

# Successful learned society publishing —The Royal Society of Chemistry strategy

Robert PARKER The Royal Society of Chemistry, CEO



Since its founding in 1841 the Royal Society of Chemistry has published the newest and best chemical research. Our first President, Thomas Graham, read a paper submitted by Justus von Liebig at the first meeting of what was then called the Chemical Society of London, which was recorded and published in the *Transactions of the Chemical Society*.

More than 170 years later we are still publishing the newest and best research—but on a scale those original chemists could never have reached, at a pace they would have found incredible, and using technologies they could not even imagine.

Our purpose—to advance excellence in the chemical sciences—was set out in a Royal Charter granted to us by Queen Victoria in 1848. One of our objectives written into that charter is to ‘foster and encourage the growth and application of such science by the dissemination of chemical knowledge’. We pursue this objective by providing journals, databases and books that serve the needs of our members and the wider chemistry community.

As a not-for-profit organisation, any surplus generated from our publishing activities is invested in our mission to advance excellence in the chemical sciences, through our education, policy, outreach and scientific activities and events to build communities and develop skills within the chemical sciences. So not only does publishing directly contribute to our mission by disseminating chemical information, but also supports many of our other activities. This is why it was essential for us to plan ahead: to shape our publishing in a way that supports our ambitions for the long term.

In 2008 we embarked upon a strategy of growth in both the quality and quantity of the journals and books we publish. We did this to ensure that our community of authors have a choice within our portfolio of where to publish their most exciting results across all areas of the chemical sciences and related fields, and where they can be sure that their work is easily found and accessed by a wide-ranging readership. We also wanted to make sure our readers continued to trust that our articles have undergone a fair and robust peer review process.

The strategy was a success—and that success is borne out in the numbers. In 2008, we published 60 books and 7,000 articles across our portfolio of 24 journals. In 2013, we published around 27,000 journal articles and 91 books—a growth of 373% in just five years. And this growth in volume did not come at the cost of quality; we also increased our average Impact Factor from 4.9 to 5.7.

The strategy focused on five key areas for development, including: community engagement; editorial boards; keeping quality high; new journals, books and databases; and publishing partnerships.

## Community engagement

Being in close contact with our community was a vital part of the strategy. We promoted our journals and books with targeted, relevant marketing, and our Editors attended more scientific events and visited research institutions. This tailored approach means we not only shared the right information with researchers, but also heard their thoughts on the publishing landscape, allowing us to refine the service we offer to our authors and readers.

We interact with researchers internationally and continue to strengthen our network on a global scale. To provide a greater link to key communities, we established editorial offices in Japan, USA, China and India. Dr Hiromitsu Urakami is our RSC Manager in Japan, based in Tokyo, and he has visited many research institutions and met many researchers since joining the Royal Society of Chemistry in 2013. Our team in the Tokyo office is based in the same building as the Chemical Society of Japan, which enables our two societies to work closely together on joint activities.

From all of our key countries we have seen an increase in submissions and publications. Community engagement has been particularly effective in countries where the research funding and the number of articles being published has significantly increased—for example, China, which is now the largest contributing country to our portfolio in terms of number of journal articles published.

## Editorial boards

An important aspect of our success has been the ambassadors within the research community for publishing at the Royal Society of Chemistry. Our journals and books Editorial and Advisory Boards are formed from world-renowned researchers who are leaders in their fields. Their support and endorsement is a stamp of quality for the journals and books they represent and their advice on strategic development is important to ensure we are meeting the wants and needs of the community.

## Keep quality high

Throughout all of the developments of our publishing programme over the last

few years, quality has remained at the heart of everything we do. We strive to maintain our reputation for a fair and transparent review process and engage with our referees to ensure they are aware of each journal's scope and standards.

Since 2008 we have seen an increase of 16% in our average Impact Factor. New journals we have launched have already established themselves among the leaders in their fields in terms of Impact Factor, such as *Energy & Environmental Science* (2013 IF 15.5) and *Polymer Chemistry* (2013 IF 5.4).

### New journals, databases and books

As well as developing our existing portfolio of journals through organic growth in articles published, we have embarked on a programme of new launches since 2008.

