INIS/ETDE Joint Technical Committee Meeting: Laying the Foundation for the Future

Representatives of 11 Member States, ETDE and INIS participated in the 12th INIS/ETDE Joint Technical Committee (JTC) Meeting at IAEA Headquarters in Vienna. Held from 21 to 22 October 2009, the meeting laid down solid foundations for future success, sustainability and relevance of both the INIS and the ETDE databases through its guidelines and recommendations. In a friendly and collaborative atmosphere, participants discussed many issues ranging from actions taken on previous recommendations and status of current projects, to very technical and detailed reviews of Metadata Extraction Tool (MET), Computer Aided Indexing (CAI), various character sets and Web 2.0 activities.

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During the two years since the previous JTC meeting, many actions were taken and projects undertaken. Lengthy reviews of separate ETDE and INIS activities, as well as a review of joint activities, gave an excellent crosscut of issues and challenges facing these two organizations which were both established to facilitate the sharing of information among their respective Member States.

Over 20 years of cooperation between ETDE and INIS has increased efficiency and effectiveness of database production and the provision of services of both organizations. Compatible sets of authorities and guidelines for Member States, a balanced and equitable sharing of work, and resource efficiency in the development of mutually beneficial new information technologies are some of the benefits of this cooperation.

12th JTC Meeting participants (Photo: T. Kalapurackal/IAEA)

George Bernard Shaw once said that "we are made wise not by the recollection of our past, but by the responsibility for our future". Although this session of the JTC meeting took time to review the past, its main emphasis was on the future. The economic and financial constraints facing the world, the changing needs of today's scientists, researchers and engineers, the pace of innovation and new developments in the area of information technology, and an ever increasing amount of available information, all have a tremendous impact on our daily activities and our working environments. The 12th INIS/ETDE JTC Meeting made an attempt to lay the foundation for the future by addressing some of these issues of long-term importance, such as the issue of standardization. During the JTC Meeting, the orientation towards recognized world-wide standards such as XML and UNICODE was reconfirmed. It was emphasised that this should be followed by adjusting and updating all current information processing facilities, distribution mechanisms and retrieval tools to meet these standards. This focus on standards brings new opportunities but also begets the need for continual monitoring of new web developments and review of possible ways to use these new technologies to enhance information usage.

In view of current world challenges and the increasing role that information plays in the process of social, cultural, economic and technological democratization, as well as in overall development and prosperity, the JTC meeting commended INIS for providing free and open access to the INIS Database and non-conventional literature (NCL) on the Internet. At the same time, criteria for gaining access to the ETDE Database will be simplified bringing developing countries closer to that valuable information resource.

The meeting also recognized financial constraints that many Member States and international organizations, including INIS and ETDE, are facing. It recommended that efforts be made to keep purchasing and processing bibliographic records at least for core scientific and technical journals so that scientists, researchers, developers, and students may continue to have access to the most important and influential literature published around the world.

Actions taken to increase usage and popularity of the INIS and ETDE databases, including becoming part of World Wide Science and Google Scholar were also encouraged. These and other actions could bring increased use of already available information collections. To measure the database's usefulness, a special Task Force was set up to define such metrics for future use.

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