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An investigation into scientist involvement in science communication activities

MAIN POINTS

- 8964 academic scientists in Japan took part in a survey about science outreach.
- The results showed a rising number of academic scientists who are recognizing the value of science communication activities.
- Results suggest the rise is not entirely due to academic scientists realizing they have a responsibility towards society, but also because they realize it is an opportunity to learn about their field from a variety of perspectives.
- However, outreach is limited because academic scientists are challenged by the lack of time, funding, and rewards.

A research team led by JST fellow and National Institute for Physiological Sciences Associate Professor Amane Koizumi, focusing on science communication carried out by universities and research institutes within Japan, has carried out an investigation into the current state of science communication activities in Japan involving academic scientists. Following an online survey sent out to 122,000 academic scientists, which received 8964 responses (7.4 per cent), a summary of the results have been compiled into the a report.

The research team belongs to the JST Center for Science Communication, directed by Mamoru Mohri, which carries out investigative research as part of its goal to develop and implement measures for long term progress according to the 4th science and technology basic plan approved by Japan' s Cabinet.

This investigation found 70.9 per cent of scientists agreed with, or somewhat agreed with the 4th science and technology basic plan section to improve communication with the general public. The results clearly showed scientists were aware of the value of research outreach. On top of this, 64.4 per cent of scientists had said they had already taken part in some kind of outreach.

More than 80 per cent of scientists had said they carried out research outreach because they felt it was their responsibility as scientists to inform the public about their research, making it clear scientists are aware of their social responsibilities. Additionally, more than 60 per cent of scientists have said they carried out activities in order to get a better understanding of their own research from different perspectives. This shows scientists have been able to get a broader view of their field, and a deeper understanding, by interacting with the general public and researchers from different fields.

However, only 28.1 per cent of scientists had said that such voluntary activities had become the norm. Many scientists do not see such voluntary activities as being normal, which suggests there are certain barriers that need to be dealt with first. For example, when asked whether the research institutes where scientists worked at had adequate staff or resources to support research outreach, 51.2 per cent of scientists with outreach experience had answered 'yes', but only 23.3 per cent of scientists without any outreach experience had given the same answer.

Common barriers keeping scientists from research outreach included lack of time, too much paperwork, no rewards, funding restrictions, and difficulty in creating a platform that would allow science communication. Therefore, it is possible research outreach will become more widespread when something is done to address these issues.

A full report of the investigation is available in Japanese at the following website.

URL : http://csc.jst.go.jp/material/csc_fy2013_01.pdf

Contact us

About the report

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About the survey

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