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On being the Trainee Editor of the *Psychiatric Bulletin*

SUMMARY

The *Psychiatric Bulletin* offers the post of a trainee editor on its Editorial Board, open to all trainees in psychiatry. In this paper we (the immediate past and current

Trainee Editor) describe the roles and responsibilities, learning opportunities and our own experiences from our time as Trainee Editor of the *Bulletin*. We hope we will give readers

some understanding of the immense learning potential and academic exposure that this post offers, and encourage trainees to consider whether it is of interest to them.

Since 1999 the *Psychiatric Bulletin* has offered the post of a trainee editor on its Editorial Board, open to all trainees in psychiatry. There have so far been two Trainee Editors and the third person started office in January 2008. Up until recently, this post was not advertised widely and consequently did not attract much interest from trainees. The purpose of our paper is to share with trainees (and hence potential future applicants) the eligibility criteria for the post, the roles and responsibilities, as well as learning opportunities and our own experiences in the post.

Ideal candidate

Ironic yet true, there is no set of specific criteria that makes a candidate ideal for the Trainee Editor job except a demonstrable interest for the job and commitment. Of course, any evidence of successful or attempted editorial/academic work, appropriate to the applicant's level of training and experience, will be a bonus. We view this flexibility in selection criteria as being very trainee-friendly, given that trainees have widely varying strengths and interests. Potential applicants are screened and further assessed with an acknowledgement that more specific editorial and writing skills can and will be nurtured in the job. Although by no means exhaustive, Box 1 lists some of the essential and desirable criteria for the job.

Roles and responsibilities

The post holder is expected to work as an integral and active member of the *Psychiatric Bulletin's* Editorial Board. This includes attending quarterly Editorial Board meetings that are held at the College office in London. The Trainee Editor will have to actively participate in peer-reviewing papers submitted to the *Bulletin*. This involves reading a paper thoroughly, identifying its strengths and

weaknesses, assessing its originality, importance and topicality, and eventually making recommendations to the Editor on whether or not the paper could be published.

The Trainee Editor is expected to undertake one project (of their choice or one suggested by the Editorial Board) to be completed during their term in office. Examples include the e-interview series developed and maintained by Dominic Fannon (Trainee Editor 1999–2002) and statistical guidelines for papers submitted to the *Bulletin* developed by Sanju George (Trainee Editor 2003–2006).

They might also be required from time to time to help with the commissioning process – suggesting potential topics (and authors) to be commissioned/ solicited as 'Editorials' or 'Review' papers for the *Bulletin*.

The post holder may need to work with the Collegiate Trainees' Committee (CTC) in identifying and addressing trainees' needs and, if appropriate, commissioning themed articles that are of topical relevance to trainees. This might also mean that they may have to attend some of the CTC meetings in London.

Box 1. Eligibility criteria

Essential criteria

- Trainee in psychiatry
- Working towards College membership
- Interested in writing
- Involvement in research
- Academic exposure/experience
- Willing to commit time and energy into the job

Desirable criteria

- Higher specialist trainee
- MRCPsych
- Publications
- Has had critical appraisal skills training

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Selection process

The post is advertised in the *Bulletin*. Applicants are invited to submit their curriculum vitae and a covering letter outlining why they want the post and details of a project they wish to undertake. Short-listed candidates are invited for an interview with the Editor and the immediate past Trainee Editor. Aspects discussed at the interview include the candidate's reasons for interest in the job, any relevant past experience and the project proposal. The successful candidate is offered the position initially for a year, with the possibility of further extension subject to conditions.

Our learning experiences

Although the current trainee editor (N.H.) has only been in post for 15 months, his experiences so far exactly match those of the previous trainee (S.G.). Some of the key learning experiences are listed below.

This post provides an excellent opportunity to actively participate in reviewing and commissioning papers, thereby sharpening one's own critical appraisal skills and also gaining an insight into what, when and where to publish. Such an awareness of a paper's publication potential will also help one with their own writing/publishing career.

