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**Editors’ Report**

We have now almost completed our third year as editors – which will be our last full year as we will be handing over to new editors at some point in 2017. As observant readers will note, we have had a slight change of editorial team. Carina Girvan joined the new editorial team of BJET (the British Journal of Educational Technology), which is also in the BERA portfolio. In her place, we have been lucky enough to be joined by two colleagues – William Baker (a sociologist of education whose work focuses broadly on educational inequality, culture, social class and aspirations) and Peter Hemming (a sociologist and human geographer with interests in schooling, faith-based education, childhood/youth, identity and citizenship and qualitative research methods).

We have really enjoyed editing BERJ – it gives a wonderful opportunity to appreciate and shape (albeit in a small way) the wide field of educational research. We continue to be impressed by the scholarship and imagination of many of the articles submitted and hope we have provided you with an interesting diet. We have tried to ensure that we have included a spectrum of excellent research which covers different phases (from pre-school to higher and adult education), different disciplines and methodological approaches. We also try to ensure that every article speaks to issues that are of international concern.

One of the issues that is facing the educational research community is the ongoing debate about the ‘usefulness’ of our research for policy-makers and practitioners. Last year’s volume of BERJ concluded with Professor Gemma Moss’s excellent BERA Presidential Address. Through a compelling analysis of the development of literacy policy in England, she maps out the complex terrain of the ‘knowledge landscape’. She argues that we need to find more profitable ways of working across the current division of labour epitomised by the policy-research-practice relationship – but in ways which do not compromise the complexity of the research process and research findings.

We believe that BERJ (and BERA) has an important role to play in contributing to debates in this areas – and are confident that the research we disseminate in this Journal is both complex and ‘useful’. As the following sections outlines, BERJ continues to increase its influence and reach.

**Impact Factor**

We all know that these kinds of indices are problematic, but we also know that they do matter. Maintaining a high Impact Factor means that we will continue to attract high quality submissions from around the world. Indeed, we have heard of some institutions that will only acknowledge articles that are placed in journals with an Impact Factor greater than 1. So, whatever our own personal feelings about these kinds of metric, they cannot be ignored.

We are delighted, therefore, to report that the 2-year and 5-year Impact Factors for BERJ have risen in the latest figures for 2015. In particular, the 2-year Impact Factor has increased from 0.891 in 2014 to 1.124 in 2015. What is even more pleasing is that this is based on the highest number of papers published during a year in the history of the Journal; in 2015 we published 58 citable items. This now places BERJ as the highest ranking non-specialist education journal in the UK, and 80th out of all 230 (and US-dominated) education journals. However, just over 60% of papers published in BERJ are not cited within two years of being published. While this does not reflect how influential or well-read our papers are, this figure is quite high. For our ‘sister’ journal in the US, the American Educational Research Journal, this figure is below 30%. It is still incumbent on us all, therefore, to ensure that the articles we publish continue to demonstrate originality, significance and rigour.

**Submission rates**

In terms of submission and subscription, 2016 proved to be another good year for the Journal. In terms of ‘hard indicators’ of progress, subscription rates still remain healthy – both in terms of individual ‘traditional’ subscriptions and as part of consortia/collection packages to institutions. International subscriptions are also strong. Rates of manuscript submission have continued to be healthy, which means that we are having to be more selective. As can be seen from Table 1, only around 11 per cent of submissions are accepted.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 2010-11 | 2011-12 | 2012-13 | 2013-14 | 2014-15 | 2015-16 |
| Submitted | 406 | 396 | 325 | 336 | 377 | 372 |
| Rejected | 347 | 316 | 269 | 261 | 316 | 286 |
| Accepted | 51 | 57 | 40 | 42 | 40 | 377 |
| Acceptance Rate (%) | 12.8 | 15.3 | 12.9 | 13.9 | 11.2 | 11.5 |

*Table 1. Submission rates since 2010 (excluding book reviews, October to October)*

