

Editorial

This editorial marks a further stage in the development of *Ageing and Society* as we initiate an increase in frequency of publication from four to six issues a year. Readers will have noted that individual issues have expanded over the last four years, and now seems the right time to formalise and extend the enlargement. When *Ageing and Society* grew from three to four issues in 1984, Malcolm Johnson commented in his editorial that quarterly publication had been the intent of the journal's founders once a clear identity and flow of material had been achieved. They may well have foreseen an eventual move to six issues. At any rate, this further step is a mark of the success of the journal and the wisdom of the vision of its founding editor, review editor and editorial board.

The present expansion reflects and is justified by a rise in submissions of good quality papers. This improved quality is observable across a range of subject matter and countries of origin, and invites re-consideration of the journal's function as a vehicle of multi-disciplinary and international research and scholarship.

In previous editorials emphasis has been played on *Ageing and Society's* role in promoting multi-disciplinary gerontology, in which scholars and practitioners from diverse backgrounds communicate a holistic view of ageing. Although this may appear an impractical and over-idealistic vision at times, it is particularly important to hold on to something of this spirit at the present, when interest in ageing issues is rising dramatically. As academic and research communities grow, so inevitably the specialisation of work and outlets intensifies. If we are now at the stage where journals in educational gerontology, elder abuse, gerontological nursing and geriatric psychiatry are demanded, twenty years ahead titles may have been founded on older people's leisure trends, grandparenting and gerontological criminology. While research communities fissure into ever-narrower fields, doubts are heard about the role of an integrative field like gerontology, and of academic journals that span, some argue, an increasingly abstract epistemological idea.

It remains central to our *credo* that the best gerontological understanding and the sanest and most effective policies for the welfare of older people require unusual breadth. When those in specialised

professional, academic or policy-making fields can place the well-being of older people in a broad societal context, then fewer divisive, ephemeral and merely fashionable statements and changes will be made. Given the acceleration of scientific, social and political change, arguably the value of such efforts continues to grow. Gerontologists can still aim and achieve breadth of vision and understanding.

It is also important that understanding is communicated effectively across countries. Interest and concern about ageing-related issues are now expressed worldwide. Societies look to apply lessons to their own situation from others' experience. But this is difficult to do well. For example, how successfully do the long term ageing societies of northern Europe describe their experiences to the newly accelerating ageing societies of the Pacific region, and vice versa? It is very easy to miscommunicate across countries, and create a superficial and misleading understanding of one another's culture. History, religious background and living circumstances need to be appreciated and the precise meaning of societal and individual values explained. The ideals of 'independence', 'security' and 'integration', so often employed in social policy documents on ageing in various countries, may refer to quite different realities, even within a closely knit cultural or economic community as the European Union.

Ageing and Society has its origin, its primary support organisations and its publisher in Britain. But from the outset it has claimed to be an international journal, very well reflected in its first issue. The confidence of scholars from non-English speaking countries to publish in *Ageing and Society* has gradually grown and a majority of its published papers are now from outside the United Kingdom. A large number come from other European countries, and a steady flow from the United States, Canada and Australia. We are particularly pleased to note, as was hoped for in the editorial written four years ago, that the journal is now publishing papers from South East Asia. In this issue there is a notable paper on the situation of older people and their families in Korea. This has been preceded by papers on policy for old age in Singapore and on Indian philosophy. In the course of 1996 the journal will publish two papers from Japan, at last giving recognition to that country's gerontological as well as economic importance.

However we are still not satisfied with the journal's international coverage. Some success is apparent in attracting contributions from India, South Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, but our contributions from other parts of the world are tiny in relation to their demographic weight (as China, Indonesia or Brazil). All suggestions about ways and people who could extend our global awareness would be welcome.

To return to subject matter, we re-iterate our wish and intention to publish material originating from diverse disciplines: psychology, medicine, philosophy, history and literature, as well as sociology, social policy and social work. But, in truth, the disciplinary distinctions which are adopted in the organisation and management of academic work, become distinctly artificial in gerontology. We are happy to publish across the boundaries of disciplines. Psychologists may have important things to say about society, and sociologists about individuals. What is also evident from a survey of *Ageing and Society* papers is the futility of attempting a distinction between theoretical and applied contributions. Practical lessons are drawn from the vast majority of papers we publish, and it is a poor paper that does not develop conceptual thought about its subject matter. The bridging of the theory/practice distinction is perhaps one hallmark of the gerontological endeavour we espouse.

After fifteen years of publication, editors and readers develop clear ideas about the interests and level of an academic journal. Misconceptions also set in. One we keenly contest is that *Ageing and Society* is not interested in publishing quantitative research. We would be delighted to publish more first-rate positivist sociological, psychological and economic papers. For all themes and methodologies, there are two essential requirements for acceptance of an article: it must make a contribution to gerontological knowledge or debates, and it must be accessible to (a substantial proportion) of the multi-disciplinary and international readership of the journal. Positivist researchers would be asked, for example, to work hard to explain the reasoning behind the questions they have formulated and the selection of their method, and to interpret the results for a broad gerontological audience. The journal proudly puts a premium on communication across disciplines and across national research traditions and styles.

Among the originators of the journal were several with a background in the humanities, and the journal continues to promote high standards in scholarship and writing. One hears our articles described as (in the polite version) discursive. We suspect the label arises by comparison with the cryptic and highly formalised styles vaunted in certain disciplines, particularly the physical and medical sciences. We cannot follow that model because our readers do not all subscribe to or understand a single scientific or disciplinary 'culture'. We would emphasise however that articles do not have to be long, by which is meant more than 5,000 words. Terse but well expressed articles and research notes of 3,000 words are encouraged.

Ageing and Society is also distinct from other gerontological journals in the range of services it offers its readers. It provides high quality and international reviews of recent books, abstracts of notable articles

appearing in a wide range of other journals, review articles and review symposia on particularly important books or publications appearing in close proximity on the same subject. In recent years it has also taken the initiative in drawing readers' attention to notable areas of enquiry through the publication of special issues, as on sociolinguistic issues in ageing, the Berlin Aging Study, resource allocation and societal responses to old age, and (forthcoming) biography and its practical application. We welcome new proposals for special issues.

With this issue we also launch a new feature, *Progress Reports*. These will be concise reviews of vibrant areas of gerontological research and policy debate. Authors are being commissioned in the first instance to submit two successive reviews, two years apart. Among the fields already secured are 'The experience of later life', 'Research in the biology of ageing', 'Old age in history', 'Health services for older people' and 'Development of personality in late life'. Six further themes will establish the feature in its second year: suggestions and offers are still most welcome.

From the feedback we receive from readers we know that the periodic review articles we publish are highly appreciated and we think it justified to build on them in this systematic way. But we would like to know more about readers' opinions of the journal. You have often generously written with support and appreciation of what has been done, but constructive criticism and detailed evaluations have been quite rare. Please do send to us your recommendations and appraisals. Thoughtful suggestions will always be given close consideration by the Editorial Board which now also includes the recently appointed editors designate, Ken Blakemore and Bill Bytheway.

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