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

Policy Development and the SCOPUS Citation System

Part 3: The Work of the Content Selection Advisory Board 2017 - 2019:

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

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Correspondence to dr1@soton.ac.uk

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Abstract

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.

The academic journal content of SCOPUS is curated by the SCOPUS Content Selection Advisory Board (CSAB), working through the Scopus Title Evaluation Platform (STEP) and a range of supporting technical systems.

The CSAB was created in 2004 and STEP was developed from 2009 onwards. The SCOPUS CSAB plays a key role in developing the policies which maintain Trust, Integrity and Quality in the academic publishing ecosystem. In previous essays, I have described the technical development of SCOPUS and of STEP, and policy development from 2004 to 2016.

This quality assurance programme developed in parallel with dramatic changes in the academic publishing landscape, including the move from paper to digital and on-line publishing; the development and explosive growth of open access publication, and the change in the funding model from subscription based publishing to Article Processing Charge (APC) based funding.

These changes have also brought a tidal wave of publication malpractice in many forms and of considerable complexity as individuals and organisations seek personal advantage from citation manipulation and paper fakery, and easy profit from various forms of predatory publishing.

In this essay, I describe the further development of the SCOPUS quality assurance programme and the policy work of the CSAB through 2017 to 2019, with particular reference to Altmetrics. The Citescore and Virtual Citescore: an Appeals system for SCOPUS applicant journals; the launch of the China Advisory Board; publication and conference fraud; and entity to entity assessment models for SCOPUS.

Introduction

SCOPUS is a commercial system which has been developed and expanded with substantial investment of resources by Elsevier BV since 2004. At the heart of the system lies a huge relational database of academic journals, books, conference proceedings, patents, from which data on titles, abstracts, references, authors, institutions and funding awards are analysed for a range of practical purposes. Valued intelligence can be generated by SCOPUS for governments, institutions and corporations, from which they can:

- Make decisions around the academic inputs outputs of individuals, teams and units;

- Assess the "Gross Academic Product" of institutions and countries.

- Make informed decisions on fraudulent practices and aberrant publishing outputs.

Trust and Quality Assurance are central to the societal and commercial value of bibliometric systems. The members of the SCOPUS Content Selection and Advisory Board (CSAB) make a major contribution to this work, and particularly through the development of robust and transparent policies which govern the admission and management of academic journals to the SCOPUS ecosystem. These policies in turn influence:

- The evaluation of large numbers of candidate journals for SCOPUS;

- The design and implementation of the SCOPUS Title Evaluation Platform (STEP);

- Understanding of the academic publication landscape;

- Advice on technical and operational initiatives in quality control, including:

- The Journal Re-evaluation programme;

- The acquisition of new content sources (eg academic books);

- The development of the SCOPUS Radar system;

- The development of the SCOPUS AI program, and

- Strategies to address the industrial scale of publication fraud

The policy development work of the SCOPUS CSAB is exercised through twice yearly Board meetings in the form of three day retreats in various countries, combined with regular email communications between Board members and the Elsevier management team. The prime effector of policy is STEP, which is the system through which applicant journals are evaluated for SCOPUS inclusion, and subsequently re-evaluated when concerns arise.

The Policy Work of the SCOPUS CSAB in 2017

The meeting at Elsevier London Wall Office, London, UK, 31st May – 2nd June 2017

The first meeting of 2017 took place in London. The principal discussions addressed:

- Developments in respect of the modernisation of the STEP system;

- Journal re-evaluation;

- Publication Ethics and Malpractice; and

- Conferences, the Countermock and Compendex guidelines.

