
Editorial

European Science Editors – recruiting the next generation

Dear Sir,

I am applying for the position of editor recently advertised in ...

Thus began for me, and doubtless for many others, a career in publishing; unforeseen at school, at university and grasped at more in desperation than as a strategic decision when two years at the bench had finally convinced me that I was not cut out to be a research scientist. I was lucky. The only one of those letters that earned a reply led to a fantastic job as a science editor with the Ciba Foundation. First, I discovered that I had a natural talent for copy editing. Secondly, that talent was honed by two very experienced editors, Julie Whelan and Maeve O'Connor. Thirdly, Maeve introduced me to EASE and thereby the greater community of science editors.

Two decades later, I find myself mentoring work experience students who are studying for masters degrees in publishing. They come from around the world to universities in London or Oxford, with degrees in the arts and “a passion for literature”, to try and improve their CVs and thereby their prospects in the job market. Computer literate, articulate, motivated – most of them are already an employer's dream. Yet only one had ever considered a career in science publishing; the others cite travel or children's books, and I often feel that our medical books' team is seen as the short straw. However, they settle down to preparing contracts, checking third-party permissions and all the “paperwork” associated with publishing books and soon realise that much of the work is the same, whether the book (or journal) covers family holidays in Sardinia or managing depression in the elderly. At “entry level”, subject knowledge is not essential – although it always helps to have an interest in or understanding of the topic. The crunch comes at the next level, when one takes responsibility for a journal or publishing programme and needs to liaise with academics, assess manuscripts in some way, plan for the development of that publication, etc. It's at that point that employers notice the absence of people with scientific backgrounds.

My question is whether we, as individuals and as an organization, should be doing something to change this. Not all science graduates want to be scientists. Some study science for interest and for basic skills, knowing that they plan to enter business or management. What about those, like me, who love science but for various reasons don't want to stay at the bench? Are they aware of the many opportunities within science editing and publishing? Some societies have career workshops at their annual meetings: has anyone ever represented EASE, formally or informally, at one of these? To be more proactive, have we ever offered speakers for such a session to societies?

Last November (*European Science Editing* 2008;34(4):94), Stuart Handysides wrote an editorial asking: “European Science Editors – who are we?” Stuart reviewed the

membership of EASE over the years by geography and type of membership and briefly mentioned subject, but he didn't ask: what do we do? Many (most) of us work with journals, but even that group covers a range of activities: copy editors, production editors, managing editors. Then we have freelancers (again covering a range of activities), as well as people working for medical communications agencies, national and international organizations, and at least one (me) commissioning books. This represents a large fund of experience and expertise that we could use, not just to train editors but to encourage more young scientists to consider a career in science publishing. How do we go about this?

Science careers are discussed and promoted at various events; one is the Euroscience Open Forum, which is held in alternate years. EASE organized two sessions at the last one in Barcelona and has applied to do so again in Turin in 2010. There are, however, limits to how much the Council and Programme Committee can achieve. Can EASE facilitate its members, as individuals, to do more to raise the profile of science editing as a career and recruit more people, preferably scientists, into our ranks.

The world of publishing is changing rapidly and the role of the editor with it: basic copy editing may now be done by computer, other jobs are being outsourced to companies beyond Europe. Some see open access publishing as obviating the need for any editing, with authors posting their manuscripts directly on the web. Threats or opportunities? If software leads to copy editors receiving manuscripts with no spelling or grammar mistakes, surely that's a good thing – for the individual and the profession? Editors are then free to concentrate on the content and to apply their skills to the more interesting matters, such as structure, accuracy, and clarity. If content management jobs are moving to countries where labour is cheaper, should we in Europe focus on content acquisition and development? If authors want to self-publish, should we work with them pre-publication, offering more training in science writing? All of these require editors with knowledge of science as well as of science editing – which means we should be encouraging more science graduates and postgraduates to consider editing and publishing as a career.

EASE has seen substantial changes in its membership since it passed its 25th birthday in 2007, with many of the original members retiring and new members taking their places. As an organization, we feel well placed to serve the needs of our members over the next few years. As a profession, are we in such good shape? If not, what should EASE be doing to help?

Joan Marsh

Vice President EASE

Associate Publishing Director, Wiley-Blackwell

jmarsh@wiley.com