An opportunity to meet, interact and work with senior academics (Editorial Board members) offers a unique chance to understand how an 'academic mind' works. The debates and discussions that take place at the Editorial Board meetings are intellectually stimulating. All in all, it is a fruitful and immensely rewarding experience for any aspiring academic.

We also noted that this post provides ample opportunities to establish or broaden one's contacts and network – both with fellow trainees and senior researchers. Some of the academic 'contacts' can help with one's own career path – be it in terms of advice or support.

The links that the Trainee Editor can potentially establish with the CTC (as a co-opted member or otherwise) can help them represent the 'voice of trainees' on the Editorial Board. This in turn can help make the *Psychiatric Bulletin* more relevant to trainees.

Although not 'officially' expected of the job, often junior trainees and novice authors get in touch with the Trainee Editor for advice and guidance on how to write or for help with editing their draft manuscripts.

Time commitments and benefits of the post

We did not find the time commitment required to be excessive: Editorial Board meetings (quarterly) take place in London and each lasts for about 2 h; the time required to peer-review papers can vary (and gets less with experience) and on average there are requests to review one or two papers per month.

Box 2. Key benefits of the job of the Trainee Editor

- Excellent learning experience
- Exposure to academic activities
- Thorough understanding of the peer-review process
- Sharpens critical appraisal skills
- Encouragement to read widely and to write more
- Provides insight into what, where and how to publish
- Opportunity to guide budding authors
- Can help with career progression, especially academic

Although not necessarily the case, the Trainee Editor after their term in office might be offered a chance to serve as a permanent Editorial Board member.

To summarise, the key benefits of the Trainee Editor experience are listed in Box 2.

Views from the current Trainee Editor

When I applied for the post, it was with a mixture of excitement and apprehension. This was a new venture, the details of which I knew little about, and it would take me out of my comfort zone. As the only member of the Editorial Board from the north of England, I was worried this was going to be a major obstacle for the post. However, almost all the work of peer reviewing and liaising with the team can easily be done via email or phone. My worries disappeared after starting the post as I realised I was part of a helpful, friendly and approachable team. Time management skills are vital, as there are strict deadlines to adhere to. The work is hugely satisfying and an eye-opener to learn how journals are put together. Working 'on the inside' has enabled me to appreciate what is looked for when it comes to publishing papers. This awareness is invaluable when writing my own articles. I have also started work on a specific project, under the guidance of a senior academic, looking into setting up a regular column in the *Bulletin* that will discuss portrayal of mental health topics in the media.

For new specialty trainees, I think it makes for an excellent and unique addition to their portfolio. Although 'special interest' days for specialty registrars are being phased out, sessions devoted to the Trainee Editor's work can be negotiated with your trainer. This can also be incorporated into your personal developmental plan, and it looks impressive in your portfolio. When it comes to applying for posts higher up the 'ladder', this can set you apart from other candidates. I have no doubt this experience will make me a more rounded and better psychiatrist, and have no hesitation in recommending the post to anyone.

Trainee editor posts for other psychiatric journals

It is beyond the remit of this paper to discuss work opportunities for other psychiatric journals. However, it is worth noting that the *British Journal of Psychiatry* also has two Trainee Editor posts, which offer similar learning experiences to what we have already described.

Conclusions

We hope this paper has provided readers with an insight into the immense learning potential and

academic exposure that the post of the Trainee Editor offers. Hopefully we have also clarified what the job entails and thereby helped trainees consider whether it is for them or not. The Trainee Editor's job advertisement goes out once every 2–3 years. So look out and good luck.

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Declaration of interest

S.G. is the immediate past (2003–2006) Trainee Editor of the *Bulletin* and N.H. is the current Trainee Editor. The views expressed here are only those of the authors and not of the *Psychiatric Bulletin's* Editorial Board or of the Royal College of Psychiatrists.



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