In line with our policy of public engagement through invited speakers, Zoe Mullan, who was a Trustee and Member of Council of the globally influential **Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) and** Editor, *The Lancet Global Health*. Zoe described the policy work of COPE and her perspectives on the changing landscape of Publication Ethics.
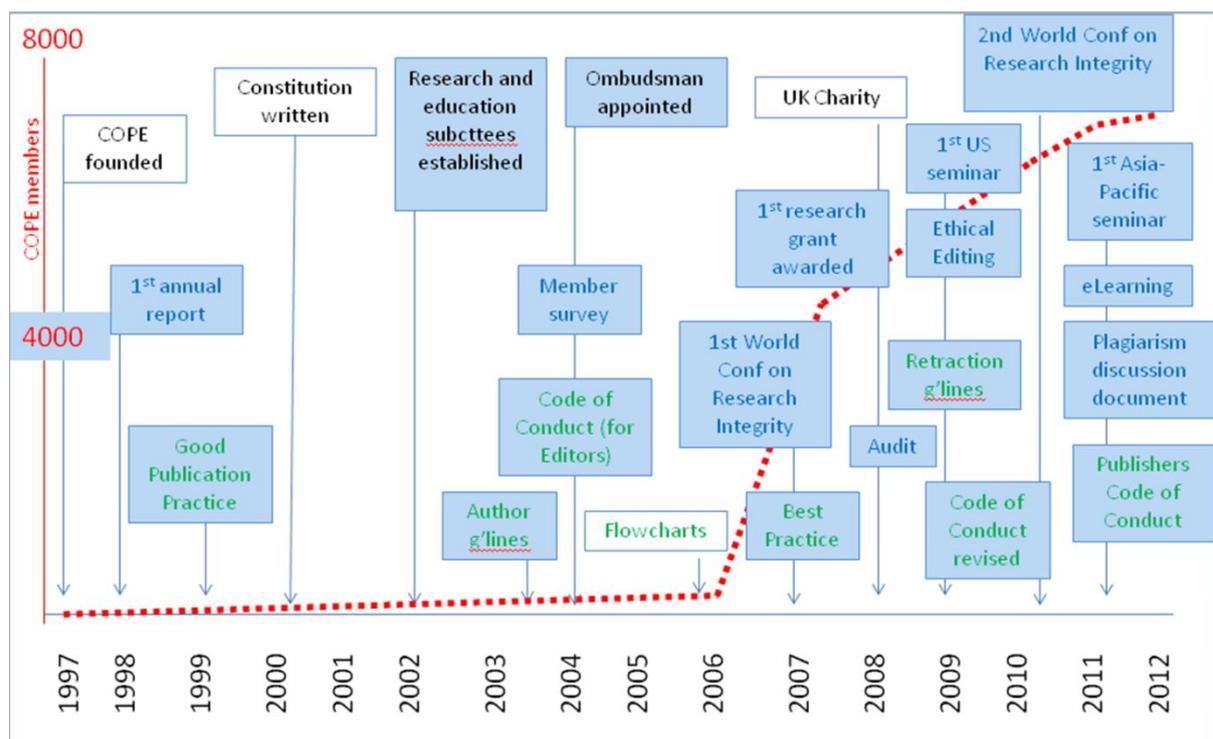
Figure 1. Key milestones in the life of COPE, 1997 to 2012 (Image by Dr Liz Wager)

Zoe mapped out for us the development and key policy milestones for COPE from 1997 the present (Figures 1 and 2). She noted with concern the growth in fake reviewers, where the Author recommends a known reviewer and provides an email address which he or she administers; the author then reviews his or her own paper
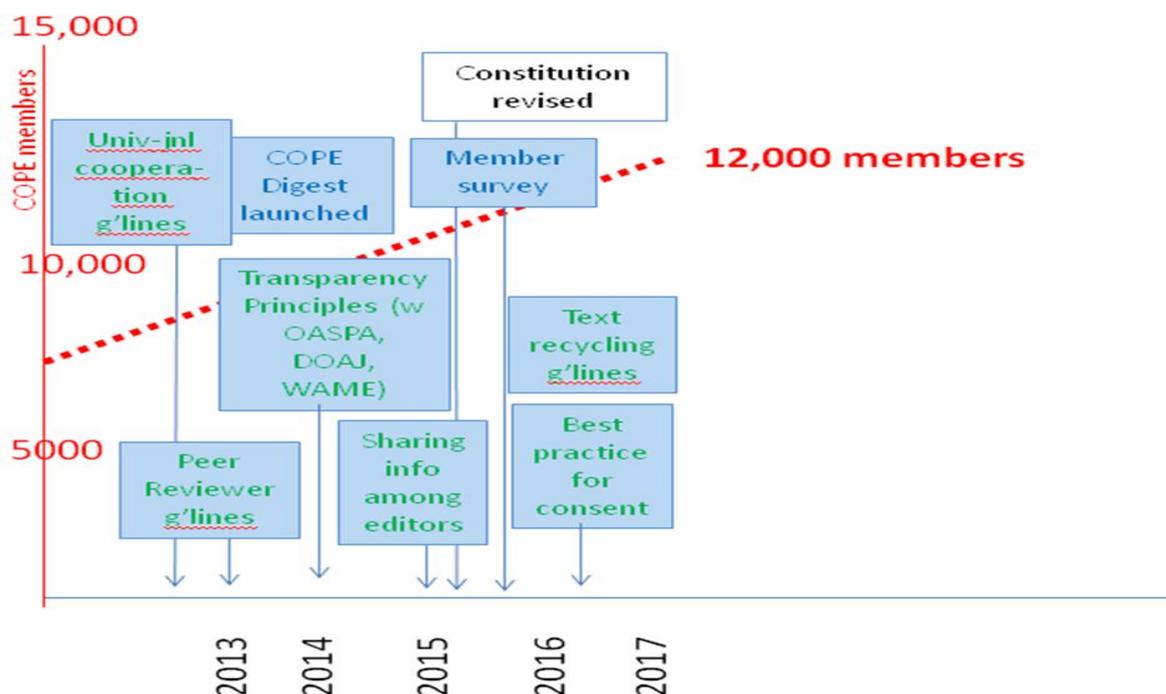
Figure 2: Key milestones in the Development of COPE, 2013 to 2017 (Image by Dr Liz Wager)

