

Greetings from the new Editor-in-Chief

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EDITORIAL

Greetings from the new EIC

On 1 January 2004 I will be assuming the position of Editor-in-Chief of *Journal of Physics A: Mathematical and General* (*J. Phys. A*). I am flattered at the confidence expressed in my ability to carry out this difficult job and I will try hard to justify this confidence.

The previous Editor-in-Chief, Ed Corrigan, has worked tirelessly for the last five years and has done an excellent job for the journal. Everyone at the journal is profoundly grateful for his leadership and for his achievements.

Before accepting the position of Editor-in-Chief, I visited the office of *J. Phys. A* to examine the organization and to assess its strengths and weaknesses. This office is located at the Institute of Physics Publishing headquarters in Bristol. *J. Phys. A* has been expanding rapidly and now publishes at the rate of nearly 1000 articles (or about 14,000 pages) per year. The entire operation of the journal is conducted in a very small space—about 15 square metres! Working in this space are six highly intelligent, talented, hard working, and dedicated people: Neil Scriven, Publisher; Mike Williams, Publishing Editor; Rose Gray and Sarah Nadin, Publishing Administrators; Laura Smith and Steve Richards, Production Editors. In this small space every day about eight submitted manuscripts are downloaded from the computer or received in the post. These papers are then processed and catalogued, referees are selected, and the papers are sent out for evaluation. In this small space the referees' reports are received, publication decisions are made, and accepted articles are then published quickly by IOPP. The whole operation is amazingly efficient. Indeed, one of the great strengths of *J. Phys. A* is the speed at which papers are processed. The average time between the receipt of a manuscript and an editorial decision is under sixty days. (Many distinguished journals take three to five times this amount of time.) This speed of publication is an extremely strong enticement for submitting papers to *J. Phys. A*.

In addition to the office staff, the journal has two assets of enormous value. First, there is the pool of referees. It is impossible to have an academic system based on publication of original ideas without peer review. I believe that when one submits papers for publication in journals, one assumes a moral responsibility to participate in the peer review system. A published author has an obligation to referee papers and thereby to keep the scientific quality of published work as high as possible. In general, referee reports that are submitted to scientific journals vary in quality. Some referees reply quickly and write detailed, careful, and helpful reports; other referees write cursory reports that are not useful. Over the years *J. Phys. A* has amassed an amazingly talented and sedulous group of referees. I thank the referees of the journal who have worked so hard and have contributed their time without any expectation of financial compensation. I emphasize that the office tries hard to avoid overburdening referees. Sending back a quick and detailed response does not increase the likelihood of the referee receiving another paper to evaluate. (A number of people have told me that they sit on and delay the refereeing of papers in hopes of reducing the number of papers per year that they receive to referee. The office at *J. Phys. A* works to make this sort of strategy unnecessary.)

The second asset is the Board of Editors and the Advisory Panel. For some journals membership on the Board of Editors is a sinecure. However, the 37 members of the Board of Editors and the 50 members of the Advisory Panel of *J. Phys. A* have been chosen

not only because they are distinguished mathematical physicists but also because of their demonstrated willingness to work hard. Six members of the Board of Editors are designated as Section Editors: H Nishimori, Tokyo Institute of Technology, Japan (Statistical Physics); P Grassberger, Bergische Universität GH Wuppertal, Germany (Chaotic and Complex Systems); F W Nijhoff, University of Leeds, UK (Mathematical Physics); G Ghirardi, Università di Trieste, Italy (Quantum Mechanics and Quantum Information Theory); G Dunne, University of Connecticut, Storrs, USA (Classical and Quantum Field Theory); and L Turner, Los Alamos National Laboratory, NM, USA (Fluid and Plasma Theory). It will be an honour and a pleasure to work together with all these talented people towards the high-minded goal of running a world-class scientific journal.

As Editor-in-Chief of *J. Phys. A*, my principal objective will be to raise the standards of this first-rate journal to even higher levels by raising the quality of accepted papers. I do not believe that this goal will be too difficult to accomplish. The journal already has a rejection rate of over 50%, but because the rate of paper submission is rising extremely rapidly, I anticipate that we will reject up to 25% more papers next year. A letter has already been sent to referees urging them to raise their standards for acceptance. I believe we will make rapid progress in this direction. (I have heard a few people criticize the journal for being a 'write-only' journal. My goal is for the worldwide community of mathematical physicists to view *J. Phys. A* as essential reading.)

I am extremely optimistic about the future of *J. Phys. A*. I believe that we will raise the standards of acceptance while maintaining the short time from submission to decision. I am confident that we will continue to improve the quality of the papers published in this already first-class journal. I look forward to working with the journal's excellent staff, the Board of Editors, and the Advisory Panel.

Carl Bender

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Editor-in-Chief