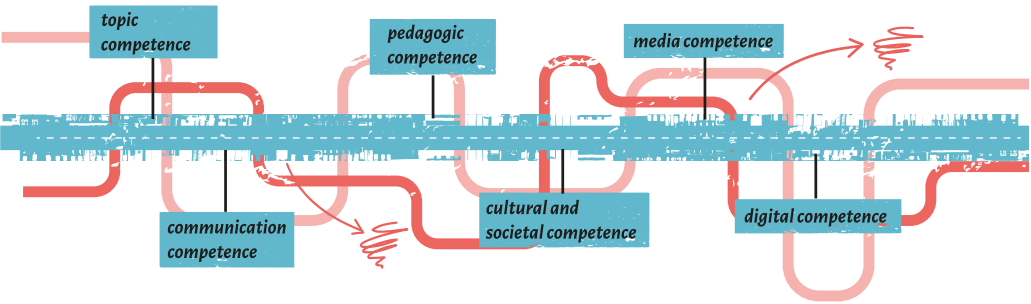
Learning science communication



by SERGE HAAN

The proliferation of communication platforms, each with its own specificities and pitfalls, is just one factor that illustrates the need for formal training and continuing professional development in SciCom. A relatively small number of science communicators (28% [23]) enter the field of SciCom with a degree in journalism or communication. A much larger number develop their skills through informal training, by observing others, or simply through learning by doing. However, the number of formal training courses is clearly increasing. These range from short introductory courses to entire masters programmes [24]. But what should be taught in this training, and who needs it?

Nobody will deny that SciCom professionals need to be familiar with SciCom concepts and their translation into practice, and that they must understand today's society and its dynamics. Ideally, the same will also be true for researchers engaging in SciCom. Although a quick practical introduction without much theoretical background may help researchers to survive some initial activities, a more wholesome approach is needed for lasting success and impact. An optimal approach provides a foundation of conceptual knowledge as well as hands-on training approaches. However, long courses tend to strongly discourage busy researchers from participating. It makes sense to propose a catalogue of smaller training courses instead of long ones. This helps researchers to manage their time and increase their SciCom competence gradually. In addition, those considering an alternative career in SciCom can take the first steps during their scientific career and get a feel for

the environment and the different jobs in the field. Courses range from basic to advanced, and they include media training, social media training, presentation training, individual coaching for outreach activities. Courses on inclusivity and cultural awareness are also very useful. Often more difficult for institutions to set up, but very important for those thinking about a career in SciCom, are internships in communications departments, museums or SciCom organisations, as they allow interested researchers to take the pulse of the SciCom system. Major barriers for early-stage researchers are the time investment and/or resistance from their supervisors, who often fear a reduction in scientific output. Supervisors may need to be convinced that SciCom training provides transferable skills that can increase the quality of research as well as its dissemination and impact. In doctoral education, the integration of SciCom courses in the catalogue of transferable skills trainings and the awarding of ECTS credits may help to valorise these courses. Starting even earlier, at bachelor's level, with a more general course in communication and extending it to science communication at master's level, could further prepare the new generation of scientists for their interaction with society.

AREAS OF TRAINING IN COMMUNICATION AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT
that respondents would be interested to undertake. Respondents could tick multiple answers.

(Source: Fähnrich *et al.* [23])

Recommended reads:

- Fähnrich *et al.* (2021), *RETHINKING Science Communication Education and Training: Towards a Competence Model for Science Communication.* Front. Commun. 6:795198; https://doi.org/10.3389/fcomm.2021.795198
- Longnecker N. (2022). *Twenty years of teaching science communication — a personal reflection.* JCOM. 21:C06110. https://doi.org/10.22323/2.21070306
- Baram-Tsabari *et al.* (2017) *Science communication training: what are we trying to teach?*, International Journal of Science Education, Part B, 7:285-300. https://doi.org/10.1080/21548455.2017.1303756