Essays on the Adjudication of Quality in the Global Academic Literature

The Development of Policy for the SCOPUS Citation System

Part 1: The Work of the Content Selection Advisory Board 2010-2011

David Rew, MA MB MChir (Cambridge) FRCS (London)

Honorary Consultant Surgeon to the Faculty of Medicine, University of Southampton, UK
And to the Clinical Informatics Research Unit.

Former Editor in Chief of the EJSO, The European Journal of Surgical Oncology, 2003-2009

Subject Chair for Medicine to the SCOPUS Content Selection Advisory Board, Elsevier BV, The Netherlands, 2009 to the Present

A Working Paper for publication on the ePrints Server of the University of Southampton

6th February 2026

Correspondence to dr1@soton.ac.uk

Key Words: SCOPUS, Content Selection Advisory Board, Policy, Corporate Strategy
Bibliometrics: Publishing Ethics, Publication Malpractice
Scopus Title Evaluation Platform (STEP)

Contents

Abstract

Bibliometrics is a statistical science which has a profound influence on behaviours and resource allocation across the global academic ecosystem. It affects the allocation of energies and resources by researchers, authors, journals, publishers, universities, corporations and governments.

Bibliometrics is primarily a product of two major information systems: The Web of Science, from Clarivate Analytics, and SCOPUS from Elsevier BV of the Netherlands. Both products are hugely complex systems. They must be managed and organised in an ordered and structured manner to be effective, through policies which describe the rules of content accrual, processing and delivery to its customers.

Trust and Quality Assurance are central to the societal and commercial value of bibliometric systems. The designers of SCOPUS, with which I am most familiar, determined at the outset in 2003-2004 that content accrual would be managed through an external board of advisors, the SCOPUS Content Selection Advisory Board (CSAB).

I have been privileged to be a member of the CSAB as the Subject Chair for Medicine since the outset of the current CSAB programme in 2009. This role has engaged me in the development of the SCOPUS Title Evaluation Platform (STEP); the major expansion and diversification of SCOPUS content; the diversification of bibliometrics; the growth of open access publishing; the move from subscription based to article processing fee based commerce; and the massive growth of sophisticated publication fraud; and the emergence of Machine Learning and Artificial Intelligence systems.

In this essay, I seek to describe the work of the Board in terms of the development of its policy framework over the formative period 2010-2011.

Introduction

This paper is one of a series of essays in which I examine a range of elements in the global bibliometric system from my unique and enduring perspective as the Subject Chair for Medicine on the Content Selection Advisory Board (CSAB) to the SCOPUS Citation system since 2009.

SCOPUS is a commercially owned academic abstract and citation system. It has a profound l influence on behaviours in and around the academic publishing ecosystem through the recognition for quality assurance and the profitability which it bestows on its listed journals and publishers.

SCOPUS occupies a central role in the global ecosystem of academic publication. It is a key component of a proprietary information system which has been developed by Elsevier BV for the provision of bibliometric information on the performance of authors, journals, books, publishers, faculties and institutions to Universities, Corporations and Governments around the world. It functions in respectful competition with the Web of Science, which is owned by Clarivate Analytics.

SCOPUS provides a range of data outputs from which valuable knowledge can be derived. It generates a range of author-, article-, journal- and publisher- based metrics which can be related to performance indices such as grant awards. Important actionable intelligence can be derived, from which purchasers of the system:

- can make decisions around the academic inputs outputs of individuals, teams and units;
- can assess the “Gross Academic Product” of faculties, institutions and countries.
- can make informed decisions on fraudulent practices and aberrant publishing outputs.

The data outputs of SCOPUS and of the Web of Science shape the careers of researchers and the huge investments of institutions, grant bodies and governments in global academic competition. These outputs also shape global publication malpractice of great complexity, as “bad actors” seek to game the system for dishonest profit and advantage.

SCOPUS works in partnership with all academic publishers through the listing of their outputs in a huge database, from which titles, abstracts and references are analysed. The ownership of the full article content remains with the original publishers, who benefit commercially from the link with SCOPUS (and the Web of Science) from the reputational gain that a listing in these systems provides.

The Nature of Strategy and Policy in Complex Organisations

All successful human endeavour is determined by Strategy. Strategy is the process of setting clear aims for the enterprise, or the plan of action to achieve the overall aims. Policy is the framework of processes and rules by which the strategy is achieved.

In the complex and dynamic world which we occupy, both Strategy and Policy are fluid and dynamic concepts, as organisations and people respond to external political, legislative, social, economic or environmental events over which they may have no or limited control. Executive and Advisory Boards therefore exist both to set and monitor strategy and policy, and also to revise and adapt to change in real time.

In the context of Elsevier BV, of SCOPUS and specifically of the work of the SCOPUS CSAB, there is a Hierarchy of Strategy from the Elsevier Main Board, which determines the direction of the company and its primary commercial interests; through the Executive team which manages the SCOPUS system; and to the SCOPUS Content Advisory Board, which has an advisory role to the SCOPUS Executive Team in the development and adaptation of policy.

In terms of Policy, the relationships are more complex. They include **externally imposed** policies in relation to human resources, legislative and financial policies, behaviours and disciplines; and internally developed policies to ensure that the executive strategy works.

The independent board members are also answerable to external agencies, including their universities. In my own case, I am also answerable to the UK General Medical Council in respect of my professional behaviours and judgements, which are uniquely exercised in the Subject Chair role.

The Hierarchy of Policy Making for SCOPUS

On its formation in 2009, the CSAB was initially charged with developing the SCOPUS Title Evaluation Platform (STEP) and the policy framework around it. However, as the confidence of the Elsevier BV management team grew in the Board, and as the academic publishing environment changed rapidly around us, we were also trusted with contributions to a much wider and interrelated corporate policy framework (Figure 1). This framework was intended to maintain the reputation and trustworthiness of the SCOPUS system, through a series of internal and external changes over time which included:

- The major expansion and diversification of SCOPUS content;
- The diversification of bibliometric indices;
- The growth of open access publishing;
- The move from subscription based to article processing fee based commerce;
- The massive growth of sophisticated publication fraud;
- And the emergence of Machine Learning and Artificial Intelligence systems.

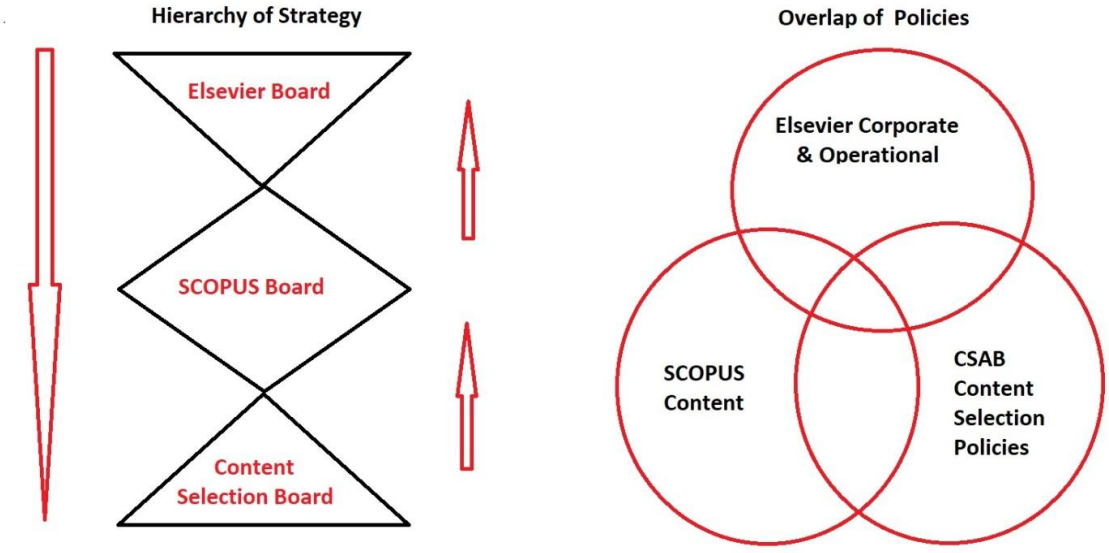

Figure 1: Diagrams of the Hierarchy of Strategy and the overlap of Elsevier Corporate< SCOPUS Content and CSAB Selection Policies (The Author)

Between 2009 and 2025, the board has expanded from 12 to 17 Subject Chairs, and there has been a steady turnover of members. The Board has met twice per year in person and members are in continuous email communication at other times.

