Essays in the Art and Science of Academic Journal Editing and Publishing

Preparation for Academic Medical Journal Editorship

A Personal Case Study in Professional Development.

The European Journal of Surgical Oncology (EJSO), 1996 to 2002:

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Introduction

The Editorship of an academic journal is a professional privilege, an intellectual challenge and an exercise in vision and leadership. Journal editors can call upon a wide range of published resources and some benefit from practical apprenticeships of serial promotion through the ranks of editorial roles and responsibilities, but relatively few benefit from a prolonged and systematic training in a very challenging and wide-ranging role.

My own career in academic journal publishing now spans four decades, of which two decades were largely spent with the European Journal of Surgical Oncology (EJSO). From 1996 to the end of 2002, I undertook an informal apprenticeship in Editorship with the EJSO. From 2003 to 2009 I held the post of Editor in Chief of the journal.

Most editors will pursue their publishing duties in parallel with a primary professional career, and few will have had the opportunity of significant formal training or a publishing curriculum to fall back upon.

In reflecting on my career in publishing to date, I have drawn heavily on my personal archives and my collection of articles from that era. Many of those are now locked behind publisher paywalls where the entertaining, informative and challenging writing of the 1990s will never again be widely read. I hope that my own experience may be of value to others who find themselves a similar career trajectory, or who are seeking insight into the era when academic publishing went digital.

What is an Academic Journal?

An academic journal is a structured repository for original intellectual works and reports of original research which have been validated by peer review and editorial processes. It is usually organised by volumes, which may be published on paper in print, in online only format, or in a combination of both mediums. By convention, volumes cover periods of up to one year, and comprise a series of discrete items, which may include editorials, original articles, and correspondence. The content may be subject specific, or in may cover a wide range of subjects. The specific purpose of the journal should be clearly set out, although it may be kept deliberately vague to attract the greatest flow of manuscripts.

A journal may be affiliated with an institution, usually a university; an academic society or association; or solely with a commercial publisher. Whatever the ownership, the journal is primarily a business, which is competing in the academic marketplace for the interest and trust of its intended authorship and readership. Like any business, it consumes resources and it succeeds or fails in the continuation of its financial support.

The oldest continuously published academic journal is the Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society, which was launched in March 1665 by Henry Oldenburg. Journals such as Nature, Cell and Science have become synonymous with advances in human knowledge across the Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics and Medicine disciplines. They have been shaped by the vision and leadership skills of generations of Editors in Chief, Editorial Boards and Publishers. As in life, journals are born, evolve and die. Some species are short lived, while others attain longevity and pre-eminence in the journal ecosystem.

In 1996, a journal could be readily defined as a serial publication which was subscription based, which was peer reviewed, and which had a defined publication frequency.
There have been major changes in the academic publishing landscape since 1996. They have been in consequence of the technology of the internet and of the global reach and marginal costs of online publishing. Journals are now often published online as single annual volumes, where accepted articles accrue continuously.

There have also been the unintended consequences of open access publishing, which have largely moved the funding of journals from the “subscriber or reader pays” model to the “author or institution pays” model. This has created a huge expansion in publishers and journals, and it has threatened profoundly to change the editorial decision-making dynamic business models which increase the “pressure to publish” on editors.

The subscription based model of journal publication continues for professional Societies and Associations, but highly reputed subscription journals now commonly partner with derivative or “cascade” open access journals on the same subject and with derivative titles.

Every intending editor, however highly principled and aspiring, must understand his or her core role in the efficient management of the journal as a marketable product and business in a competitive ecosystem for the distribution of knowledge, which now includes preprint and eprint servers, academic blog, social media and multimedia (eg YouTube) formats..

The true extent of the ecosystem of academic journals in 2025 is uncertain, but it comprises of the order of 50,000 journals or more, of which some 30,000 are listed as primary sources in the SCOPUS and Web of Science bibliometric systems. The ecosystem is Darwinian and constantly changing, as journals are born or fade away.

The Distinction between a Journal and a Book Series

Serial academic publications include Book Series, which have both similarities and differences to academic journals. Book Series are generally free standing collections of articles on a particular topic in each volume of a general theme. Articles are usually commissioned and review is at the Editor level rather than the Peer Reviewer level.

Individual articles may resemble review articles or may present original research, and they are very similar to articles in a standard journal, with reference sections that may be cited. However, they are regarded as chapters in that particular volume (book), and they are marketed and sold independently as volumes in a book series. Springer is a prolific publisher of book series in many different subject fields, as seen on the web site www.springernature.com/gp/researchers/campaigns/book-series.

An Introduction to Journal Editorship

Journals exist in symbiosis with their publishers, who will usually take care of the material aspects of supporting the journal, managing manuscript flow, production, distribution and staffing.

Each journal will have an Editor in Chief, who heads up the content program of the journal and who embodies the professional values and presentation of the journal. Some journals may have more than one Editor in Chief, who share responsibilities and the division of labour. Editors in Chief will generally be supported by a panel of subject expert Associate Editors, whose work in turn will be overseen by an Editorial Board of individuals with a professional interest in the success of the journal.

Therefore, the global academic journal ecosystem comprises (at least) several hundred thousands of diverse individuals with editorial and supervisory roles in some form. Many of them will not have had a formal education in the duties, practice and opportunities of editorial responsibility in journal publication and leadership.

All Editors are transient actors in a profession of academic journal editorship which dates back to the 17th Century. It is continually changing. The enabling technologies have evolved from the mechanical printing press and mail coach to digital systems and the Internet. However, the core qualities and demands of Editorship are enduring, even if the tools and methods of publishing continually evolve.

My Background to an Academic Publishing Career

Every Editor will come to the role from a different educational, cultural and academic background. My own introduction to academic publishing started at school at Christ College Brecon in mid Wales between 1968 and 1974. This was at the tail end of the Analogue Age, when schoolwork was done with pen, ink and paper, and when digital tools and the internet for on line learning were still unknown. The boundaries of learning were the contents of the school and county libraries, along with copies of daily newspapers and educational magazines such as New Scientist and Scientific American, where obtainable.

