Editorial

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It is with a frisson of apprehension that I take on the role of Editor in Chief of the *International Review of Administrative Sciences*. In succeeding my internationally distinguished predecessor, Professor Christopher Pollitt, there is much to live up to. Christopher is not simply a difficult act to follow, he has set an exceptional example in terms of the improvements in organization, standards and content for *IRAS*, thereby addressing the rapid changes in the publishing and academic realms during his tenure that had made such a strategic response necessary. Under his editorship, *IRAS* has maintained its scientific excellence and further evolved and developed into a world-class journal, reflecting the skill and expertise he and his team of gifted deputy editors, along with Catherine Humblet and the colleagues at SAGE, have applied in recent years. It is a global journal of note and makes an important contribution to the academic and practitioner debate in the administrative sciences. I shall seek to harness that success and pursue ways to maintain the challenging momentum Christopher has set.

For those of us who know his work, it is evident that Christopher Pollitt is one of the outstanding public management academics of his generation; his empirical and theoretical innovations contained within his books and papers, having helped to define and deepen our understanding of the complex developments taking place in public policy and administration. It is a mark of the quality of *IRAS* that such a renowned academic has edited it for the last eight years. High regard for the journal, however, is also reflected in the array of respected authors it publishes. A casual perusal of the contents pages of the journal’s volumes reveals a global roll call of the world’s leading administrative sciences academics and a leavening of theoretically engaged practitioners. With its distinctive separate language versions (of the English original), the journal has a genuinely global reach, and it is important to look again at publishing Arabic and Spanish versions of the journal and exploring ways of maintaining its reach in terms of its delivery and its publishing of international authors.

The themed issue is one way of doing this. Guest editors working with the editorial team are able to identify matters of great importance and or interest and solicit contributions of direct relevance to the readership. In this way the journal is able to remain innovative in terms of identifying trends and developments, while also bringing together writers able to analyse, discuss and debate
those topics. IRAS has increasingly devoted space to these themed, or special issues, but this is not to deny the importance of individual contributions in general issues, it is simply to reflect the role the journal has forged in bringing together a debate and discourse around the dynamics that are driving global administrative change; a vital role for the journal as it continues to be the medium of expression for those seeking to understand the context of public sector reform. As a discipline we are constantly reminded of the rapidity of reform in the administrative sciences. We also need to look at the subtleties and causalities of change. In future years it seems likely that a rediscovery of the tenets and lessons from both Islamic and Chinese public administration will have an impact, but so too will South America and India as they forge separate and increasingly important administrative identities with a combination of old traditions and new technologies.

It is new technology that also poses a threat to IRAS and indeed to all high quality journals in the humanities and social sciences. Most articles are now read after being downloaded individually and not as part of a hard copy issue in a library or delivered to the home of individual subscribers; delightful though it is to some of us of a certain vintage to receive a fresh new journal with a satisfying thud through the letterbox. Most academics and practitioners hardly venture into campus libraries, but remain fixed to their screens and read research articles after carrying out an electronic search. IRAS has greatly benefitted from this, as have all leading journals. It has been a truly beneficial development in terms of reaching a wider audience for influential articles.

The rise of a demand for open access (OA), however, especially when combined with a new kind of copyright license (CC-BY) that strips away the rights of authors to own and control or assert rights over their own intellectual property prove to be a challenge. In the UK, the British research councils and Higher Education Funding Council for England are strongly pushing for all research-based outputs that have an element of public funding to be made open access and, wherever possible, this should be gold open access. There are moves afoot in other European countries to emulate this, and in the USA the OA debate has been in play for some years. In Belgium (and elsewhere), implementation has stalled, given the recognition by the authorities of the potential harm such a libertarian policy can have.

In the UK version the author pays article-processing charges (APCs) to the journal, which then publishes the paper and makes it instantly open to all. It is a system that works fairly adequately in science, technology, engineering and medical subjects, but does not transfer well to humanities and social science. In the former, adherence to a recognized methodology and code of ethics suffices for most journals to agree to collect the APCs and then to publish. These subjects also usually protect their intellectual property through patents, an option not open to social science. Publishers have a financial incentive to publish large numbers of papers; each paper published harvesting a monetary reward for them. The more papers they publish the more money they take. It is hard to discern an incentive to quality in this model. Social science has a very different tradition and here OA is akin to
vanity publishing or blogging. It also cuts to the heart of a major quality control, unpaid and experienced reviewers who carry out unbiased reviews through their devotion to the subject and not for remuneration.

If all papers are free as soon as they are submitted then libraries will cancel subscriptions to those journals. Furthermore, only those individuals wealthy enough to pay for this particular kind of vanity publishing will get published unless a new and more democratic model can be found. Even then, traditional high-quality publishers and the role of the independent reviewer will be under threat. If OA is implemented wholesale, high-quality discipline-based journals such as *IRAS* will be threatened. We need to be aware of these issues and seek ways of maintaining the excellent high quality tradition of *IRAS*, while working with the demands and dynamics of new technology within which we all operate.

The future, therefore, remains unpredictable, interesting and exciting. We have all manner of challenges to face and I am sure we will do so from the position of strength that the editorial team has established. With the advice, guidance, support and (I am sure) critical and healthy skepticism of Catherine Humblet, Isabella Proeller, Shamsul Haque and Yves Emery, as well as our authors and academic and practitioner readers, we will continue to shape and deliver an outstanding international journal of note.