For our journal portfolio, we focused on areas in the chemical sciences where a gap existed, and also on areas that are at the interface of the chemical sciences and other disciplines. Our new journals have widened our community of authors and readers and increased the visibility of the Royal Society of Chemistry and our publishing activities, with many of our new journals already high in Impact Factor rankings in their field.

We have established an efficient transfer process, in which articles rejected for publication from one journal are offered a transfer to another suitable Royal Society of Chemistry journal. This makes the resubmission process smoother for authors and can negate the need for further peer review, reducing time and effort for authors and reviewers.

We developed our books portfolio, publishing volumes in 12 new series since 2008. We have also expanded our database offering, acquiring internationally-renowned products such as the Merck Index\*<sup>1</sup> and MarinLit in 2013.

\*<sup>1</sup> : The name THE MERCK INDEX is owned by Merck Sharp & Dohme Corp., a subsidiary of Merck & Co., Inc., Whitehouse Station, N.J., U.S.A., and is licensed to The Royal Society of Chemistry for use in the U.S.A. and Canada

### Publishing partnerships

We have established 38 partnerships through our journals programme with sister societies or institutions. These take a number of forms: from co-ownership of journal titles, to endorsements, to us publishing journals on behalf of other organisations. Working with these partners mutually raises the visibility of our activities and expands our communities further.

An example is our collaboration with the WPI Institute for Integrated Cell-Material Sciences (iCeMS) at Kyoto University with our journal *Biomaterials Science*. We launched this journal in collaboration with iCeMS and one of the Editors-in-Chief, Professor Nakatsuji, and an Associate Editor, Professor Sugiyama, are based there. They have helped us to shape the journal's scope towards the mesoscopic basis science of biomaterials, a strong research area at the institute itself. This collaboration has helped both the journal and the institute increase their global presence.

### Growing CSJ publishing

Everything outlined above has contributed to our increased profile and impact on a global scale and it is excellent to see the Chemical Society of Japan also continuing in this direction. The society's two key journals, *Chemistry Letters* and the *Bulletin of the Chemical Society of Japan*, can continue to build on the reputation of the Japanese scientific community for high quality research. The new website will enhance the ease of discovery of published articles and the increased representation of Senior Editors on the journals' Editorial Boards will aid in their international visibility.

As with all scientific journals, continued success is dependent on ensuring the journal remains impactful and relevant, attracts the emerging top investigators as well as the more established leaders in the field and allows the reader to readily access the research they wish to in a convenient way.

### Future of publishing

The publishing landscape is changing each day with—new technologies, new areas of science, and new opportunities

such as open access publishing—and we keep a close watch on these changes to make sure we're equipped to meet our community's needs. We will continue to actively develop our publishing portfolio, focusing on our strengths in community engagement, developing our current and new products, and establishing new partnerships.

As we move further into the electronic era of scientific publishing, we are hugely excited by the opportunities this offers to improve the accessibility and interactivity of journal articles and books.

We are also undertaking a number of initiatives in open access publishing, such as converting our flagship journal, *Chemical Science*, to a fully gold open access journal from issue 1 in 2015. We are waiving the article processing charges for two years, allowing free publication for authors and free access for readers until 2017. For more information on our open access initiatives, please do read the article\*<sup>2</sup> published by the Japan Science and Technology Agency.

We will also strengthen our links with sister societies, and we are very pleased to include the Chemical Society of Japan among our friends and collaborators. From the signing of our International Cooperation Agreement in 2010, we have run a number of co-organised symposia; most recently, the 5th Joint CSJ-RSC Symposium on Supramolecular Chemistry took place in Dublin, Ireland, in June 2014. We will hold our next joint event at the CSJ's 95th Annual Meeting.

As we face the future of learned society publishing together, I very much look forward to seeing the great successes we can achieve.

© 2015 The Chemical Society of Japan

\*<sup>2</sup> : [https://www.jstage.jst.go.jp/article/johokanri/57/7/57\\_475/\\_pdf](https://www.jstage.jst.go.jp/article/johokanri/57/7/57_475/_pdf)

The commentary shown here is written by a commentator invited by the Commentary Committee of the Society, and the author is basically responsible for the contents. The Society acknowledges that this is important and worth publishing. Opinions and comments of the readers are highly appreciated.  
E-mail: [ronsetsu@chemistry.or.jp](mailto:ronsetsu@chemistry.or.jp)