Zoe also noted the dramatic growth of "Predatory Publishers" from minimal numbers in 2011 to around 900 identified publishers in 2016, as identified by Jeffrey Beall. She also addressed the increased research output from "emerging research economies". She noted that COPE had held its first Seminar in China in March 2017; that it was carrying out a trial of institutional membership; and that it was exploring how we could support organisations that provide editorial services such as copy editing.

She cited Dr Mai Har Sham of the University of Hong Kong, who had identified widespread issues of publishing malpractice in the Asia-Pacific region, which appeared to arise from:

- Increasing pressure to publish, and the link of Publications to career advancement;
- The Lack of clear policies and training to deal with research misconduct;
- A Feudal work culture and loyalty at the cost of integrity;
- A Lack of understanding on acceptable behaviour, including;
- Conflicts of Interests (CoI);
- Authorship attribution;
- Human and animal research ethics approval ;
- Lack of compliance with international guidelines; and
- Poor enforcement of policies to deal with publication malpractice.

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The Chinese government had clearly taken these concerns on board, and we have since worked closely as a Board with Chinese representative bodies to develop high quality publishing and standards through the new China Local Board and to bring accreditable Chinese Journals into the SCOPUS portfolio.

The Elsevier Mendeley Product and Career Support

A common theme in our policy discussions at Board meetings related to how to make SCOPUS content more easily available and relevant to early career researchers, and more generally how to use technical insights around the Elsevier information systems to improve the professional lives and career development of these individuals.
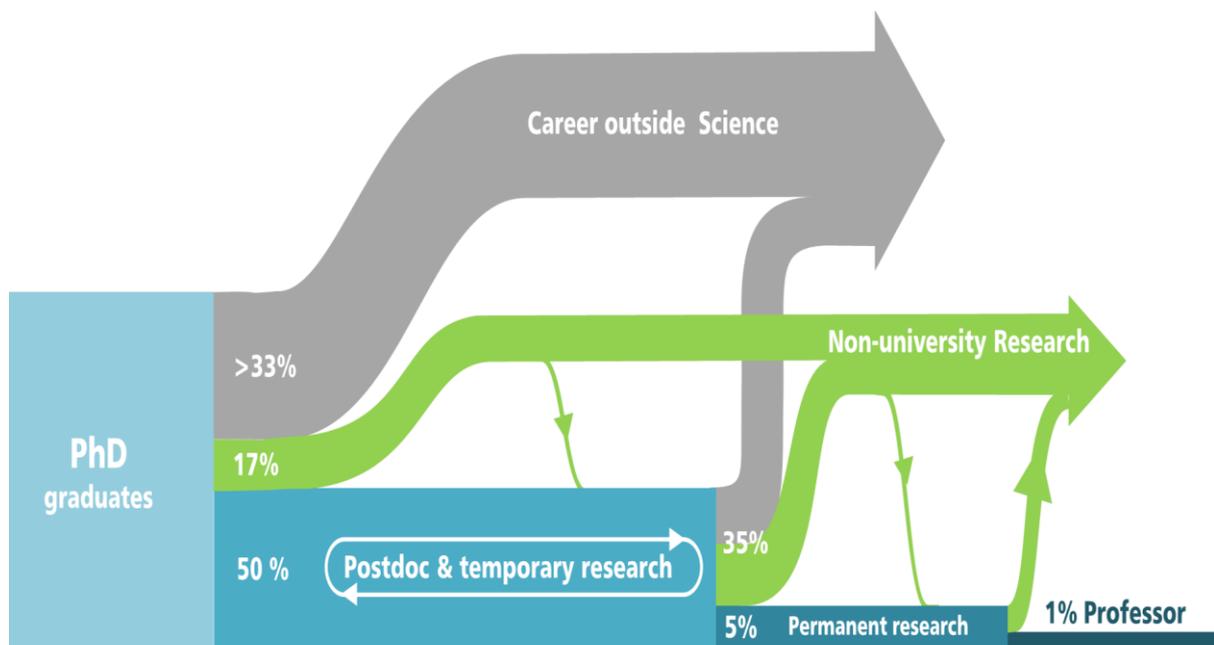
Figure 3: Pattern of general career progression of PhD Graduates (courtesy of Zoe Appleton)