**The international profile of BERJ**

Since taking on the role of editors, we have worked hard to increase the international

profile of the Journal through encouraging strong submissions from international contributors. However, despite our efforts, we have seen a slight reduction in the proportion of papers from ‘overseas’. As can be seen from Table 2, submissions from ‘overseas’ account for just under half of the manuscripts we receive. Last year, the proportion was nearly two-thirds. There is strong continuity between our ‘top-12 sending countries – with only three changes. Iran, Malaysia and Taiwan have been replaced by China, Spain and India. As with previous years, unfortunately the acceptance rate for papers from non-Anglophone countries is relatively low.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Country | Number | % |
| United Kingdom | 169 | 45.6 |
| Australia | 23 | 6.2 |
| Netherlands | 10 | 2.7 |
| Spain | 10 | 2.7 |
| United States of America | 10 | 2.7 |
| Belgium | 10 | 2.7 |
| Israel | 9 | 2.4 |
| Hong Kong  | 8 | 2.2 |
| India | 8 | 2.2 |
| Turkey | 8 | 2.2 |
| China | 7 | 1.9 |
| Pakistan | 7 | 1.9 |

*Table 2. Number of manuscripts submitted by ‘top 12’ countries*

We outlined in our last report some of the ways we are trying to raise the international profile of the Journal: we have been using more international peer-reviewers, working hard to promote BERJ at international conferences, and the Editorial Board has been ‘revitalising’ the International Advisory Board. In April 2016, we met with some of the members of the International Advisory Board during the Annual Meeting of AERA in Washington, where we had a really useful discussion about how to take the Journal forward.

**The Editors’ Choice Prize**

This is our third opportunity to single out one paper which we feel epitomises all that is best in BERJ. As always, it was a difficult task as there were so many contenders, but in the end we came up with the following winner and shortlist from 2015:

***Editors’ Choice***

John Jerrim, Anna Vignoles, Raghu Lingam and Angela Friend

‘The socio-economic gradient in children’s reading skills and the role of genetics’

41 (1) pp. 6–29.

***Also shortlisted***

Neil Selwyn, Michael Henderson and Shu-Hua Chao

‘Exploring the role of digital data in contemporary schools and

schooling—‘200,000 lines in an Excel spreadsheet’’ 41 (5) pp. 767–78.

Rob Webster

‘The classroom experiences of pupils with special educational needs in

mainstream primary schools—1976 to 2012. What do data from systematic

observation studies reveal about pupils’ educational experiences over time?’

41 (6) pp. 992–1009.

Malcolm Thorburn

‘Theoretical constructs of well-being and their implications for education’

1 (4) pp. 650–665.

**Encouraging early career researchers**

We are always keen to receive high quality submissions from early career researchers and have been working with BERA to ‘de-mystify’ the process of publishing in peer-reviewed journals. To this end, we have participated in sessions at the annual BERA Annual Conference – sessions which have been generally well-attended. This year we also held a BERJ ‘Surgery’ at the Annual Conference in Leeds where potential authors were invited to come and chat to a member of the editorial team about whether their research would be suitable for publication in the Journal and, if so, how they should go about presenting and submitting a manuscript.

**Peer reviewing**

As last year, we would like to thank all those who have reviewed articles for us in the past year. However, the challenges of finding high quality reviewers who are able to deliver reviews on time continues to increase.

We know there are many reasons why people find it difficult to review as many papers as often as they are asked – and we are sympathetic to that. However, the main cause of delays comes not so much from refusals, but from lack of response. Lack of response is an issue at the original invitation stage, but also once someone has agreed to review. Please, please can we ask colleagues to respond in a timely fashion? A ‘no’ answer is much better than no answer at all!

And, as we pointed out last year, we don’t need a lengthy commentary in a review. While we are very impressed with colleagues who provide a list of typographical errors or misspellings to be corrected, it is not necessary for you to do this. Just let us know that the author(s) need to do some serious copy-editing and proof-reading. We would rather you spent your valuable time on the intellectual issues rather than production matters.

