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Editorial 2019: is patience a virtue we are progressively losing?

Stuart N. Lane

For this year, I thought I would develop an argument centred on the need to take time. A young colleague once asked me, generically and not with respect to *Earth Surface Processes and Landforms*, why journals take so long to handle papers? For those who can remember the pre-electronic submission days (we began to go electronic in 2005), current times to first decision (at ESPL our median varies between 50 and 60 days) seem remarkably rapid. Then, postal services moved our manuscripts around the world, at submission to the editorial office, from the office to reviewers, back to the editorial office and then back to the authors. Most manuscripts spent some weeks in the postal system. It was not surprising that, when we introduced electronic manuscript submission, our times to first decision more than halved. Nowadays, for 4 to 5 months, read 1 to 2 months. Yet still we seem to be dissatisfied and want even more rapid turnaround.

As an Editorial Board, we do reflect on the options available to us to respond to such demand. We have considered reducing the time allowed to review a paper from 4 weeks to 3 weeks but this can have unintended consequences, in requiring more time to find willing reviewers (our record is now 20 approaches before we could find two). We also want reviewers to have the time to do their job, that is to make sure the work being presented reaches required standards and that advice is given to authors on how to improve the quality of submitted work. We wonder if our pre-submission checks could be shortened (every paper is checked for plagiarism, its history prior to submission, its basics standards of writing and presentation, its fit to the journal, and the extent to which the paper is likely to meet our policies on quality and importance). Such checks serve the community of reviewers (and authors) by weeding out those papers that won't make it before they are reviewed. Every time we think about our manuscript handling times, we come back to the conclusion that a target of 50 days from receipt to first decision is about as good as is reasonably possible. This is a target as, in the end, how long it takes to make a decision is controlled by people over whom we have little control, our reviewers. But it is our reviewers who are integral to making sure that we publish work of the highest quality.

Whilst the academy may still be enamoured by its research metrics, there is a growing call for us to focus on quality and not quantity (see, for example, the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment), and ESPL's focus is fully on quality. So, my message for this year is a reminder that in choosing ESPL as the journal to submit your article, you are choosing a journal that emphasises quality and not quantity. Securing this quality can sometimes take some time and, whilst we will do our best to get a first decision to you as quickly as we can, this may occasionally require some patience.

The journal remains busy in terms of submissions and I remain ever grateful to my editorial team. This year we have three Associate Editors, Chris Houser, Larissa Naylor and Heather Viles, who reach the end of their term of service with us. I would like to thank them for their hard work for the journal over the last 5 years. Larissa and Heather occupied a jobshare position which was an experiment that worked well and which we will support in the future. I would like to welcome two new Associate Editors who will replace them. Jo Nield, of the University of Southampton, will join us to cover Aeolian processes as well as "soft" coasts, areas where we continue to receive many submissions. Vincent Regard, of the Université Paul Sabtier,

Toulouse, will join us to assist with papers relating to “hard” coasts and weathering. He will bring additional expertise in relation to geochronology which is an important part of what we do. I hope that both of them will enjoy their time with us.

Finally, I would like to thank the team that supports the running of the journal, and notably Assistant Editor Fiona Kirkby, whose wisdom and efficacy in handling our papers remains a critical contribution to the journal’s success.