Gaby Appleton of Elsevier noted how the Academic jobs pyramid had become bottom heavy globally: there were relatively few permanent positions at the top of the career structure, and many temporary positions lower in the career hierarchy. It had been estimated in various studies that as few as 1% of PhD graduates ultimately obtained a tenured professor position. Most leave the academic world, as illustrated in Figure 3.

Elsevier had acquired the academic social reference and research collaboration platform Mendeley in April 2013 to develop its expertise in the field. The observed pain point for early career researchers in information management terms was that applicants had various profiles which were scattered across many different sites, and that not all were appropriate for showcasing their career achievements and progression.

We considered with Gaby how Mendeley might be integrated with SCOPUS Author Profiles as a CV and career enhancement tool. Mendeley has since evolved in a different direction as a reference management system (www.mendeley.com/) but the observations on career development for PhD graduates remain very apposite.

Publisher perspectives in working with SCOPUS

Good feedback is very important to the development of effective policy. **James Hardcastle**, who was a Senior Manager for products and analytics for the Taylor & Francis Group, provided publisher perspectives on working with SCOPUS. He also considered the use of metrics in the humanities and the challenges of measuring outputs from the "Global South".

Figure 4: Questions of interest about analytics to publishers (courtesy of James Hardcastle)

James posed the questions around analytics that publishers might ask in evaluating their outputs; and in terms of the perspectives that authors, institutions, readers and funders might have on their published portfolios (figure 5). He also discussed:

- The significance of Altmetrics (media activity on the social impact and communication of published works) as a proxy for citation activity;
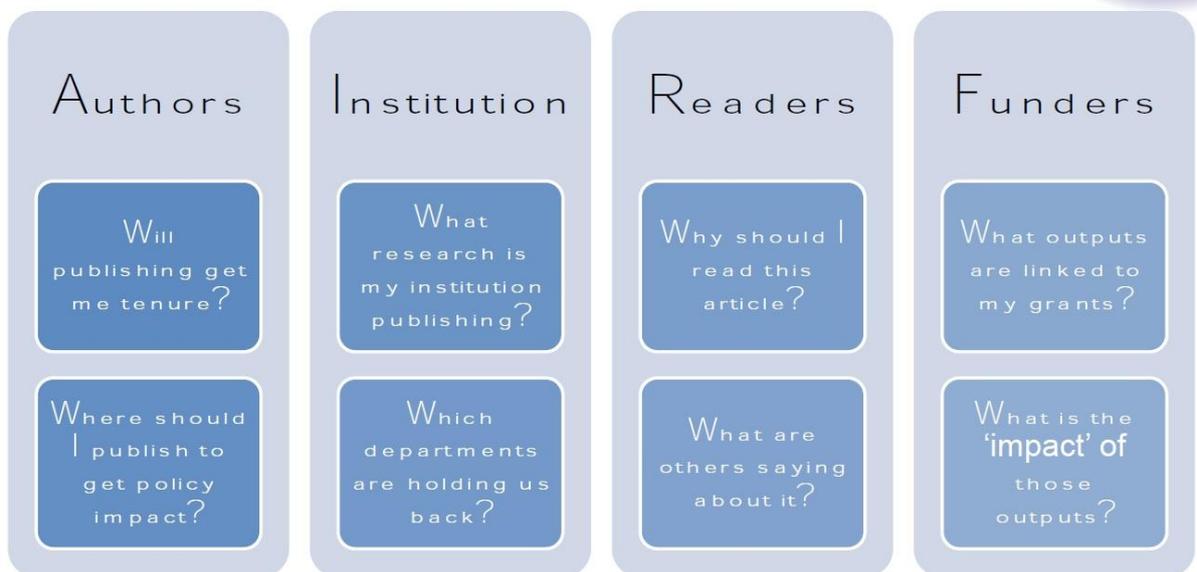
- The value of logical taxonomies in the classification of journals and articles, in relation to Content Discoverability, to the Creation of Metrics, and to Journal Management; and

