

LLC Editor's Report

ALLC Committee Meeting, December 2002

1. General issues

The Journal is running reasonably well at the moment. Submissions are good, and we are getting back on schedule after slipping back a little earlier this year. I continue to be very happy with the two reviews editors. There were some problems with editorial changes at OUP that I reported upon at the July meeting. Things are improved as we now have our former editor, Brenda Betteridge, back with us. However, Brenda retires in January and I am not sure what the situation will be then.

2. Publication of the journal

At the April committee meeting, I reported that I had been approached by Philip Joseph of Blackwells, our former managing editor at OUP, suggesting that Blackwells might be able to offer us a better publication service. The committee mandated that I and one or more of the Officers pursue this possibility and report back. Harold, Jean and I have met with Philip, and Jean and I had a full meeting with the editorial, production and marketing team at Blackwells in November. Philip has now produced a draft proposal of what Blackwells could offer us, which is very impressive (see proposal as circulated. Please note that this is confidential to the Committee and the editorial team only).

I would now like to propose formally to the Committee that the publication of the Journal be put out to tender, and that OUP be notified of this decision by 31 December, as required by our contract with them. OUP and Blackwells should be invited to tender, and we should write an Invitation to Tender that invites their response to certain key requirements. Blackwells can offer a range of membership services such as we have envisaged but never managed to achieve with OUP, and a great deal of the burden of serving members would be taken from us by Blackwells. Also, Blackwells' on-line publishing facilities are interesting. Their merger with Blackwells Scientific has meant that their humanities journals can now be exposed to some of the innovative publishing technologies developed for the sciences. As you will see from p.5 of the proposal, Blackwells have set up a free trial subscription to their Synergy system for the Committee to try. See also pp. 6-7 for some initiatives they are taking in providing subject-specific portals for Associations, which I think would be very exciting for ALLC on its own, but no less so in the context of the wider collaborations currently under discussion.

We are assured by Blackwells that, should we decide to make the transition, they will do everything in their power to ensure that there is as little disruption for members as possible. The design will remain the same; all that will change will be the publisher's name and some addresses. The other thing that will not change, except possibly for the better, will be the revenue stream. We are assured of at least as good a deal as with OUP, but with better marketing, so that at worst revenue would stay the same, but we would hope for an increase.

Of particular interest to me as editor are the portals described above and the Electronic Editorial Office service that they offer (see p. 11), which would allow me to set up a full submission and reviewing process on line.

I have explored very carefully the implications of going to tender in this way, in particular with reference to our current arrangement with OUP. Jean, Harold and I have been reviewing the contractual position, and if

we were to move the journal to a different publisher we would have to make a payment to purchase the OUP share of its accumulated "goodwill". Initial estimates suggest this would be of the order of 20-25k, and the Committee would need to take into account the implications of this.

Apparently, it is a normal process for associations to review publication of their journals in this way, and the risk that OUP will not wish to re-tender is probably minimal. It is a profitable journal and they will want to keep it. So whatever we ultimately decide, my view is that we will end up with a better service for members: this should act as a wake-up call for OUP. Things have been a bit messy with them for a while, with a number of editorial changes, and I am concerned that we are losing our one point of continuity in January.

There will be a considerable amount of work involved in effecting the change, much of which will be done by the editorial team and the Officers. I am very excited at the possibility of making some changes, and am prepared to do whatever it takes to make the journal a better resource for our members.

Marilyn Deegan
Dec 2002