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QUALITY COUNTS: TEN YEARS CHEMISTRY

"I dieci anni di Chemistry", è questo l'oggetto dell'allegata intervista nella quale l'Editor-in-Chief di Chemistry-A European Journal, Neville Compton, risponde alle domande poste da Gerhard Karger del Nachrichten aus der Chemie.

Punto di forza di Chemistry-A European Journal è l'essere stato il primo giornale autenticamente europeo, nel senso che è stato voluto e finanziato, sin dall'inizio, da alcune Società Chimiche Europee (ora sono quattordici) raggruppate nell'Editorial Union of Chemical Societies (EuChemSoc).

Chemistry ha rappresentato in questi dieci anni un ottimo mezzo di promozione e divulgazione della Ricerca Chimica Europea. Pur non avendo raggiunto il livello del Journal of the American Chemical Society (impact factor di 4,35 contro 6,51) esso si colloca ben al di sopra dell'altro diretto competitor europeo, il New Journal of Chemistry (impact factor 2,27).

Adesso ci sembra naturale che l'Europa,

per la qualità e la quantità della sua Ricerca in campo Chimico, disponga di propri organi di divulgazione scientifica, ma solo dieci anni fa non era così. Da allora altre iniziative editoriali sono state intraprese in maniera unitaria dalle Società Chimiche Europee e oggi abbiamo giornali europei in quasi tutti i settori della Ricerca Chimica. Comunque l'opera è ancora lungi dall'essere completa ed altre iniziative sono in fase di progettazione. In questo modo l'Europa potrà affrancarsi del tutto dalla subalternità alla leadership di altri continenti ed affermarsi come soggetto autonomo ed autorevole. Dobbiamo essere grati a chi, con lungimiranza, dieci anni fa ha intrapreso un cammino di aggregazione della frammentata realtà europea che ancora continua.

L'avventura Europea ha rappresentato

anche una grande opportunità per la Società Chimica Italiana. La SCI era già pesantemente impegnata in attività editoriali, dal momento che compito di ogni Società Chimica è quello di promuovere e pubblicizzare le nuove scoperte. La pubblicazione tempestiva su giornali di grande diffusione è uno dei modi per realizzare questo obiettivo. Tuttavia quello che sarebbe stato possibile realizzare come singola Società Nazionale è ben poca cosa rispetto a quello che è stato possibile realizzare unendo gli sforzi. In questo senso quanto fatto dall'Editorial Union of Chemical Societies va molto al di là della semplice sommatoria. (Giovanni Natile)

With the support of 14 European Chemical Societies, and more and more top authors from around the world using the Full Paper

Journal as the forum for their research, *Chemistry-A European Journal* is ideally placed and ready for the challenges of the future. The 10th anniversary of the journal provides an opportunity to assess the progress: Editor-in-Chief Neville Compton in discussion with Gerhard Karger from the *Nachrichten aus der Chemie*.

Nachrichten aus der Chemie (NCh): Dr. Compton, *Chemistry* began its 10th anniversary year with a "tome-like" first January issue containing 428 pages. That was not always the case.

Neville Compton: No, *Chemistry* originally appeared monthly, bound in a piggy-back fashion in *Angewandte Chemie*. The journal became independent in 1997, and *Chemistry* increased the frequency to 24

issues a year in 2000. In 2004, we published over 6,550 pages, ten times more than in 1995.

Chemistry - A success story? Let us return to the beginning. Back in 1995 what attracted the community to the journal?

Compton: Well, the most exciting was that the new journal, *Chemistry*, was based in Europe. It immediately found strong support because many of the authors had a close affiliation with this part of the world and because many European Chemical Societies were directly involved from the start.

What was special?

Chemistry was the first European Journal for Full Papers from all disciplines of chemistry, which attained truly international acceptance. The full paper format offered, in contrast

to that for a short communication, the room for detailed discussion of the results. In direct competition with the *Journal of the American Chemical Society (JACS)*, we were thus able to fill a gap in the market.

Which was also present in the USA?

Yes, from the outset we have published papers from the USA. In the meantime, we receive more and more papers from over-

How can you attract authors today?

By offering the best service. We are currently working on cutting our publication times. At present, the average time is about five months, but when it has needed to go faster because of competition, we have published articles within four weeks. Here, our Editorial System manuscriptXpress has contributed considerably to make the process simpler,



Gerhard Karger in discussion with Neville Compton, Editor-in-Chief of *Chemistry* (right). (NCh-Foto: Guggolz)

seas, and the share from Asia is continuing to grow disproportionately.