During the regular CSAB meetings, of which there have been more than 30 since 2009, a wide range of policies have been implemented. During the Covid pandemic and post-Covid years, work has continued on line with Teams and Zoom based teleconferencing.

The operational hierarchy which defines the place of the SCOPUS CSAB within the Elsevier corporate structure is illustrated in Figure 1. At the highest level, the Senior Executive Board of Elsevier determines the strategic direction of the company, and the operational policies which keep the enterprise viable.

At the next level of policy development, SCOPUS has its own subsidiary corporate management structure, through which it develops policies to address the form and technical structure of the system, its outputs for its target markets, its dealings with customers, its rate of expansion, its diversity of content, and so on.

The SCOPUS CSAB is managed directly by the SCOPUS management team, through which it also contributes to policy development. The advisory members of the SCOPUS CSAB have a non-executive role in advising on SCOPUS developments.

In the previous essay in this series, I described context of the creation of the CSAB from the creation of SCOPUS in 2003 to maturation in 2009, when 12 global Subject Chairs were appointed (see https://eprints.soton.ac.uk/507668/).

Policy and the SCOPUS Title Evaluation Platform (STEP)

Our first challenge was to develop a system which would allow the accession of applicant journals to SCOPUS in such a way as to select journals on the basis of quality, while demonstrating fairness of opportunity for all applicant journals. Implicitly, our work would also protect Elsevier's commercially important reputation as a responsible owner, operator and custodian of SCOPUS.

I have described in a separate paper the technical development of the SCOPUS Title Evaluation Platform between 2010 and 2025 see https://eprints.soton.ac.uk/507702/

From 2009 onwards, the global academic publishing landscape was evolving and changing radically in parallel with our work and in ways which were not foreseen when the Board was formed. Changes included:

- The expansion of the Internet and its enabling technologies:
- The development of the open access movement;
- The growth of internet based publishing models and the number of publishers;
- The transition from paper to digital and web-based publishing technology;
- The centrality and universality of journal websites;
- The primacy of "Article Processing Charge" (APC) based financing;
- The growth, scale and sophistication of systemic publication fraud and malpractice.

By early 2009, almost 5000 journals per annum were being submitted for inclusion into SCOPUS, and the contents of Ulrich's Periodicals alerted us to some 200,000 serial publications worldwide which might (or might not) seek a SCOPUS listing at some point.

The development of the SCOPUS Title Evaluation Platform required a series of policies which initially addressed:

- The process of journal selection from submission to final decision;
- How the process would be managed;
- The inclusion and exclusion criteria for consideration of an application;
- What criteria would be used to evaluate quality;
- The responsibility for the decisions;
- The communication of those decisions to applicants;
- The form that rejection of a journal would take;
- The duration of embargo periods for re-application, and why.

As the system developed, so we were obliged to develop policies for the implementation of processes and decisions in respect of:

- Publication Ethics and to counter Publication Malpractice;
- Content Expansion to include Books, Book Series and Conference Proceedings;
- The management and recognition of the work of the Subject Chairs;
- A process to manage Appeals by applicants following rejection;

- A process for the Recognition and Re-evaluation of failing journals
- The expansion of Re-evaluation using the SCOPUS Radar system;
- The introduction of Artificial Intelligence (AI) systems in support of SCOPUS;
- The use of AI by researchers, authors and journals for SCOPUS content;
- The recognition and management of large scale publication fraud.

Many actions and events flow from policy decisions. Some of the policy developments were consequential upon developments across the SCOPUS system. Others evolved from within the Board; from the technical teams working on SCOPUS; at corporate level within Elsevier; or in response to external developments in academic publishing.

The industrialisation of publication fraud has become a particular challenge for Trust and Quality Assurance in the academic publishing industry since 2010, (see The Conversation: 25-08-15 How bad science is becoming big business), and even more so with the explosive growth of generative Artificial Intelligence technologies since 2023. These developments have obliged the further evolution of our policies and of the technical framework with which to manage these problems.

Policies for the Operation of the SCOPUS CSAB

The formation of the SCOPUS Content Selection Advisory Board in 2009 was itself underpinned by a series of policies which have stood the test of time. In particular:

- The Board would be comprised of external advisors (Subject Chairs) with relevant backgrounds and experience in academic publishing, to provide independent advice and opinions in relation to their allocated tasks.
- Each Subject Chair would have personal advisory responsibility for a portfolio of related subject categories, for example, Engineering, Medicine or Biological Sciences, based upon a broad understanding and overview of their subject fields;
- Board members would receive a contract of engagement with a flexible term of service and stipendiary pro rata remuneration.
- Elsevier would retain primary responsibility for all decisions and for dealings and communications with applicants and publishers.

The Development of the SCOPUS CSAB and STEP Policies through 2010

Following our earliest meetings of the Board in Noordwijk and Cape Town in 2009, we focussed on the development of STEP and on the detailed technical and policy framework. The key objectives of these policies would be:

- To produce a journal appraisal and evaluation system which led to consistent, defensible and sustainable decision making on each journal in their diverse subject portfolios;

- To integrate quantitative and bibliometric measures of performance with the qualitative judgement of experienced editors;

- To create an efficient and quality assured pipeline of journal evaluation from initial submission to final decision making, with an initial sorting process by the Elsevier office team to ensure that all journals in the pipeline subsequently met minimal quality criteria;

- To permit flexible and remote working by each Subject Chair using a secure online system;

- To use and agile and iterative process to minimise development costs and to optimise the end user experience of the system;

- To accommodate the various speciality-driven needs of the subject chairs. For example, much academic work in Computing and Engineering is published in Conference Proceedings, while Medicine presents its own evaluation challenges, such as in Case Report Collections and in the Complementary and Alternative Medicine fields.

Through 2010, we had extensive discussions about the information needs of the board and their translation into a bespoke computer system and into a practical work flow for the equitable evaluation of journals. We held two meetings in 2010: in Reykjavik in June, and in Istanbul in October; and two meetings in 2011, in Rome (Spring) and Miami (Autumn).

In early June 2010, Ove Kahler, the architect of the new Board, accepted a promotion with the German publisher Brill (now De Gruyter Brill as of 2024). Ove was succeeded by Wim Meester, whose role was to set the strategic objectives for Scopus title evaluation; along with Michiel Schotten, whose role was to manage the processes to secure the strategic objectives; and with Gillian Griffith, to manage the technical development of STEP.

Ove Kahler's Summary of Policy Development for STEP in October 2010

Ove Kahler summarised his strategic policy work on the STEP project in a paper in the journal Learned Publishing in October 2010. He noted that the submission of journals to SCOPUS had grown from 1680 in 2008 to 4700 in 2009, and reflected that "*each applying journal deserves a fair assessment that should follow consistent and transparent principles*" .He summarised the work on the redesign of STEP around two questions:

- Who should be taking the final decisions on accepted titles, and
- How should these decisions be made?

