



AUSTRALIAN BUSINESS DEANS COUNCIL JOURNAL QUALITY LIST

BACKGROUND

In 2007 the Australian Business Deans Council determined that it would establish a Journal Quality List for the use of its members. While the Council accepted that it was impossible to establish a journal list that would meet with the full agreement of all interested parties given the diversity of subjective opinion that surrounds academic journal quality, the Council nonetheless recognized that there were benefits from establishing a journal list. There was a growing proliferation of journal lists internationally and various Council members were using different lists for internal purposes.

A review of international journal lists was undertaken and it was agreed that an Australian Business Deans list was required as there were shortcomings in the available international lists. These shortcomings included regional biases, insufficient coverage of Australian journals, too heavy an emphasis on some criteria that worked against specific disciplines, and lack of consensus of a definitive list.

The development of the initial ABDC Journal Quality List was undertaken by a disciplinary representative working group under the leadership of the ABDC sub-group of Associate Deans of Research (BARDsNET). The subsequent list was ratified by the Council and published in early 2008. It was agreed that the ABDC Journal List should not be revised for two years to allow members an opportunity to become familiar with the list and to provide some certainty over journal ratings. The Council agreed to review the list after two years.

During the course of 2008 and 2009, a feedback mechanism allowed interested parties to provide commentary on the ABDC Journal List. Over 200 items of feedback were received. Approximately half of this feedback related to incorrect journal titles, inactive journals, matters of fact relating to journal identity and disciplinary classification. These corrections were subsequently made to the list. The remaining items of feedback entered the review process.

REVIEW

Toward the end of 2009, the Council advised that it was undertaking a review of the ABDC Journal List. The first stage of the review involved establishing a panel of 17 discipline experts who reviewed the existing ABDC Journal List. The experts were given latitude to exercise their judgment. Criteria to be considered included:

- Relative standing of the journal in other recognized lists (such as the Association of Business Schools)
- Citation metrics
- International standing of the editorial board
- Quality of peer-review processes
- Track record of publishing influential papers
- Sustained reputation
- Influence of publications in the journal in relation to hiring, tenure and promotion decisions.

A draft ABDC Journal List was released in December 2009 for public comment. The list was sent to all Council member business schools and faculties, professional and academic associations, international business schools that were known to be using the list, and publishers. In addition, the list was made public on the ABDC website. The exposure period was two months.

Of note, from the feedback items that concerned the rating category of journals that were received during 2008 and 2009, most of these were no longer a relevant input to the review as the expert reviewers had produced a draft list that agreed with the commentary. The remaining feedback items were then treated as submissions on the draft list.

Almost 1,000 items of feedback were received on the draft ABDC Journal Quality List. Late submissions were accepted after the closing date of 15 February 2010 and submissions continued to trickle in until the end of March.

The submissions were grouped according to type. Submissions broadly fell into four categories:

1. Incorrect journal details (title, ISSN)
2. Incorrect field of research classification
3. Missing and expired journal titles
4. Debate over journal rating.

Questions over journal rating were the most contentious matters. In around 90% of cases, submissions concerning journal rating were made for an upward re-rating of journal titles.

The journal rating questions were dealt with through the following process:

- Initial assessment was made by reference to comparable journals in the specific discipline; relying mainly on citation metrics and other reputable journal quality lists. In some cases, the submissions were judged as lacking sufficient evidence to take the case further.
- Where submissions were judged to be reasonable, specific cases were referred to a new group of discipline experts who made a recommendation.
- Where possible, the expert recommendations were compared to an existing disciplinary list from a recognized discipline association for alignment.

A revised list was subsequently produced. Before publication, this list was referred to a panel of 10 disciplinary experts selected because of their experience and standing to make comparisons across broad disciplinary groups. The final panel of 10 experts were instructed to make a "sanity check". This final review resulted in only a handful of amendments.