Do you have the feeling that the growth of Chemistry has had an adverse effect on other journals?

There is generally more being published. The pressure on professors to publish their results has increased significantly, in particular to justify and secure research funding. In addition, as mentioned earlier, there has been a large increase in submissions from lands such as China. At *Chemistry*, like at other journals, we are, of course, trying to attract the best papers - the crème de la crème.

faster, and more efficient. We have now also increased the number of personnel to deal with the flood of manuscripts. All contributions are available online after the author corrections have been included. This date is thus considered as the publication date, since the scientific content is then no longer changed.

And is this final version then ready to be downloaded?

Yes. Our internet statistics show that, many of these contributions are read before the print edition of the journal appears. The number of downloads has increased dramatically.

But the download costs?

Yes and no. The service is free for subscribers; the others can access articles with our pay-per-view system.

How long will there be a print edition of Chemistry?

For the foreseeable future.

Part of the service to readers, is the online-searchability of the texts.

That is why we provide the full text online. Wiley-Interscience and a whole series of other publishers have implemented the joint project CrossRef. Simply by clicking on the reference in the electronic version of the journal, one is taken directly to the contribution, providing one has a subscription to the journal.

In numerical terms?

JACS is currently 6.516, we have an impact factor of 4.353, and a further competitor, the *New Journal of Chemistry*, is 2.272.

How high is the current rejection rate?

Around 50%.

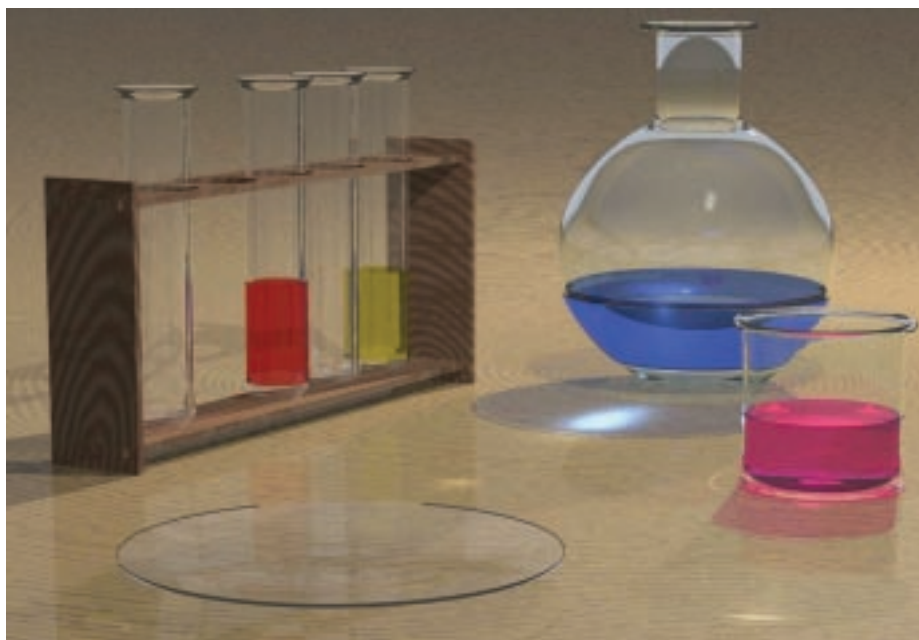
Does the rejection rate differ for different fields of chemistry or for different countries? Are there are notable differences for China?

The distribution of manuscripts in terms of quality is approximately the same for all areas of research. In geographical terms, there are differences: For example, many Chinese authors initially tested

however, improved notably, as the authors have learned from their experiences. The quality of papers from China has improved considerably over the last two years, also in terms of the formal requirements, and the latter has made it easier for referees

So there is no special treatment for new authors?

No. To reiterate it once again: Our main criterion for acceptance of contributions is and always will be their quality. There are no geographical targets or restrictions, there must not be a particular number of papers from Europe; however, the competition for space has intensified. Naturally, we have continued to grow



Let us go back to the authors. Another attractive feature for them is a high impact factor. Where does that of Chemistry stand in comparison to those of the competitors? The impact factor of our main competitor, JACS, is higher than ours, but we are working on it.

the water. They experimented to see which papers would be accepted by the different journals. Initially, a large number of papers were submitted without realizing the level of quality required for publication in *Chemistry*. This clearly led to higher rejection rates. This situation has,

over the years in an effort not to drive the rejection rate to a level at which it would be counterproductive for the development of the journal.

Is it a problem for referees when many unknown authors force their way into the journal?