He observed that *"The logic of appointing an external board is therefore clear: Given that Elsevier is a major publisher, decisions made by an internally appointed selection committee of Elsevier employees would always have been the subject of suspicions around objectivity, particularly in the appraisal of Elsevier's own journals vis a vis their competitors.*

We have identified the value of consistent criteria in journal selection. Those criteria were established through our deliberations in 2009-2010, and they have stood the test of time to date, as published on the current Elsevier website (Table 1)"

Ove concluded that the application of a form of peer review (the CSAB process) to journal evaluation remains an experimental undertaking, with unexpected challenges, and that the task of evaluating whole journals would require specialist experience. He observed that it remained to be seen whether all of our adopted criteria would prove to be useful and sufficient indicators of the journal's quality across all subject areas and whether the weighting of criteria and categories would result in the right balance in decision making. He acknowledged the particular concerns around the evaluation of recently launched journals.

Ove was also concerned at the accountability of the STEP process both to the journals and to suggestors in the matter of turn around times for the assessment process, which he hoped would take a maximum of six months.

In addition to transparency and currency, he highlighted the importance of safeguarding the quality of scientific and academic work in the face of the overload in the flows of research outputs, and in the ways in which access to academic content is mediated (Kahler O. 2010).

His project has endured for >15 years, but the factors which drove the original content selection categories in 2009 have evolved substantially since then, and the Categories and Criteria would benefit from revisions.

The Scopus Subject Chairs meeting in Reykjavik, Iceland, 17th - 18th June 2010

The primary objective of this meeting was to finalise the policies and design for the new SCOPUS Title Evaluation Platform. In a series of sessions and breakout groups, we identified a number of operational policies, procedures and responsibilities to resolve. These included:

Policies on Finding and Using Reviewers to assist the Subject Chairs:

From our collective past experience as Journal Editors, we assumed that Subject Chairs would wish to appoint reviewers for individual journals. This had significant implications for the design of the system; for the identification of suitable reviewers; and for the induction of invited reviewers who would have no experience of evaluating journals (unlike individual manuscripts), or knowledge of the principles and ambitions behind the STEP process. We were concerned about:

- Conflicts of interest and the need for confidentiality contracts;
- Incentivisation for reviewers to work in a timely manner;
- Feedback to reviewers if the Subject Chair opinion differed.

The complexities of using reviewers led us to decide not to pursue the concept, although it took a new form with the creation of regional advisory boards, about which more later.

Policies on Communication between Subject Chairs, Title Suggestors and Publishers:

We discussed the legal responsibilities for decisions made in STEP, and whether the recommendations for final decisions should rest with the Subject Chairs or with Elsevier. We agreed that Subject Chair recommendations were advisory to Elsevier and would be dependent upon information provided by Elsevier through STEP. Subject Chairs would not therefore be individually responsible for communications with the suggestors and publishers on Elsevier's behalf. The legal responsibility for each decision would rest with Elsevier, and letters to suggestors and publishers would not be signed by individual Subject Chairs.

We also recognised that all correspondence should be trackable and retained centrally, and templates for acceptance and rejection, terms and conditions should be watertight and checked by the legal department. Elsevier would deal with correspondence from suggestors and publishers who ask for additional feedback on decisions.

Policies on Journal Selection Criteria for SCOPUS

Category	**Criteria**
Journal policy	Convincing editorial policy Type of peer review Diversity in geographical distribution of editors Diversity in geographical distribution of authors
Content	Academic contribution to the field Clarity of abstracts Quality of and conformity to the stated aims and scope of the journal Readability of articles
Journal standing	Citedness of journal articles in Scopus Editor standing
Publishing regularity	No delays or interruptions in the publication schedule Full journal content available online
Online availability	English language journal home page available Quality of journal home page

Table 1. The general criteria for journal selection in SCOPUS

The policy on the selection criteria for applicant journals for SCOPUS was now established. It is helpful to consider the thinking behind the Categories and the Criteria for journal selection through 2009-2011 (Table 1).

These were an evolution of framework of criteria which had originally been established in the spreadsheet based model of the SCOPUS Title Evaluation Project from 2004 onwards. This had included the high level categories of Journal Policy; Journal Content; Journal Standing; Publishing Regularity and Online Availability.

The generic and broadly defined wording of the criteria reflected the diversity of opinions among the contributors to the debate among the CSAB members in a serious of discussion groups and break out exercises; and the best efforts to create a simple set of criteria which addressed the many variations in journal type, discipline and subject coverage that we might expect to be asked to evaluate.

Once posted, these criteria strongly influenced global behaviour in academic publishing from 2010 onwards. They drove the formatting of journal policies and applications for a SCOPUS listing. I will address each of the policies in turn.

Journal Policy: Convincing editorial policy

This is a particularly challenging and qualitative criterion to define, and it is open to very broad interpretation. It is probably helpful to substitute “convincing” with the words “credible” and “sustainable”. In this sense, we can assess the aims and scope of the journal, and consider whether they are realistic and matched to the circumstances ambitions of the editor or of the publisher.

For example, we may ask whether the stated ambitions of a journal to be “international” and “multidisciplinary” are realistic in the context of a modestly rated institutional publisher with limited resources and limited expertise in academic publishing .

Journal Policy: Type of peer review

The nature, quality, variations and limitations of the Peer Review model stimulate continuing debate. This has been further complicated by the rapid growth of “review-lite” ePrint and Preprint servers in recent years, and of debate about AI led review. Ethical editors struggle to secure timely reviews of a high standard for many journals.

STEP therefore make no judgement on the specifics of the peer review model which has been adopted by any particular journal, beyond seeking a clear, honest and accurate description of the model used by the applicant journal. Subject Chairs are of course aware the many malpractices and dishonesties that accompany claims of Peer Review and the difficulties of identifying such malpractice without insider testimony of abuse of the process.

The rapid advance in machine learning, shared digital intelligence and algorithmic analytics may help both to advance Peer review and aid our detection of the “bad actors”.

Journal Policy: Diversity in Geographical Distribution of Editors

This is another problematic criterion. By editors, we mean Editors in Chief, Associate Editors, and Editorial Board members. The general thinking behind this criterion was that editorial diversity would bring greater quality to the outputs of a journal. However, this assumed that named editorial board members would have the skills, training, engagement and authority to contribute effectively to the editorial strategy of a journal.

This is unlikely to be the case, given the explosion in the numbers of journals, and we are all familiar with spam emails which trawl relentlessly and uncritically for editors

it is difficult to escape the impression that for many journals, many lists of editorial board members, whether associate editors or advisory board members, include individuals who offer little or no practical experience of the principals of their editorial roles. It seems likely that such posts are often merely titular and used for padding of the personal curriculum vitae.

Journal Policy: Diversity in distribution of authors

The geographical diversity of authorship was introduced as a marker to increase the richness of content of a journal. Indeed, we now have effective digital systems which identify authorship fraud in many forms.

However, the policy clearly begs the question as to the practical and meaningful geographical boundaries of authorship for institutional and small loco-regional journals. Unfortunately, many such journals have interpreted this policy as a green light to expand their authorship beyond their geographic boundaries of knowledge and influence.

This has led to the frequent acceptance of content which the editors cannot validate, and it has opened up many journals to publication and citation malpractice which they are ill equipped to recognise or counter.

It is important to note that the word diversity for editors and authors in this context was introduced in respect of sources and not specifically in the context of the global Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity (EDI) debate.

No formal criteria were introduced in any attempt to define “Diversity”. Nevertheless, we fully recognise that responsibly applied diversity of authorship of a high standard can be a valuable tool for quality improvement.

