Essays in the Art and Science of Academic Journal Editing and Publishing

SCOPUS and the Content Selection Advisory Board, 2003-2009: The Foundations of the SCOPUS Title Evaluation Platform

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Preamble

Academic publication is underpinned by a sophisticated global system of data collection and analysis which measures the outputs and attainments of authors, journals and publishers. The science and technology of bibliometrics provides valued information on performance for individuals, institutions, academic networks, corporations and governments .

The business of bibliometrics is dominated by two systems; the Web of Science (WoS), whose heritage dates back to the work of Eugene Garfield and the Institute for Scientific Information in the 1960s; and SCOPUS, which was introduced in 2004. Both systems are broadly similar in their outputs.

The global output of journals is huge, and of very variable quality. Trust in their content is critical to the success of journals and publishers. SCOPUS (Elsevier BV) and the WoS (Clarivate Analytics) have built their own systems on the trustworthiness of their listings of journals and their contents. Both organisations have therefore been obliged to develop quality assurance systems for the vetting, acceptance and continuing oversight of their journal portfolios.

The WoS uses an in internally employed panel of adjudicators for journal selection, about whom little is known. SCOPUS adopted a different approach, in appointing an external panel of subject matter experts with proven track records in editorship and librarianship. The SCOPUS Content Selection Advisory Board (CSAB) was initially formed in 2004.

By 2009, it was clear to the SCOPUS development team that a systematic approach was needed to journal evaluation, both for efficiency and for fairness to all applicant journals. A new and streamlined Content Selection Advisory Board (CSAB) was appointed in 2009, and a bespoke computerised SCOPUS Title Evaluation Platform (STEP) system was developed.

Since 2009, the global publishing industry has been transformed by the internet and by open access publishing models. The STEP system has endured and matured, as has the CSAB model. In this series of essays, I examine and record the challenges and successes of quality assurance in academic publishing through the prism of the SCOPUS and STEP systems.

Introduction

The Science of Bibliometrics

The Science of Bibliometrics has had a profound impact on global academic practice and behaviours over the past 75 years. Bibliometrics is the use of numerical data and statistical analysis to evaluate the performance of academic outputs through the study of authors, articles, journals, books and publishers. It allows for performance comparisons across the academic spectrum, and its outputs are highly valued by public and private institutions, corporations, Universities and Governments.

There are many significant and practical limitations to bibliometric measurements and evaluations, and the system has been opened up to a range of fraudulent manipulations in recent times. Nevertheless, bibliometrics is embedded in academic career development and in the allocation of resources at all levels of academic and research activity.

Bibliometrics is a complex discipline which requires huge investments in resources and skilled people to deliver its outputs. The organisations that can provide trust, quality assurance and the scale of investments needed to deliver efficient and meaningful bibliometric services will therefore be able to create profit and significant influence upon academic behaviours.

The Origins of Bibliometrics in the Science Citation Index (SCI)

Bibliometrics broadly mirrors the history of computing from the 1950s onwards. The development of the Science Citation Index (SCI) of Eugene Garfield at the Institute of Scientific Information (ISI) from 1964 onwards, and the citation network analysis of Derek John de Solla Price created the fundamentals of modern bibliometrics.

Interestingly, Derek Price's work subsequently found echoes in the creation of SCOPUS and the current work of the SCOPUS Advisory Board. His Wikipedia autobiographers tell us that "In 1965, Price gave the first "Science of Science" Foundation lecture, on *The Scientific Foundations of Science Policy*, to the Royal Institution in London. He noted that the exponential growth of science presented new challenges to policy-makers; that they could be helped by Scientometrics, which is broadly synonymous with Bibliometrics; and that

exponential growth cannot continue indefinitely. He also emphasised the importance of the "invisible college" or network of informal scientific communication.
(see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Derek_J._de_Solla_Price)

The ISI was acquired by Thomson Reuters and was subsequently sold to the Thomsons spin-out company Clarivate plc through private equity funding in 2016. Clarivate has subsequently invested heavily in the ISI evolution, which is now known as the Web of Science, and in related businesses, including Proquest. Clarivate also owned the Scholar One manuscript management system, which will be known to many science authors, until 2024, when it was sold on.

The Origins of SCOPUS

The Dutch publishers Elsevier started life as a family business in the early 1600s, and it has published The Lancet since 1823. The company was modernised in 1880 by the bookseller Jacob George Robbers. In the 1930s it translated German scientific texts and textbooks into English. The company further developed after the Second World War as a scientific publisher. It merged with Excerpta Medica in 1971 and developed the Embase data system into a commercial product in 1972.

The company continued with a procession of corporate publishing acquisitions, including Pergamon Press in 1991. It then merged with the publisher Reed in 1993, and subsequently with Mosby, Saunders, and Academic Press. It absorbed Harcourt in the late 1990s. The EJSO, of which I was editorially associated from 1996 to 2009 (Rew Refs), became an Elsevier Journal and my own parallel career in publishing was linked to the company.

From 1991 to 1995, Reed-Elsevier (now the RELX group) managed the **TULIP** project, which was aimed at the electronic distribution of journals to universities. This evolved into the ScienceDirect electronic publishing platform in 1997.

Discussions about the creation of a competitor to Web of Science began in the late 1990s. The late Professor Peter Stambrook of the University of Cincinnati, and one of the members of the original SCOPUS Content Selection Advisory Board, told me that support from within

the academic and librarianship communities. SCOPUS was ready for launch with around 12,000 academic journal titles in early 2004.

The creation of the original Scopus content advisory board was somewhat ad hoc. Peter's wife, Mary Piper, who was a senior librarian at the University of Cincinnati, recalls that: *"In the fall of 2004, I accompanied Peter to an Elsevier journal editors' meeting. On the morning of the last day we had breakfast with an Elsevier employee who told us about Scopus. I was very interested and said that if they had a librarian advisory committee, I would like to be on it. Peter said the same for a scientist committee.*

At that time Elsevier had not planned committees, but they liked the idea and in January, 2005 we were invited to New York City for a meeting to discuss Scopus. The only other librarian at the meeting was Julie Arnheim of the Princeton U. Chemistry Library."

Accession of journals to SCOPUS was intended from early on to be through an independent validation process. An academic advisory board of some 30 individuals was created to review and score journals from spreadsheet lists in an early version of the Scopus Title Evaluation Platform (STEP), using a simple scoring system (Table 1).

Many of the early accessions were journals from the collections of the established and trusted publishers, through licensing agreements to secure content. The principle was that SCOPUS would reproduce titles and abstracts, and use the reference lists to generate bibliometric content, but the full text content of the articles would remain under the control of the publisher. Separately, the full content of Elsevier journals was made available through ScienceDirect, whose journal titles and abstracts were also listed in SCOPUS.

The generation of bibliometric data and the standardisation of reference data sets from large numbers of journals and articles was a very challenging task which had to be delegated to trained human operators, and the work was outsourced at scale to specialist businesses in Asia.

1	**Journal title**	WSEAS Transactions on Advances in Engineering Ed	**Your final vote:**		**Overall score**	**range**	**recommend. vote**
2	**ISSN**	1790-1979				8-10	accept journal
3	**eISSN**		**Comments?**		**3.2**	6-7	*case of doubt*
4	**Source type**	Journal				0-5	reject journal
5							
6	**Category**	**Criteria per category**		**Information to be provided**	**Scoring basis**	**Source of score**	**Maximum possible points per crit.**
7							
8	**Journal policy**	English-language abstracts available		no / yes	0 vs 1	prepopulated	1
9		Language quality of abstracts		levels	0 (low) - 4 (high)	prepopulated	4
10		Articles have cited references		levels	0 (none) - 3 (all)	prepopulated	3
11		Convincing editorial concept/policy		URL	0 (none) - 5 (high)	reviewer	5
12		Level of peer-review		levels	0 (no PR) - 4 (double-blin	prepopulated	4
13		Availability of editorial board		no / yes	0 vs 1	prepopulated	1
14		Diversity in provenance of editors		levels	0 (not adequate) - 4 (very	reviewer	4
15		Diversity in provenance of authors		levels	0 (not adequate) - 4 (very	reviewer	4
16	**Scoring**						**26**
17							
18	**Presentation of content (sample articles)**	Originality/relevance		sample records	0 (very bad) - 5 (excellent	reviewer	5
19		Methodology		sample records	0 (very bad) - 5 (excellent	reviewer	5
20		Argumentation		sample records	0 (very bad) - 5 (excellent	reviewer	5
21		Conformity with the journal's stated aims		sample records	0 (very bad) - 5 (excellent	reviewer	5
22		Conformity with publication ethics		sample records	0 (very bad) - 5 (excellent	reviewer	5
23		Clarity of title, objectives, abstract		sample records	0 (very bad) - 5 (excellent	reviewer	5
24		Mean length of articles		sample records	0 (very bad) - 5 (excellent	reviewer	5
25		Quality of language/proof reading		sample records	0 (very bad) - 5 (excellent	reviewer	5
26		Illustrations/tables		sample records	0 (very bad) - 5 (excellent	reviewer	5
27	**Scoring**						**45**
28							
29	**Citedness**	Citedness of journal		numbers	0 (none) - 5 (high)	reviewer	5
30		Citedness of editors		numbers	0 (none) - 5 (high)	reviewer	5
31	**Scoring**						**10**
32							
33	**Timeliness**	Timelineness of publication		no / yes	0 vs 1	prepopulated	1
34	**Scoring**						**1**
35							
36	**Distribu-tion**	Major publisher?		no / yes	0 vs 1	prepopulated	1
37		Published by society?		no / yes	0 vs 1	prepopulated	1
38		Covered in major bibliographic databases?		no / yes	0 vs 1	reviewer	1
39		Number subscribing libraries (World Cat)		number	0 vs 1	reviewer	1
40	**Scoring**						**4**
41							
42	**Homepage**	Content available online			0 vs 1	prepopulated	1
43		English-language homepage available			0 vs 1	prepopulated	1
44		Quality of homepage			0 (low) - 4 (high)	prepopulated	4
45	**Scoring**						**6**