- His experience as the publisher of a journal which had been flagged up by our re-evaluation metrics from an early iteration of the SCOPUS Radar.

An Introduction to Altmetrics and PlumX Metrics

Chris James of Elsevier introduced us to Plum Analytics. This is a US based company which specialised in altmetrics. Plum was acquired by Elsevier from EBSCO Information Services in early 2017. It has retained its corporate identity under the PlumX Metrics trademark.

Altmetrics seeks to quantify the contemporaneous awareness and usage of published content, which extends beyond the significant limitations of conventional bibliometrics. The Plum portfolio has expanded to include:

Citations, including conventional bibliometrics from Scopus, and indices of societal impact, including patent, clinical and policy citations

Measures of Usage: These include clicks, downloads, views, library holdings, video plays

Captures are indices of future citations. They derive from a range of online activities and keystroke actions, including include bookmarks and software code forks.

Mentions: These reference indices such as news articles or blog posts about research., comments, reviews, and Wikipedia references.

Social media; This includes references through shares, likes and comments which measure attention and promotion of a particular piece of research has been promoted.

PlumX Metrics therefore extend beyond the formal measures which we curate on SCOPUS to other citation indices, including the Chinese Science Citation Index, PubMed Central, CrossRef, SciELO; a range of global Patent Registries; and the Overton Index of policy documents (now ~26 million) and "grey literature", including government reports, theses, conference proceedings, white papers, and working papers which also feeds into SCIVAL.

Perspectives on Responsible Publication Metrics

Dr Ian Rowlands, who works as a Research Information & Intelligence Specialist in the Research Management & Innovation Directorate at King's College London, provided perspectives on responsible publication metrics in relation to the UK Research Excellence Framework (REF) academic institutional assessment exercise of 2014.

Ian noted how the major Citation Databases (SCOPUS and Web of Science) enabled his team easily to count numbers of papers and the number of times a paper is cited, from which simple facts they could derive indicators of **institutional productivity.** These included the number of papers per producer in a given time window, and the impact in terms of the number of citations in that time window.

From this information, his team could "spin out" these indicators from the **micro level** (an individual researcher) through a research group or institution to the **macro level** such as a country or supranational grouping. However, unlike most research indicators, publication and citation counts could only provide an **indirect** view of the phenomenon that was being measured. Ian reminded us that the journal Impact Factor was designed by Dr Euene Garfield as a management tool to contain costs in database indexing. **It was never intended to be used in research evaluation.**

Ian noted the working of **"Goodhart's Law"**, which observed that "When a measure becomes a target, it ceases to be a good measure." (Charles Goodhart 1975). He also reminded us that Mario Biagioli, a Professor of Law and of Science and Technology Studies at the University of California, Davis, had later observed that , "All metrics of scientific evaluation are bound to be abused." (Biagioli 2016) .

