

EDITORIAL

Let there be preLights: one year on

James Briscoe^{*,§} and Katherine Brown^{†,§}

It's a year since the launch of preLights, The Company of Biologists' preprint highlighting service. This is an exciting (if unconventional) venture for us and we'd like to take the opportunity to celebrate a successful first year and reflect on how it has developed. For those of you who've not yet come across preLights, you're missing out: preLights is run by an international group of early-career researchers who select, summarise and comment on the preprints they find most noteworthy – with the hope of helping the broader community navigate and digest the ever-growing preprint literature. We'd encourage you to take a look at the site (<https://prelights.biologists.com>), read our introductory Editorial (<http://dev.biologists.org/content/145/4/dev164186>), and find out more in an interview with preLights' community manager, Máté Pálffy (<http://jcs.biologists.org/content/131/14/jcs221838>).

So, one year on, how is preLights doing? We've posted over 300 highlights on a diverse array of topics: from synthetic biology to toxicology to animal behaviour. Gratifyingly, there's been a strong showing in the development field – over 100 posts discuss developmental biology-related preprints. We receive around 2000 page views per week, and the most popular posts receive around 1000 views (see <https://prelights.biologists.com/news/the-most-read-prelights-in-2018/> for the most-read posts of 2018). One important feature of preLights is that we engage with the authors of the preprint: preLighters are encouraged to contact the authors of the article they are highlighting to raise comments and questions about the study. Author responses are then included alongside the main post. Just over a third of highlights contain an author response, providing valuable additional information on the science and the background story behind it. We think this contributes to encouraging a culture in which other readers can get involved in the discussion by commenting on posts or getting in touch with the authors. We also hope this provides useful feedback to the authors – indeed, we know in a number of cases that the discussion between preLighter and author has influenced revisions to a paper.

For us, one of the most important things about preLights is the network of early-career researchers – from PhD students through to early-stage PIs – that we are helping to build. We now have over 100 'preLighters' in our community (see Fig. 1): we initially recruited through nominations from editors and board members, but more recently we have held two open calls for new preLighters. This vibrant community spans four continents and a diverse range of fields. preLighters interact through a dedicated Slack channel that sees not only discussions about recent preprints, but also about wider aspects of publishing and research [resulting in, for example, a recent Node post on preprints and journalism (<http://thenode.biologists.com/preprints-promote-transparency-and-communication/>

discussion/), as well as a collaborative preLight post on an analysis of the preprint literature (<https://prelights.biologists.com/highlights/tracking-the-popularity-and-outcomes-of-all-biorxiv-preprints/>)]. We are delighted to be able to play a role in supporting these scientists by giving them a platform to write about the science that excites them, by offering guidance and feedback to help hone their writing skills, and through interviews posted on the preLights site (see e.g. <https://prelights.biologists.com/news/meet-prelighters-interview-natalie-dye/> and <https://prelights.biologists.com/news/meet-prelighters-interview-james-gagnon/>). It's also been exciting to see that, through their activity on preLights, some of our preLighters have had the opportunity to give talks and take part in workshops about preprints and science communication.

What next for preLights? Our hope is that the site (and its associated social media accounts – follow on Twitter @preLights) will continue to grow in popularity, and that preLights will become the go-to place for researchers wanting to find out about the latest exciting research across the life sciences. One new initiative we're about to launch is 'preLists' – curated lists of preprints on a particular topic (for example, centred around the theme of, or featuring preprints discussed at, a conference). These will complement, but not replace, the Node's regular round-up of developmental biology preprints. We're also pleased to announce additional ways in which we're making the preLights more accessible. bioRxiv already includes links to preLight posts, and soon links to preLights will be available from preprints deposited in Europe PMC. In addition, preLight posts will be assigned unique digital object identifiers (DOIs), providing a reliable persistent link to each post. preLights is still in its infancy, and so we're particularly keen to get feedback on what you think of the site and how we can better fulfil the needs of the community – please do get in touch at prelights@biologists.com.