Table 1*: pre-STEP Journal scoring matrix using an Excel spreadsheet (Courtesy Ove Kahler)*

The Background to the Creation of the New SCOPUS CSAB in 2009

In 2008, Ove Kahler, who was then the lead for SCOPUS development, produced a study of journal launches since 2006. His team noted that 2948 new journals had been launched since 2006, of which 872 new journals used an Open Access model of publication, which in turn accounted for around 30% of all new journal launches. 770 new journals were online only, and only 411 (14%) of those journals were Society journals. The most prolific fields were Social Sciences and Health Sciences journals.

Moreover, the growth of applicants journal numbers for SCOPUS listing was becoming a challenge for the existing team of evaluators. An efficient, standardised and defensible quality assurance evaluation system was needed. Data from the Ulrich's online periodicals directory was reviewed, as shown in Table 2. The data across the columns is filtered to include only refereed titles, only titles still active, or both.

Ulrich's catalogued all serial academic publications, whereas SCOPUS and WoS were only intended to catalogue serial publications which had a formal refereeing/ reviewing process, this being a key surrogate for the quality assurance of journals and their content. Therefore, Ulrich's catalogue was an important reference point for the planning of a new format for the Scopus Title Evaluation Platform.

			All (Total)		All (Active 2008)		Refereed (Total)		Refereed (Active 2008)	
Launch	Ulrich's Total		Academic/Scholarly Serials		Academic/Scholarly Serials		Academic/Scholarly Serials		Academic/Scholarly Serials	
Year	Yearly	Cumulated	Yearly	Cumulated	Yearly	Cumulated	Yearly	Cumulated	Yearly	Cumulated
<1900	8000	8000	1445	1445	1354	1354	680	680	661	661
1900-1909	2668	10668	553	1998	524	1878	261	941	255	916
1910-1919	2972	13640	570	2568	520	2398	285	1226	271	1187
1920-1929	5049	18689	1170	3738	1070	3468	541	1767	512	1699
1930-1939	5507	24196	1278	5016	1185	4653	601	2368	575	2274
1940-1944	2356	26552	500	5516	453	5106	222	2590	215	2489
1945-1949	7504	34056	1468	6984	1314	6420	597	3187	565	3054
1950-1954	9543	43599	2262	9246	2032	8452	839	4026	803	3857
1955-1959	10320	53919	2669	11915	2408	10860	1009	5035	951	4808
1960-1964	13352	67271	3022	14937	2643	13503	1182	6217	1094	5902
1965-1969	17916	85187	3676	18613	3167	16670	1530	7747	1421	7323
1970	4782	89969	897	19510	758	17428	374	8121	353	7676
1971	4476	94445	856	20366	746	18174	342	8463	319	7995
1972	5047	99492	993	21359	854	19028	382	8845	354	8349
1973	4971	104463	1018	22377	868	19896	382	9227	353	8702
1974	4934	109397	938	23315	814	20710	382	9609	352	9054
1975	5022	114419	1027	24342	885	21595	405	10014	378	9432
1976	5022	119441	1047	25389	893	22488	422	10436	381	9813
1977	5141	124582	1073	26462	919	23407	450	10886	401	10214
1978	5215	129797	1156	27618	1007	24414	423	11309	375	10589
1979	5422	135219	1240	28858	1092	25506	465	11774	404	10993
1980	5644	140863	1295	30153	1123	26629	522	12296	463	11456
1981	5320	146183	1218	31371	1072	27701	472	12768	419	11875
1982	5250	151433	1206	32577	1033	28734	468	13236	407	12282
1983	5361	156794	1234	33811	1065	29799	486	13722	432	12714
1984	5304	162098	1254	35065	1080	30879	449	14171	393	13107
1985	5304	167402	1329	36394	1163	32042	441	14612	390	13497
1986	5262	172664	1312	37706	1142	33184	496	15108	445	13942
1987	5169	177833	1310	39016	1123	34307	560	15668	484	14426
1988	5362	183195	1353	40369	1123	35430	551	16219	462	14888
1989	5474	188669	1350	41719	1160	36590	542	16761	470	15358
1990	5911	194580	1404	43123	1182	37772	527	17288	462	15820
1991	5568	200148	1532	44655	1280	39052	611	17899	525	16345
1992	5515	205663	1522	46177	1291	40343	550	18449	484	16829
1993	5573	211236	1508	47685	1314	41657	579	19028	496	17325
1994	5557	216793	1528	49213	1312	42969	573	19601	494	17819
1995	5194	221987	1500	50713	1325	44294	571	20172	490	18309
1996	4954	226941	1403	52116	1239	45533	504	20676	437	18746
1997	4750	231691	1357	53473	1223	46756	511	21187	456	19202
1998	4625	236316	1406	54879	1294	48050	512	21699	464	19666
1999	4162	240478	1393	56272	1285	49335	480	22179	438	20104
2000	4086	244564	1323	57595	1266	50601	461	22640	437	20541
2001	3537	248101	1311	58906	1248	51849	440	23080	419	20960
2002	3463	251564	1213	60119	1170	53019	423	23503	401	21361
2003	3446	255010	1179	61298	1132	54151	401	23904	378	21739
2004	4329	259339	1331	62629	1268	55419	486	24390	454	22193
2005	4676	264015	1240	63869	1230	56649	448	24838	442	22635
2006	4565	268580	1418	65287	1414	58063	508	25346	508	23143
2007	3251	271831	1327	66614	1320	59383	568	25914	567	23710
2008	1127	272958	729	67343	536	59919	386	26300	288	23998
Launch Year Unknown				4761		4084		875		709
TOTAL				72104		64003		27175		24707

Source: Ulrichsweb.com July 2008

NB: Data for recent years incomplete due to time-lag in sourcing and updating records

Table 2: Cumulative data on academic serial publications from 1665 onwards, sorted by active and refereed journals (courtesy of Ove Kahler). The data has been re-plotted from 1970 to 2008, as shown in Figures 1 and 2, data courtesy of Ulrichsweb 2008.