The school was a bastion of the English language in the centre of Welsh Wales. It provided "Use of English" courses for students who opted for science subjects for their higher examinations (Advanced or A Levels). I have owed a lifetime of appreciation to the late Mr Gareth Jones, our English teacher, for the rudiments of linguistic analysis and for honing my understanding of the power of well crafted English in the communication of ideas.

The transistor arrived in rural Wales when pocket calculators appeared in the early 1970s, but personal computing was still unknown. Interaction with the then advanced IBM 360 computer at the computer lab at the University of Cambridge in the later 1970s required special permission and familiarity with punched card programming, ticker tape outputs and early versions of Fortran code. The earliest Apple computers were sold in California in 1976.

The 1980s saw an explosion in personal computing, with the concurrent introduction of the IBM PC in 1981 and the birth of Microsoft with the MS-DOS operating software. We lived through the release of the BBC Micro machine and similar hobby computers from companies such as Acorn, Sinclair, Tangerine and Dragon in the UK. The Amstrad series of computers were popular at the end of the 1980s, and I wrote up my Mastership of Surgery Thesis for Cambridge University in 1990 on an Amstrad 1640 PC with minimal memory and using word processing software that lacked a page numbering mode.

I qualified with a degree in Medicine and Surgery from the University of Cambridge in 1981. I pursued my early career in basic and higher surgical training posts in general surgery and surgical oncology in London and the South East of the UK from 1981 onwards. I was awarded the Fellowship of the Royal College of Surgeons in May 1985.

My professional training continued through 1987 and 1988 in Portsmouth, from where I moved to the University Surgical Unit at Southampton General Hospital under the direction of Professor Irving Taylor in early 1989. My MChir Thesis of Cambridge University on the subject of tumour cell proliferation kinetics was published in 1991. I served at Leicester University as a Senior Lecturer in Surgery in Sir Peter Bell's Professorial Unit from July 1994 until January 1999, when I returned to Southampton.

I kept in close touch with Professor Taylor, who had moved to University College Hospital in London. He became Editor in Chief of the EJSO in 1994. From 1996 onwards, he generously mentored my editorial development in support of the EJSO.

Preparation for the Editorship of the European Journal of Surgical Oncology (EJSO)

In 1996, I was invited to represent the Editor and Publisher of the European Journal of Surgical Oncology on the Council of BASO (Appendix 1). This role involved attending meetings both of the Journal Board at various European venues and at the Elsevier London base, and of the BASO Board at The Royal College of Surgeons in Lincoln's Inn Fields.

The European Journal of Surgical Oncology (EJSO) was founded in 1975 under the title "Clinical Oncology", at which time it was published by Academic Press (Rew and Taylor 2001); In 1985, it received its present name as a joint venture between the British Association of Surgical Oncology (BASO) and the European Society for Surgical Oncology (ESSO).

Academic Press subsequently merged with the US publisher Harcourt, which incorporated the journals of W. B. Saunders, Academic Press, Churchill Livingstone and Mosby. Harcourt was in turn absorbed into Elsevier BV in the late 1990s. Over this period, the EJSO enjoyed a small number of Editors in Chief who were also Consultant Surgeons and Surgical Oncologists. In sequence, they were Mr Harvey White (1984-1988), Mr Ian Burn (1988-1994), and Professor Irving Taylor (1994-2002).

I was therefore motivated to acquire the skills and knowledge to make the most of this opportunity. There are many routes to editorial appointments, but an apprenticeship of graduated engagement with editorial decision making and systematic teaching provide a strong foundation for effective editorship.

The 1996 BMJ and Lancet Short Course for Medical Editors

In September 1996, I attended the BMJ and Lancet branded residential training course for aspiring academic journal editors. This course was held over three days at the Florence Boot Hall of the University of Nottingham. The course was very valuable and profoundly influential in shaping my understanding and thinking about the responsibilities and strategies of journal editorship.

The course was run by Richard Smith, then editor of the BMJ; by Richard Horton, long time editor of the Lancet; by Tim Albert of TAA Training; by Harvey Marcovitch who was then editor of Archives of Diseases in Childhood, and who went on to be a founder member of the Committee on Publication Ethics, COPE; and by Alex Williamson, who then managed the journals programme for the BMJ Publishing Group. There were 27 attendees. The goal set for the course was to produce editors who had an informed view of the role, and a good command of the core skills.

The course predated digital publishing, the open access era, the challenges of publication ethics and publication malpractice, and the massive expansion in global publishing in many languages over the following decades. Nevertheless, there was much of value in this course on the enduring skills of Editorship which well prepared me and others to become effective editors through the coming changes.

In his introduction to the course, Richard Smith noted that *"most editors of specialist medical journals have had little or no training in editing. One day they are distinguished clinicians and researchers, and then they find themselves editing specialist journals with many manuscripts and large budgets... Editing is a complex and demanding process".*

The course was divided into four key Sections, P.Q.R.S., vis:

- **Publishing**: the role of the editor and the world of publishers;
- **Quality**: dealing successfully with authors;
- **Readers**, and how to meet their needs;
- **Staffing**; getting the best from teams.

SECTION 1 of the BMJ-Lancet Course: Editors as PUBLISHERS

This section addressed the role of the Editor and his or her responsibilities to publishers, authors, readers and staff, setting out strategies for defining their needs, and defining and sustaining the publication, including its academic credibility, its readability and its financial health. The course was primarily focussed upon English language content

The Role of the Editor of an Academic Journal

Richard Smith set out the case for the Editor as leader of the creative team, with ultimate responsibility for the vision, the mission the strategy, and for the outcomes.

Alex Williamson likened the Editor to the conductor of a symphony orchestra, with accountability for all copy and for the policy, aims and scope, and for the selection of the Editorial Board.

Richard Horton triangulated three roles for the editor, as the "Sovereign" of the journal creation process; as the Manager of the process; and as the Entrepreneur with an understanding of the business component of the process. The balance between these roles is further influenced by a series of inherent conflicts between custodianship and innovation; between independence and dependence; between record and opinion in the journal outputs; between conservatism and "creative subversion" in the journal outputs; and between the interests of the profession and the public.

