CORRESPONDENCE

Helping young scientists to speak for themselves

SIR — As you indicate in your Editorial 'Cheerleader or watchdog?' (*Nature* **459**, 1033; 2009), the quality of science journalism could be improved by better communication between scientists and the media. We should encourage this valuable skill in scientists at the outset.

I help an international team of high-school students to manage an online journal, *Young Scientists*, which is entirely written by people aged 12–20. To our knowledge, *Young Scientists* (www.ysjournal.com) is the only peer-reviewed science journal for school-aged students. Articles range from reviews of current hot topics to scholarly pieces of original research.

Many youngsters are now involved in scientific research, and at an increasingly early age — as demonstrated by the proliferation of science fairs around the world. Sadly, communication of all this promising work suffers because, once these bright young scientists have exhibited and gone home, their work goes with them. They need more opportunities to publish and share their ideas — before science journalists who are not scientists try to do their communication for them.

Science journalism is making increasing use of online media, which includes social networking sites. Who better to embrace it than our young scientists? If we can engender in them a critical perspective on the way science is reported and encourage them to participate in the process themselves, then we can look forward to a generation of scientists proficient at weighing up evidence and articulate in communicating it.

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Flu: no sign so far that the human pandemic is spread by pigs

SIR — Further to your Editorial 'Animal farm: pig in the middle' (*Nature* **459**, 889; 2009), the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) would like to clarify what is understood so far about how animals are associated with the human influenza A/H1N1 pandemic.

Although the human H1N1 virus contains gene sequences that have been identified in influenza viruses from swine, these are not present in exactly the same combination. The OIE has encouraged its members to intensify surveillance of pigs for infection, but there has been no evidence so far that swine are playing any role in the epidemiology or in the worldwide spread of the virus in the human population. It is likely that we shall never know the specific origin of this pandemic virus.

As you mention, the OIE has campaigned against calling the human disease 'swine flu'. Although the World Health Organization (WHO), the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the OIE have since agreed officially to rename the virus 'pandemic (H1N1) 2009', common use of the misleading

term 'swine flu' is in danger of continuing. This initially prompted several countries to ban import of pigs and pig products or to destroy all their pig populations, without any benefit to public or animal health. It could cause further economic harm, in the same way that the H5N1 'avian flu' crisis of 2004 unnecessarily triggered a drop in people's consumption of poultry products. Such an unjustified disruption of trade would affect small farmers and animal producers around the world, more than a billion of whom are already living in poverty.

In 2005, the FAO and OIE set up a joint network of expertise on animal influenza. The network, OFFLU, was created to help the WHO obtain rapid access to circulating animal viruses for the early preparation of human vaccines. After the emergence of the pandemic virus in humans, OFFLU called for laboratories worldwide to aid public health by publicly sharing gene sequences of influenza virus identified in swine. As a result, it is proposed to expand the current OIE reference laboratories for avian influenza to cover all animal influenza viruses and to increase research on the behaviour of these viruses at the human-animal interface.

The OIE will continue to advise its members and the public on the control of potential zoonotic diseases, for example

by strengthening veterinary infrastructure and stepping up surveillance and reporting capabilities in all countries, regardless of their trade potential.

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Small but effective moves towards a greener China

SIR — Your Editorial 'Raising the standards' (*Nature* **459**, 1033–1034; 2009) reports on the pressure being imposed by non-governmental organizations on China's local governments to provide the public with more information about pollution. There is encouraging evidence that even a small organization can have an impact in this domain.

Ten years ago, there was hardly any environmental enforcement by civil society or by the markets in China. In 1999–2000, the World Bank collaborated on a pilot programme with the Chinese Academy of Environmental Planning, Nanjing University, the Zhenjiang Environmental Protection Bureau in Jiangsu Province and the Hohhot Academy of Environmental Sciences in Inner Mongolia. This experiment, aimed at publicizing information about environmental performance, was run in Hohhot and Zhenjiang. Although the programme was halted at the end of the pilot phase in Hohhot, it was sustained in Zhenjiang.

Despite the top leadership's intention to clean up China's environment, the evaluation system is biased towards economic development. A push from the bottom is badly needed to attract the attention of local governments to the environment.

The Pollution Information Transparency Index now has wide geographical coverage, and efforts are continuing by the Natural Resources Defense Council