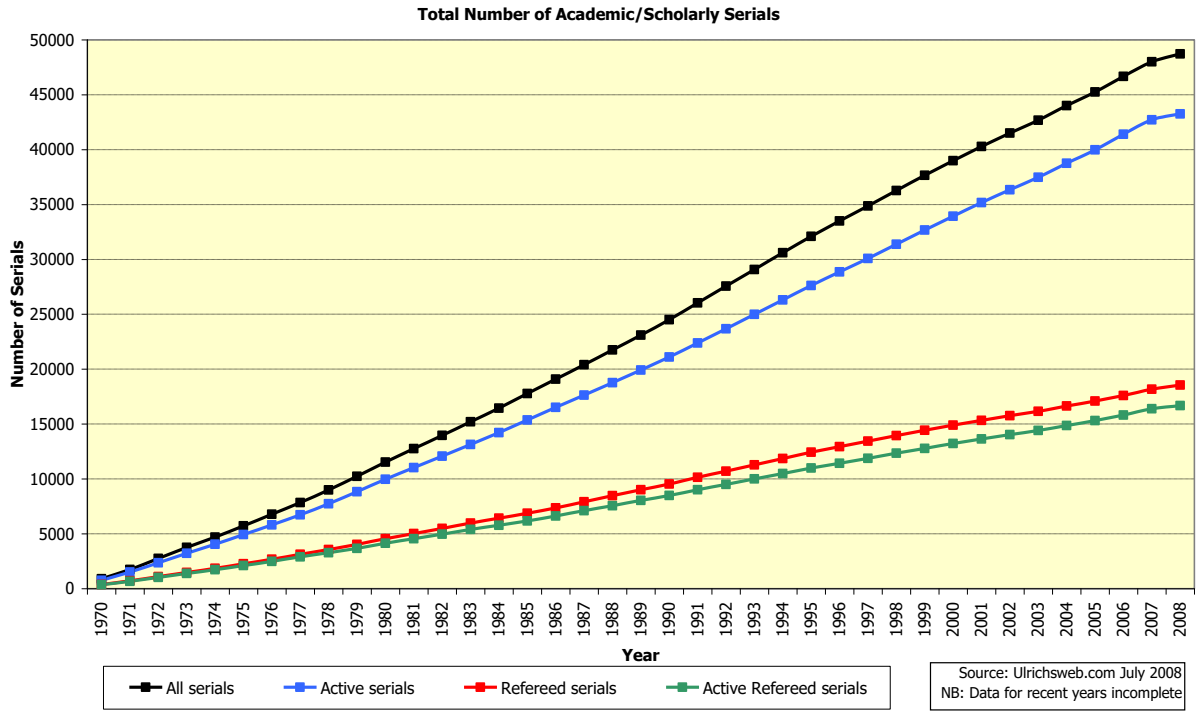

Figure 1: The growth in scholarly serial titles, 1970-2008 (courtesy of Ove Kahler)

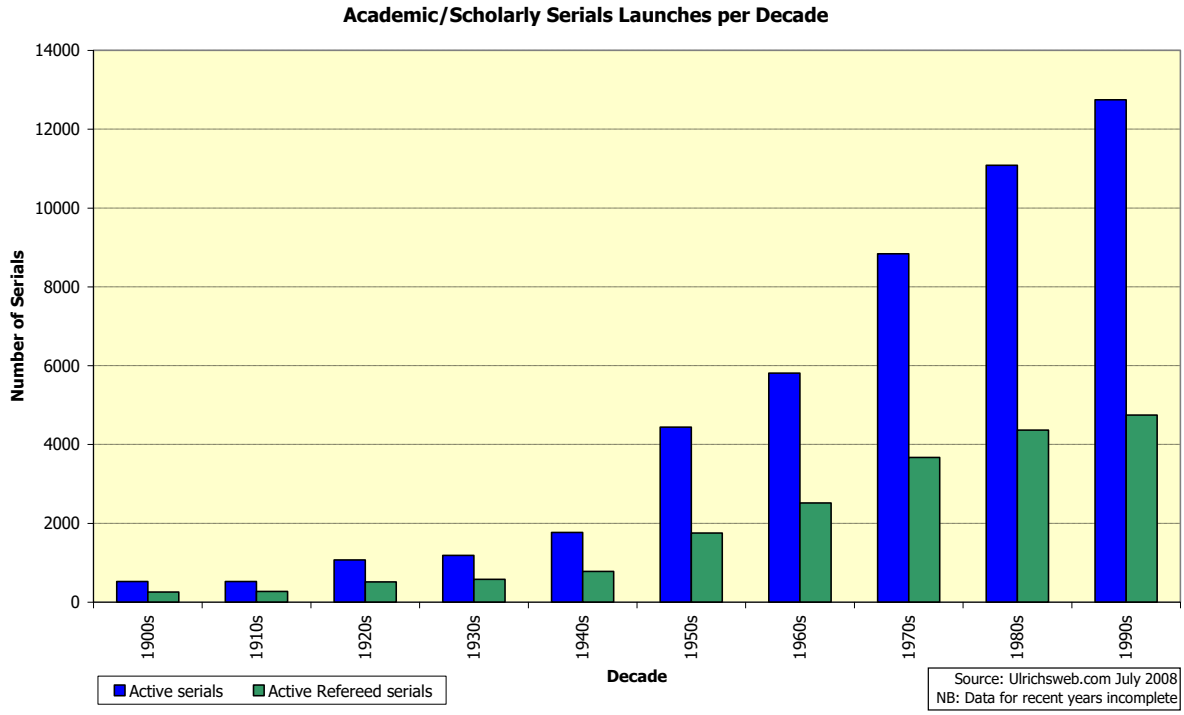

Figure 2: The growth in active and refereed scholarly serial titles, 1970-2008 (courtesy of Ove Kahler)

Figures 1 and 2 highlight this growth, both of all titles and of formally refereed or reviewed journals, or serial periodicals.

It is important to note that the publishing environment is very dynamic, and journals fail as well as succeed, as illustrated in Table 3 of Ulrich's data for the same time period.

SERIALS TITLE LAUNCHES PER DECADE ULRICH'S ACADEMIC/SCHOLARLY SERIALS

Launch	All Academic/ Scholarly				Refereed Academic/ Scholarly			
Year	Total	Active 2008	Ceased	Ceased %	Total	Active 2008	Ceased	Ceased %
<1900	1445	1354	91	6.30%	680	661	19	2.79%
1900s	553	524	29	5.24%	261	255	6	2.30%
1910s	570	520	50	8.77%	285	271	14	4.91%
1920s	1170	1070	100	8.55%	541	512	29	5.36%
1930s	1278	1185	93	7.28%	601	575	26	4.33%
1940s	1968	1767	201	10.21%	819	780	39	4.76%
1950s	4931	4440	491	9.96%	1848	1754	94	5.09%
1960s	6698	5810	888	13.26%	2712	2515	197	7.26%
1970s	10245	8836	1409	13.75%	4027	3670	357	8.87%
1980s	12861	11084	1777	13.82%	4987	4365	622	12.47%
1990s	14553	12745	1808	12.42%	5418	4746	672	12.40%
>2000	11071	10584	487	4.40%	4121	3894	227	5.51%

Source: Ulrichsweb.com July 2008

NB: Data for recent years incomplete due to time-lag in sourcing and updating records

Table 3. Journals which ceased publication for any reason over the period for which Ulrich's Periodicals had records, up to 2008 (courtesy of Ove Kahler)

The Global Academic Publishing Environment in the 2000s

In general terms, and regardless of numbers, the academic publishing environment in the early 2000s was very different to today. Until the early 2000s, virtually all publishing was in print. I well recall discussions on the EJSO Board as to whether and when and how completely that our own Elsevier journal should ever move to an online only model. Many organisations were not focussed upon the fast-developing power of the Internet, and most websites were primitive in terms of functionality and usability by modern standards.

Moreover, the ownership model of journals was still primarily subscription based, and article acceptance was usually free. Authors had none of the financial influence over editorial decision making and publisher behaviour which now characterises much of the publishing industry. Publishers were trusted for the academic content of journals, and publication malpractice of all forms was far less prevalent than it is now.

In consequence, the original (2004) and new (2009- 2025) version of the SCOPUS Title Evaluation Platform (STEP), whose origins I describe in this essay, were designed for the Trusting and Trusted global academic publishing environment which sadly no longer exists.

The Technical Background to the SCOPUS Data Sets

Modern bibliometric systems are constructs of the computer age. They have developed through an era of rapid technical change and evolution of methods for the storage, analysis and manipulation of the alphanumerical text and data which make up academic documents.

Decisions around the purchase and implementation of systems which were made early in the era of change have to be constantly revisited and updated as new capabilities and standards emerge, and as market expectations for data accessibility and use evolve. Given the importance of system design and its limitations at each stage in its evolution, it is helpful to know of the general history of the technical systems that underpin our work for SCOPUS.

More generally, publishing has been transformed through the digital era. This started in earnest in the public and commercial domain for academic publishers in the early 1990s, with the rapid development of the public internet, browsers and search engines, and of easily usable word processing, spreadsheets, powerful and other software tools, and iconographic computer screen interfaces.

These advances in the public computing domain were mirrored by advances in commercial computing systems at speed and scale, and Elsevier was one of the early adopters of computing technology in academic publishing.
Early decisions which were made on corporate and institutional computing systems have profound impacts upon the collective use and received wisdom about digital systems, as the costs of change and of interfering with the original data architectures are substantial.

Dr Rob Schrauwen, corporate Vice President for Data and Platform Strategy, and the Research Data Platform at Elsevier, kindly provided some notes on the history of the system which led to the development and subsequent evolution of SCOPUS. Rob recalls that Elsevier first moved to Computer Aided Production (CAP) in 1995, with Standard Generalised Markup Language (SGML) Document Type Definitions (DTDs).