Harvey Marcovitch viewed these conflicts as meeting and balancing expectations:

- in respect of the authors and contributors;
- in respect of the institution, the association or society owners and publishers
- in respect of your own wish to provide an interesting and comprehensible read.

Tim Albert considered a reader-centred model of Editorship, given that communication is successful only if the message gets through to the target audience. This created a feedback loop between the Communicator, the Message and the Audience. He felt that Editors also have to balance an "infernal triangle" of resources, readers and reliability.

The Editorial Leadership Role in the Management of Change

Given the developments in publishing over the three decades after 1996, I would add to this list the skills needed to manage radical change, and the breadth of reading, technical and societal awareness to anticipate, respond, adapt and integrate novel approaches and systems. The education, life experiences and personality of the Editor are therefore also integral to his or her success.

The 1996 course was a product of the analogue age, and of an anglo-centric view of publishing from a medicine and healthcare perspective. I have retained an instructive collection or articles from that era. In a paper entertainingly titled “Journalology- or what editors do”, Jane Smith described in 1990 the process of change at the British Medical Journal over 150 years (Smith J 1996).

It is noteworthy that as late as 1996, journal printing still involved analogue typesetting, as reported by Jane and Richard Smith in a paper on “Preparing the BMJ for the electronic revolution”. (Smith J and Smith R 1996) They noted that “once information is held neutrally (digitally) from the outset, production costs will be dramatically reduced and the use of the material may be transformed. No longer will the “hard copy” be primary or dominant.”

In my subsequent editorial and academic publishing career, I was faced with challenging decisions and interventions in respect of radical changes in publishing models, vehicles, processes and threats, including:

- Internet publishing;
- Electronic manuscript submission and management;
- Open access publishing;
- Publication Ethics and Malpractice as central themes in publishing;
- Bibliometrics and the growth and influence of the major citation systems;
- Immediacy of free-to-use search tools, including Google, Google Scholar and Scimago;
- Globalisation of academic publishing, with growth in non-English language publishing and non-Latin scripts;
- The emergence of machine learning and artificial intelligence inputs and oversights of global publishing outputs.

Section 2 of the BMJ-Lancet Course: Editors and QUALITY

In Section 2 of the Nottingham course, we considered factors that influence the development and sustainment of Quality in journal editing and publishing, including:

- The definition of a journal (which I have introduced earlier in this essay);
- The development and management of a Peer (Referee) Review System;
- The fair management of contributors;
- The definition of an author and the challenges of “Poly-authoritis Giftosa”.

The Peer Review System

Peer reviewing has many recognised flaws and abuses, and it is the subject of a large literature. Nevertheless, Peer Review is a process with many variants which is held to be a hallmark of definition of an academic journal. It has yet to be satisfactorily improved upon, although the re-engineering of peer review has often been explored, as discussed in The Economist in 1996 (Anon 1996)).

It is subject to the opinions and personas of individual reviewers, and to the challenges of finding reviewers who are prepared o review in general or a particular paper. Even where reviewers are commissioned, the quality of reviewing varies considerably, from causal comments to a detailed and rigorous appraisal of the journal.

I do not intend to examine the peer review process in detail in this essay, but I note that editors and not peer reviewers are ultimately responsible for the decision to publish and in what form. Reviewing is primarily an advisory process. Indeed, editors from time to time need to make decisions on the fate of manuscripts directly when trustworthy reviews cannot be sourced.

The Definition of an Author

Authorship is important to individuals and to collectives for attribution, gratification and career purposes. However, authorship also includes guest authors, ghost authors, and paying authors who cannot take public responsibility for the content of a paper, final approval of the paper or provide evidence of involvement. There has been a dramatic growth in the average number of authors per paper across all disciplines, and in some

subject areas authorship runs into the hundreds. In medicine, it has become commonplace for all triallists in any particular clinical study to be offered authorship in exchange for participation and the contribution of patients.

Richard Horton and Richard Smith addressed the complexities of this issue in a paper in the Lancet in March 1996 on “Signing Up for Authorship” (Horton R, Smith R 1996), since when the issues have become even more challenging. George Lundberg and Richard Glass followed this up with an editorial in JAMA in July 1996 which asked “What does Authorship mean in a peer-reviewed medical journal?”(Lundberg and Glass 1996).

There are a number of bibliometric and citation implications that fall out of polyauthorship and of the sequencing of authors. This was highlighted in 1993 by Richard Epstein in the BMJ, on the engaging topic of “Six authors in search of a citation: villains or victims of the Vancouver convention”(Epstein 1993).

The Management of Rejected Authors

A further challenge is the management of rejection of manuscripts. This can be a painful process for the authors and the end of happy relationships between editors and professional colleagues. In general terms, short dismissals of a paper are unwelcome. A detailed explanation is far more helpful to rejected authors. Unfortunately, the Editor is the bearer of the message of rejection to disgruntled authors and colleagues.

Quality in writing and Style Guides

All editors will have personal views on style, textual and grammatical detail in the language of publication. Many of the expectations can be met in the publication by the journal of a Style Guide, which can also set out expectations for reviewers, statisticians and for manuscript checklists. Electronic submission systems have made much of this work more controllable, with checkpoints from which submission cannot proceed until particular questions and formats have been addressed.

Author Misbehaviour, Publication Ethics and Publication Malpractice

The issues of Author Misbehaviour, Publication Ethics and Publication Malpractice have generated much attention and occupied much professional time in modern academic publishing practice. They were less prominent in the 1990s, and they did not feature as a major topic on the 1996 course. Nevertheless, the BMJ and the Lancet had played a major role in drawing attention to a range of ethical misdemeanours and problems through the 1990s, as for example in the matters of illegal share dealing, conflicts of interest and paid for pharmaceutical influence (Freestone and Mitchell 1993, Smith R 1994, Wilkie T 1996, Rew DA 2002). These challenging issues pre-dated the founding of The Committee on Publication Ethics, COPE, to which Harvey Markovitch made a particular contribution. I will return to the issues in future essays.

