their best to follow this policy.

Publication time is something that can always be improved upon. What can we do about providing you with faster service? First and foremost, we have an excellent Editorial Office. Irene Hames and her outstanding staff work hard to keep the process running smoothly. We have also expanded our Editorial Board over the last year, both adding new expertise and reducing work loads of the entire Board. But there is only so much people can do. To reach a higher level of performance, in early November we initiated an Electronic Editorial Office (EEO) that now permits direct Web-based electronic submission and review of manuscripts. The entire process from submission through to acceptance can be accomplished without paper. Author response has been rapid and has far exceeded our expectations. As I write this at the end of the first month, around 50% of our manuscripts are being submitted electronically online and feedback from authors has been very positive. We are very gratified by this response. My initial experience with the EEO indicates that it can potentially shave weeks off of the review process. The EEO is easy to use and can put manuscripts in the hands of reviewers within 24 h of submission. It allows instant tracking of any manuscript in the system. I have confidence that our already very rapid time to publication will only improve.

Finally, we reach the issue of impact and circulation. This is where electronic publishing has great potential to level the playing field. The publishers are totally committed to increasing circulation. Electronic institutional subscriptions have increased dramatically. We have also offered inexpensive individual electronic subscriptions to groups such as the SEB and the ASPB. The response has been

excellent. If you publish in *The Plant Journal*, your paper will be rapidly and widely disseminated to the scientific community.

All of these initiatives will have a positive impact on the journal. You are not going to see dramatic changes to the final published product – except perhaps the cool new cover. We have a high-quality journal and we do not need to make wholesale changes. Where appropriate, as in the ongoing series of articles on GM crops, we will occasionally feature special topics. No matter our views on this subject, the campaign against GM crops impacts the plant science community in many ways. We felt a strong obligation to address the issues as objectively as possible. Where appropriate we will continue this policy. But *The Plant Journal* has built a solid reputation. No tinkering is necessary. Just a firm commitment to quality.

Finally, let me personally thank each of you who have taken time to help us in any way to publish quality research in a timely manner. I look forward to serving you and encourage any and all of you to share your views on *The Plant Journal*, positive or negative, with me.

Harry Klee
Editor-in-Chief