

New Journals review 1997

The New Journals review supplement is intended as a service to potential subscribers (especially librarians), authors and publishers who may welcome comment on their infant journals.

Criteria for journals to be considered for review in this issue were circulated to publishers earlier this year, and were also published in *Nature*.

They are that:

- (1) the first number appeared during or after June 1995, with four separate numbers available by the end of May 1997 (although journals not covered in last year's review issue were also considered)*;
- (2) the journal is published at least three times a year;
- (3) the main language is English; and
- (4) where possible at least four issues should be made available for review, including the first and the most recent numbers.

The time criteria ensure that a reasonable sample of issues is available for judgement at the time of commissioning reviews. A spread of four different issues is taken as the usual minimum on which a reviewer's comments can be based.

Exceptions and omissions

Exceptions have been made to these rules if a journal covers subject matter of unusual interest or it complements another one reviewed in these pages.

Several journals known to satisfy the criteria were not submitted for review or arrived too late for inclusion. And those publishers that sent in four identical issues of, say, Vol. 1, No. 1 are less likely to find their journal reviewed here.

Disappointed editors should note, however, that it proved difficult to find reviewers for some doubtless worthy journals, while some titles were considered to be of marginal interest to *Nature's* audience. Journals covering any aspect of science are eligible although those dealing with clinical

medicine and pure mathematics are excluded, as are abstracts publications and newsletters. A list of submitted titles eligible for review but not covered appears below.

Reviewers' brief

The brief given to the reviewers was to limit themselves to comments on the publications sent to them, and to avoid discussion of general questions of periodical publishing. Opinions expressed in the reviews are based on a sample of issues. As in previous years, the preponderance of journals in the biological sciences, and in particular neuroscience, reflects the bias of the material submitted.

Prices

Details of editors, frequency of publication and subscription rates appearing at the top of each review are given in most instances for 1998. This information is not complete in all cases, and readers interested in subscribing to a journal should check the rate with the publisher.

Journals also submitted for review

Accreditation and Quality Assurance (Springer); *Apoptosis* (Rapid Science); *Biomarkers* (Taylor and Francis); *Chemistry: A European Journal* (VCH); *Cognitive Neuropsychiatry* (Psychology Press); *Computational and Mathematical Organization Theory* (Kluwer); *Empirical Software Engineering* (Kluwer); *Enantiomer: A Journal of Stereochemistry* (Gordon and Breach); *Environment and Nutritional Interactions* (Taylor and Francis); *Field Analytical Chemistry and Technology* (Wiley); *Foundations of Science* (Oficyna Akademicka); *Haemophilia* (Blackwell Science); *Journal of Health Psychology* (Sage); *Journal of Heuristics* (Kluwer); *Molecular Diversity* (ESCOM); *Multiple Sclerosis* (Stockton); *Neurobiology of Disease* (Academic); *Terra Nova: Nature and Culture* (MIT Press).

At the time of the change, the editors set several goals to distinguish *MCN* from its competitors. An intriguing proposal was a promise to provide "incentives" to reviewers who quickly returned their review. On the basis of my own experience in chasing reviewers, I was interested in this strategy, but was not sure that I found the suggested reward — copies of *Methods in Enzymology* — all that enticing. A more alluring promise was that colour figures would be published free of charge. Now, nearly three years later, it is worthwhile to review the journal's success in the light of these incentives.

MCN has assembled an impressive and large editorial board of about 50 neuroscientists, more than half of whom are editorial board members for *Journal of Neuroscience* or *Neuron*, the best-known established journals which publish a great deal of cellular and molecular neuroscience. The papers published in *MCN* are generally full-length communications, with an average of six to nine figures and a format similar to that used in *Neuron*.

Each issue is fairly small, with six research articles and occasional topical reviews. The research articles are generally well-written and on current issues. But there is a strong bias toward developmental neurobiology, despite the editors' stated goal of publishing reports of interest in any area of molecular neuroscience. One wonders whether a more substantial change in title might help to direct interested readers to the topics actually covered in *MCN*.

As to the quality of the research articles, I would rate many of the papers as having less impact and general interest than similar articles in journals such as those mentioned previously. About a third of the papers could probably have been published in one of these other journals.

Articles in *MCN* contain many half-tone and colour plates. Although the quality of reproduction is generally excellent, I found several articles where the reproduction, particularly of electron micrographs, was fuzzy and lacking in contrast. The editors have achieved their goal of rapid publication, as most articles were accepted within a month of receipt and published within two months of acceptance.

In one remarkable case, a paper was accepted within a day of receipt — one could hardly wish for more as an author!

Overall, *MCN* does not really cover the area of cellular and molecular neuroscience as broadly as advertised. But it may find a home, particularly in the area of developmental neurobiology. The table of contents and abstracts are available electronically through the Academic Press site (<http://www.apnet.com>).

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*See *Nature* 371, 439 (1994); 377, 259 (1995); and 383, 33 (1996).

Many of my colleagues lament the profusion of journals and the work required to keep up with the truly vast literature. Frankly, I hold our journals in great reverence because it is among these pages that we document the rambunctious argument and startling insight that underlie our best achievements.

The trend of these four new journals is to respond to the burgeoning literature with innovative review formats, and at least two of the four, *Genes to Cells* and *Cellular and Molecular Life Sciences*, are available on-line. These conveniences matter, but, of course, the true impact of the journals lies in their multidisciplinary focus and emphasis on basic biological fundamentals. □

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More development than advertised

MCN: Molecular and Cellular Neuroscience

Editors-in-chief Greg Lemke and Frank S. Walsh
Academic. 12/yr. \$395 (institutional); \$99 (personal)

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This journal is more of a publication reborn than a new journal, because its scope and direction were revamped in early 1995 with a change in editors and a subtle shift in name from *Molecular and Cellular Neurosciences* (although numbering carried on from volume six).