Dwight Gunning, writing on the Edgartools infosite in February 2025, explains that:

"SGML emerged in the 1980s as a solution to the growing problem of how to structure and share documents across different systems and organizations. It was born from IBM's ***Generalised Markup Language (GML).*** *SGML became an international standard (ISO 8879) in 1986. SGML can be thought of as the Latin of markup languages – it is not widely used directly today, but it gave birth to many of the markup languages that computer specialists use daily.*

SGML introduced several revolutionary concepts that we now take for granted:
- Separation of Content and Presentation: *Before SGML, document formatting was typically hardcoded. SGML introduced the concept of semantic markup, where content structure is separate from its presentation.*

DTDs: *SGML introduced DTDs, which define the structure and rules for a document. This concept lives on in XML schemas and* ***Javascript Object Notation (JSON)*** *schemas. A DTD is a specification file that contains a set of markup declarations that define a document type for SGML-derived markup languages which include* ***GML, SGML, XML, and HTML****. Ite can be used to validate documents.*

- Platform Independence: *SGML documents could be processed across different systems. This enabled the cross-platform compatibility which is standard today".*
See (https://www.edgartools.io/sgml-grandfather-of-html/)

In 1998, Elsevier moved to a computer based **Production Tracking System**, and in 1999 it launched Science Direct. These developments in turn permitted the generation of backfiles for selected journals and the addition of digital object identifier codes in 2000; articles in press in 2002; books and book series in 2003; and the launch of Scopus.com in 2004.

In 2005, the SGML framework for documents in the Elsevier publishing systems was updated to the modern **Extensible Markup Language, XML**, which categorises and structures information and permits its exchange between disparate systems using metadata tags.

In 2023, Elsevier moved to the **Content Profile/Linked Document (CP/LD) standard**.
The National Information Standards Organization (NISO) Infosite (https://www.niso.org/) informs us that *"the CP/LD standard is an application of HTML and JSON-LD to create semantic relationships between content and data elements in scholarly publishing. It permits the expression of self-describing, machine-actionable content for the reuse and interchange of scholarly research information.*

The format description defines a set of rules that outline the minimal characteristics of Linked Documents that conform to the standard, and a mechanism to define more detailed Content Profiles for specific use cases.

CP/LD upgrades existing data models for journal articles, books, data sets, or semantic and metadata schemes. It allows the combination of arbitrary portions of content, data, semantics, and other resources from separate sources into a single, standards-based format which is optimized for interchange, search, and display."

This progression of data frameworks in turn underpinned the development of the SCOPUS AI and Science Direct AI tools, which were launched in 2024.

My Introduction to the CSAB

In early 2009, I knew very little of the SCOPUS system. My publishing experience was still focussed on my editorship of the EJSO, which still had another year to run. I was therefore intrigued when I received an email from Sarah Jenkins, who was my managing editor at Elsevier Science in Kidlington, Oxford, on 2nd Feb 2009, and to whom I remain most grateful for the introduction, to the effect that:

"I have taken the liberty of nominating you as Elsevier's Scopus Subject Chair for Medicine. Scopus was launched in 2004 and now indexes more than 17,000 journals. Scopus is growing all the time and we regularly receive requests to include new journals. These journals need to be evaluated so that a decision can be made on whether or not they should be covered by Scopus.

We would like to appoint a specialist team, lead by a Chair, to evaluate the Medicine journals which are put forward for inclusion in Scopus. I thought that you would do an excellent job as Chair, particularly in light of your interest in publication ethics and peer-review (as a member of the Council of the Committee on Publication Ethics, COPE) and your experience as an Editor-in-Chief of seven years standing. My Elsevier colleague, Ove Kahler, will be in touch with a formal invitation and more information on the role. "

That same day, Ove Kahler wrote to introduce himself and to say that:
Scopus has been chosen to provide data for the yearly THES-QS World University Rankings. The OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) has opted for Scopus to enhance its research performance analysis for its (non)member countries.

One of the key factors for making Scopus a success has been the continuous involvement and feedback from users and librarians. Innovative features like the Scopus Citation Tracker, Author Identifier and Affiliation Identifier have enhanced the product next to an additional 4,000 journals that have been added over the last three years. Last year almost 2,000 titles were suggested by users, authors and editors.

To maintain this development process, we have used a board of experts who act as advisors to Scopus on end-user needs and evaluate newly suggested journals. This Content Selection and Advisory Board (CSAB) consists of approximately 20 researchers and 10 librarians, who each represent different scientific disciplines.

We are currently setting up a new process around the CSAB for evaluating suggested titles. Until now all CSAB members have been looking at titles that they choose to evaluate. This left some titles without an evaluation. We therefore plan to assign the suggested titles in each subject area to one member on the CSAB, who is an active researcher in this field and will now serve as a Subject Chair. This Subject Chair will be responsible for the proper evaluation of all titles. He/she can do this based on his own experience, or can also involve additional reviewers - either by appointing a Subject Panel or by approaching experts "on the fly" for advice on just one particular journal.

The function as Subject Chair may remind you of the role of the Editor-in-Chief of a journal. This is not by coincidence; this new approach of Scopus towards title evaluation was developed in close cooperation with the Elsevier publishing units.

The ownership of the Subject Chair Medicine on the CSAB will involve the following:
- Active participation in one board meeting per year;
- Evaluation of all titles suggested in Medicine (last year the number was 205);
- Leadership of the subject panel that you might choose to set up;
- Willingness to speak at Elsevier events.

We plan to hold the next board meeting 28-30 October 2009 in Cape Town, South Africa. We will cover expenses such as travel costs, and offer as a token of appreciation a stipend of USD 2,000 per year plus a fee of USD 10 per reviewed title ("pay per review").

I was very pleased to accept the offer, as it provided me with an intriguing opportunity to build upon the knowledge and experience which I had gained over the past six years in the Editorship of the EJSO.

Ove continued to assemble the CSAB team on recommendations from among the Elsevier management team, and he followed up his email with an introductory paper for the newly invited members of the SCOPUS CSAB, writing that:
"According to Ulrich's Periodical, there are over 60,000 scientific publications world-wide. By indexing over 17,000 titles, Scopus is already the broadest scientific abstract & citation database. An increasing number of journals is being suggested annually for inclusion in Scopus, with over 1,600 titles for 2009.

The market opinion about the breadth of Scopus is divided: Some customers perceive the openness of Scopus to include regional sources as a strength, whereas others see this as a sign that Scopus is not selective enough.

To address these concerns, Scopus needs to develop an efficient and effective approach towards title evaluation, which should achieve two objectives:

§ To Deliver Quality, so that the Scopus title selection will be trusted by the community;
§ To Manage Quantity, by addressing the increasing number of title suggestions.

Scopus handles its title selection via an independent board of experts, unlike Thomson's approach with the Web of Science to use internal systems for title evaluation) is highly respected by the market and has contributed to date to the positive reputation of Scopus.

Until now, each CSAB member has decided him-/herself, which titles s/he will review.
This selectivity has two negative effects, in that:
§ CSAB members have limited =responsibility for titles in which they are not interested.
§ Many titles are not assigned to any reviewer, so they are not evaluated at all.

The number of suggested titles per year also varies significantly by subject area – from only a very few (in chemistry) to several hundreds (in Social Sciences). This leads to two further negative effects, vis:
§ "Too many titles for too few reviewers", with a lower level of care for titles, and a limited spread of subject specialities across the CSAB.
§ "Too few reviewers for each title", with a higher risk of subjectivity if a title is reviewed by only one person.

The current CSAB members base their review upon information that the Scopus team gathers for them: e.g. citedness of the suggested journal in Scopus, citedness of editorial board members, provenance of the authors, coverage in other A&I databases, and sample articles (PDF's). However, there are no clear guidelines on how to apply and how to weigh these criteria. For example, "open access" may be used as a reason either for accepting or rejecting a title. The reviewers vote by logging on to the Scopus Title Evaluation Platform (STEP . STEP has three interfaces, for Suggestors, System Administrators and Reviewers.

Following from the CSAB meeting in Buenos Aires in September 2008, we propose:.
(1) To Create Subject Chairs within the CSAB and;
(2) To establish a scoring system for evaluating titles.

The intended role of subject chairs within the CSAB

Subject Chairs will be responsible for finalizing the vote for each title in their area of expertise, and they will be free to make use of reviewers from within and beyond the CSAB. They can also approach individuals "on the fly" in case for specialist advice on titles.

Ove noted that the plan raised a number of issues to be addressed, in respect of.

- The Profile of the Subject Chair – who would be an effective participant in the meetings; should be a researcher, with authority among the panel members; who will act as the gateway to Scopus; and who has the right (and capacity) to decide titles without assigning them to other reviewers.