SECTION 3 of the BMJ-Lancet Course: Editing for Readers

The Focus on the Reader and the Fight for His or Her Attention Span

The attention of readers is critical to the success of any publication, academic or otherwise. We are all bombarded during every waking moment of every day of our lives by efforts to capture our attention, through our visual, auditory and other senses. Professional media, including print (newspapers and magazines), televisual systems and social media platforms have a mastery over the presentation of content which generally eludes the editors and publishers of academic journals.

The human visual system is conditioned to fast scanning and interpretation of visual imagery as a key element of self-preservation in a dangerous natural world. Fast reflexive processing takes place in the hindbrain (occipital cortex) in advance of the much slower higher level cerebration the forebrain (frontal cortex).

Papers with content which are optimised for visualisation and which are written with clear headlines, compact language, keypoints, bulleted lists, subheadings and regular paragraph breaks will invariably win out for the reader's attention over poorly presented material, even where this science of the latter is better.

Most readers will briefly scan the title and abstract of a paper, and only then the introduction, discussion and conclusions. It is therefore in the self interest of all authors and writers to learn to optimise their presentational skills on the (e-)printed page, with tight, concise writing, clarity of content and purpose, and recognition of the primary needs of the visual brain and cortex.

LESS IS MORE in Effective Writing

There is an unfortunate tendency in academic writing to excessive use and misuse of language. This problem is often even more inflated among those who are writing in English as their second language. This style is adopted in the mistaken belief that it confers an aura of cleverness and authority on a manuscript. There are mathematical representations of the complexity and readability of text, including the memorably named Gunning Fog Index. The principle of the Gunning Fog Index is that short sentences written in plain English receive a lower score than longer sentences written in complex language.

The shorter, more concise and readable the content, the greater the interest and impact of the article will be on the reader. Articles which are set out with the generous use of subtitles, short and focussed paragraphs, and a layout which optimises the visual absorption of the content will be more readily absorbed.

The importance of this approach is even greater in the social media age, where messages and memes must be shaped for the maximum impact with the fewest words. Think of the X/Twitter social medium, which limits tweets to 140 characters.

The Art of Precis

The 1996 course also placed considerable emphasis on ensuring the readability and copy editing of articles, which are enduring skills. Generations of British schoolchildren have been taught the art of Precis, which is the skill of reducing and rephrasing bodies of text to their core messages. The writing of an Abstract for a paper is an act of Precis.

Reference Guides to Writing in Plain English

HA.Waldron wrote a polemic on “English as she is wrote” in an Editorial in the Lancet in 1995, and this theme has been a constant in the Plain English Campaign “against gobbledygook, jargon and misleading public information” since the 1970s (Waldron 1995).

There are a number of valuable reference guides to writing in Plain English, including:

- The Complete Plain Words by Sir Ernest Gowers, as regularly republished since 1954;
- The Oxford Guide to Plain English;
- The Economist Style Guide, which emphasises that “Clarity of writing usually follows from clarity of thought”;
- Fowlers Modern English Usage (Oxford University Press);
- George Orwell's essay "The Politics of the English Language" promoted the thesis that vague or meaningless language was intended to hide the truth rather than to express it. Unclear prose is a "contagion" which concealed a writer's thoughts from himself and others.

The Active and Passive Tenses

The active tense (I/We did this) is a far more powerful and direct means of communication than the passive tense (it was done by us).

Richard Smith summarised his rules of clarity for the course attendees as follows:

- Never use a metaphor, simile or figure of speech which you are used to seeing in print;
- Never use a long word or phrase where a short one will do;
- If it is possible to cut out a word, always cut it out;
- Never use the passive when you can use the active tense; As an example, “It is suggested that you should use your ocular capabilities”. This clumsy phrase translates as Look Out!
- Never use a jargon word if you can use an everyday equivalent.

Simplicity and Translation

These rules have become particularly important in the era of machine learning, Artificial Intelligence and Machine Translation, where computers are challenged to translate an article from one language to another. “I bowled a maiden over” or “I hit it for six” are phrases that will be well understood by any English speaking cricket follower, but they will utterly bamboozle in translation a Chinese or Russian reader.

Therefore, a particular skill in scientific and professional writing is to simplify language, much against the advice of our creative writing teachers.

Tim Albert gave a powerful talk on style, highlighting the advice that **Clichéd Phrases** such as "last but not least" "conspicuous by its absence" and "on a temporary basis" should be "avoided like the plague". Every decade throws up new phrases and clichés which have this meaningless and space filling quality, such as "paradigm shift" and "pushing the envelope" (Atkin P 2002).

Tim also highlighted the use of "Perilous Pairs", "Redundancy Situations" and "Inflated Words and Phrases".
Perilous Pairs are similar words with very different meanings, for example nauseous (he makes me feel sick) vs nauseated (he feels sick); affect (influence) vs effect (accomplish), and disinterested (unbiased) vs uninterested.

Redundancy Situations highlight words which duplicate the meaning with redundancy, for example "**few** in number"; "**he** is a man who"; "**old** veterans" and "**solicitor** by occupation".

Inflated Words and Phrases include discontinue (stop), exceedingly (very, owing to the fact that (because)**,** and for the purpose of (to).

However, language and common use evolves constantly, and we have to demonstrate some editorial flexibility in the interpretation of the use of phraseology in manuscripts, so long as clarity of the core themes and ideas is not lost.

Academic Journals and relations with mainstream media

Given that the purposes of an academic journal and a paper are to promote knowledge, journal editors and publishers should be prepared to interact regularly and effectively with the mainstream media. In 1996, this advice was mainly directed to interactions with the printed press as the primary communications media in the pre-internet era. The "Ingelfinger Rule" was created by Dr Franz Ingelfinger, Editor of the New England Journal of Medicine in the 1970s, who mandated that manuscripts would be rejected by the journal if they had

been published elsewhere in advance, as this undermined the newsworthiness and profitability of the journal's outputs (Altman 1996 Parts 1 and 2).

