Editorial

MATTHEW COOP*

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Amidst the chaos of packing as I prepared to leave Imperial College, late one afternoon I had a visit from Leon Heward-Mills of ICE Publishing. As Leon spoke with some passion of his ideas for an internet-based journal for geotechnics, it dawned on me that his visit was not purely social. I wonder whether he knew at that time that I am the only person in my university without a Facebook page or whether he was aware of my article for the sixtieth birthday issue of *Géotechnique* (Coop & Schnaid, 2008) in which I lamented the rise of the internet PDF download and extolled the virtues of an afternoon among dusty volumes in the civil engineering library. Nine short months and much hard work later, *Géotechnique Letters* has reviewed and published online its first paper in just 7 weeks and 5 days after submission.

The advantages of high-quality rapid publication are obvious by comparison with the more lengthy processes of the major printed journals. As an experimentalist, I know only too well that after a PhD is complete, it takes a couple of years to get the work written up and into press, thus typically appearing 5 years after the research commenced. Meanwhile, I have had to report to my sponsors and my university, who may not be familiar with the stately progress of soil mechanics, that at project completion I have written precisely zero journal papers.

Although *Géotechnique Letters* covers the same broad range of geotechnical engineering as the other major journals, the shorter format of the papers and the rapid dissemination that the short format permits will make the content distinctive. Clearly, with a limit of 2000 words there will not be room to report every detail of a major research project or novel engineering design, and the format will better suit work in progress or the rapid dissemination of new, controversial or emerging ideas. As with any journal, the ideas and concepts – no matter how fresh and exciting – still need data or evidence to support them. Although a letters journal is new to geotechnics, it is common and influential in many or even most other disciplines. Our aim is to recover some of the immediacy of

research and discovery in our science that perhaps has become a little lost in the succession of rather presidential addresses that conferences and learned society meetings seem to have become. It is our intention to introduce an online forum for discussion of papers that we hope will help revitalise debate in geotechnics, which seems to be suffering under our bean counting culture where academic success depends on numbers of papers written.

The review process has the same rigour as all the major printed journals. An initial decision is made by me and one other panel member as to whether a paper is suitable for review. It then undergoes two external referees' reports and assessment by a panel member, each decision being ratified by the panel. Problematic decisions and other editorial matters are discussed at monthly panel meetings. These are held online, which means that difficult issues get a thorough hearing while enabling us to have a completely free choice over where members work (presently listing nine countries). I am fortunate to have a panel of such experience.

Setting up the first major online journal in geotechnics has, of course, required considerable effort. I would like to thank the advisory panel, to whom I am very grateful, and Ben Ramster, journals editorial manager at ICE Publishing. I would also like to thank Professor Chris Clayton, editor of our sister journal *Géotechnique*, for his advice and support; we shall continue to work closely together as *Géotechnique Letters* develops.

Rapid online publishing is an exciting new venture for our discipline. I am sure that many readers will have ideas about the nature, content and format of *Géotechnique Letters* to share with us and I would encourage them to contact me.

REFERENCE

- Coop, M. & Schnaid, F. (2008). Contributions to *Géotechnique* 1948–2008: Laboratory and field testing. *Géotechnique* **58**, No. 5, 423–428.