- Active membership of the CSAB. – Subject chairs would be members of the CSAB and provide yearly status report on the selection activity within their panel; they would attend CSAB meetings to discuss best practices and evaluation-related questions

It was recognised that in order to secure these benefits

– the computer based STEP system would need to be modified.

- Subject Chairs would need dedicated admin rights to manage the review of titles

- The Subject Chair role would require Incentivisation, as through:

o Prestige (to be generated by effective marketing)

o Remuneration on a "Pay per review" model (€10-15 per every title that was assigned to the subject chair), possibly combined with a base fee

o Public recognition on a dedicated CSAB website

Other considerations to be addressed included:

- The number of titles to be assigned to each Subject Chair per annum;

- The duration of tenure of each Subject Chair in post;

- The scope of functions and frequency of CSAB meeting

- the contribution of strategic advice Subject Chaisr to Scopus and to Elsevier

- Representation of librarian perspectives at CSAB meetings

Ove's Proposals for the Establishment of a Scoring System for Evaluating Titles.

Ove proposed that we would develop a compulsory scoring system according to various criteria, e.g. "is this title highly cited" (assign 0 to 5 points). These points would be weighted automatically by STEP, e.g. 20% for citedness of journal; 15% for citedness of editors; 10% for editorial policy; 5% for being indexed in important bibliographic databases, and so on c. The scores would build up, as the reviewer goes through the process.

Some scores would be pre-generated by the system. Others would require expert evaluation. Certain metrics – e.g. h-indices- might also be scored. .

A scoring process would ensure consistency and objectivity, and generate quantitative and comparative data. Other suggestions for CSAB consideration included:

- A trial period for journals in SCOPUS, with re-evaluation after two years titles, particularly for recently launched titles.
- The suggestion and backfilling of well cited titles with references before 1996.
- the spread of the title selection process over whole calendar year.

02 March 2009, Ove emailed me to say that:

There are currently 177 titles for review loaded to STEP. Note that this evaluation is still going to take place in the "old regime", i.e. with no Subject Chairs and Subject Panels involved. It would be an excellent opportunity for you to get to know the system in its current state. We are already in contact with our software development partners to adapt STEP for the new set-up. Please feel free to give your opinion on the 16 suggested titles in Medicine.

I replied to Ove with a number of suggestions for the software team, in respect of

1. The Subject Chair Vote: I felt it to be essential that there were both a free text section, and and a structured series of questions to address to help reviewers

2. The Information to be provided on the submitted Journal

There are a range of structured questions which those submitting their journals for publication need to complete, in respect of the ownership (commercial, society, sponsoring institution etc); the purpose of the journal; the date of origin of the journal; the number of

issues per year; the probity and ethics strategy of the journal; the target audience, the geographical and speciality market; the peer review practice; the primary language of publication (as this is not always obvious); reasons not to publish in English; the circulation of the journal; the perceived immediate competitor journals with a similar audience; the acceptance policy and rejection rates; the subspeciality areas of coverage within Medicine (or other subject); Information on coverage by PubMed and other databases, or reasons for exclusion; and the identity and authority of the individual writing the commentary and remarks on the Journal.

3. Other Suggestions for Improved System Design:

- Such information would give the reviewer a much clearer understanding of what the journal is about, particularly where we are dealing with small regional journals in a language other than English.
- It would also be useful to have a more detailed search on each submitted journal to link directly through to the contents pages and possibly the abstracts, which could then be scored by a number of semi objective criteria.
- Such information and objective criteria would also give you valuable intelligence for future business development.
- Unless there is some quality control and assurance input which can be recorded and audited as to why decisions are made, you may as well just accept all comers. Indeed, it would be most interesting to have the opportunity to have a look at the historic acceptance or rejection decisions and to understand how they have been made.
- Such information will also with time thelp drive up the quality of the literature.

I concluded with the note that:

"I hope these first thoughts are helpful, as you could presumably easily be getting on with them in advance of forthcoming board meetings. This is a fascinating challenge. Many thanks indeed for the invitation".

Ove kindly wrote back to say that:

"I am impressed. On day one of your new task as Subject Chair you have gained/shown a really deep insight in the challenges of evaluating titles for an all-science database (your problem description is excellent). You have also generated quite a few new ideas.

Some of these ideas are already on our agenda - e.g. the "structure series of questions" (I used to call that a "scoring device", but I find your description actually more appropriate). Your suggestions of additional questions to be asked come at an excellent point of time, as we are currently in contact with our agency about extending STEP.

My colleague Ulrika Nordlöf-Honée f*rom Scopus marketing and I would like to visit you in Southampton.* We arranged to meet on Tues, April 7th.

On 5th April, Ove sent to me the draft of a scoring system, noting that:
"The sheet incorporates a fictitious scoring for a fictitious journal. Feel free to play around and fill in other scores, and how that will change the overall score. This draft is subject to discussion on all levels: categories (of criteria), criteria, weighing of criteria within category, weighing of categories within overall score."

The Synopsis of my Meeting with Ove and Ulrika in Southampton
We held a very convivial meeting on the 7th April at my home in Southampton, which I summarised for Ove as follows:
"**The Aims of SCOPUS** must be clear. We agreed that there is room for improving both the commercial and the philosophical definition of the roles of SCOPUS, vis a vis other search engines, including Google Scholar and Thomson-ISI, and what added value SCOPUS does and should bring to the market place.

We also discussed the problems of identifying **the users of SCOPUS and their needs**, and how these are met by SCOPUS in its present and possible future forms. We recognised that the historic process of Journal inclusion into SCOPUS was unsatisfactory and arbitrary, and that a progressive review of previously accepted journals would be advisable.

We discussed a number of possible models for journal inclusion in SCOPUS. These notes were intended to help form the basis of improvements and clarification of the SCOPUS system, with a view to having a test system in place for the Meeting in early July, and a working system up and running by the time of the October Meeting in Cape Town, vis:

1. **Accepting all applicant journals** in SCOPUS, which Ove estimates to be up to 200,000 journals and serial publications, of which only 16,000 journals are presently on the system.

2. We considered **the minimum acceptance criteria for a journal**; what models might make this cost-effective; and what data a journal would be expected to provide about itself to justify inclusion

3. A **strategy of expansion for SCOPUS** on the present model, starting with the existing database and accepting accruals subject to "quality thresholds". We agreed that there were parallels between the processes of selecting manuscripts of quality for publication in a journal and journals on quality for inclusion within SCOPUS, and the various processes and strategies by which editors conduct this function and reach decisions.

4. We agreed that it would be beneficial if SCOPUS were to take **a proactive approach** to helping journals/editors/publishers to develop to a standard which would merit inclusion by acceptable and supportable criteria.

5. The new selection criteria might also **be applied retrospectively** to previously included journals.

6. SCOPUS should take **a long term view** of its dealings with applicant journals rather than a one-off accept or reject decision. Thus, a journal which was initially deemed unacceptable for whatever reason would be supported to develop and re-apply at a later date.

<u>Publisher-supplied information for inclusion of journals in SCOPUS</u>

We agreed that it would be helpful to secure publisher-supplied data for STEP, including:

- The title, Aims and Scope of the journal, and the subject areas covered;
- The ISI Impact Factor over the past (5) years, if Registered with ISI;
- The mode of publication (Print, Internet etc), and the Web Site;
- The frequency of publication, the target market and the language of publication;
- The Print and Internet circulation (as measured by downloaded articles);
- The ownership of the Journal;

- The identity of the Editor and the terms of appointment of Editorial team
- Plagiarism policy, membership of publisher associations and COPE
- Peer review policy
- The numbers of articles of each type published each year
- The provision of English abstracts.

Subjective and Qualitative Criteria for the Appraisal of Journals by Subject Chairs

Once in the assessment pipeline, the journal would be subject to a qualitative appraisal by the relevant SCOPUS Board Editor, Associates and nominees, if necessary with input from local language specialists. The Journal would be assessed subjectively by considering:
- A list of contents for the past three issues
- PDFs of all or selected papers from the past three issues.

Articles from the submitted journal would be assessed and scored for quality by way of (eg):
- conformity with the journal's stated aims and with publication ethics;
- clarity of title, aims and abstract; mean length of journal articles;
- subjective assessment of qualityy of editing and proof reading; and
Feedback would be offered to the Publishers and Editor with suggestions and a timescale for changes if the decision is rejection (at this time)."

Ove generously thanked me for "a great meeting in Southampton and a fresh way of thinking". In early June 2009, he wrote to me to say:
"Your input allowed us to further improve the scoring card in various ways...Your responses about the scoring system also helped us to identify the most important issues around title evaluation, e.g. how to deal with journals that do not publish in English....

"we have uploaded 96 titles to the new version of the Scopus Title Evaluation Platform (STEP), where you can find plenty of information about the suggested titles - including sample PDF's of full-text articles.