I am also concerned that in some countries, it is still a hallmark of institutional pride and status that each university and/or university hospital and/or academic department will have its own academic journal, rather than collaborating at a regional or national level.

This “diversity of intention” dilutes the critical mass of higher quality content which would be achievable in fewer and more specialist journals, and thus undermines rather than advances the development of high quality academic writing.

Journal Content; Academic contribution to the field

It is difficult to measure an applicant journal's contribution quantitatively other than by the passage of time and the accrual of bibliometric data. When the criterion was established in 2010, there was still a large backlog of long established journals whose past performance could be readily assessed.

This is no longer the case. Many new journals which aspire to accession to SCOPUS at the earliest possible date, and indeed their business model may be predicated upon early accession to SCOPUS. Such journals lack any meaningful bibliometric history if they have only been in print for 1-2 years. This situation places a particular onus on Subject Chairs to make a difficult judgement on the potential academic contribution of the journal to the field.

Fortunately, the development of the SCOPUS Radar tool and continuous scanning of journal performance in the SCOPUS database permits us early recognition of problems where judgement calls on accession have been compromised by untrustworthy behaviour on the part of the particular journal, leading in some cases to re-evaluation and deletion from SCOPUS

Journal Content; Clarity of abstracts

Well written and formally structured abstracts (Background, Methods, Results and Conclusions) for each and every article are a valuable resource for a journal, its readers and for SCOPUS analytics tools, and there is an art to writing them well.

The abstract is often the only element of an article which is read by a researcher who is scanning the literature, so it is critical that it is accurate and informative. It is also the only substantive component of the paper that is accessible by and on SCOPUS, both for the reader and for SCOPUS AI. Full article content for Elsevier journals is accessible on Science Direct, which is a partner system of SCOPUS but not fully integrated with it.

We are aware that the use of such abstracts is subject-and discipline- specific. Arts and Humanities journals make less use of structured abstracts than do STEM journals, because

the nature of their outputs is different. Nevertheless, the use of an abstract as a brief and accurate synopsis of the content of a paper, chapter or book is very helpful in the listing and promotion of the publication.

It is also important to note that the use of structured abstracts is a relatively modern academic publishing practice, and that older (pre-1990s) journal articles often lack usable abstracts. The abstract criterion therefore has to be interpreted flexibly.

Side Note: The Clarity of the Journal Title

The clarity of a journal title was NOT a criterion in the 2010 SCOPUS Content Selection Policy. It has nevertheless become a significant matter, given the explosion in journal titles in the past 15 years.

The clarity of the title of the journal and the conformity of the content to the title is an important indicator of journal focus and purpose. Other than where the title is a long established and trusted global brand (as for example Nature, Cell, Science or The Lancet), a distinctive and informative title has considerable utility. Such a title states the origin of the journal and its purpose, as for example, The British Medical Journal; The New England Journal of Medicine; or the Journal of the American Medical Association. I nevertheless note that some publishers encourage single word titles, notably MDPI.

Generic and imitative titles for journals may prompt suspicion as to the motives of the editors and publishers. Where there is doubt about the choice of a trustworthy title for a new journal, an internet search will readily provide a list of existing names to avoid, or to imitate if the intent is malign.

Journal Content; Quality of and conformity to the Aims and Scope of the Journal

This is a critical and enduring assessment factor in journal appraisal. A succinct, clearly worded statement of the Aims and Scope of the journal generates trust, and creates a focus of purpose for authors, editors, reviewers and readers. It also aids evaluation of the journal. Vague, long winded, imprecise and generic statements do not generate such trust.

Journal Content; Readability of articles

This is a subjective criterion which is influenced by many factors, including the layout of the text, the clarity and conciseness of the writing, the language and script of the source documents, and by the native language(s) of the assessor in the particular subject area. SCOPUS does not specify the language of the content, other than that the title and abstract must be in English, and until recently, that all references should be in Latin script.

Advances in machine learning have reduced the restrictions on the script of references, and the rapid advances in AI based machine translation herald the advent in due course of universal language-to- language translation of document content for native speakers of any given language. That time has not yet arrived, and English remains an important medium for international communication as “the world’s “second language”.

Journal Standing; Citedness of journal articles in Scopus

This criterion mirrors the Academic Contribution criterion, in so far as bibliometrics are a widely used surrogate for academic performance. Regrettably, trust in citedness has been seriously undermined by rampant and sophisticated forms of citation malpractice to inflate citation counts. Fortunately, advanced AI-led fraud detection systems are in development which will create new standards for hallmarks of quantitative “sanitisation” of bibliometric measures.

Journal Standing; Editor standing

This criterion was introduced in the belief that the professional status and reputation of the Editor in Chief would be a surrogate index of the quality and trustworthiness of a journal. Regrettably, increasing evidence of Editor-led fraud has undermined this assumption. Moreover, the “status” or institutional seniority of the Editor, however defined, may not correlate with his or her competence in that role.

Given the explosive growth in journal titles, many editors are unknown outside their local professional circles in their native country. Moreover, there is no formal training, accreditation or evaluation process for journal editorship, and training courses are few and far between. The major publishers provide some training materials and guidelines for

editors, and experienced editorial managers of journals will be on the lookout for able editorial talent.

The ease and low cost of on line publishing and the business economics of academic publishing has also encouraged various individuals to become owner/publisher/editors, although this raises questions around governance, oversight and sustainability of the title.

Editor Standing is therefore generally of little practical use in journal evaluation, as trusted publishers will provide oversight for their editors, while there is little or no accountability for editorial quality in the “wild west” of fraudulent publishers.

Individual editors with fraudulent intent are increasingly brought to our attention through detection of citation malpractice and self-aggrandisement. We are aware of a range of methods through which Editors can abuse their status and influence.

Regrettably, as yet there are few sanctions against such individuals, other than through exclusion of their journals from SCOPUS (and/or The Web of Science)

Publishing Regularity; No delays or interruptions in the publication schedule

This was a significant evaluation factor in 2009-2010, when most journals were still published as regular issues, for example monthly or quarterly. Since then, many on-line journals have moved over to continuous publication, amounting to one volume per annum, which is now often the default marker of regularity.

Online Availability; Full journal content available online

This criterion has also been overtaken by the march of technology. There is now almost no journal that does not have some form of internet representation, whether a specific website or a standard publisher-formatted website; or which does not publish its archives on line, either freely or through a subscriber portal.

Online Availability; English language journal home page available

This is a valuable step to the internationalisation of academic publishing, and most serious academic journals have adopted the policy. The process is now made increasingly easier with the advent and progressive sophistication of standard commercial machine translation tools, which are facilitating more and more translation options.

However, there remain limitations to machine translation, as we have set out in a paper in 2019 which specifically addresses Russian <-> English translation (Rew and Popova 2019)

Online Availability; Quality of journal home page

This criterion has broadly been made redundant through the standardisation of formatting of professionally designed websites. From an assessment perspective, key elements of quality of a journal home page include:

- Ease of access to comprehensive archival lists of article titles and abstracts, with standard metadata (eg digital object identifiers for post-2000 articles)
- Clarity as to the ownership, governance and country of jurisdiction
- Comprehensive information on the senior editorial team members, their institutional affiliations and Orcid details.

In addition to the general evaluation criteria as set out in Table 1, applicant journals should meet the following technical criteria: They should:

- Have a registered International Standard Serial Number (ISSN);
- Have a publication history to be reviewed;
- Publish (and adhere to) publication ethics and publication malpractice statements.
- Publish (as of 2025) their policy on the use of Artificial Intelligence in relation to content creation, peer review and any other relevant applications of AI

In summary, the Categories and Criteria which were established in 2010 deserve re-examination after 16 years, given the operational, technical and behavioural changes across the global academic publishing ecosystem since then.

