

## 2 Become 1

It is an exciting new journal and it will provide healthy, rather than aggressive, competition for the Americans; which seems to sum up the feeling among editors and physicists at the launch this January of the new general journal of physics, *The European Physical Journal (EPJ)*. And the word among editors is there have been more papers submitted than expected, but nothing yet of outstanding quality.

The journal's four sections, and a 'fifth' applied physics section, begin appearing in January as the result of a merger between *Zeitschrift für Physik* and *Journal de Physique*, the German and French physics journals respectively. The merger, largely the work of two of its Editors-in-Chief, Denis Jérôme and Siegfried Grossman, has its roots in a desire to unite European physics journals, and in a wish to see more papers from European laboratories published on homeground, and to stem the flow of papers across the Atlantic to *Physical Review*.

'Everywhere, you hear the same song, that physicists, although they love *Physical Review*, are sometimes upset by *Physical Review*,' says Jérôme, joint Editor-in-Chief of the condensed matter section of the new journal. 'No problem with *Physical Review* – the American one is a very high standard – but everybody feels you should also have a possible alternative,' he says.

During his time a few years ago on the editorial board of the physics journal published in Britain, the *Journal of Physics*, Jérôme says, 'I heard among these people this complaint against *Physical Review*: they were very sorry that most of the British papers are going to *Physical Review*. And it's true. Most of the European papers are flying to *Physical Review* these days.'

The idea for a new European journal

came out of a meeting between Jérôme and Peter Fulde (now the head of the Max Planck Institute in Dresden) back in 1990. Recognising that European publishing is fragmented into many small journals, they came up with the idea of combining them into one strong journal. 'We wanted to establish a nucleus for future European review. Something which is credible. We said only at the European level we could do that,' Jérôme says.

Denis Jérôme is quick to point out the new journal must not be introspective: 'It's a European initiative, but by no means restricted to the physics going on in Europe. It's open to a world-wide readership, and works done anywhere in the world.'

Across the Atlantic Martin Blume, Editor-in-Chief of the American Physical Society, confirms the flow of articles from Europe to his offices. 'There are more articles submitted to *Physical Review* from Western Europe than there are from the United States,' he says. 'One of our problems has been continued growth. It has moderated in the last two years; it had been 6 per cent a year increase in submitted manuscripts; it's now down to about 3 per cent. We get about 22,000 manuscripts a year. We publish about 13,000 of them altogether.'

The new European journal should be a viable alternative. 'A bit of a respite would be good,' says Blume, 'but we still want the best articles, of course.'

The emphasis in the competition between the two journals is not on commercial competition, but on healthy competition that is good for science. 'The *Physical Reviews* and *Phys Rev Letters* are truly international journals. However, it is not healthy overall that there not be a number of different options available to scientists,' says Blume. 'It is important there be options, because you don't want one place having an absolute say what

should and should not be published.'

'The fragmented situation that existed before in Europe, I think, was not healthy,' adds Blume.

The new era should be healthier for science in Europe, explains Professor Beiglböck, a freelance editor who negotiated the contract for Springer, publishers of the old *Zeitschrift für Physik*. 'Libraries cannot afford all the journals. If you would cancel, for instance, *Zeitschrift für Physik* and keep *Journal de Physique*, you would lose quite a lot of interesting scientific contributions,' he says.

The cost of the new journal will be less than the combined cost of the previous two. And all libraries that subscribed to both in the past are expected to sign up for the *EPJ*.

And the latest on the papers: Jérôme told *EN* he thought none of the papers submitted so far would lead to a Nobel prize. But the number submitted was higher than they had planned for. 'The budget was established on the basis of a certain number of pages for 1998,' he said. 'Apparently we do get more papers than expected. I think we will have to make some rather strict selection based on the quality.'

Luca Peliti, one of the soft condensed matter editors, commented: 'I hope that the new journal will soon find its place as *the* place in which to publish one's best papers in the fields of condensed matter physics, complex systems, and statistical mechanics. It should build on the tradition of both its predecessors and be open to exciting new developments like the statistical approach to financial problems.'

The door has been left open for collaboration with that other Euro-journal, *Europhysics Letters*. Discussion between the directors of these journals may follow. The possibility also exists for further mergers with other national physics journals. A more united Europe awaits.

### Other news: Going Electronic

Keen readers of *Physical Review D* will notice that the January issue contains papers that appeared first on the Web in October and November. The journal is making the change from paper first to 'e-first' – a process full of challenges, according to Bob Kelly, in charge of electronic planning at the APS. For one, papers will be tricky to cite as they carry no page number. But pagination will catch up by April: pages of the July print version will be forecast in advance and their pages numbers will appear online.

**Europe's New Baby** This merger of journals brings together a commercial publisher and a physical society (Springer, Berlin and Les Editions de Physique, Paris) – a tricky match to make according to Bernard Cagnac, Les Editions de Physique President, which took time. But most discussion, it seems, was reserved for agreeing on the title, a process Cagnac describes: 'When you choose the name of journal, it's maybe as when you choose the name of a baby.'

**Previously, publishing in the French or German journal was considered more "local" science and it was always considered better to submit to *Physical Review*** Didier Sornette, editor, *EPJ B*

**We still want the best articles** Martin Blume, Editor-in-Chief in charge of *Physical Review*

