

www.njp.org The *New Journal of Physics*, as it is called, is a general physics journal that came into being at the end of last year. Its first three papers had been published at the time of writing, and twenty others were under consideration. The *NJP* is an online journal, and an electronic one, in that the use of paper during production is kept to a minimum. Referees receive papers, usually in the form of portable Adobe Acrobat files, attached to emails, and authors download a Webpage for proofing.

Production has been designed to be fast, too. Referees are encouraged to reply quickly. *Europhysics News* contacted authors of the first three papers published to ask their opinion: production is indeed faster than a paper journal. And is it risky publishing in a new journal? Two authors were confident the journal had—or would quickly gain—respectability; one thought the idea of an online journal, easily accessible, was a good one.

As we reported last year (*EN* 29 3 p85) the journal began with a partnership between the German Physical Society (DPG) and the Institute of Physics in the UK (IOP). According to the current President of the DPG (*see page 51*) other physical societies are now being invited to join. And according to Bernard Fricke (*also page 51*) the more people involved in such a venture, the better.

Notably, the journal will not create extra tension in already strained library budgets, as it is free to any library with an Internet terminal. Indeed, access is free from any computer connected to the Net. The cost is borne entirely by authors. The rate: £300 (460 euros) for an accepted paper. Before setting the rate the publishers interviewed a hundred physicists and held planning meetings in Europe and the US. "I think it's a reasonable price, and if you look at what other journals are charging, in terms of page charges, then \$500 per article is very reasonable," says John Haynes, *NJP* Publisher at the IOPP. "If you look at most page charges they are anything from \$60 to \$150 per page."

Many physicists we talked to are enthusiastic about the price. But there are others who are concerned about who should be paying for journals. They wonder: should it really be the author? One of their concerns is that research budgets will have to support the cost of publishing in the *NJP*, so the cost of several papers will eat into the budgets of small departments. Another: is it ethical to relate the financing of a journal to the acceptance of papers, and thus to the quality of the science? Given this, we should point out: everyone we talked to supports the idea of a journal that is free to readers.

Denis Jérôme, co-Editor in Chief of the *European Physical Journal*, is concerned about something else. The *EPJ* was launched January 1998, which means that two new physics journals have got under way within a year of each other. The two are not in direct competition, they are financed differently, published differently, and have different editorial policies, and could easily co-exist. But they are both European projects. The *New Journal of Physics* (DPG and IOPP) and the *European Physical Journal* (launched by the French Physical Society and the publisher Springer) both have plans for expansion. And Professor Jerome, like Professor Fricke, would like to see Europeans working together.

Both journals are now, in fact, seeking partners. The *EPJ* has already taken on the Italian Physical Society as a partner (by absorbing the condensed matter part of the journal *Nuovo Cimento*) and its publishers are now talking to the Spanish and the Swiss—physical societies with their own journals. And the *NJP* partners are in discussion with other physical societies, including the French (*page 51*).

It will be interesting to see if other journals in the next few years start up (or switch to) an *NJP*-like model, online and free to readers. The *NJP* is promoted as a release for libraries from the journals crisis (in which budgets can not cover the yearly price increases of journals). Like all online journals, it releases us from having to trek to the library to find a journal, and turns our desktop computer into the new library. One *NJP*-article author painted a picture for us of a future free from paper journals, in which "the money currently used to pay for subscriptions to journals will instead be redistributed to pay author's fees."

Such a situation may not release us from concerns over journal pricing—costs might simply be redistributed and not reduced. (And we do not see a paperless future in our lifetimes, anyway.) If the journals crisis is to be solved once and for all, it will have to be solved another way. One emerging idea is for libraries to form coalitions in order to negotiate better licences with publishers. Library coalitions may never be powerful enough to make this work—the diversity of libraries and effects of national borders prevent strong coalition. It will be interesting to see which groups, libraries or otherwise, come together to tackle the journals crisis.

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The cover image shows chromium atoms recoiling in a chromium crystal. Their Doppler shifts are shown, red to blue see page 52

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