Policies on the Scoring of Applicant Journals and the Outcomes of Decisions

We inherited a scoring model from the original (2003-2009) evaluation system which was spreadsheet-based. We proposed to optimise scoring criteria and objectivity in general, and to improve the discriminatory power of the scoring range. Scoring weights for selection criteria needed to be improved, while qualitative elements remained important and scoring should only be a guide to the final decision.

We agreed that extra scoring criteria should be added in respect of Ethics, Plagiarism and Fraud policies, which issue I will address in greater detail elsewhere.

There would only be two final decision categories: Acceptance or Rejection. For journals which were **Accepted** for SCOPUS, Elsevier would implement a contract with the relevant publisher which included the backloading of key metadata for up to five years to permit the development of relevant and meaningful analytics for that journal. The input of the Subject Chair into that journal effectively ended at that point.

In the case of **Rejection**, applicants would be notified a predetermined period in which the title cannot re-apply for inclusion in Scopus. The time period for re-application after rejection might be around two years.

The general policy would be that Rejection would be a constructive process, to provide time for a journal to improve, and that advice would be constructive and supportive. Indeed, Rejection is a harsh term, as all of us who have ever received rejection letters will be aware, and it seemed to me that "Deferral" better reflected our policy of supportive intent towards all but the most egregiously bad and unreformable journals at that time. Nevertheless, the word Rejection was adopted for the clarity that it brought to the process.

However, it was felt that journals needed variable time to correct apparent deficiencies, and we subsequently experimented with a series of "time delays" from six months to five years We also recognised the need for a **"Never Return"** category to reject journals with irredeemable ills, such as demonstrably predatory features.

There was one particular adverse consequence of the selective approach to journal inclusion in SCOPUS, and this is illustrated in Figure 2. For those journals which were not selected for SCOPUS, valuable data would not be captured and followed on authors, institutions and publishers.

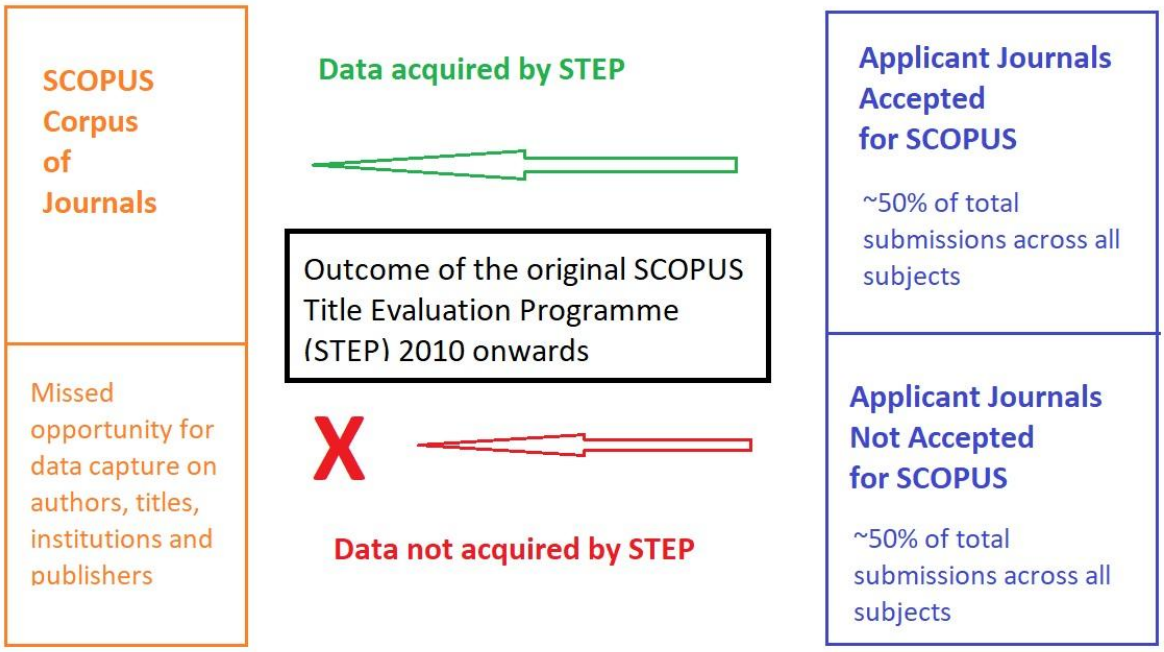

Figure 2: Diagram of the opportunity cost of the selective STEP policy (Image: the Author)

Design Policy and Functionality of the User Interfaces in STEP:

We were keen to optimise the user interfaces in the new design to maximise efficiency and ease of use, when compared with the interaction with Excel spreadsheets. The general design principles which were agreed were that;

- The system would display a History of all work done by each Subject Chair.
- The list of new journals for evaluation would be presented on the Home page.
- The work flow through the system would be logical and intuitive.
- Each title would link to a series of relevant data screens.
- The system would present a list of decision options for the Subject Chair to score.
- On completion of scoring, the Subject Chair would provide his or her decision to accept or reject, and unique text in support of that decision.

There were many other policy details to consider, including:

- Information on the track record of the Publisher in SCOPUS;
- On the sequencing of the release of processed applicant journals to subject chairs;
- Around potential conflicts of interest of Subject Chairs with particular journals;
- On the transfer of assignments of titles to another Subject Chair;
- On the allocation of multi-disciplinary titles;
- On the communication of concerns directly to the Scopus team.
- On the value a private online forum for Board members to communicate;
- On "best practices" regarding the evaluation of difficult cases
- And on the means of response to Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs).

A Policy for the Expansion of the Content of SCOPUS: Conference Outputs

In 2010, SCOPUS was still largely focussed upon academic journals. However, academic conferences and their publications represent a large information ecosystem in many subject categories, including Computer Sciences, Electronics and Electrical Engineering. Some conferences and their publications are regular, while others are occasional and irregular, with varying standards and consistency of peer review.

As with other forms of academic publishing, academic conferences have become vulnerable to large scale fraud and fakery, demanding vigilance among attendees, publishers and the citation systems.

For historic reasons outwith the remit of the CSAB, the management of Conferences had early on devolved to the Elsevier New York office under the direction of Judy Salk, who was subsequently a regular attendee at CSAB meetings. We were asked whether the evaluation of conference proceedings should fall within the remit of CSAB Subject Chairs.

We recognised that the coverage of Academic Conference outputs poses particular challenges of quality assurance, given the complexity and diversity within the Conference ecosystem. We therefore considered whether conference outputs could and should be accommodated within the new STEP design process. We considered:

- Whether peer-review could be implemented for conference proceedings;
- Whether an "acceptance and rejection policy" could be standardised;
- Whether the "citedness of a conference" could be reliably determined
- What does "regularity" mean for a conference?
- Are there other approaches for evaluating conferences and their publishers?
- That there was a need to clarify the terminology to classify conference outputs.
- That some Conference Proceedings were not linked to recognised publishers such as the IEEE and the Association for Computer Machinery (ACM);
- That not all were allocated ISSN/ISBN numbers for consistent identification.
- The extra workload that this would impose on Subject Chairs
- Whether a separate Conference Advisory Board should be established.

We noted the challenge of tracking the publishers of conference proceedings, given that conferences and affiliated societies often changed their titles and focus, and that Peer-review for conferences was "patchy" and of variable quality. We agreed that Conference Publishers should define their peer-review policies and should be transparent about around their technical and financial sponsorship; and that Citedness and regularity are hard to measure for conferences.