Voting and Subject Chair Decision making on Title Selection

"Per title you will be asked to assign a vote: "yes, take title" or "no, reject title" with reasons for your decision and to indicate the "level of confidence", and to finalize your votes."

On 16th June 2009, Ove wrote to all members of the outgoing (2004-2008) Board, and of the newly appointed board, to update us on the plans:

- To develop subject-related evaluation committees, headed by Subject Chairs
- To develop a scoring system for evaluating titles.
- To capture pre-1996 articles and references.
-to identify missing issues of accepted journals post-1995.
- to track the currency of Scopus, with a bi-monthly "Content Currency Dashboard" (CCD) to measure the speed of incorporation of newly published issues of listed journals into Scopus.

Ove also reported a change in leadership of the Elsevier team, in that the ownership of the CSAB team now rested with the new "Marketing Partner Relations" team comprising Derrick Duncombe (based in Singapore) and Dash Brookins (based in New York).

The meeting of Scopus Subject Chairs in Noordwijk,The Netherlands 2-3 July 2009

In early July, the newly appointed Board met for the first time. The meeting comprised a combination of presentations, plenum discussions and breakout sessions, which set the pattern for future meetings.

We also set the tone for the open, robust and convivial debates, and discussions continued into the evening at local restaurants, which established another enduring practice of group bonding. The programme is reproduced below (Figure 3).

Thursday, July 2nd

Theme of morning: **Strategy around Scopus title evaluation**

8.30-9.30	***Ove Kähler:*** **"Scopus and the Line of Relevance" (Introduction)** *With 18,000 titles, Scopus has almost twice as many journals as WoS. Whereas ISI looks mainly at the citedness, Scopus aims at working with a scoring system around the question, which of the 200,000 existing journals are relevant to our users.*
9.30-9.45	Coffee break
9.45-10.45	***Plenum discussion:*** **"What is the purpose of Scopus and how selective should Scopus be"** *Whereas many users appreciate the breadth of content in Scopus, others perceive it as "noise"and would want to focus on top journals. The scoring system allows determining the priorities for selecting journals, e.g. citedness vs. journal policy.*
10.45-11.00	Coffee break
	Group will be split in two parts. Both sub-groups should discuss the following two topics.
11.00-11.30	***Breakout session part 1:*** **"How should Scopus deal with non-English content"** *Regional content is a core differentiator of Scopus against WoS. 30% of the Scopus journals are published in other languages than English. Should that be expanded? By indexing institutional repositories? How can non-English content be properly evaluated?*
11.30-12.00	***Breakout session part 2:*** **"How should Scopus deal with journals in niche areas"** *The breadth of content in Scopus also includes journals for a very small audience. But how much value does that add for Scopus as a whole? And where to draw the line? Another challenge is again to apply an appropriate evaluation of such titles.*
12.00-12.30	***Plenum discussion:*** **What are the take-away points from the break-out sessions**
12.30-13.30	Lunch

Theme of afternoon: **Process around Scopus title evaluation**

13.30-15.00	***Ove Kähler:*** **Demo of the scoring system in STEP** *In August, we will release the 2nd version of the Scopus Title Evalation Platform (STEP). The scoring system will change the way, how titles are being evaluated - not only strategically, but also in terms of the reviewer's user flow.*
15.00-15.15	Coffee break
15.15-16.00	***Ove Kähler:*** **Demo of the proposed admin areas for subject chairs in STEP** *For the 3rd release of STEP (October), we plan to introduce admin areas for Subject Chairs, so that they can assign suggested titles to additional reviewers, e.g. experts in niche areas or with special language skills for non-English journals.*
16.00-17.00	***Breakout session:*** **"Subject panels - are they useful and how should they be managed"** *Additional reviewers can be approached "on the fly", i.e. for individual titles. In addition, a Subject Chair can decide to set up a Subject Panel with a steady group of reviewers. This brings up many questions, e.g. terms of appointment*
17.00-17.30	***Plenum discussion:*** **What are the take-away points from the break-out session**
18.30-23.00	Evening program *(meet in lobby of Hotel Alexander at 18.30)*

Friday, July 3rd

Theme of morning: **Policy around Scopus title evaluation**

9.00-9.30	***Plenum discussion:*** **"When can rejected journals re-apply for inclusion in Scopus"** *If a journal is rejected by ISI, it can re-apply for inclusion only after a period of two years. Scopus does not have such a policy in place yet - partly also because we are not confident (yet) in the reliability of our decisions.*
	Group will be split in two parts. Both sub-groups should discuss the following two topics.
9.30-10.00	***Breakout session part 1:*** **"How should Scopus deal with new journals"** *In 2008, many journals were rejected as "too new to take a decision". In the scoring system with its emphasis on citedness and content, the question arises: Should we even review these titles? But what about new top journals, e.g. "Nature Chemistry"?*
10.00-10.30	***Breakout session part 2:*** **"How should Scopus deal with different source types"** *In 2008, many suggested trade journals were rejected as "not really scientific". But corporate customers find them often very relevant. A similar dilemma exists for conf. proceedings, which are top-content in some areas and low quality in others.*
10.30-10.45	Coffee break
10.45-11.15	***Plenum discussion:*** **What are the take-away points from the break-out sessions**
11.15-12.00	***Plenum discussion:*** **"The other side of the coin: (When) should Scopus start deselecting journals"** *Some journals in Scopus have low usage, which can have different reasons. Such journals could be candidates for applying the same criteria that are used to evaluate new journals. Also: Should new journals be selected for a probationary period?*
12.00-12.30	Group picture & making of films
12.30-13.30	Lunch

Figure 3. The agenda for the Board Meeting in Noordwijk, July 2nd-3rd 2009

Figure 4 The meeting attendees at Noordwijk. From left to right, initials as per the names on Table 4; MP,UN-H, PM, JW, PB, DR, KH, CR, RW, PS, JR-S, EB, MW, GS, Ove Kahler and GP.

Evan Bieske	University of Melbourne	Australia	Subject Chair for Physics & Astronomy, Chemistry, Chemical Engineering, Mathematics, Energy, Materials
Ger Spikman	Wageningen University	Netherlands	Subject Chair for Agricultural & Biological Sciences; Immunology & Microbiology
Peter Miller	Med Univ South Carolina	USA	Subject Chair for Psychology, Veterinary Sciences
Manolis Papadrakakis	National Technical University Athens	Greece	Subject Chair for Engineering
Richard Whatmore	University of Sussex	U.K.	Subject Chair for Arts & Humanities
Jörg-Rudiger Sack	Carleton University	Canada	Subject Chair for Computer Science
Peter Brimblecombe	University of East Anglia	U.K.	Subject Chair for Earth & Planetary Science; Environmental Science
Peter Stambrook	University of Cincinnati	USA	Subject Chair for Pharmacology, Toxicology and Biochemistry, Genetics, Molecular Biology; Neuroscience
David Rew	University of Southampton	U.K.	Subject Chair for Medicine
Karen Holland	University of Salford	U.K.	Subject Chair for Nursing; Health Professions
James Wright	Univ. of Central Florida	USA	Subject Chair for Social Sciences
Gerard Pfann	University of Maastricht	Netherlands	Subject Chair for Economics/Business
Ulrika Nordlöf-Honée	Elsevier	Netherlands	Solutions Marketing Manager
Ove Kähler	Elsevier	Netherlands	Senior Product Manager
Monique Wilbers	Elsevier	Netherlands	Executive Assistant
Cameron Ross	Elsevier	Netherlands	Head of Scopus

Table 4. The members of the new CSAB with Elsevier colleagues in Noordwijk.

