

An interesting year

As we enter 2017, *Nature Microbiology* completes its first year as a journal dedicated to publishing work of the highest quality from across the field. And what a year it has been. We take this opportunity to mark up the report card and check on our progress.

“May you live in interesting times.” Many readers could be forgiven for thinking that 2016 did indeed fall foul of this cryptic curse, with the last 12 months witnessing often dramatic political upheaval, and the loss of a seemingly large number of leading lights, both from the celebrity and scientific worlds. A year that took Bowie, Prince, Lemmy, Wogan, Rickman, Corbett, Wood, Cohen, Ali, Tsien and Lindquist, to name but a fraction, can justifiably be asked to politely excuse itself and leave (or more robust words to that effect). However, 2016 will always hold a place in the heart for those involved in the launch of *Nature Microbiology*, and so I hope that you will excuse us a moment to reminisce and take stock of our first 12 issues and the development of our journal.

In our opening Editorial¹, we set out a number of principles and values by which we aimed to work; key among these being to publish high quality research from across the entire field of microbiology. When asked about our scope, we editors have often expressed this breadth in the maxim: “it’s in scope if there is a microorganism in the study and it is at least one of the following: interesting, important, novel, useful.” So how have we done? Well, over the 12 issues in 2016, we published 126 Articles, Letters and Brief Communications, which have covered work on Bacteria (47), Archaea (7), fungi (8), parasites (3), viruses (23), algae (1), and host-associated and environmental microbial communities (37). These important studies have covered topics ranging across the entire microbiology field, from hospital bed to sea bed. We have published work on clinical microbiology, infectious diseases, epidemiology, modelling, host defence, pathogenesis, antimicrobials and resistance, cellular and molecular biology, physiology, metabolism, bioinformatics, computational biology, genetics and genomics, all the way through to the ecology and evolution of individual microorganisms and microbial communities.

To pick just a few of the many highlights from our 2016 issues, January saw a modelling study that revealed that the global distribution of *Burkholderia pseudomallei* and the burden of melioidosis has been severely under-reported². In March, we

learned how *Toxoplasma gondii* accesses the central nervous system through the infection and lysis of endothelial cells in the brain vasculature³. Perhaps the most visible study published (and certainly the most read) came in the May issue, with an update to the ‘tree of life’ from Laura Hug and colleagues, revealing the dominance of bacterial diversity and extensive evolution in some branches of the tree⁴. October brought us a fundamental change in our understanding of bacterial cell wall biogenesis, with the identification of the transglycosylase activity of the SEDS-family protein RodA in *Escherichia coli*⁵, as well as the first public repository of bacterial strains and associated genomes from the mouse gut⁶. November saw a comprehensive view of the intra-host dynamics of Ebola virus during the 2014 outbreak⁷, and how a class of antimicrobial agents, termed structurally nanoengineered antimicrobial peptide polymers, are effective at killing a variety of multidrug-resistant Gram-negative bacteria *in vivo* with low host toxicity and resistance⁸. With these papers and many more beside, we feel that it is fair to say that for the quality and breadth target, we can put a tick in the box.

Beyond our research content, we have published over 90 pieces of vibrant magazine content, including Editorials, Comments, Features, News and Views, Books and Arts, Q&As, Reviews and Correspondence that collectively have enabled us to explore many of the important topical issues facing the microbiology field. A particularly creative feature involved the microbiological community coming together to imagine the Microbial Olympics⁹. Alongside all this, the Nature Microbiology Community (<https://naturemicrobiologycommunity.nature.com/>) continues to develop, with over 215 blog posts, pieces of artwork and videos posted over the year to a community that now has over 670 members. A particular highlight has been our ‘Behind the paper’ channel, which features blogs from authors of papers both from *Nature Microbiology* and other journals. The posts tell the real story behind their study, from conception to publication, covering the highs and the lows, and are always an enjoyable and insightful accompaniment to the publication proper.

Another key set of values on which we aimed to deliver is related to author service: providing editorial decisions that were rapid but fair; taking an active role in a peer review process that was fast, but not at the expense of scientific rigour; and adopting an open and collaborative editorial approach. On this it really is up to authors (for work both published and rejected), referees, and you the reader, to decide how we have done. We can report that for the 12-month period during which our 2016 content was under consideration, the median times for a first editorial decision to be made were 3 days (reject) and 5 days (review). For those manuscripts that were sent for review, median times from initial submission to receiving a decision with referee reports were 34 days for the first round and 27 days for a second round. We sent out slightly over 20% of submitted manuscripts for review and our acceptance rate was 9%. Of those 126 manuscripts accepted, 86% were published after 2 rounds of review or fewer, while 14% needed to be seen by at least 1 referee a third time. For all submissions to the journal, whether a presubmission enquiry or full manuscript, and whether sent for peer review or not, our editors explained in detail the reasoning behind our decision rather than relying solely on form letters, and made themselves available to discuss a decision if an author so requested. Furthermore, microbiologists had the chance to discuss their work with us at some of the 26 conferences, workshops and lab visits attended during the year.

We hope that you have enjoyed the content of our first 12 issues and thank the microbiology research community for the enthusiasm with which our new journal has been received. We remain dedicated to the same principles and values on which we were launched and look forward to working with you for the next 12 issues and beyond. □

References

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