We therefore decided to continue with the status quo arrangements for separate Conference evaluation by Elsevier, but to reconsider the policies over time and to be open to various strategies for the quality assurance of conference outputs.

Policy on the Embargo Period for Consideration of Recently Launched Titles

Given the rapid expansion of academic publishing on the back of digital-only and open access publishing, we recognised the demand from publishers to be able to list new journals directly ("fast track" acceptance) on SCOPUS, including from Elsevier itself and from other "trusted" publishers who had supported the early development of SCOPUS.

In general terms, we agreed that an embargo period of two years ("The Two Year Rule") between the launch of a new journal and the application for a SCOPUS listing was

appropriate. This would give time for the academic trajectory to become clearer. We considered that some weak journals would otherwise "front load" their early issues with content for impact when they were unable to sustain the manuscript flow subsequently.

Moreover, we would have no citation metrics or other evidence with which to judge new journals. We would therefore need to find surrogate measures of quality, such as Scopus Author Profiles of the authors of articles in the new journal.

We wished to mitigate the reputational risks to SCOPUS and to the CSAB from allegations of favouritism and a two tier system of "high quality" or "inside track" and "outside track" publishers. Following much debate and in consideration of commercial needs, we agreed to compromise.

The "two year rule" would be our standard for evaluation, but that exceptional cases would be fast tracked if the decision was clearly defensible on quality grounds. We would need trust that the original partner publishers would only submit titles to us whose credentials they could validate, and which we could reasonably expect to perform well, for example titles from the Nature and Lancet portfolios of journals.

The two year embargo policy was subsequently tested from time to time under pressure from applicants. However, in general terms it served us well until the early 2020s, when the developing SCOPUS Radar technology provided us with new means of continuous surveillance of the good, poor and malign performance of journals in SCOPUS.

Policy on Language and Regionalisation of Source Content

We recognised that the traditional dominance of the Anglosphere in academic publishing in the late 20th century was now changing with the growth of research, scientific and technical outputs in many countries and regions.

We therefore discussed whether Elsevier could offer a translation interface for the full content of articles for languages other than English, with particular consideration of Chinese. We noted the costs of such a policy and that the technology of machine translation

was not yet mature enough to allow automated translation. The policy of asking for article titles, abstracts and references are in English was nevertheless defensible to underwrite a common language of communication, and this policy has been sustained to 2025 and beyond.

However, Machine and AI based translation between many languages have advanced considerably since 2010 and continue to do so at speed. We regularly revisit this policy in technical discussions, while seeking to ensure that SCOPUS does not become a tower of Babel and that content does not become extensively siloed behind practical and technical language barriers.

Policy on Local Boards: Regional Content Selection and Advisory Boards

The issue of the possibility of forming 'Local' CSABs was initially raised at the Cape Town meeting in 2009, where Derrick Duncombe at the Elsevier Singapore Office made the proposal. This was driven by the work of Professor Narogrit Somnatopop in Thailand to create a Thai Advisory Board. Narongrit wished to align the development of Thai science outputs and journal listings with SCOPUS acceptance standards.

As an experiment, a policy decision was made to support the proposal in principle and an **Expert Content Selection and Advisory Committee (ECSAC)** was created in Thailand**.** The Thai ECSAC would be affiliated to the main SCOPUS CSAB, who members would have full and final say over their journal selection. Derek had also established interest in two other test markets for the ECSAC model, in Taiwan and South Korea.

We had some reservations about the proposal, in that the new CSAB was not yet fully settled in role and on a steep learning curve. The new version of STEP was not complete, and the technical design of STEP to accommodate parallel and sequential working practices with local boards would introduce greater technical complexity for the coding team.

We had early concerns that the selective development of local boards would also be a source of instability and preferential treatment of journals from countries that created Regional Boards. Over the next decade, the portfolio of Regional Boards grew to include

Thailand, South Korea, Russia and China. The Boards were successful in stimulating improvements in the quality of the academic outputs in their own countries.

The SCOPUS Policy on Publication Ethics and Malpractice Policies

Of my various contributions to the work of the CSAB from 2009 through 2025, the introduction of the Publication Ethics and Malpractice Policies gives me particular satisfaction. Between 2008 and 2010, while still editing the European Journal of Surgical Oncology (EJSO), I had served on the Council (now the Board of Trustees) of the Committee on Publication Ethics, COPE.

COPE was established in 1997 by a group of medical journal editors in the UK. As of 2022, it had over 13,000 members worldwide, from all academic fields. COPE first published Guidelines on Good Publication Practice in 1999, and, the first edition of the Code of Conduct for Editors was published on the COPE website in November 2004, along with with an Editorial in the British Medical Journal (BMJ).

During my Editorship of the EJSO, I first became aware of the scale and early forms of publication malpractice, which I raised with our readership in various editorials. On taking up the CSAB role with SCOPUS, it became apparent that relatively few authors, editors and reviewers of journals were seemingly aware of COPE and its policies. I had raised the issue informally in early CSAB meetings, although the focus at that time was on malpractice in individual papers by miscreant authors, rather than at the journal or publisher level.

Publication malpractice is nothing new, although its scale and sophistication has developed dramatically since the early 2000s. In August 2010, I circulated a paper to the Board for wider dissemination on **SCOPUS, COPE, Scholarly Publication Ethics and Malpractice** in which I noted that:

"Progress in science depends on publication of trustworthy research results in trustworthy journals by authors who justify that trust. There is evidence of frequent breaches of that trust across the breadth of the world literature... Publication malpractice takes a variety of forms, from minor and unintentional or unrecognised breaches to the most wilfully and criminally deceitful actions.

While there is no international consensus as to the definitions, regulation and penalties for Publication Ethics and Malpractice Misdemeanours, it is likely that there will be formal regulation if public trust is undermined; if there is a continuation of high profile cases in the international media, and if the publishing industry does not establish regulatory procedures for the prevention, detection and action upon PEMM.

The Scopus Content Selection and Advisory Board (CSAB) takes a strong view on Publication Ethics and Malpractice as an international problem that must be addressed across all disciplines and jurisdictions. This view encompasses the following principles:

1. That Publication Ethics is the responsibility of all involved in the publication process, including Host institutions; Funding bodies; Authors; Reviewers; Journal Publishers; Citation Bodies; And anyone who believes with good reason and/or has evidence of malpractice.

-2. That while malpractice takes a variety of forms and definitions, the principles are now so widely established in the published literature and so widely adopted by the major publishers that there can be no reasonable excuse for malpractice.

3. That while individual jurisdictions take a different view on the seriousness of malpractice and on the appropriate punishments, publishing is now such an international phenomenon that "best practice" will be judged for the purposes of SCOPUS on that pertaining to the most highly regarded and effective jurisdictions.

4. That malpractice will be judged in the first instance at the level of the individual paper, and that editors and publishers will take investigative action and responsibility for notification in the first instance. Where any party detects evidence of malpractice, the responsibility will be to report the matter to the editor and/or publisher.

5. Papers which are found to raise significant concerns must be withdrawn (REDACTED) from the world literature by virtue of a formal retraction notice (procedure to be detailed.)

The SCOPUS CSAB recognises, as does COPE, that as this is a developing area of jurisprudence and professional ethics, detailed implementation will vary from time to time as new collective, cross platform and cross disciplinary procedures are put in place for the detection, grading notification, recording and publication of evidence of malpractice.

The Board therefore believes that a statement of membership of COPE or an equivalent voluntary advisory body, and subscription to its principles and procedures, provides a sound starting point for all journal editors and publishers seeking appraisal, acceptance and retention on the SCOPUS or any other public database.

The SCOPUS CSAB would also wish to see a clear statement of ethical principles published in each journal or on its website, as part of the general process and international responsibility for education and information for authors in matters of Publication Ethics and Malpractice."