There followed from this concept the News Embargo and the Press Release, which distilled to "gentleman's agreements" not to undercut the journal in exchange for prior access and advance knowledge of a discovery or new finding. The newspaper could then "scoop" the news as soon as the journal had published after the embargoed time point.

Since 1996, the explosion of publication models, journal and publisher web sites, social media platforms, e-print and pre-print servers and the decline of conventional press and media outputs has transformed promotional communications. Nevertheless, the skill of recognising what is newsworthy (de Semir 1996) and targetting the appropriate audience through the appropriate medium remains essential. This applies both at the time of the launch of the message and thereafter in sustaining it in various formats, and in making it as widely as available as possible through Open Access processes.

Communicating Knowledge: the importance of Public Education

The course went on to consider the strategic role of the journal editor in communicating science to the general public and the nurturing of public trust in science, whether in the political arena (Turney 1996), or through television entertainment and high fidelity medical series such as ER, Dr Quinn, Medicine Woman, Chicago Hope or (more recently) House. (Turow 1996).

Conversely, there was reflection on the subversive influence of the media in relation to medical issues; as for example the distorting and populist press coverage of "Gulf War Syndrome" or the claim that the HIV virus had no relationship to AIDS (Radford 1996); and general tensions between Medicine and the Media (Nelkin 1996).

Richard Smith summarised his thoughts on the strategic role of the editor as being prepared into alia to delight readers; to obtain good material for publication; to raise and address obscure issues; to change the balance of discussion and perceptions; and to aim to lead and not to follow (on key issues).

Individual editors have different strategies for securing content. One approach is to be proactive and hustle colleagues, conference attendees or other contacts to write contact through personal connections. However, this approach has a downside in that difficulties arise if you judge the subsequently received content to be substandard for your needs.

This approach has been superceded by the direct email approach, wherein (often suspect) publishers trawl the literature resources and then send out quasi-targeted and flattering emails from large data bases to attract content in exchange for a fee to publish.

I subsequently found that a more effective approach than commissioning material was:
a. to focus on the quality of the received content and make the best of incoming manuscripts through rigorous copy editing, combined with published rules of style, and;
b. to use the peer review process to maximum effect.

More generally, in the internet era, digital optimisation strategies such as an excellent website and aggressive use of social media platforms can generate interest, trust in the title and manuscript flow. There are many other techniques, such as inviting editorship of Special and Themed Issues to tap into specialist expertise and networks.

SECTION 4 of the BMJ-Lancet Course

The Management of People

A journal Editor has to work with a diverse journal production team, which includes:
- Editorial Assistants, who provide administrative and secretarial support, and liaison with authors and reviewers;
- Technical Editors, sub-editors and copy editors
- Product managers, who promote and market the journal
- Production managers
- The Publisher's Managing Editor
- A support services teams, including legal advisors on publishing-related matters.

The Editor's principal interaction will be with the Publisher's Managing Editor, who has overall responsibility for the success and sustainability of the journal, including the performance of the Editor and the Editorial Team.

Much of the routine communications work with authors and reviewers has been automated since the late 1990s, and we can now add the digital professionals, web site managers and software developers who can add value to the product and its digital presentation with innovative functionality.

Time Management

The course also touched upon the importance of good time management. Most editors are busy working professionals for whom their editorial portfolio is only one part of their working lives. Time management skills address the efficient organisation and prioritisation of activities within an individual's personal and working lives, and the stratification of workload once those priorities have been established. The skill of prioritisation allows an Editor to distinguish the critical and time sensitive issues, from the less pressing issues, and to determine those matters which can be delegated to others or eliminated (deleted) from the workload.

Time Management and Computers

The computerisation of our lives has transformed our capacity for productive working since 1996, when working practices were still dictated by paper, face to face meetings and disembodied telephone calls. At the publishing level:

-Electronic editorial and manuscript submission systems have transformed the information flow through the editorial process, and have eliminated much of the manual work in processing the flows.

- Search tools have also made it much easier to find reviewers with the appropriate interests in the subject matter of a manuscript.

- Internet based systems have transformed the distribution, marketing and promotional tools that are available to editorial teams.

- Plagiarism and malpractice detection tools increase the confidence in the quality of the published product.

Importantly, these tools do not as yet transform the quality of the ideas behind a manuscript, or the quality of writing of the manuscript, or the behaviour or the authors, or the willingness of reviewers to engage or turn around reports in a reasonable time frame.

Machine learning and Artificial Intelligence based systems have the potential to make a major contribution to academic publishing. Beyond the obvious opportunities for fakery and forgery of manuscripts and content, many potential benefits are apparent in ethical academic publishing practice, as in:

- The guiding, précis, rewriting, restructuring and/or proofreading of poorly written manuscripts according to the Rules of Plain English or their equivalents in other languages;
- The translation of languages and scripts to aid with the globalisation of content;
- The checking and optimisation of data tables
- The generation of visual representations of the content of the paper;
- The generation of abstracts, key words and key points.

Time Management at the Personal Level

Home and workplace computing has made us much more productive if we chose to be so. Laptop and mobile devices transform "dead time" into productive time, as while travelling or during breaks in professional activities. The use of TEAMS, Zoom and other remote networking systems has minimised the downtime and costs involved in travelling to and from meetings, and has made possible face to face conversations at a distance that would otherwise have been impractical.

The End of the BMJ-Lancet Journal Editors Course

The course had a profound impact on my own understanding of the art of Editorship, and my enhanced confidence in the Journal Editorship role. Sadly, the BMJ-Lancet course was discontinued soon afterwards in its original form, although Tim Albert picked up the task through his company, Tim Albert Training until the early 2000s. He summarised the evolution of the course in an article in Science Editor in 2003 (Issue 26, 6, 201). Tim reflects on his website that:

"One of the early problems was persuading eminent academics that there was anything to learn about being an Editor, and some refused their publishers' suggestion that they attend. But those who did were almost universally enthusiastic. One wrote: 'I came here deeply suspicious of being lectured to but found myself being provoked and stimulated'"

Tim can certainly add my name to those who appreciated the course.

