

# Spanish scientific journals must raise professional standards in order to compete

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Although 72 percent of the journals gave their reviewers instructions, only 6 percent made any reference to the confidentiality of the paper. Credit: SINC

A study by the Spanish Foundation for Science and Technology (FECYT) shows a lack of standardisation in the peer review systems whereby independent experts assess the content of scientific publications published in Spain. This results in a low level of international competitiveness among these publications.

"We studied the entire [peer review](#) process, beyond the fact of such a review simply being stated in the publication. Our research showed a low level of standardisation in these processes. This reflects a need to work to professionalise some of the Spanish [scientific journals](#) analysed", María Ángeles Coslado, lead author of the study, published in the journal *El profesional de la información*, tells SINC.

The study is based on documentation provided by editors participating in the first round of the Quality Evaluation of Spanish Scientific Journals carried out by the FECYT in 2008. The study analysed a total of 119 publications.

"We examined some of the editorial processes used by these kinds of journals, such as use of external evaluation, provision of instructions to reviewers, the existence of protocols for papers, and the anonymity of those involved in the review", says Coslado.

Out of the 119 journals studied, 32 of them failed to meet the external review requirement. Out of the 87 that did meet this requirement, not all used the same protocols to evaluate work, and so they were discounted.

"The protocols should be a tool that the editor provides the reviewers with, and which should help them to evaluate the formal aspects and content of the paper. They should also act as a means of informing the reviewer of the journal's editorial line, what is expected of the evaluation, and the deadlines for the review", says Izaskun Lacunza, co-author of the study.

Similarly, although 72% of the journals gave their reviewers instructions, only 6% made any reference to the confidentiality of the paper, while 84% failed to ask their reviewers whether they had any conflict of interest.

## **Preventing 'inbreeding'**

The results of the study show that in 94% of the cases studied, there was no indication of whether the reviewers would be paid for their work, while financial payment was only offered in two cases among the remaining 6%.

"In a scientific journal, the purpose of peer revision is to evaluate the scientific quality and originality of the work that researchers send to the publications. The reviewers should be experts in the subject in question and not be linked to the journal publishers. This is to ensure the scientific interest of the articles published, as well as to prevent possible inbreeding – in other words members of the publishing entity acting as reviewers", explains Coslado.

The research by Coslado and Lacunza underlines the fact that, although most journals carry out peer reviews, there is a lack of standardisation between their evaluation protocols. In addition, in one-third of the cases studied, the reviewers were not explicitly required to evaluate the originality of the study, and a large majority of the experts were Spanish, and all of them Spanish speakers.

"The fact that a high percentage of the reviewers are Spanish reflects the lack of internationalisation among Spanish scientific journals, which has a direct effect on their visibility, and as a result makes them a less competitive product at international level", the researcher concludes.

**More information:** Maria Ángeles Coslado, Izaskun Lacunza, Germán Ros. "Evaluación de la calidad de revistas científicas españolas: análisis de sus procesos de revisión". El profesional de la información 20 (2): 159 – 164, 2011.

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