high quality peer review an integral part of all aspects of professional life, including training, practice, and reward systems.

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BMJ training for peer reviewers

We are offering free courses in London and a training pack on bmj.com

Peer review, although fundamental to science, has been largely an amateur process, with new reviewers learning their trade like apprentices.¹ You can learn about critical appraisal of research papers and other academic articles in many places. But do peer reviewers know what editors want from them? Clearly, many do, and the *BMJ* is lucky to have hundreds of excellent reviewers. We don't want to rely on luck, however, so this week the *BMJ* is launching a programme of training for peer reviewers.

We have published a free package of learning material at http://bmj.com/advice/peer_review/. The training has four aims: to tell participants about the state of peer review research; to make clear to them what constitutes a good review; to help them understand what matters to *BMJ* editors about reviews; and to help them to produce good reviews. From April, we will be offering the same material through half day workshops that will also give reviewers the chance to quiz *BMJ* editors.

We have been thinking for years about offering training for peer reviewers, but we wanted to wait until we had developed and tested workable material that could be used in workshops and for self teaching. Now that the randomised controlled trial of training for *BMJ* peer reviewers has been published (p 673), we are ready to start.² The trial showed that training was feasible and yielded some improvements in the quality of reviewers' reports. The benefits were slight, however, and were not sustained. Of course, more research is needed.³

So much for evidence based policy making, you may say. If the authors of the trial concluded "very short training has only a marginal impact. We cannot therefore, recommend use of the intervention we studied," why have we decided to use the intervention anyway? We have several reasons, all of which boil down to the fact that we want to do this as a service to reviewers and, most importantly, we hope the training will prove to be useful. The main reason is that most participants said during formal feedback that they enjoyed the training. We believe that training is a potentially important way for us to recruit, inform, and retain good

reviewers. The trial showed that the intervention did not worsen the quality of reviews. In the workshops held during the trial, editors felt they learned much from reviewers. Furthermore, the package of learning material is not set in stone: we will expect to amend it in response to further evaluation.

We have recently offered the training to the reviewers who comprised the control group in the trial, and we would like to extend that invitation to all other reviewers. We plan to hold a couple of workshops a year, and we will advertise these in the journal. This year we are holding five workshops, to ensure that everyone in the trial's control group who wants to be trained can attend (box). We have invited those trial participants personally, but there will also be room for 50 other *BMJ* reviewers. We hope lots of you will come along and that many more of you will use the training package on bmj.com.

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Trish Groves *senior assistant editor BMJ*

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Competing interests: SS was the principal investigator of the randomised controlled trial of training for *BMJ* peer reviewers. TG did some of the face to face training during the trial and rated reviewers' reports. Both will run the peer review training programme but neither will receive any direct payment from this.

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BMJ 2004;328:658

Peer review workshops: further information

The peer review training workshops will be held at BMA House, Tavistock Square, London WC1H 9JP

During 2004 the workshops will be on 28 April, 11 May, 29 June, 13 September, and 15 October. Each will run from 10 am to 1 pm

We are offering 50 places, allocated on a first come, first served basis. If you are interested in attending please email Janet Cross (training@bmj.com), stating your order of preference for the above dates