ANALYSIS

Statistics on the 2010 list are produced below. Note that the disciplinary groupings follow the Australian standard classification of Field of Research code (FoR). Further details on FoR can be found at:

www.abs.gov.au (refer to Australian & New Zealand Standard Research Classification, series 1297.0)

When classifying journals, we have relied upon disciplinary opinion rather than following any existing journal-FoR mapping. Further, we have attempted to minimize the number of titles appearing in "other" categories.

FoR	Description	Total journals	A* %	A %	B %	C %
All	All	2671	5.5	19.5	27.6	47.4
0806	Information systems	175	6.9	12.6	24.6	56.0
1401	Economic theory	29	13.8	27.6	31.0	27.6
1402	Applied economics	602	3.5	15.3	33.2	48.0
1403	Econometrics	119	14.3	29.4	29.4	26.9
1499	Other economics	157	4.5	30.6	29.9	35.0
1501	Accounting, Auditing & Accountability	107	5.6	17.8	15.0	61.7
1502	Banking, Finance & Investment	150	4.0	17.3	26.0	52.7
1503	Business & Management	741	5.9	18.8	24.2	51.1
1504	Commercial services	57	0.0	14.4	38.6	47.4
1505	Marketing	117	6.0	12.8	30.8	50.4
1506	Tourism	79	3.8	15.2	31.6	49.4
1507	Transportation & Freight services	49	6.1	20.4	18.4	55.1
1599	Other commerce	0	-	-	-	-
180105	Commercial & Contract law	243	6.2	32.1	25.9	35.8
180125	Taxation law	46	4.3	17.0	31.9	46.8

DISCUSSION

The 2010 version of the ABDC Journal Quality List is not perfect but it represents an improvement over the previous 2008 version. There has been substantial consultation about the list and it generally aligns with many of the sub-disciplinary lists in circulation.

The list has been developed for the purpose of serving ABDC members. The list does not purport to serve multiple masters, rather it is provided for the benefit of business school deans, departments and their academic staff. While it is inevitable that other parties outside of the ABDC will use the list and it will be subject to external scrutiny, the marginal decisions have been slanted to the interests of the members of the ABDC.

Perhaps the most significant departure of the 2010 list from the 2008 list is the removal of the inter-disciplinary category. However, many of these journals have not disappeared from the list altogether. Rather, journals previously listed as inter-disciplinary (which might more accurately be termed multi-disciplinary) now appear under a field of research code that aligns with the type of academic areas likely to publish in such journals. For example, actuarial science appears under Banking Finance & Investment (FoR: 1502); applied psychology appears under Business & Management (FoR: 1503).

Some inter-disciplinary titles have been removed as they appear elsewhere on other discipline lists. The Council believes it is unhelpful to have journal titles appearing on multiple lists with different ratings. Hence, where journal titles appear in other subject areas (eg education, psychology, history), they have been left off the ABDC list.

There is little doubt that most journal lists are biased against new journals, mainly on the basis that they have not had sufficient time to be listed under citation databases or gain sufficient citations which occurs with the passage of time. However, in revising the list, attention was paid to those journals that are on a particularly steep upward trajectory, and where appropriate there was some extrapolation made of future trajectory. Hence, the 2010 list has sought to mitigate against new journal bias.

A handful of Australian based journals were judged to be of high quality but suffered from small readerships and hence did not fare as well as some of their international counterparts in metric contests such as citations. In such cases when the expert feedback indicated a marginal rating decision (ie. falling in-between two rating categories), the journal was rated into the upper category.

ERA

During the review, the Australian Research Council issued a draft of the Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) Journal List (to which the ABDC had made submissions). While much of the existing ABDC list coincided with the draft ERA list, important differences were noted especially at the influential A* and A ratings. There were calls for the ABDC to disband its list and instead adopt the ERA list. The Executive of the Council discussed options and decided to continue with the review of its own list. Reasons for this decision included:

- The ERA list was draft and uncertainty over the ERA process meant that a final ERA list could be quite different from the draft list.
- The ABDC Journal List had gained both national and international credibility.
- The ABDC list can be updated regularly whereas the ERA list aligns with the ERA assessment dates.
- Irrespective of the final ERA list, it was healthy to have an alternate list that was owned by the discipline.

3 May 2010