We discussed the paper at the Subject Chairs Meeting in Istanbul, and the Elsevier team subsequently posted the following statement on the SCOPUS website under the heading Publication Ethics and Publication Malpractice:

"Publication Malpractice is unfortunately widespread in the world literature, in all subject areas and in all jurisdictions, and no journal is immune. The prevention of Publication Malpractice is the responsibility of every author, editor, publisher and institution.SCOPUS will in future require that every journal which accrues to the system must publish a clear and consistent statement of Publication Ethics and Publication Malpractice, and that each and every publisher will be held to account for the performance and compliance with this policy of every journal in its portfolio. SCOPUS mandates no specific wording of a Publication Ethics and Publication Malpractice statement, but notes that:

- *Major publishers already publish comprehensive statements of compliance on their websites, see for example Elsevier;*
- *A number of industry organisations (as listed) publish comprehensive guidelines which can be readily adopted and adapted by all journals and publishers*".

It is important to emphasise that it was not the intention or purpose of this SCOPUS policy to police the world literature in respect of publication malpractice. It was simply to neuter the excuse that I/We did not know from any individual or group who were engaged in malpractice of any form. I had no expectations that fraudulent publishers would adhere to the policies, but at least we were parking the issue on their front lawns.

From now on, through being obliged to post a statement of engagement with the subject of Ethics and Malpractice, all publishers and editorial boards were implicitly to be held accountable for those policies, as were authors, reviewers and all others in the creation and publication process for academic material.

The Subject Chairs Meeting in Istanbul, Turkey, 26 – 29 October 2010

At this meeting, we reviewed Policy in relation to the Roles & Responsibilities of the Board, and we undertook extensive discussions and experimentation with the early version of the STEP scoring system under the guidance of Gillian Griffiths.

Gillian shared with us the impressive progress which she had made in modelling the workflows for the new STEP system, how the information on suggested title would flow from the Suggestor, who might be an author, librarian, editor or publisher, to the Elsevier Administration team and on to the Subject Chair. We subsequently tightened the Submission Policy so that the Publisher took primary responsibility for the application. I have described this process in greater detail in a separate essay on the Evolution of STEP from 2010 to 2025 (see Selected References).

For those journals which passed the minimal thresholds for the quality of the submission, including the new policy on publication by every applicant journal of an Ethics and Malpractice statement, the information from the Publisher was then enriched with bibliometric information from a search on the secondary documents in SCOPUS.

The enriched application was then passed to the relevant Subject Chair for an Accept/Reject decision. Gillian's original design included a pathway for an invited reviewer for a journal, but this process subsequently matured into a tool for the Local Content Advisory Boards.

The Policy on Public Openness with the STEP Project

From the outset of the formation of the new SCOPUS CSAB, it was clear that our work would be very influential in shaping global academic publishing practice. We were keen that the work of the Board was conducted in a spirit of openness, and our identities were made public on the SCOPUS website. We recognised that this approach would also benefit Elsevier teams in their operations in a complex and discerning academic marketplace.

In this spirit, I wrote a **Statement on the Scopus journal selection process** during the Istanbul meeting for publication on the SCOPUS website. Wim Meester and Satomi Nakamura kindly posted it on the Scopus website in December 2010 .

In the article, I outlined the nature and purpose of SCOPUS, to which I added that:

*"**Quality is difficult to define** both qualitatively and quantitatively in a way which satisfies everyone ...*

*Scopus has appointed a panel of experienced and independent advisors from the world of publishing, librarianship and commerce to form a Content Selection and Advisory Board (CSAB)... whose members meet on a regular basis ... to set **fair, measurable and testable standards** for the accrual of all new journals to the Scopus database.*

Journals which fail to meet the evaluation standards are given fair opportunities to adopt and adapt to Scopus requirements and in the process, so that their content can in future become accessible to a worldwide audience....

The statement also addressed the accession policies for an applicant journal, including English Language Usage, and Publication Ethics and Publication Malpractice. I wrote that:

Publication malpractice is unfortunately widespread in the world literature, in all subject areas and in all jurisdictions, and no journal is immune. Malpractice ranges from innocent transgression to deliberate and wilful fraud, and most journal editors have experience and can cite examples of fraudulent practice.

Malpractice reduces confidence in the reliability of the published literature, and substantially increases the costs to Society as a whole, to the Publishing industry and to the Scientific and Arts community. In some disciplines, malpractice and fraud can have serious and even mortal consequences, where undetected but misleading and fraudulently published material leads others into actions which are founded in misplaced trust.

The prevention of publication malpractice is the responsibility of every author, editor, publisher and institution, and there are advisory codes in all major jurisdictions as to how to deal with it. In order to start to address this endemic problem, the Scopus CSAB has taken the unanimous view that Scopus will in future require that each and every journal which accrues to the system must publish a clear and consistent statement of Publication Ethics and Policies in respect of Malpractice, and that each and every publisher will be held to account for the performance and compliance with this policy of every journal in its portfolio.

The Scopus CSAB mandates no specific wording of such statements, but notes that:
i. some publishers already publish statements of compliance on their websites;
ii. A number of reputable organisations, notably the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), and the World Association of Medical Editors (WAME), publish guidelines and advice which can be readily adopted and adapted by all journals and publishers.

The Scopus CSAB recognises that this action in itself will not be sufficient to eliminate publication fraud. However, it will ensure that at least within the boundaries of influence of Scopus, no author, editor or publisher will be able to claim ignorance of best practice as an excuse for condoning or executing publication malpractice.

The Scopus CSAB looks forward to auditing the results of this policy and to assisting in the development of robust, industry wide strategies for the marginalisation, profiling and elimination of publication malpractice.

The Policy Work of the SCOPUS CSAB in 2011

Reflections on the Early Impact of the new STEP System for Journal Accrual

In March 2011, I noted for the Board that the new STEP model was rigorous, semi-quantitative and systematic, but that journals which accrued to SCOPUS between 2004 and 2009 had been subjected to a different model and standards of evaluation. I asked whether and how we should reassess them, and what we might learn of what I dubbed "The SCOPUS Effect". By this, I meant the increase in performance and bibliometrics which would be expected from the accrual and reputational gain of the journal into the system.

I also noted that the selective model was directive (dirigiste) rather than market driven. By this, I meant that the expert-led assessment system pre-empted market forces in evaluating the longer term performance of the journal. Moreover, each journal which was rejected by SCOPUS represented loss of the data on performance, author contributions and other continuously accruing intelligence which would further enrich the SCOPUS core and bring the "secondary sources" into the data mainstream.

I therefore wondered whether a more relaxed acceptance approach to new journals should be considered, where exclusion during an initial STEP screening process would be re-focussed on demonstrably fraudulent or excessively weak journals.

The Football League Model of Journal Accrual to SCOPUS

In order to stimulate debate on this policy, I proposed a "Darwinian" accession structure which was characterised by a hierarchical "league" or "divisional" ranking structure. In this model, journals would find their natural place according to market usage and citation activity, which would change over time. This model is illustrated in the SCIMAGO journal rankings, where journals move dynamically through Q1 to Q4 scores according to their SCIMAGO journal rank and various other performance metrics.

I speculated that this model would provide a continuous visible and competitive incentive to journals towards improvement, at least in terms of citation metrics. The commercial model for SCOPUS was based upon the added value of quality assurance of the product to its customers. And I asked whether this aim could be more effectively achieved through the

provision of differential access to SCOPUS content by performance quartiles, akin to the UK football "league" structure. I suggested this business model would maintain the objectives of SCOPUS in maintaining selectivity and quality for its customers, while broadening SCOPUS Usage and capturing new income streams. It would also allow the capture of rich data on weaker journals, with richer author, institutional and national data profiles. This concept is illustrated in Figure 3.

