

Interim Editors' report

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When the interim editorial team took over from the former Editors in September 2002, there were many aspects of the production and editing process for us to understand. This initial period also involved setting up a new system of administration that would clearly track all correspondence with authors and reviewers.

Of the new papers received since September 2002, two-thirds were submitted by female first authors. Forty per cent of the papers received were from NSW, 22% were from Queensland, 18% were from Victoria, 14% were from Western Australia, 2% were from South Australia, and there was one paper each from New Zealand and Canada. This may reflect recent strengths in NSW, but could also indicate a wide variation between years. A quick check of the State given for the corresponding author in papers published in 2001 indicates that 31% were from Victoria, 23% were from other countries, 18% were from NSW, 14% were from Western Australia and the rest from Queensland, South Australia, ACT and Northern Territory.

Of the new papers received 26% were rejected, 26% were published, 10% have been accepted, 8% are with authors for revision and 30% are being reviewed. None had lapsed or been withdrawn. An overview of the status of all papers with the Journal up to 30 April 2003 is presented in Table 1. It is apparent that the rejection rate for new papers has increased (to 26%) and this is consistent with the editorial aim of improving the standard of the Journal. It is also apparent that far fewer papers have lapsed or been withdrawn.

Table 1: Status of all papers received by HPJA September 2002 to 30 April 2003.

Status	At 30 April 2003 (%)
Rejected	17
Lapsed	16
Withdrawn	7
Published	35
In administration	3
Accepted for future issue	8
With authors for revision	4
With reviewers who are late	3
With reviewers within time	8
Total	100

Guidelines for Journal reviewing

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All peer-reviewed journals are absolutely dependent on the quality of the reviews of submitted manuscripts by volunteer reviewers. While editors make an initial assessment of the relevance to readers of a manuscript as well as ensure general writing standards are met, it is the independent reviewers who give detailed feedback about the content, methodology, conclusions and significance to health promotion. Reviewers also give advice to the editors on whether a manuscript should be accepted for publication, revised, or rejected (in their view). Editors then make a decision about the fate of a manuscript and this decision is often, but not always, consistent with the recommendation of reviewers.

The review process of the *Health Promotion Journal of Australia* has been 'single blinded' in the sense that authors do not know the identity of reviewers, but the identity of the authors has been known to the reviewers. The Journal is moving to 'double blind', where neither authors nor reviewers know each others' identities, although in practice the authors can often be deduced from the content and setting being described. Similarly, reviewers can sometimes be identified by the type of remarks they make about a manuscript.

While the different review processes have recognised weaknesses, peer assessment remains the best approach to screening articles for inclusion or exclusion.

Our experience of the publishing process, as readers, authors, reviewers and editors, is that reviewing is at least as technical a process as writing. However, the skills of reviewing have no formal training program and are often acquired through experience. New reviewers typically report that they found the process very rewarding or very taxing (and sometimes both!). The insights into the publishing process help them understand how their own writing is assessed. Exposure to new material helps keep the reviewer up-to-date with developments in the field. Recognition as a reviewer is an element of professional contribution that can be part of applications for promotion.

What can be done to support reviewers in their critical role in assessing manuscripts? There is a flip side to this question because if authors know the criteria by which their manuscript will be appraised, then they can write in such a way as to address these criteria and therefore improve the standard of their submitted manuscript. When asked to review a manuscript, potential reviewers are provided with a general checklist of what to consider. These include:

- Is the paper relevant to the wider issues of health promotion?