Tim's work was subsequently taken over by Pippa Smart through her company, PSP consulting, and the course survives in a new form under the auspices of the European Association of Science Editors, EASE.

Some of the major publishers have continued to provide editor training resources through their web services. For some years, Elsevier ran in-person Editor's conferences. I was privileged to attend one such conference on June 21-22nd 2003 at the Hotel Fira Palace in Barcelona as one of 75 attendees following my appointment as Editor of the EJSO. However, such conferences were complex to run and were ditched in favour of on-line material.

Elsevier continued to publish advisory booklets for Editors. The 2012 Editor Welcome Pack highlighted the extent to which the publishing context had changed since 1996, with sections on Open Access, Copyright issues, publishing ethics, innovation and online products, the monitoring of journal performance, bibliometrics and systems in support of editors, including Science Direct and SCOPUS. Elsevier maintains an Editor Hub for editorial skills at https://www.elsevier.com/en-gb/editor, and many of the major publishers provide similar information packages.

The EASE Science Editors' Handbook, the most recent version of which was published in 2013, features 56 chapters and covers all aspects of copy editing and running a journal. EASE also publishes European Science Editing, which is a SCOPUS listed journal with a variety of content of interest to journal editors.

The Gratification of Journal Editorship

The pursuit of excellence in Journal Editorship is a formative personal journey. The direct education of respected exponents of the arts and hard won experience from front line editors of the likes of Richard Smith and Richard Horton cannot easily be replicated in on line teaching material.

There is pleasure and reward in the search for clarity and conciseness in the use of language to communicate scientific work. This in turn requires a love and agility in the use of your primary language, which in my own case is of course the English Language.

The successful editorship of a major academic journal requires the disciplined accumulation of a diverse range of skills and personal traits to underwrite the status and influence that comes with the role. In my experience, these are as follows:

A clear understanding of the use of language and imagery to communicate ideas with economy and elegance;

A willingness to challenge orthodoxy in thinking and organisational functions;

A vision for what you wish to achieve, and measures and waypoints to that success;

Clear-sightedness in the pursuit of your aims;

A broad knowledge of the subject area that your journal addresses;

Insight into strategic developments and advances in knowledge in the subject field;

A capacity for lateral and cross-disciplinary thinking;

A clear understanding of the mechanics of publication of your journal in relation to:

- the business model and the ownership of the journal;
- the key personalities with whom you relate, including your business and publishing manager; your Advisory Board, Chair, Members and Associate Editors; your Peer Reviewers; your Authors and your target audience;

You also need to understand:

- Your competition, your opportunities, constraints and risks;
- The Financial disciplines as they affect your publishing business model;
- Technology, Internet, Multimedia as they relate to your publication;
- Publication ethics and the mechanics of publication malpractice;
- Sustainability of the business model and the durability of content, archiving systems;
- An understanding of the wider ecosystem and of bibliometric systems, including SCOPUS and Web of Science listings

These skills are a synthesis of educational and life experiences and in particular of the product of wide and continual general reading outside the particular subject area of the journal.

The Management of Change for the EJSO from 1996 onwards

The BMJ-Lancet course invigorated my interest in the challenges of editing and developing an academic journal. The late 1990s were a period of considerable change in publishing. There were many takeovers and amalgamations among publishers to shake out the inefficiencies in the industry. Computers, web-based information systems and digital publishing tools were on the immediate horizon, and their likely impact on academic publishing was of great interest to me.

Information Technology in the 1990s

In the light of my particular interest in matters digital, I was also invited to take on the new role of Information Technology Editor for the EJSO, and I was increasingly invited to undertake reviews and editing of submitted manuscripts, to the point of being invited to take on a formal role as the Assistant or Deputy Editor. I began to write regularly on the applications of the nascent Internet in academic publishing and its relevance to the EJSO in particular.

The 1990s were a transformative era of global digital experimentation and democratisation, as we moved from the earliest personal computers and copper line telephony to the public internet and the World Wide Web; to the first generation of practical search engines and web browsers; and through early experimentation with websites.

For those whose careers post-date this era, the internet and its infrastructure were still very immature in the mid 1990s. Domestic internet connectivity was limited to ADSL modem connections at up to 50kB per second, and the concept of a web site was still in its infancy.

The Internet suite of TCP/IP protocols had its roots in research and development by the US Defence Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) in the late 1960s, but it was only in 1989 that (Sir) Tim Berners-Lee proposed and implemented the first successful communications of a public information management system using the Hypertext Transfer Protocol (HTTP) between client and server computers via the Internet, and the earliest web browsers were developed.

Thereafter, commercial and domestic digital technology seemed to cycle through a generation of development every year, as faster chips, larger data storage tools and USB communications ports evolved. Google was only officially launched in 1998, displacing an earlier generation of browsers among which Netscape was pre-eminent.

The Digital Foundations of the modern EJSO

In June 1996, I noted for the EJSO Board that the journal website "was buried deep within the site of Harcourt Brace in the WB Saunders section". Nevertheless, it was accessed 850 times between 1st March and 29th August 1996.

In support of my role as Information Technology Editor, I wrote a series of articles for the journal, which Irving Taylor generously published. Rehearsing the articles may be of future interest to students of publishing history, as they in effect map the transition from the analogue to the digital publishing era, and the challenges which it brought.

My first contribution introduced the first website for the journal, **http://www.hbuk.co.uk** **(**Rew, 1996). The weblink is still active for the publishing business Headline Bulletin, which evolved out of Harcourt Brace publishers, and this paper is still referenced on their website! This technology and its potential was all very new and exciting to me, as to others.

It was soon apparent that web publishing was introducing a requirement for a systematic approach to ***scientific citations in the digital age***. I wrote an editorial in which I noted that: *"The increasing intermarriage between the printed page and the electronic screen brings with it problems of citation. Many web sites offer valuable information and documents to download, with greater rapidity and efficiency than the printed page. Indeed, much information is now only available in electronic format, and many journals of reference are experimenting with the presentation of supplementary information in electronic form only.*

Electronic data is more ephemeral than the printed page and more able to be updated frequently, because web sites can easily be modified, reorganized and readdressed. Indeed, we cannot be sure that a whole new form of electronic archiving will not emerge to supersede the current World Wide Web models.

