

Access to scientific journals

SIR—Edward G. Goldberg says of this institute (*Nature* 332, 10; 1988): "... This distinguished institution, with more than eighty scientists and a large number of laboratories outside its central facility in Zagreb, has single subscriptions to both *Science* and *Nature*, which are kept under lock and key in the Zagreb Library." A few lines below, referring to "... a superabundance of periodicals from international agencies such as UNESCO, UNEP, FAO and WHO", Goldberg suggests diverting a small fraction of these costs to "... the reproduction and distribution in adequate numbers of articles and reports from *Science* and *Nature* to the laboratories and scientific facilities of countries in the developing world".

I hoped that nobody would read and refer to this letter but sadly I was wrong and we have to deal with the consequences.

Goldberg's letter, in spite of its good intentions, views our institute from a rather skewed angle. Few institutions can become and remain "distinguished" by keeping *Science* and *Nature* under lock and key. The Ruder Bošković Institute (with a staff of 400 scientists, rather than Goldberg's 80) is either not distinguished, or it does not keep these journals under lock and key. In this institute, devoted largely to fundamental research in hard sciences, very few things are under lock and key, least of all journals and books.

The role and costs of the 'grey' literature have been discussed elsewhere. There is hardly a publication, journal or periodical, that can boast 100 per cent scientific or informational value (whatever that means). But many of the guidelines, evaluation reports, 'cookbooks' and critical reviews produced by the various UN agencies have their role in many laboratories and governmental agencies around the world. Consequently these should not be discussed as an either/or item with current periodicals. Nor is the selective copying and distribution of information from *Science*, *Nature* and other journals a viable solution. The problem for many countries and their scientific institutions is lack of foreign exchange. Payment in national currencies has long ago been shown as impractical in the light of market conditions for both scientific societies and publishing houses.

May I suggest another possible way to solve this problem? The World Bank requires proof of the environmental compatibility of every investment project before it approves a loan. Maybe it should also make it mandatory that the receiving country provides proof of allocation of some minimum level of investment moneys to the acquisition of proper open literature. The same should apply to

similar governmental or international bank investment loans. Considering the sums floating in such loans, a small proportion of it would solve all the problems.

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SIR—I would like to reassure Edward D. Goldberg (*Nature* 332, 10; 1988) that some organizations are working to remedy the severe lack of scientific journals and books in developing countries.

The Australian Centre for Publications Acquired for Development (ACPAD) was established six years ago with the aim of collecting surplus books and journals in Australia for distribution to tertiary institutions in South-East Asia and the Pacific. Funds are provided by the Australian International Development Assistance Bureau through the International Development Program of Australian Universities and Colleges. This allows ACPAD to meet the costs of sorting and listing, and shipping approximately 3,000 cartons or 75,000 items overseas annually.

Fifty institutions in Indonesia, Thailand, Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Malaysia and the Philippines are now included in the ACPAD programme. Donations of material, which are received from libraries and individuals, are listed and offered overseas, allowing libraries to select titles that will be of use to them. When supplying a backset of a journal, ACPAD attempts to provide subsequent volumes and currently provides 350 serial titles to a number of libraries on a continuous basis.

Many organizations, such as the American Chemical Society and the Netherlands Universities Foundation for International Co-operation (NUFFIC) Periodical Project, have similar schemes. And the International Centre for Theoretical Physics, the Third World Academy of Sciences, the International Council of Scientific Unions and the Association of Geoscientists for International Development are organizing a workshop in October on increasing the flow of scientific literature to Third World institutions.

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Leukaemia in UK

SIR—Simon Hadlington's headline "UK leukaemia study implicates nuclear reprocessing plants" (*Nature* 333, 587; 1988) should surely read "UK leukaemia study acquits nuclear processing plants", the

doses of radiation received from these being far too low to have been responsible.

The large excesses of child leukaemias at Seascale and Thurso clearly call for an explanation other than chance; but the 165 child leukaemias at Gateshead on Tyneside, and several other groups of child leukaemias far from any nuclear plant, surely provide conclusive proof that other causes than radiation can be responsible. No mention was made in Hadlington's article of the fact that raw sewage at Seascale and inadequately treated sewage at Thurso were discharged on their respective beaches, strongly suggesting a local carrier of an infectious agent — which anyway should surely be considered whenever clusters of cases of any disease are found to occur.

A smaller and statistically less striking cluster similarly suggestive of infection occurred in an estate of 100 households north of Slough, where three child leukaemias occurred in two years, two of them to unrelated children living next door to each other.

The unreasonable confinement of serious studies to the neighbourhood of sources of artificially produced radiation must have delayed for five years or more the investigation of alternative possible causes.

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Leading sentence

SIR—I hesitate to comment on the leading article by John Maddox ("How not to catch attention", *Nature* 332, 391; 1988) for fear of appearing to support scientific writing that wastes words with ineffectual banalities.

The lead sentence in a scientific article, however, may be far less important in drawing the readers' attention than are lead sentences in other types of literature or news reporting. For example, what attracts me to a scientific article is the title; if it appears to be of interest, I then read the abstract. A poorly written, uninformative or confusing abstract will generally lead me to skip the rest of the article. If the abstract encourages me to read on, I then look at the figures and references for a quick evaluation of whether the material is new and up to date. Only after passing this last check will an article reach the 'to be read' stack. Unfortunately, by the time I have a chance to get back to the article, I'm usually in such a rush that I just skip the first few paragraphs of the paper and look for the 'meaty parts' instead.

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