

Mini-profile:

a day in the life of a journal publisher



ANDREW WRAY

Group Publisher, Institute of Physics Publishing

I work as a group publisher in the journals publishing department at Institute of Physics Publishing (IOP) and look after the *Journal of Physics* series and our two open access titles *New Journal of Physics* and *Journal of Physics: Conference Series*. The journals have fully electronic processes with correspondence arriving via e-mail or the author and referee web pages. Both peer review and production are handled from our Bristol offices and so everyone's day begins with the new requests, reports and submissions that arrived overnight. I start with my own mail and then handle queries passed on by colleagues in the *Journal of Physics* group. The publisher, production editor and publishing administrator for each journal sit next to each other and so there are frequent discussions about copy flow, special issues, urgent papers or how to coax a referee report from a particular editor.

The major part of my job is to plan and implement development strategies for each journal along with the individual publishers. As well as

handling new issues and questions each morning we have regular meetings, often with the sales, marketing, production or IT departments. I'll try to describe some of the work that comes out of these meetings with respect to editorial boards, conferences, ethics and training.

Each journal has a scientific editorial board responsible for peer review, quality and development. The boards meet once or twice a year at conferences or in London and for much of the year I will be either preparing for or following up one of these meetings. There are a few days' work preparing reports on trends in submissions, subscriptions, downloads and citations. Then the publisher and I will write proposals on new marketing plans, article types, the latest scientific developments or measures to address the quality or time of refereeing. Each journal has its own needs and the reports and proposals are tailored to that academic community. *Journal of Physics* meetings take place in March and October, with preparation in the month before and follow-up



Andrew with fellow participants at the American Physical Society conference last March

the month after to ensure that actions are taken.

I attend several large general conferences each year to meet people from as many disciplines as possible. A typical day will involve some element of planning for these events – it's no use just turning up, mounting the display and waiting for punters to arrive! In the month before each conference I will review travel plans, study the conference programme and set specific objectives, often in conjunction with marketing and publishing colleagues. Next come a couple of afternoons sending e-mails to arrange meetings, and trying to improve on replies such as, "I'll see you during one of the coffee breaks". Once at the conference we assess the layout and organization at the venue. If the coffee is served at a distance from the exhibits then can we move, or distribute materials in the coffee area? Are there social events at which to exhibit? How are participants moving through the building and where are the best places to meet them? I hope to meet as many people as possible, keep my physics knowledge up to date and commission some new articles. After the conference there may be jet lag and e-mail lag, but within a week it's important to thank people for their time and act on any requests or suggestions.

A couple of years ago I volunteered to draft an ethical policy for IOP journals and have since found myself offering regular advice on ethical problems. Fortunately, fraudulent results are very rare but accusations of plagiarism or authorship disputes crop up most months. It is interesting but

time-consuming to work out exactly what has happened, establish IOP's responsibilities and limitations, and what action we should take. Both scientists and journals depend upon their reputation so we are very careful before reaching positive or negative conclusions about an individual or a piece of work.

The journals publishing department often employs people who have recently graduated or left research. Basic training is provided within each group of journals and I organize a series of skills lunches where an in-house expert leads an informal discussion of some aspect of the publishing industry. I'll spend time persuading speakers to come forward and agreeing content with other experienced staff. Both old and new staff may attend (the free lunch is a great attraction) and a recent event led to a lively discussion on different ways to run editorial board meetings, handling talkative and untalkative board members, and building team spirit.

Responsibility for IOP's two open access journals involves me in many discussions of OA, institutional repositories and preprints. It doesn't feature in my work every day of the week, though it does sometimes seem that way! You might think that working alongside the physics preprint server and running an OA journal for six years would give IOP the experience to answer all the questions. However, even the terminology of OA is often debated. Each week I spend some time reading new documents, considering other publishers' activities, or trying to understand the views of

fundings and scientists in different disciplines. I am currently involved in a NISO Working Group on naming and metadata for journal article versions, and recently reviewed the relation between IOP's journals and institutional repositories (for example, requesting links to the version record in a journal).

The typical day varies through the year as we move through spring and autumn board meeting seasons, Easter and summer conferences, budgeting

rounds and planning times. It's certainly fun trying to keep abreast of research across the whole of physics, and it's a challenge persuading the best authors to choose our journals and provide them with ever-improving publication services. (The status quo is never enough!) I often end the day with a little 'light surfing', reminding myself of what our web site looks like, checking out new services (such as the ALPSP award winners) or simply reading the science news.