No definitive reference system has yet emerged for electronic information. We must turn to the web itself for guidance. Electronic citations must include the date of accession and sufficient information to track the computer server and the source. Moreover, the citation should be to the printed form of the data wherever possible...

At this stage in the electronic revolution, we encourage you to explore the electronic resources which are so radically and rapidly changing the way in which we seek out, access, record and store the treasure trove of human scientific knowledge"(Rew 1997).

I followed up with two introductory articles in 1997 on the background to the Internet and to the World Wide Web. These were written with the help of Peter Watson, who had built a successful technical consultancy around the internet, MarketBroad Communications Ltd. In the first article, we introduced the concept of clinical networks, and described the technology, definitions and structures (Watson P and Rew D 1997). We noted that *"The European Journal of Surgical Oncology has been an early exponent of intranet technology in the publishing process. Many aspects of the publication process remain manual, including manuscript submission and refereeing. We may expect to move to a more electronic preparation medium in due course".*

In the second article, we considered the World Wide Web standard networks and clinical applications in greater detail, concluding that "the direction and irreversibility of the Internet revolution were now beyond doubt" (Watson P and Rew D 1997b).

I also wrote a series of page filler items on web site reviews under the "Highwayman" moniker, but this exercise soon fizzled out.

I also wrote an introductory paper on the future of information sourcing and resources in the Internet Age with Humphrey Dunn, librarian at Glenfield Hospital, Leicester (Rew and Dunn 1998) to alert our readership to the evidence that *"the information revolution was upon us, and that it had profound implications for our lives*".

In January 1999, Nature journal published a long briefing paper by Declan Butler under the title “The writing is on the Web for Science Journals in Print”, noting that the journal publishing system was increasingly looking like a house in the face of e-publication (Butler 1999).

In 2001, I was able to introduce the EJSO community to the International Digital Electronic Access Library, IDEAL and to the concept of the Digital Object Identifier (Rew 2001). This was provided by our then publisher Harcourt. The Harcourt business incorporated the journals of W. B. Saunders, Academic Press, Churchill Livingstone and Mosby. IDEAL developed as an electronic journal distribution service, IdealFirst, through a consortium licensing programme for more than 1300 institutional users.

I wrote in an Editorial that:

“The internet has transformed the projection of the EJSO. Through the IDEAL website, it can now be assessed instantaneously and worldwide. The success of the journal, the pressure on our publication schedules and the growing demand for electronic pre-publication, encourages our further innovation. The integrity of the EJSO remains founded upon the printed edition. New e-publication methods allow us to unbundle the constituent articles in each issue without compromising the journal.

Our publishers have been innovative in developing and testing an extension of the IDEAL model, IDEALFirst. This allows electronic posting of each and every article as soon as the final proofs of an article have been completed and authorized for publication by the Editorial team. This is usually well in advance of the print issue. Each paper is then published on the IDEAL website, where it can be accessed by IDEAL subscribers, abstracted, indexed and cited with the same copyright status as has the printed version. Publication is not delayed by the preparation of other articles. The printed article appears in the journal in due course.

The Digital Object Identifier, DOI

The key to this process is the development of the Digital Object Identifier, DOI. The DOI is a common and open international collaborative standard. It assigns each electronic item of intellectual property, such as an article, video clip or sound sequence, a unique and permanent identifier code. It differs from an Internet Universal Resource Locator, URL, in that it identifies an object and not a location. This allows articles to be identified and tracked online, and may be used to cite and reference the article. The date of publication is the date of online publication. The DOI mechanism is of profound

value both to publishers and editors, who can identify the electronic use made of each article or item, and the user, who can track down the article of interest regardless of its location or host computer.

IDEAL and IDEALFirst thus dramatically extend the access of the worldwide clinical and scientific community to the work of our authors both in time and place. We are a journal both of reference and communication. We intend that our new initiatives will underpin the dramatic growth in our impact factor and further encourage and support our authors.

IdealFirst becomes ScienceDirect

In 2001, Harcourt was purchased by publishers Reed Elsevier Group plc, so our association with IDEALFirst was brief but instructive. Elsevier had a similar web-facing product, ScienceDirect, into which IDEALFirst was integrated. I wrote in an Editorial in the Journal in December 2002 that:

ScienceDirect is an electronic resource and digital library for the 1500 scientific journals. Some 1500 titles, two million articles and 40 million abstracts are accessible to institutional and individual subscribers, and to occasional users on a fee per item basis. The system thus brings additional resources for investment in the EJSO and utility for our subscribers.

ScienceDirect is also linked to an expanding suite of bibliographic databases; to another one million full text articles owned by collaborating publishers using a system known as CrossRef; to a scientific search engine, scirus.com; to a series of major reference works with full text access; and to subject collections with direct links between texts, abstracts and references.

The introduction of ejso.com

The EJSO will also remain accessible on the IDEAL website for the time being, and directly through our newly listed Internet address, ejso.com. As with IDEALFirst, our articles will be available in citable electronic form following acceptance and proof preparation, and in advance of print publication. The journal remains focused on a strategy of providing a worldwide reach for scientific publication across the many inter-related disciplines of cancer surgery. Our accessibility on the Internet enhances our appeal and our usefulness to our readers and authors. The electronic revolution goes on.

Electronic Manuscript Submission

In August 2002, Jane Smith published an editorial in the BMJ, which announced the introduction of electronic manuscript submission to the BMJ, through a system from Highwire Press. The benefits of such a system in eliminating the costs, delays and general inefficiencies of the submission, management and tracking of manuscripts on a global basis were clearly set out. The system included Medline linkage to create click through functionality from references to abstracts and full text papers (Smith J 2002). Concurrently, Elsevier was developing the similarly functional Elsevier Editorial System (EES) for EJSO use.