**Why do papers get ‘immediate reject’ decisions?**

We are reiterating verbatim what we wrote last year about the grounds for ‘immediate reject’ – which is the verdict on over 70% of all manuscripts submitted. There are a number of reasons why we decide not to send a submission out for peer review. These can broadly be summarised as:

* *The paper is too specialist for BERJ.* As we indicated in the opening paragraph, we recognise that BERJ has a distinctive role as a generic rather than a specialist education research journal. This means that we want every article to be accessible to our readers – even if they have no in-depth expertise in that particular area. This is the most common reason for an immediate rejection, and when we write to the author(s) we usually indicate the kind of journal where their paper might be better placed.
* *The paper doesn’t make an original contribution.* Every now and then we get papers which may be very well written and where the subject matter would appeal to a wide readership, but where the paper has nothing new to say. It really helps us if authors signal early on, even in the abstract, how they think their paper will take the field ‘forward’.
* *The empirical base is too weak.* We also get a number of papers where the empirical basis of the paper is simply too weak to support the arguments which are being made. We always think that BERJ should be showcasing only the best educational research.
* *There is no attempt to connect with a UK or international readership.* This is particularly an issue with overseas contributors. We are sure that our readers

are interested in developments in education around the world, but we expect authors to outline how their paper is of relevance or interest to a largely UK-based readership. Evaluations of single interventions in countries where there is no attempt to contextualise the research and draw out its broader relevance tend to get an immediate reject.

* *The paper is poorly written.* We receive a number of papers where the quality of writing is not good enough to justify sending the paper out for review. This is most usually, but not inevitably, a problem for those writing in non-Anglophone contexts. Although we are sympathetic to the challenge this creates, we do not think it is appropriate to ask our reviewers to struggle through writing which is incomprehensible.

**Turnaround times**

We continue to have relatively quick turnaround times – although there is wide variation. Some manuscripts get ‘turned round’ very quickly, and some seem to stay in the system much longer (usually because of problems finding responsive reviewers). As Table 3 reveals, the average reviewer turnaround time is only just over three weeks for the first submission, and just over two weeks for a revised manuscript. We think this is very impressive and are grateful to those reviewers who are so prompt and diligent in their responses.

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| --- | --- |
| Average reviewer turnaround time (Original) | 22.4 |
| Average reviewer turnaround time (Revision) | 15.6 |

*Table 3. Reviewer turnaround times in days (Oct 2015–Oct 2016)*

This means that we are able to make decisions in a timely manner. Table 4 provides data on the average number of days taken for different decision categories over the last year.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Accept | 23.28 |
| Minor revision | 59.53 |
| Major revision | 79.43 |
| Reject | 25.74 |

*Table 4. Average number of days to decision (Oct 2015–Oct 2016)*

In conclusion, we are approaching the end of our third year as editors with increasing

confidence that BERJ will continue to thrive. Many many thanks to all those who have played a part in its ongoing success. First and foremost our gratitude goes out to the contributors who send in their papers for us. Without them were would be no Journal! We would also like to thank our peer reviewers for being part of a community of scholars that reciprocates time and expertise for the benefit of the field. For the same reason, we extend our thanks to the members of the Editorial Board and the International Advisory Board for giving their time and attention. In terms of operational matters, we are grateful for the ongoing support of all those at BERA – both in its central administration, the BERJ editorial office and the Academic Publications Committee. Our colleague, Liza James, needs to be singled out for thanks for her role in providing us with administrative support, checking the proofs and ensuring the manuscripts get turned round by us in a timely fashion. Finally, we need to thank colleagues at Wiley who work with us to ensure the Journal is produced to the highest standards and marketed to the widest audience.

*William Baker*

*Mark Connolly*

*Peter Hemming*

*Sally Power*

*Chris Taylor*

Editors