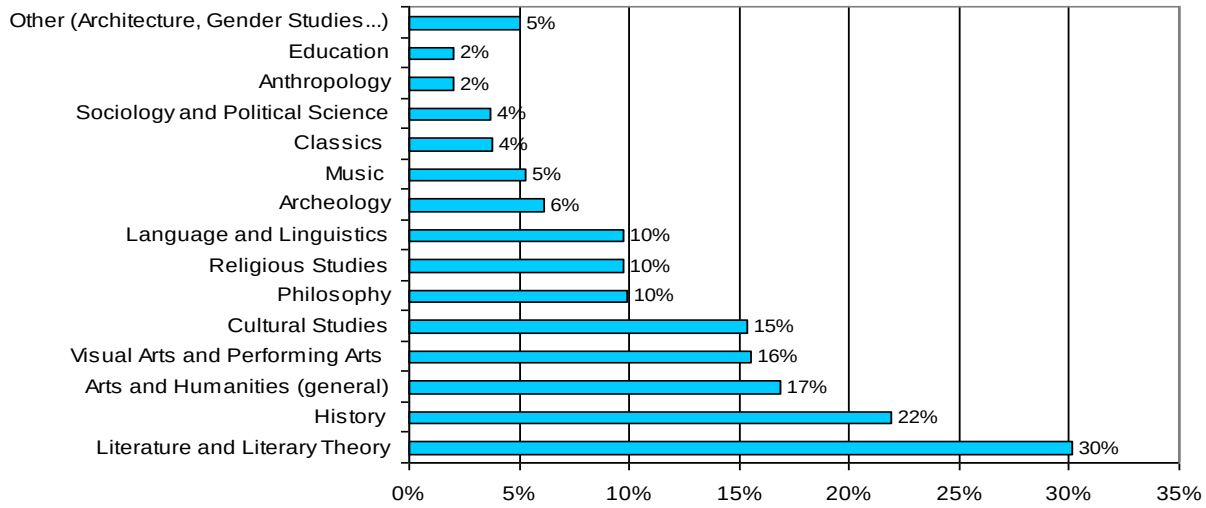

Figure 4 . The distribution of 1450 newly accepted journals by subject in the new Arts and Humanities portfolio in 2009

Ove also announced the official launch of the **Arts & Humanities** journal content on Scopus, with the addition of 1,450 A&H journals (Figure 4). He summarised the Noordwijk meeting as follows:

This first board meeting of the new Scopus Subject Chairs was a true success, with many tangible outcomes for the title evaluation process and from a motivational "bonding" perspective – I gained the impression that this meeting helped turning a bunch of strong (!) individuals into an even stronger team – sharing a vision and clear views on what needs to be achieved.

Peter Stambrook compiled **the Minutes of the Noordwijk Meeting** for us. He recorded that the agenda was structured around two major topics.

- How will the new scoring system support the title evaluation process?
- What are the tasks of the newly created function of a "Subject Chair"?
- He noted that the number of scientific serial publications world-wide is estimated to be about 200,000. Currently Scopus covers 18,000 titles.
- We agreed that the question of exclusivity versus inclusivity was similar to the question of balancing quality against quantity.

- We considered whether Scopus should set a target for the number of titles, with opinions varying from 20,000 to 80,000 titles.
- We discussed the proposed scoring system to evaluate quality, and the relative merits of . a numerical scale and a descriptive model, and the merits of recommending improvements for marginal journals.
- We discussed whether a submission fee should be charged to a publisher for having a journal evaluated. It was decided to not proceed with this idea at this point
- We discussed a range of other parameters, including:
- The importance of English language abstracts:
- Sample documents: publishers should submit 10 articles from three recent issues.
- Citedness of journal and of the editors:
- The provision of English-language websites
- It was agreed that each title should be assigned only to one Subject Chair, who then will be the owner of this title and its evaluation.
- A drop down menu of decisions for each journal, along the lines of:
Other areas for discussion included:
- Accept with confidence, Accept with uncertainty; Review in 1/3/5 years; or Reject:
- A phased programme of revisiting existing journals on the system.

Journal Ethics Adherence and SCOPUS

I also noted that I was concurrently engaged as a Council Member for COPE, the Committee on Publication Ethics. COPE was and is committed to raising ethical standards in Journal publication worldwide, and it was enjoying dramatic growth and support.
Given that quality in publication was at the heart both of the COPE and the SCOPUS agendas, I wondered whether we could discuss possible synergies between the two organisations at the forthcoming Cape Town Meeting, which I could report back to the COPE Council.

We did not take this specific proposal forwards, but the discussion set the scene for the subsequent development of an Ethical Standards Policy for SCOPUS which had very wide ranging impact , and about which I will write about further in a following essay.

The SCOPUS CSAB Meeting in Cape Town, 28th-30th October 2009:

This meeting was the 7th meeting of the outgoing advisory board since 2003, and the first meeting of the new CSAB. The meeting combined both the membership of the first board and the new board. In the course of the meeting, we discussed :

- the search and management of specialist referees for particular journals, for example to help with language issues;
- the design of the interface for the title dashboard;
- Challenges with decision making and communicating decisions to publishers
- we were introduced to the SCIMAGO Journal ranking system and to plans to introduce new metrics to SCOPUS;
- we were introduced to the new strategy of including A&H journals into SCOPUS, under the leadership of historian Professor Richard Whatmore, then of Sussex University

"Life is not a Democracy!"

The Cape Town meeting was noteworthy for the breadth, depth and diversity of (sometimes heated) discussions. These prompted Ove Kahler memorably to announce at one point that **"life is not a democracy!**" for which he has often since been quoted to bring animated board discussions to a conclusion.

The Minutes of the Cape Town meeting record that we discussed many topics, including:

- The definition and handling of local and regional journals;
- measuring the academic activity of the editorial board ;
- manuscript submission and rejection rates;
- Early iterations of article processing fees and their significance;
- Definitions of Content, Citedness and Regularity;
- "consistency" of content across issues:
- Online availability of the journal and the possession of a website;
- stopping capture of the "number of subscribing libraries" using to World Cat.
- Whether "international" and "regional" journals should be similarly evaluated or distinguished in separate divisions;
- The development of regional and subsidiary CSABs, as with the Thai advisory board.
- Should newly launched journals be evaluated like any other journal

- Should a Journal have to publish at least X months/ years/ issues, before they are considered for inclusion?
- Should Scopus directly accept all (new) journals from designated and “trusted” publishers?
- What defines a designated or a trusted publisher, and what would be the public perceptions and consequences of preferential treatment of publishers ”?
- When can rejected journals re-apply for inclusion?
- Should we re-evaluate accepted journals after a probationary period of x months/ years?
- When should we apply the new STEP criteria to the currently indexed journals?
- Could we apply metrics to define journals for re-evaluation?
- How should we deal with non-journal sources, vis Books and Conference papers?

The SCIVAL Academic Performance Measurement System

We were also introduced to the new Elsevier SCIVAL system, which drew upon data from SCOPUS. SCIVAL was designed as a web based decision assistance too for the comparative performance analysis of authors and researchers, departments, institutions and national outputs (Figure 5) and by SPOTLIGHT, its powerful data visualisation interface.

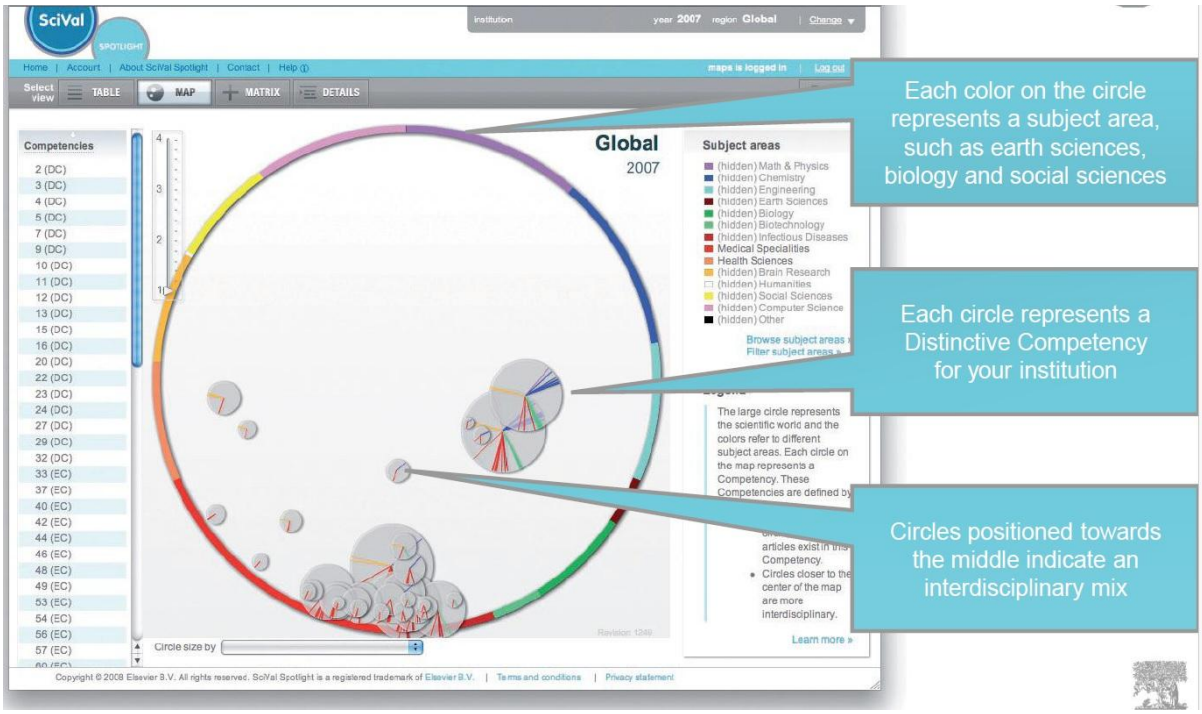

Figure 5. An image from an early iteration of the SCIVAL Spotlight interface, as presented to us by Helen de Mooij of Elsevier. The SCIVAL concept was developed by Kevin Boyack and colleagues as the University of California San Diego Map of Science (Borner et al 2012).