The Website of the Journal

By late 2002, the website of the journal was well established but it was an under-developed marketing adjunct within the Science Direct ecosystem. Journal websites have since developed to play a central role in the life of the journal, as evidenced by the EJSO website in 2025 at https://www.ejso.com/.

My Appointment to the Editorship in 2002

In May 2002, Irving Taylor invited me to take on a more senior executive role in the management of the Journal, in anticipation of his retirement from the role, and we discussed the reorganisation of the Editorial Board.

Peter Harrison, the new Senior Publishing Editor of the EJSO for Elsevier, announced the advertisement of the post on 20th August in a range of Elsevier journals, with a view to interview in November 2002. I submitted an application with a detailed “manifesto” of my assessment of the journal and its future opportunities and challenges.

On 15th November 2002, the interview for the post of new Editor in Chief of the EJSO was held at the Harcourt Place offices in London. My appointment to the post was confirmed and I received a generous welcome to the post from Professor Niall O’Higgins and other colleagues.

In the next essay in this series, I will describe my experiences, actions lessons learned in office as the Editor of the EJSO from January 2003 to December 2009.

Summary

The successful Editorship of an academic journal demands a range of skills which require consideration and preparation. Among the many attributes of Editorship to consider:

- Editorship exercises character, leadership, personality and vision alongside technical knowledge of the processes of publication.

- Editorship carries moral and ethical responsibilities to the quality and trustworthiness of knowledge which may conflict with other demands on the Editor's judgement.

- It can be challenging to find the relevant education and experience.

- Reviewing and Associate Editorial roles allow the aspiring editor to observe and learn about the editorial process at close quarters.

- The affiliation to journals which are backed by major publishers and which provide career development and educational resources and opportunities is advantageous.

The publishing world is in a state of continual flux, about which the aspiring editor must be aware and forward thinking. The 1990s and 2000s were characterised by an epochal transition from paper to digital primacy in publishing. Artificial intelligence now opens up whole new vistas in publication

These include developments in publication fraud and its detection; in the management, interpretation and repackaging of information for novel purposes; and in machine translation from any language and script to any other language and script. This will transform the globalisation of publishing by removing many practical barriers to the flow of knowledge, and to the optimisation of content, and to its presentation. Editors must be prepared.

The aspiring Editor should therefore read widely and think laterally about technology and about the challenges to the publishing art, both current and for up to a decade ahead.

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Appendix 1.

Chronology of my engagement with the Editorial Board of the EJSO, 1995-2002

(From papers in my personal archive).

1995

In February 1995, I began to review papers for the Eur J Surg Oncol (The Journal).

1996

Professor Les Hughes (Cardiff) handed on the Chairmanship of the Eur J Surg Oncol Board to Professor Joop A van Dongen (1930-2022) of the Netherlands Cancer Institute, with effect from September 1996.

On 7th May 1996, Professor Irving Taylor invited me to become an Associate Editor of the Journal, with responsibility for the new Information Technology Brief.

On Sept 5th 1996, The Editorial Board met at the University of Dublin during the ESSO meeting, hosted by Professor Niall O'Higgins.

In the first week of October 1996, I attended the Lancet-BMJ Editors course at the University of Nottingham.

On Thurs 12th December 1996, the EJSO Board met in London. The most recent Impact Factor was 1.02. I introduced the concepts of electronic MS submission and prepublication to the Board, and proposed a new strategy to reduce the large number of case reports.
The journal accepted 94 of 170 submitted manuscripts during 1996.

1997

On 19th June, the Board met at the Royal Society of Medicine in London. Website access had increased to 1295 visits by late May.

On 14th September, the Board met during the ECCO Meeting at the Intercontinental hotel in Hamburg. Access to the website had increased to 6000 visits.

On December 12th, The Board met at the Royal Society of Medicine in London. I introduced the Board to the IDEAL consortium, which would put the full text of the journal on-line.

On 17th December, I was invited by Graeme Poston (Liverpool), the then National Secretary of BASO, to take on the role of Editorial Secretary and representative of the EJSO on the BASO National Committee.

169 papers were submitted during 1997, of which 81 were accepted.
The Impact Factor was 0.7, with 962 citations, and the journal ranked 61/113 in Surgery

1998

On 3rd June, the Board met in Lausanne, Switzerland. The IDEAL model was accepted, subject to further investigation of the financial implications for BASO and ESSO.
On 11th December, The Board met at the Royal Society of Medicine in London

1999

Discussions continued on the appropriateness of the IDEAL model through 1999.
A decision was made to increase the publication frequency to 8 issues per annum to accommodate a substantial increase in the publishable manuscripts.

2000

On 6th April, The Board met in Groningen during the ESSO Congress.

On 18th April, I proposed a modification of the title from the European Journal of Surgical Oncology to the EJSO, both for marketing purposes and to reflect the growth in non-European content. On 17th May, Irving Taylor wrote to say that this proposal had been unanimously accepted by the Board.

On 26th September, we discussed raising the publication frequency to 12 issues per annum.
On 15th November, Joop Van Dongen supported Irving Taylor's proposal that I be promoted to Deputy Editor of the EJSO to take on a greater share of the workload.

On 7th December 2000, the Board met at the Elsevier Offices in Harcourt Place, London. IDEALfirst had been adopted and was seeing around 100 full article downloads per month. 118 of 302 submitted manuscripts during 2000 had been accepted for publication.

2001

On Friday 4th May 2001, The Board met at the Elsevier Offices at Harcourt Place, London. The proposed merger of Harcourt and Reed Elsevier was introduced. Professor Niall O'Higgins succeeded to Professor Van Dongen as Chairman of the Board.

On 22nd October, The Board met in Lisbon during the European Conference on Clinical Oncology (ECCO 11) Conference. The Impact Factor for 2000 was reported as 1.43.

2002

On 17th April 2002, The Board met in Lille during the ESSO Conference.
We were notified of the move of the office functions to Elsevier offices near Oxford.

On 15th November 2002, I was appointed to succeed Irving Taylor to the Editorship.