

Nature Communications: Interview with Lesley Anson

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Nature Communications is a new journal that will launch in Spring 2010. The journal will publish papers in all areas of the physical, chemical and biological sciences and is open for submissions.

The Nature Publishing Group publishes one fully open access journal (Molecular Systems Biology) and more than ten journals that offer an open access option for authors (including EMBO Journal). *Nature Communications* will be the first Nature journal with an open access option for authors. *Nature Communications* papers where the author has not opted for open access will be available through an institutional subscription, or by purchasing an individual article.

There are many good arguments for open access, but from a journal perspective the publishing model must make business sense. Most open access journals use the author-pays model, and an editorial in the August 2009 issue of Nature Materials talked about some of the difficulties of this publishing model for the Nature journals – the costs that are currently spread among many subscribers would be prohibitively high for an author-pays option. Some high-profile open access journals have article publication charges that are probably not covering all costs (e.g. PLoS Biology) or use a different business model that doesn't require article publication charges (BMJ). *Nature Communications* will have an article publication charge of \$5000, which is higher than what most journals charge. I interviewed Lesley Anson, the Chief Editor of *Nature Communications*, to learn more about the journal.

1. Can you describe Nature Communications for me?

Nature Communications is the latest journal in NPG's portfolio. It is an online-only multidisciplinary journal publishing original research papers in all areas of the biological, chemical and physical sciences. The published research will be of the quality associated with Nature-branded journals, but won't necessarily have the high impact or broad appeal of papers published in Nature and the Nature research journals. In other words, we expect that papers published in *Nature Communications* will be of interest and importance to specialists within each

field.

All research papers will be in Article format, regardless of their length, and will undergo rigorous, yet efficient, peer review and be published rapidly online. Authors of primary research papers can choose to make their published article available via subscribed access, or open access through the payment of a publication fee. *Nature Communications* will also publish occasional Reviews and Editorials.

2. What will you be doing differently from other Nature journals?

There are a number of differences between *Nature Communications* and other Nature-branded journals. For example, all other Nature titles publish print issues with regular news and comment sections and are available only by subscribed access.

Like other Nature-branded journals, *Nature Communications* has an independent team of editors who are responsible for maintaining the quality of the published research through rigorous peer review. However, *Nature Communications* has streamlined the editorial process – by limiting presubmission enquiries, appeals and the number of rounds of review – in order to secure rapid decisions for authors. The journal has also undertaken to publish research papers within 28 days of acceptance.

Another distinctive feature of *Nature Communications* is its Editorial Advisory Panel – to be announced shortly – which will consist of recognized experts from all areas of science. Their collective expertise will support the editorial team in ensuring that every field is represented in the journal.

3. Is Nature Communications still a journal in the traditional sense? The journal is online only, has no news and views, and the articles will be so specialized that most people will probably find papers by a database search rather than by looking at the table of contents.

I suppose it depends on your definition of a traditional journal. One could argue that we are going back to the roots of learned journals by focussing predominantly on primary research. In addition, like the traditional Nature-branded journals, *Nature Communications* has a defined scope and publishes only high-quality research.

We appreciate, though, that readers are accustomed to browsing journals by issue, therefore we are implementing technology to make the online browsing experience both intuitive and effective. There will be a number of ways for authors to find papers of interest to them, including personalization options and an extensive browse by subject category.

4. Why did you decide to have a hybrid model of both open access and subscribed access?

We consider ourselves fortunate in being able to offer authors the choice of publishing with open access as well as subscribed access. Increasing support by funders for open access publication has made hybrid business models more viable for publishers. Furthermore, *Nature Communications* focus on primary research is particularly suited to a hybrid model because the cost of commissioning, editing and producing secondary content is minimized. These factors, and the high rejection rates on Nature and the Nature research journals, make open access charges for any other Nature-branded journal prohibitively high in the current market.

5. With this hybrid model in place, it will be interesting to closely watch how open access and subscribed access articles are accessed over time.

Yes, it will be interesting to monitor the average view rates for open-access versus subscribed access papers and we will be doing this following launch.

6. Does an author decide about open vs. subscribed access before or after a paper is accepted for publication?

Authors won't have to make a final decision about access to their paper until the point at which their paper is accepted. Where authors do indicate a preference one way or the other during the editorial process, the reviewers will be blind to that choice.

7. What percentage of articles do you expect to be open access?

We can't predict what the open-access take-up will be like, and we are therefore prepared for open access uptake varying from as little as 0% to as much as 100%. *Nature Communications* business model works at both extremes and all values in between.

8. How does the transfer of a manuscript rejected at another Nature Journal work?

The process of transferring a manuscript to *Nature Communications* is exactly the same as the transfer mechanism between the existing Nature-branded journals. Control rests entirely with the author, so transfers are only made at the authors request and with the understanding that the reviewers' reports from the previous journal will be transferred to *Nature Communications*.

Importantly, because all Nature journals are editorially independent, authors rejected from another Nature journal can choose to submit their paper to *Nature Communications* as a new submission. In that case, any submission or peer

review details will remain confidential to the journal from which the manuscript was rejected.

9. What are your responsibilities at Nature Communications?

I am the Chief Editor of *Nature Communications*, which means I am responsible for the editorial content of the journal. I have a team of talented editors to help in the task of selecting suitable manuscripts for publication: a biologist, a physicist and a chemist. Their profiles are available on our website.

10. What did you do before starting to work at Nature Communications?

Before taking on the task of launching Nature Communications, I spent more than ten years as a manuscript editor at Nature. During that time, I handled a number of different areas in the cellular and molecular sciences, and was also responsible for the editorial content of Nature's Insight Programme. Before joining Nature I trained as a biophysicist at the University of Bristol and University College London.

11. What are the best places to find out more about Nature Communications?

For more information about *Nature Communications*, including the journal's Aims and Scope, biographies of the editors and how to submit, please visit our website. Any questions can be directed to our dedicated forum on Nature Network, or sent directly to the editorial team by e-mailing natcomms@nature.com. We look forward to hearing from you!

*For further information, please also read the announcement on the Nautilus blog and the Nature Communications Q&A with Grace Baynes on the Science in the open blog.*__