

Quo vadis EPL?

With effect of January 1st, 2007 ‘Europhysics Letters’ was renamed, the new branding being ‘EPL’. Along with this formal change went a new vision and definition for the aims of EPL over a time horizon of five years. These goals are (i) to increase the number of submissions from 1387 articles in 2006 to over 3000 articles, (ii) to decrease the acceptance rate for manuscripts from 46% in 2006 to about 33% and, allowing for a two-year delay, (iii) to raise the impact factor from 2.2 in 2006 to 3.5 by increasing visibility and prestige. These aims are ambitious. Accordingly, a strategy promising success was required.

As a first measure, the spectrum of Europhysics Letters in terms of the categories defined by the “Physics and Astronomy Classification Scheme” (PACS) was compared to other international broad-band letters journals. This showed that EPL has an appropriate fraction of publications in “Condensed Matter” sciences (PACS 60 & 70) and in “Electromagnetism, Optics, Acoustics, Heat Transfer, Classical Mechanics, and Fluid Dynamics” (PACS 40). EPL is strong in “General Physics” (PACS 00) and in “Interdisciplinary Research” (PACS 80). Rather than aiming at a reduction of the latter two topics it was decided to consider these strengths as an EPL fingerprint. The other five PACS categories, however, showed deficiencies, which we have decided to strengthen by appropriate promotion of the journal in the respective science communities.

Our first promotion campaign focused on “Plasma Physics” (PACS 50). Advertising EPL in the plasma-physics community consisted of “An invitation to submit your work” disseminated by the Plasma Physics Division of EPS, the placement of EPL flyers in the delegate bags of the EPS Conference on Plasma Physics in Crete in 2008, additional visibility from prominent displays of EPL PowerPoint slides during the event, further promotion from the EPL Executive Editor present on the exhibit stand, and, last but not least, by the appointment of additional Co-Editors. The results of these efforts are an increase in published papers in plasma physics from 13 (26) in 2006 to 32 (60) in 2008. The numbers in parentheses refer to the number of submissions and the figures for 2008 are extrapolations from the status of November 15th. The 2008 figures thus show that EPL’s deficiency in plasma physics is gradually being eliminated, although further growth in this rapidly developing area is desirable!

A second positive development concerns “Geophysics” (PACS 90). With the appointment of Rudolf Treumann as the only responsible Co-Editor for this PACS category, we tried another concept of promotion. A letter from the Editor-in-Chief announcing this appointment was posted to the peer group of Treumann. Near the end of 2008 the article balance is the following: 7 (24) in

2006 and 16 (48) in 2008. Again, this is very satisfactory and, in fact, corresponds to the targeted increase.

A deficiency still remains in “Particles and Fields” (PACS 10), “Nuclear Physics” (PACS 20), and “Atomic and Molecular Physics” (PACS 30). Analysis of the publication situation within high-energy particle (HEP) physics revealed immediately, that soliciting papers from this community had little chance of success, unless accompanied by an offer for open-access publishing. Faced with the alternative of either abandoning publications in high-energy particle physics or to move towards an open access scheme, the EPL Association Board of Directors made a first positive decision for an open access opportunity in May 2007. The matter was further clarified in November 2007: EPL now offers open access publication for all PACS categories on the basis of an “author pays” model with effect from February 2008. In the meantime, the market in high-energy particle physics had moved ahead, and this has made it necessary to take a further step. With effect of November 1st, 2008, EPL now offers open-access publication free of charge for experimental as well as theoretical letters to the high-energy particle physics communities. This offer will remain available until SCOAP3 (the Sponsoring Consortium on Open Access Publishing in Particle Physics) becomes operational, and covers the publication costs. We now believe to be well positioned in the market, and hope that this will be reflected in an increase in the number of submissions in PACS 10 & 20. Promotion of this new opportunity has been announced on CERN and other HEP facility sites and circulated to all participants at the recent “Physics at the LHC” conference in Croatia, at which EPL material and the Executive Editor were present.

Advertising EPL within the atomic and molecular physics community also began in 2008 with EPL flyers being placed in delegate bags to both the ESCAMPIG and EGAS conferences, in addition to EPL presentations and exhibits of promotional material at the Users’ meetings of several European synchrotrons. EPL sponsorship has also been given to the UK Synchrotron Users’ event for the past two years.

Overall the number of publications in EPL has increased from 638 (1387) in 2006 to 810 (1860) in 2008 with an acceptance rate of 44 %, decreasing from earlier values. The increase of submissions and publications indicates initial success of our promotional efforts. The acceptance rate on the other hand is still far from the targeted value of 33 % and certainly needs closer attention.

A rather unique feature of EPL is that the Co-Editors are well-known active scientists. They are autonomous in the accept/reject decision for each manuscript and can ask for the number of referee reports they deem necessary. This also includes publication without review by an external referee; in this case the paper is published with the addition “accepted by – name of co-editor”. This

does in fact happen, though rarely for the time being. In view of the central role of the Co-Editors in the publication process, the Editor-in-Chief takes great care in selecting persons for replacement or expansion of the Editorial Board. Due to the continued growth of the journal, expansion of the Board is an urgent necessity. The most important criterion for membership in the Editorial Board is scientific excellence. Geographical coverage is used sometimes as a secondary criterion that has led to an appropriate fraction of appointments of Co-Editors working in the United States and in Canada. This is a further improvement over the previous composition and more closely reflects the geographical distribution of manuscript submissions.

EPL also has an Advisory Board. Over the course of the past eighteen months the role and responsibilities of members of this Board have been redefined. Their duties now include: deputising for the Editor-in-Chief in cases of absence or conflict of interest, acting as adjudicator in appeal cases, selecting EPL papers for highlighting in EPN, checking comments and replies on their validity, and assisting the Editor-in-Chief with the selection of new Co-Editors. These tasks now ensure a very active role of the Advisory Board in the daily life of EPL.

Moreover, the members of the Editorial and Advisory Boards have contributed to the promotion of EPL by publishing more of their own work in the journal, thus underlining the fact that EPL promotion is a multi-faceted effort. Seeing some response to these measures suggests that we are on the right track. This is also met with great satisfaction by the EPL management team, which wholeheartedly collaborates in the effort to further raise the standing of EPL in the eyes of the general physics community.

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