
NEWS

Science journalism to get impetus

The Indian Science Writers Association (ISWA) in New Delhi is now putting more into the major exercise of increasing the number, visibility and impact of science reports in the country's newspapers. While science reporting is now finding more acceptance, it is not yet recognized as an important component of the newspapers. ISWA hopes that its new science feature service will help improve the situation considerably.

Last month ISWA organized workshops on advanced techniques in science communication at New Delhi and Bangalore. Participants included freelance science writers, science reporters and science editors. The workshops were conducted by Prof. A. J. Meadows of Loughborough University of Technology, UK, and Mr Martin Redfern, a producer in the Science Unit of the BBC. There were several exercises for the participants, including article content and readability analysis, and interviewing and writing. The problems of translation of

scientific terminology, the sources of material for science journalists, the role of science fiction in fashioning the popular image of science, and the use of radio in science communication were also discussed. The workshops were part of ISWA's efforts at improving science journalism in the country.

Meanwhile, the Joint Media Committee of the Indo-US Subcommission on Education and Culture decided at its last biannual meeting that the United States will help train Indian television producers, directors and editors in science film-making. One of the planned projects under this arrangement is a series of workshops on production of science programmes for television.

The public understanding of science is being increasingly debated, and serious efforts to improve it are becoming important both for the public on the one hand and for the scientific community and science policy-makers on the other.

Journal costs cause worry

The rapidly increasing prices of scientific journals are posing serious problems to libraries and scientists. An article in a recent issue (24 July) of *The Scientist* (published by the Institute for Scientific Information, Philadelphia, USA) discussed the ramifications of the problem. While the soaring subscription costs are forcing (American) libraries to cancel subscriptions and delay orders of new journals, scientists who depend on these journals are increasingly worried about decreased access to a wide range of information and to the latest reports.

The Association of Research Libraries (ARL), which represents 119 US and Canadian libraries, conducted two studies of journal prices last year. As a solution to the problem of libraries' inability to meet the growing costs, ARL recommended that scientists should consider submitting their papers to non-profit rather than to for-profit journals and that granting agencies could also identify preferred, non-profit journals for reporting research results. But Eugene Garfield, editor-in-chief of *The Scientist*, points out that this recommendation has no

supporting data that would allow a fair comparison between non-profit and for-profit journals. He recommends a comprehensive audit of all scientific publishers that would (i) help libraries make better-informed decisions about journal selection, (ii) be useful to authors in selecting the most efficient and responsive journals, and (iii) benefit publishers by pointing out deficiencies.

While Indian scientific journals are not prohibitively expensive, the Indian scientific community also faces the problem of non-availability of much-needed foreign and international journals because of the high cost. University and research institute libraries have a considerable problem in trying to satisfy several faculty committees representing different subjects. In the exercise of managing costs, the demands of scientists in the 'fashionable' areas may squeeze the even modest requirements of other areas.

Scientific publishing is such an essential component of science that solutions to these problems will have to be found soon.
