



Coping with backlog

If we consider the quality of our journal there is one weakness that we find more severe than anything else: the *backlog*. This is the span of time between the moment a paper is submitted up to the time the printed copy of the journal reaches the reader. Each article is assigned three dates: received (R), accepted (A), and published on-line (P). Another important date is the date of printed copy.

Usually the on-line version of the paper is available very much earlier than the printed version, and because the electronic version of our journal is freely available (under so-called *diamond open access*), readers are not hurt by the difference in time between the publication of the electronic and paper versions of the paper. Part of this lag is legitimate and it depends on the technology: it is possible to put papers on-line separately, but one has to wait for the last article to be ready before the whole issue is sent to the printer.

When we set up the journal in 2007, our primary concern was to ensure about 20 high-quality papers per year. It was not clear that we would get sufficiently many enthusiasts who would be willing to submit their good papers for publication in an unknown journal with uncertain future. At first we relied on papers arising from conference series such as the 4-yearly Slovenian Graph Theory conference, GEMS, and SIGMAP. The rigidity of special issues, however, proved to be a far greater problem than we initially envisaged.

When the journal's visibility increased and its high quality became apparent, the flow of manuscripts increased, and very quickly we had more papers accepted than we needed for a single year. We adopted three strategies for reducing the backlog:

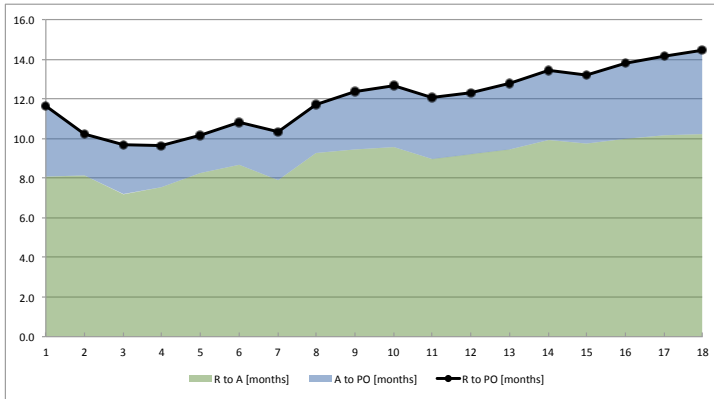
(a) We started opening future issues. This moved the problem into the future, and also gave us more flexibility in numbering the papers. But this has to be done with care: once page numbers are assigned to the electronic version of an article, they have to remain the same in the printed version, and so we cannot open the second issue of a given volume until the first one is completed.

(b) We increased the number of papers publishable each year (from the initial 20 to 60 or more), by producing two volumes each year, and publishing more articles per issue.

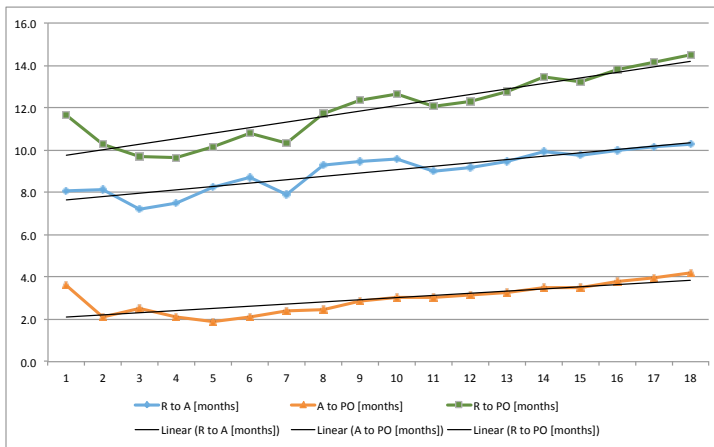
(c) We also raised the standards for acceptance, and so now the rate of acceptance of papers has been reduced to 20 per cent.

The increased volume of submissions has increased the workload for our editorial staff, and in turn this has increased the length of time taken for the review stage. Next year we will involve more Editors in managing papers. Hopefully this will reduce the backlog at this stage of the process.

Nino Bašič, Selena Praprotnik and Gordon Williams have collected and analysed data on all papers published so far in our journal. Back in 2008, it took on average less than 12 months to process a paper for the first issue of our journal. In contrast, it took over 21 months on the average to process a paper for issue Vol. 8, no. 2 in 2015. Our goal is to reduce the average time to under 12 months, as soon as possible.



The first figure (above) is a stacked plot showing the cumulative average processing time by issue: green in the bottom is the time from receipt to accepted (RA), blue at the top is the additional time from accepted to published online (AP), and the thick black line indicates the total time from receipt to published online (RP).



The second figure (above) gives plots of receipt to accepted (RA), accepted to published online (AP) and total time from receipt to published online (RP), with linear regression lines superimposed.

Unfortunately, the length of time from accepted to published on-line continues to grow as well, so our policy of slow growth and opening additional volumes is not enough. We hope that moving from 20 papers per year to the current 60 papers per year, better handling of special issues, and further management of the acceptance rate, will stabilise the backlog at an appropriate level.

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Editors In Chief