Looking both ways

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EDITORIAL

We recently received a communication from a local estate agent. Not, for a change, a suggestion of a valuation or notice of a client wishing to rent in our area but an offer of a sales brochure and some associated photographs which they had found in their archives from when our property had been on the market in the late 1980s. Needless to say, since they duly arrived they have been a source of great fascination. The pictures show it to be recognisably the same house and gardens and yet, simultaneously, there are many changes. A garage has come and gone and been replaced, bits have disappeared, others added, the gardens are a very different shape, shrubs overgrown or removed, features that no longer exist have been substituted with others that more than compensate; and so on.

Happening at a time when we have been discussing future developments of the *BDJ*, I was struck with the metaphor that the comparison provided. In recent years we have dared to make some substantial changes to the journal, which was variously described to me when I was appointed as Editor-in-chief, as being a cross between the family silver and the literary heritage of the dental world. No pressure then. Like a treasured house or home what we have attempted to do is to modernise it to make it fit for purpose in the twenty-first century, while leaving open options for further developments and at the same time keeping the shape and look sufficiently familiar so as to be reassuring and recognisable. In order to check our progress, as with all good audits, we have various measures that we use from time to time and we have recently had the analysis of a major readership survey that we carried out last autumn. This has provided us with some very helpful results and data which, while broadly supporting our own opinions and feelings has also given us some thoughts about what else we could do to improve the *BDJ* and where else we might seek to take it in the coming years.

GETTING THE BALANCE ABOUT RIGHT

Pleasingly, on average readers read at least half of *every* issue and each print issue is read by three people. There has long been a debate about the balance between 'practice' and 'research' papers in the journal; the clinicians wishing for more practical guidance, the scientists seeking greater academic content. Pleasingly, half the readers think that the balance is about right between these two sections but not surprisingly twice as many researchers would like to see more research, while the same proportion of non-researchers would like to see more practice content. However, over 65% of

the readership read research summaries and practice articles regularly and of these, more than 85% rate them either quite or very useful.

Some few years ago we transferred the publication of research papers in full to online only. This had the benefit of making more space available for more practice content while concomitantly harnessing the advantages of electronic links. After an initial outcry things calmed down and the survey reported that nearly one third of readers now regularly access the *BDJ* online and a staggering 95% of these read the research papers in full. This is a very pleasing finding as it provides an example of where implementing good publishing practice has enabled us to bring demonstrable value to the journal's constituents.

I have previously outlined the *BDJ*'s new role as an open access journal and this is now fully available to the scientific community.¹ We are looking forward to publishing our first such paper during 2013 and, as above, are pleased to be taking the journal forwards along modern publishing lines. Progress is not always about following though, sometimes we need to take the lead. In this context, using the results of another survey carried out last year into our CPD programme, we will soon be announcing some important changes to the way in which we conduct the programme in line with users' wishes. We believe this will continue the *BDJ*'s status as the leading dental journal in the UK, if not (arguably) worldwide. Very excitingly, this will form part of the soon to be unveiled BDA's new membership offering which will be a major transformation this year.

A further change which we will be introducing in 2013 is that of themed issues. These will be edited with the help of a guest editor for the issue who will have commissioned papers and content on the specific area or speciality of dentistry under consideration. We hope that these carefully crafted editions will be of value to regular readers as well as becoming much referenced pieces within the dental literature.

So, much to reflect upon as to the journey thus far; but also a lot to look forward to. Our aim is to keep everything as familiar as possible while constantly enhancing it, just as with the house and garden. Oh yes, and if all goes according to plan it will potentially be three times more valuable in twenty years time than it was when we bought it!

1. Hancocks S. Open (wide) access. *Br Dent J* 2012; 212: 301.

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