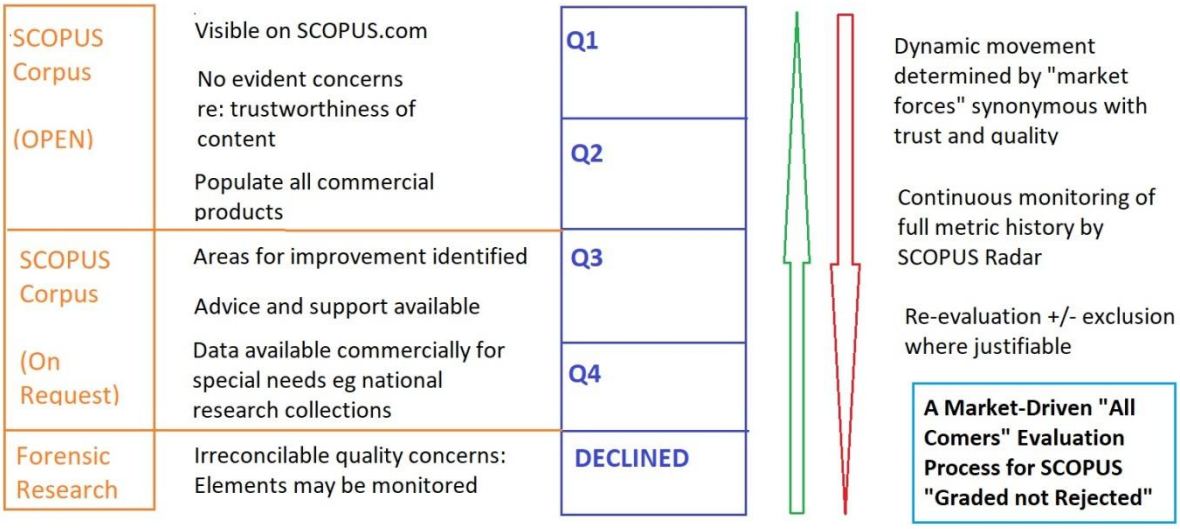

Figure 3: A league model for the dynamic evaluation of content in SCOPUS through thecompetitive performance of journals (Image The Author 2025)

Figure 3 illustrates the football league model in a more mature form in 2025, by which time the SCOPUS Radar system was developed to the point of allowing us a regular overview of performance across the entire data set; and by when the extent of publication fraud had highlighted the value of capturing detailed data on the weaker and more susceptible journals.

The Subject Chairs Meeting in Rome, Italy, 9th - 10th June 2011.

In Rome, we reviewed STEP statistics and developments, and the policies around selection criteria and scoring system. We discussed the policies on the further expansion of content types in SCOPUS, and the on proactive recruitment of candidate titles for SCOPUS. We also discussed the relevance to our work and policies of a report from the Royal Society, on **Knowledge, Networks and Nations,** which surveyed the global scientific landscape in 2011. This had been produced in partnership with Elsevier, using SCOPUS data.

The report noted the rise of new scientific powers such as China, India and Brazil. It also noted the emergence of science in the Middle East, South-East Asia and North Africa. It concluded that:

- Support for international science should be maintained and strengthened;
- Internationally collaborative science should be supported and facilitated;
- Global strategies for science are needed to address global challenges;
- Capacity building was needed to share scientific research benefits globally;
- Better indicators are required in order to properly evaluate global science.

The report anticipated the uplift in our own workload from these countries thereafter.

A summary of the STEP Policies for Journal Editors and Publishers in 2011

Following our discussions in Rome, I provided a paper to the Board on **Advice to Editors and Publishers**, which described our insights from the first year of the new CSAB and which was subsequently published on the SCOPUS website. It recorded that:

"Titles suggested for Scopus are reviewed using a combination of quantitative and qualitative measures. However, in respect of journals and their content, quality can be easier to recognise than to define, and there is inevitably a subjective element to the evaluation. In general terms, quality is defined by:

- *Conformity with best industry practice in respect of ethics and formatting;*
- *Originality of thought and content;*
- *Credibility and trustworthiness of content;*
- *Utility of content to a specialist or general readership....*

Moreover, measures of the success or effectiveness of a journal include:

- *Its durability;*
- *Its ability to attract and publish manuscripts, authors and readers;*
- *Its financial viability;*
- *The use of its content by its target audience and by serendipitous researchers.*

I summarised the detailed policy paper as follows:

- *Scopus is an abstract and citation database, which seeks competitive value for its users through pre-selection of quality journals and their content.*

- *The Scopus Content Selection & Advisory Board advises Elsevier on issues of quality and content arising from accrued and accruing journals.*
- *The Board seeks to define objective measures of quality with which to prioritise applicant Journals for accession to Scopus, and for retention in it.*
- *For those journals for which accession to Scopus is deferred or rejected, we aim to produce useful, constructive and informative feedback, and in the former case a target date for re-application by which we anticipate weaknesses could be rectified.*
- *Based upon experience to date, we have provided some guidance for the editors and publishers of institutional, regional and non-English journals which would help secure accession to Scopus and which would help bring the content to a wider audience.*
- *The Board takes a long term view of the dynamics of journal publication. We recognise that despite their imperfections, computed citation measures in one form or another will continue to provide the basis for the objective assessment for the success or otherwise of individual journals."*

The 9th CSAB meeting in Miami, U.S.A., 25 – 28 October 2011

At the meeting in Miami, we discussed a range of topics around the further development of STEP, and of Conference Proceedings and Book collections.

I presented my experience in reviewing my first 500 journals under the STEP system. I noted the wide variety of publishing models, the numerous languages, and the wide range in quality and originality of content. I observed:

- That few applicant journals brought truly new content to my subject fields;
- The challenges in assessing multi-speciality (multidisciplinary) journals
- The importance of journal web sites with English language versions
- That "journal factories", open access and "pay to publish" models were troubling.
- There was a need for interval re-assessments of the journals in SCOPUS;
- That there was a need for support of failing journals;
- That there was a need to cull journals which were no longer active.
- The benefits that might flow from the consolidation of proliferating titles into fewer, high quality and higher impact titles.
- That we needed to provide high quality Feedback to Editors and Publishers;
- That such feedback could be improved through intelligent design in STEP;
- That good feedback has commercial and financial value to applicant journals,
- That application or accession charges might therefore be applied to underwrite further investment in SCOPUS.
- That richer information would help Subject Chairs with their judgements.

In Summary

By the end of 2011, the new SCOPUS Content Selection Advisory Board was secure in its role, and the technical system which underpinned the SCOPUS Title Evaluation Programme was in place.

We had a clear understanding of the challenges in the complex information space which was the academic publishing ecosystem, and the new journal evaluation was under way.

15 years later, many of the questions and challenges which arose from our early experiences still have relevance. They anticipated a number of subsequent developments which I will address in subsequent essays, including the development of the Journal Re-Evaluation System, and of the SCOPUS Radar for the continuous monitoring of performance of all journals within the SCOPUS core collection.

Most importantly, while we were well aware of publication malpractice at this time, we were as yet unfocussed on the industrial scale of monetised malpractice that would infiltrate the trusted academic corpus in the coming years. In further essays in this series, I will follow the story of policy development for STEP and SCOPUS from 2012 onwards.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to many colleagues for discussions and insights relating the work of SCOPUS CSAB over two decades.

I am particularly grateful to Professor Julie Cullen of the University of Southampton for proofreading and comments during the preparation of the manuscript.

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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