
Editorial

European science editors – who are we?

As a new member of the publications committee I was curious to know how many members the European Association of Science Editors (EASE) had, who and where they were, and what journals they represented. I spent wet days this August analyzing membership statistics and reading old issues of *European Science Editing*. As the trends emerged I found that current concerns about the role of editors in the publishing business had been expressed for many years: “The future of scientific journals is under threat: libraries have to cut subscriptions, selling the journals becomes problematic, and sponsors are difficult to find,” wrote the president of the EASE Council in 1993.¹ Nevertheless, a year later the hope was expressed that EASE would soon welcome its 1000th member.² From the Editors’ Desks provided periodic updates on membership and encouragement to recruit.

In 1998 a membership list showed that EASE had 930 members (including 53 corporate members, representing 346 individuals). Members were from 50 countries, 23 of them in Europe. The largest numbers of members were from the United Kingdom (320), the Netherlands (84), the United States (62), and France (48). The sex of members was not stated, but for those whose names allowed me (with my limited recognition) to determine sex, women outnumbered men by 374 to 342. A total of 403 journals/series were represented.

Three years later, in 2001, little had changed. The membership list included 929 members (again 53 corporate members, representing 346 individuals). Members were from 54 countries, 26 of them in Europe. UK membership still accounted for the largest number (321), followed by the Netherlands (79), Sweden (55), and France and the United States (50 each). The sex of members was not stated: women appeared to outnumber men by 389 to 342. 377 journals/series were represented, over half of them concerned with medical sciences, but with substantial representation from physical sciences, zoology, botany, social sciences, agriculture, veterinary medicine, and palaeontology.

An electronic membership list in 2002 included members from 54 countries, representing 373 journals/series. By the end of 2004 membership had fallen to 807 and further declines occurred associated with internal administrative difficulties. An editorial in 2006 lauded the “enthusiastic and competent members” of EASE, but spoke of the need to attract more.³

The year 2007 concluded with 519 members, and as of 21 July 2008, 557 people are paid-up members (342 individual members and 24 corporate members representing 215 individuals); 18 members are sponsored by other members. Members currently represent 42 countries, 25 in Europe. The UK still accounts for the largest number (233), followed by the Netherlands (43), Finland (28), and the United States (26). Women appear to outnumber men by 250 to 241.

The past 10 years have seen a fall in membership numbers, both individual and corporate, with total members having fallen from 930 to 557 (a 40% fall) and individual members from 584 to 342 (41%), and 24 rather than 53 corporate bodies (55%) supplying 215 rather than 346 individual members (38%). The decline in membership is, thus, approximately evenly spread between individuals and corporate bodies, but the number of corporate bodies subscribing has fallen by a larger proportion. The decline is also reflected in membership from fewer countries than before.

The latest data show an increase in membership, and the quality of developments in the EASE website, this journal, the vigour of the online ease-forum, and the meetings organised by EASE suggest a thriving organisation.

The fall in corporate membership may parallel a trend toward leaner organisations, in which subscriptions to journals and societies are common casualties. That individual subscriptions have declined may suggest a similar trend in individual behaviour. Is membership of organisations becoming less popular as information and interaction become more readily and freely available on the internet? What is happening to other organisations that members belong to?

Is the tendency towards early, electronic publication reducing the role of editors in scientific publishing? Is the scientific editor a dying breed? Are journals going the way of retailers, who “pile them high and sell them cheap”? The pages of this journal illustrate the continuing need for editors, both to help authors present their data and interpretations clearly and to prevent the perpetration of fraud, and draw our attention to the wealth of interest in our business in terms of websites, publications, and conferences.

Our membership numbers have some way to go to reach the 1000 to which Hervé Maisonneuve aspired in 1994,² but the current trend is upward. EASE is a lean and fit organisation, but all organisations need feeding. Organisations are nourished by the intellectual food brought to them by their members. Perhaps the prospect of next year’s conference in Pisa is a good time to invite our colleagues to sit at our table.

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References

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2. Maisonneuve H. Will EASE soon welcome member number 1000? *European Science Editing* 1994;(52):2.
3. Polderman A. The face of EASE. *European Science Editing* 2006;32(4):93.