

Editorial

For the Géotechnique 60th birthday special issue I wrote a piece with Fernando Schnaid on the history of laboratory testing in our journal in which we lamented the inexorable trend towards online working and away from dusty libraries. After a year of rubbing sore shoulders and upgrading to stronger reading glasses I am wondering when the backlash against concentrating our entire working lives on one screen will begin. Naturally, as a journal editor the question of printed and/or online publishing is a thorny one, linked as it is to open access, how a journal is financed and the rapidity of publication. I am happy to say that it is not an immediate question for us at Géotechnique, but until an occupational therapist finally highlights the harm to our backs, eyesight and sanity, it will always be around. I would welcome your thoughts on the subject and while we don't know what pressures we will face in the future, I guess we have all learnt to be wary of irreversible decisions made by slender majorities based on ill-informed debate.

Of course one of the drawbacks of printed publishing is the inevitable production queue and under Dave Potts' excellent leadership Géotechnique has been doing all it can to manage the delays. While we may be able to tweak the numbers, for example by encouraging authors to cite Ahead of Print articles, queues are inevitably bad news for Impact Factors, let alone real effects on the impact our work and on our professional careers. I shall certainly be discussing with the Panel ways to reduce further the delays. Many of you will remember that I was the founding editor of Géotechnique Letters, which is online only, and I hope to bring some of the ideas for speeding up publication we had there to the table. But I am well aware that Géotechnique is a venerable journal that one should be wary of tinkering with; after all, there is nothing as easy to lose as a reputation. In any event, I look forward to exploring how we may work more closely with our younger sibling, Géotechnique Letters.

In the meantime, I thought I would try to put into perspective what the real influence is of long rigorous review and publication processes, so I played with some citation numbers for papers published in Géotechnique. We are all aware that it is our journal of reference, and perhaps Fig.1 may help to understand why. I assembled the citations of ten papers that were written in the 1990s that have been reasonably well cited, but excluding those with crazy numbers like John Burland's Rankine Lecture. So each has had around 200-300 citations, which have been plotted against the elapsed time since publication. Do look carefully at the graph; the citations are *per year*, not cumulative as you might think with a cursory glance. Of course I had realised that the "half-life" of citations to geotechnical papers was long compared to other disciplines, but evidently for this class and age of paper there is no half-life at all. This puts the trials and tribulations of publication delays into perspective and highlights the absurdity of metrics like Impact Factor. However, there can be no excuse for undue delays, and those of us who are in positions to influence this do well to remember the blight that slow publication can be for early career academics, especially in more metric driven countries.

Having lived and worked in the Far East, about as distant as Béatrice and I could get from London, and having many close friends there, I am well aware of a sensitivity of some who feel remote from what they perceive to be a rather "club-like" journal and I shall be endeavouring to reach out to those people. The guarantee of quality that we all value in Géotechnique is in no small part due

to the fact that we, as a panel, all gather around a table in Great George Street, London, to thrash out difficult decisions. As we strive for greater inclusivity, we must be careful not to lose what we value most.

So as we while away what will hopefully be the final lockdown months, do have a think about what we should be doing for our 75th anniversary, which is a couple of years away; given my worries about queues, a special issue, like in 1998, may not be the best choice.

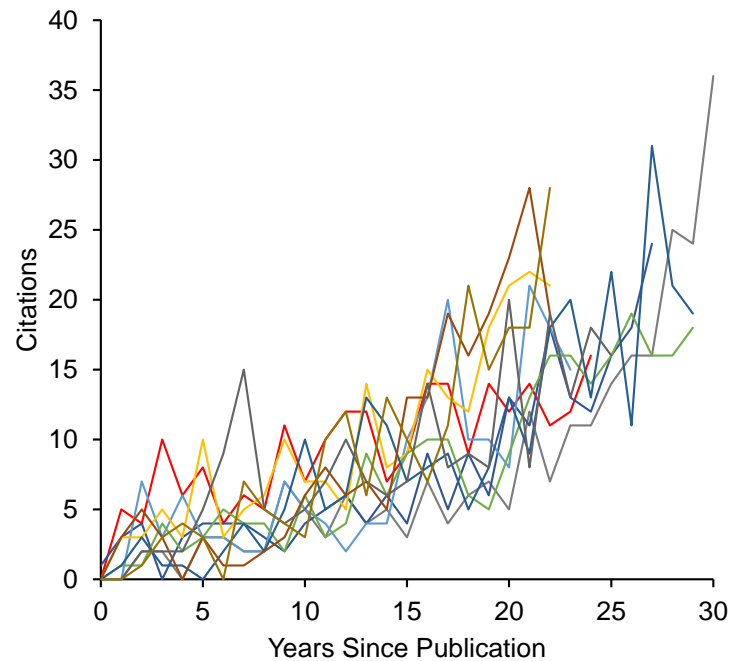


Fig.1 Citations per year of papers since publication