It is difficult to say. One always hopes that the assessment is based on purely scientific criteria

Is there now a group of authors from China that regularly submit papers to the journal? Have you identified particularly active research groups?

At present there are about 10 Institutes from where we regularly receive excellent papers. Other journals are experiencing similar trends.

Chemistry has a large International Editorial Board. What contribution has this body made to the success of the journal?

For one thing the Board Members help with difficult cases, for example when there are two extremely conflicting referee reports. In their direct communities they act as multipliers and ambassadors.

Even when they are in other Boards? For people such as Barry Trost or Fraser Stoddart is there not a conflict of interest? Are they not also active for ACS Journals?

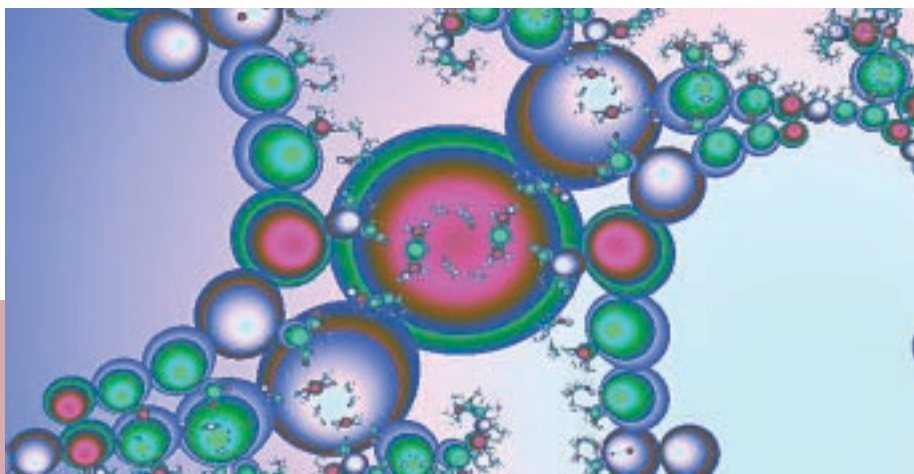
Definitely not. They were and are still very helpful. Fraser Stoddart has his 50th manuscript for *Chemistry* in press. He has not only put his name behind the product but actively supports it with

How are the Societies financially involved?

At the beginning the various Societies invested capital and bought shares in the journal - a certain number of shares were put aside for potential future partners. Today the societies receive royalties based on their share. In the course of time the Societies have grouped together and formed the Editorial Union of Chemical Societies (EUChemSoc). The

then GDCh President Heinrich Nöth, and the then GDCh Managing Director, Heindirk tom Dieck, fortunately had the foresight 10 years ago to make the necessary provisions to enable other Societies to join the partnership.

After so much work, there is reason to celebrate. A highpoint of the 10th anniversary celebrations will be a Symposium in



excellent results and papers from his research. Such an example has encouraged other top ranking colleagues also to publish with us.

Let us go back to the founding of Chemistry and to the role played by the Chemical Societies. In the meantime there are 14 European Societies who own the Journal. What role do the "Owners" play?

Firstly, they support the chemical research in their own countries. They encourage their best chemists to publish in *Chemistry*. Luis Oro, the President of the Spanish Chemical Society and member of the Owners' Society, has been particularly active and successful in this respect. They also promote *Chemistry* in their national journals - as *Nachrichten* readers well know.

Owners do not say: This year you can only publish so many pages. Nevertheless, in terms of the final pricing of the journal, the Owners' input tips the scales. The editorial office, of course, reports on how the journal is growing and what is planned for the future at the yearly Owners' Meeting. This is important because it could be, for example, that it is necessary to publish, and thereby finance, 500 extra pages.

Let us take a step into the future, to the vision of a unified Europe, which scientifically has an important voice.

Naturally, in line with the expansion of the European Union there are options to expand the "Chemistry Community". The architects of the journal, Jean-Marie Lehn, Peter Göllitz from *Angewandte Chemie*, the

Strasbourg at the ISIS Institute, where Jean-Marie Lehn is based. Who should attend and who will be there?

We have six Keynote speakers, not only from Europe, information on which is available on our homepage. These have not only made major contributions to many areas of chemistry, but have supported the journal since its inception. The selection was made with input from both the Editorial Board and the Societies.

Are there still places available?

Yes, at the moment, but the super program has stimulated a lot of interest. We are organizing the event together with the Conference Department of the GDCh. You can register from our homepage [www.chemeurj.org], where there is a link to Frankfurt.