Regional Guest Speakers at the Board Meeting

We also established a tradition for the new CSAB of inviting local speakers with a regional knowledge of academic publishing to present loco-regional perspectives on selected topics. Dr. Taurai Imbayarwo of Africa Science Trackers spoke on the subject of "Towards the coverage of more African Published peer-reviewed journals".

Dr. Imbayarwo expressed the urgent need by African nations to create knowledge intensive societies has raised concerns about the visibility and quantity of "African Science". Results from a number of international databases have prompted the question "Why journals from the continent covered in international indices are so few on a continent with 15% of the world's population?"

We have returned to these questions many times since 2009 and we have adopted a range of solutions and new technologies to help us to address the implicit goals of the SCOPUS Content Selection Advisory Board.

My Appreciation of Ove Kahler's work for the Subject Title Evaluation Platform

The modernisation of the STEP system at the outset of my participation with the SCOPUS CSAB was in no small measure due to the bounding energy and personal leadership skills of Ove Kahler. Reflecting on his transformational work and insights 16 years later, I remain deeply impressed at the speed and clarity of the changes that he led, and his willingness to go the extra miles (and over the English Channel) to build the key relationships.

With the global Covid Pandemic of 2019 to 2022 now firmly behind us, and before the era of TEAMS and Zoom, it is noteworthy that this work was accomplished by a coherent team, working in traditional ways out of an office in Amsterdam, with the software development team in the same city, under clear leadership.

In my opinion, it was a great loss to SCOPUS and to Elsevier when Ove was snapped up for a senior appointment with the Dutch academic publisher Brill, which merged with the German publisher De Gruyter in 2024 and is now headquartered in Berlin.

General Observations on the role of Members of the CSAB for Elsevier BV

Elsevier BV has been sustained down the centuries by a strong corporate culture. The decision to appoint an external Advisory Board of non-Elsevier employees rather than an in-house Board was therefore a bold step.

The SCOPUS CSAB members are not employees of Elsevier, but it must be noted that Board participation is a stipendiary role with funds from Elsevier, and that in general the Board members have been tried and tested as Elsevier journal editors.

Members of the Board also recognise the implicit tension that exists with the community of publishers because Elsevier is both an academic publisher itself and the owner of SCOPUS.

The board has a diverse composition of members from different professional cultures, ages and geographic regions, with different personalities and opinions. However, all are driven by a sense of public service and a wider perspective and concerns about the trustworthiness of academic inputs and outputs across global academic activity.

The continuity of Board membership is balanced by a steady turnover of members for various reasons, but the collegiality and sense of mutual support has endured.

Discussions are often vigorous but never personal as ideas are bounced around the room, and the diversity of views generally creates better solutions than the initial proposals.

The role of the CSAB has also matured well beyond journal validation since 2009 as trust has been built between the Board and Senior Elsevier managers, and Board meetings are often used as a sounding board for new ideas, content policies and expansion plans, and wider commercial strategies.

Elsevier managers partake in these discussions and they have the opportunity and freedom to draw on the discussions and feed the outputs into Elsevier corporate planning as they see fit.

Board cohesion and focus is sustained by two three-day meetings annually, either in the Amsterdam headquarters of Elsevier or in third party venues, along with a continuous two way flow of emails, and (since the Covid pandemic) increasing use of short topic specific meetings on Zoom or Teams. Board members also provide continuous surveillance of the global news feeds in their specialist and general reading, and feed key articles and discussion points into the common pool.

The role of the board has further expanded into teaching and education, through invited seminars and webinars in many countries , and through support for the development of subsidiary regional advisory boards in Thailand, Russia, China and South Korea.

In future essays in this series, I will describe the impact and adaptation of the work of the Board and the development of the SCOPUS system in response to radical changes in academic publishing, publication malpractice and artificial intelligence systems. The scale and impact of these changes were not anticipated in 2009, and the work and experiences of the Board have strategic relevance to the future of academic publishing.

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In seeking to preserve the historical record of an important and influential technical system, I note that the recollections and opinions in this essay are my own. They should not be construed as representing the corporate views, policies or intent of Elsevier BV.

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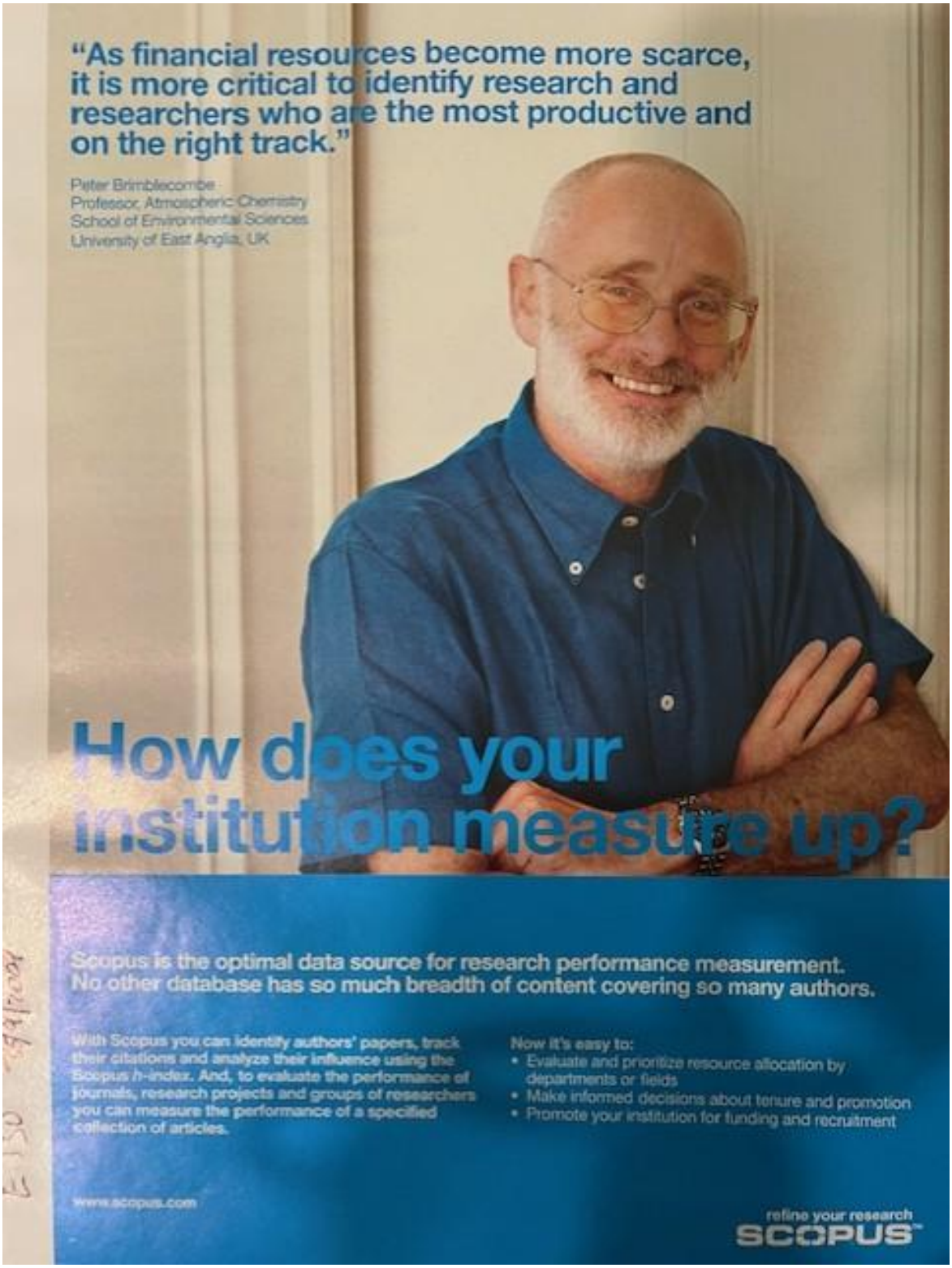

The face of SCOPUS! Service through three decades: Professor Peter Brimblecombe, pictured in 2009 for SCOPUS promotional material. Peter joined the Board in 2004 as the Subject Chair for Environmental Sciences and he continues to contribute his specialist knowledge, insights and mentorship to it in 2025.