preLights operates completely independently of Development and our sister journals. Nevertheless, it's been good to see that several preprints highlighted on preLights have subsequently been published in our journals. This reflects the enthusiasm with which preprinting is now being embraced by the developmental biology community. In 2018, over 10% of Development's submissions were deposited on bioRxiv (representing nearly 20% of the manuscripts in the 'developmental biology' category) using the bidirectional portals we have in place to allow concurrent submission to bioRxiv and any of the Company's journals. We encourage authors who want to make their research available to the community at an early stage to take advantage of these portals, and to do so without fear that preprinting their work will compromise publication in our journals.

One year into the preLights experiment, we're delighted with how things are going, and we hope that preLights will continue to grow and thrive. In an increasingly online world, we believe it is important for community journals such as Development to provide virtual spaces for discussion of science and the scientific environment. We realised this almost a decade ago when we set up the Node, which has since established an important place in

*Editor-in-Chief, Development.
†Executive Editor, Development.

§Authors for correspondence (james.briscoe@crick.ac.uk;
katherine.brown@biologists.com)

id J.B., 0000-0002-1020-5240; K.B., 0000-0001-9110-8276

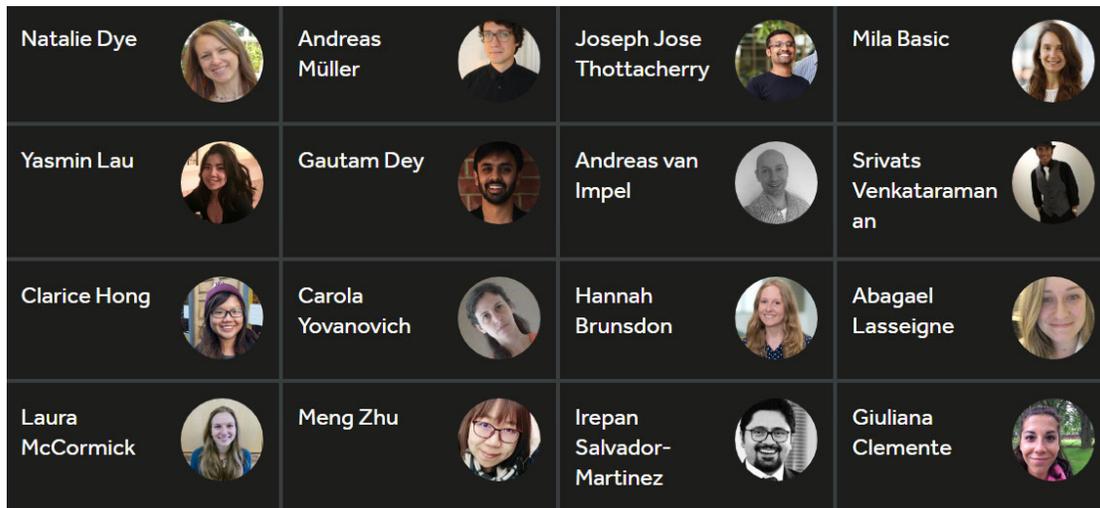


Fig. 1. Some of our preLights community – for a complete list, visit <https://prelights.biologists.com/community/>.

the community as a forum where news and views can be exchanged and discussed. And despite being middle-aged in internet years, the Node continues to increase in popularity with more than 25,000 page views a month. Alongside preLights and the Node, we run active social media channels (you can follow us on Twitter @Dev_journal, or find us on Facebook) and we have just launched an Instagram account (@developmentjournal). We

plan to use Instagram to showcase the beauty of developmental biology and we hope that soon you'll be as eager to see your images on our feed as you are to get them on the cover of Development. Together, we hope that our online activities help to support the developmental biology community by providing information, opportunities for discussion, and routes for making connections across the world.