The Complexity of Fractional Citations and Co-authorship

Ian went on to note the complexities around units of analysis, and that there are two counting conventions in bibliometrics:These are **Full counts** (or integer counts) and **Fractional counts** Fractional counting methods are needed for co-authored papers. For example, he asked whether a collaborative paper between Humboldt and Cambridge Universities should be counted as a full publication for Germany and the UK, or half a paper each?

Ian noted that Full and Fractional Counts measure different things: Full counts measure **participation**, while Fractional counts measure **contribution.** *The counting method should be chosen to fit the research question.* It is easy to argue that we need fractional counting, but the question then becomes how best to do it?

He identified **twelve** fractionation methods which gave very different results, including:

- *Uniform counting*: equal credit for all authors;
- *Noblesse oblige*: 50% credit for last author, remaining credit shared equally;
- *Proportional counting:* variable weighting per author based on their position in the author list.

The Variations in Citation Performance in Diferent Disciplines

Ian also drew attention to subject differences in the mean journal impact factor, which might affect perceptions of author impact according to their speciality. In effect, different citation counts in differnt specialities had different values (Figure 5).
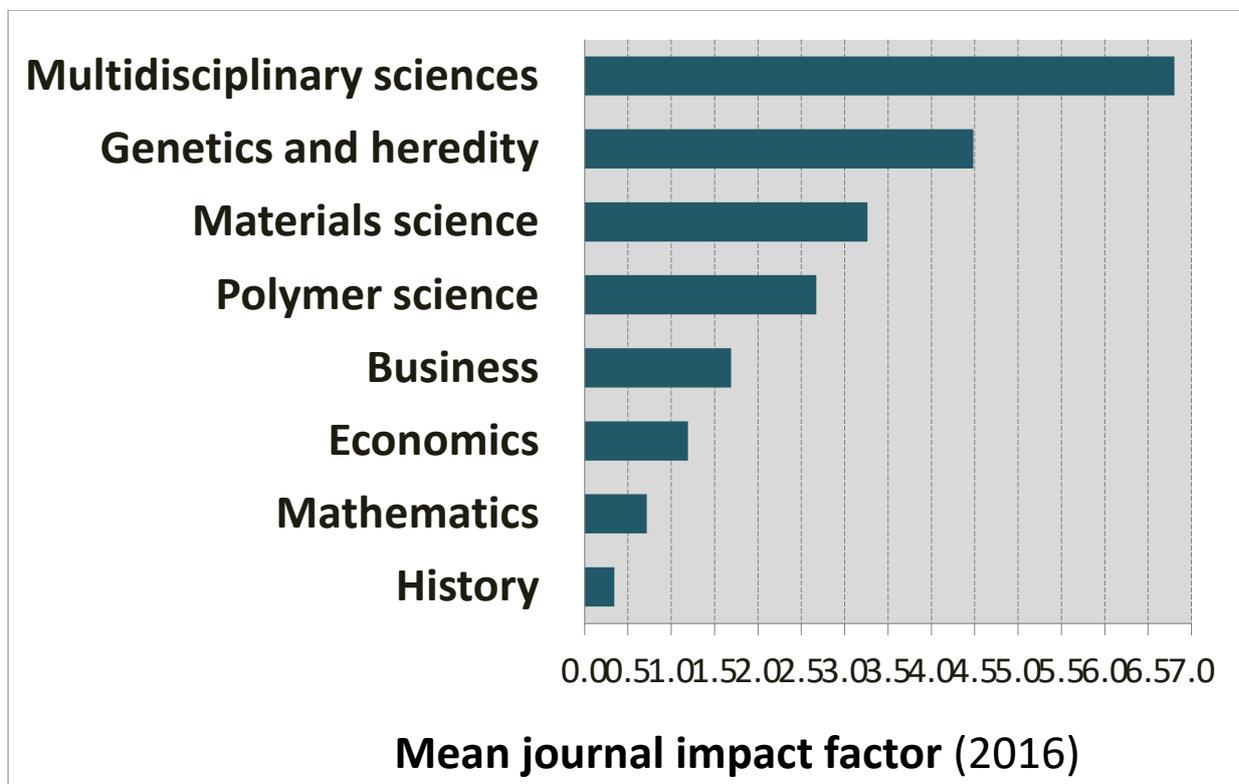
Figure 5. The variation in mean Impact Factor in a range of disciplines (see text) (Courtesy of Ian Rowlands)
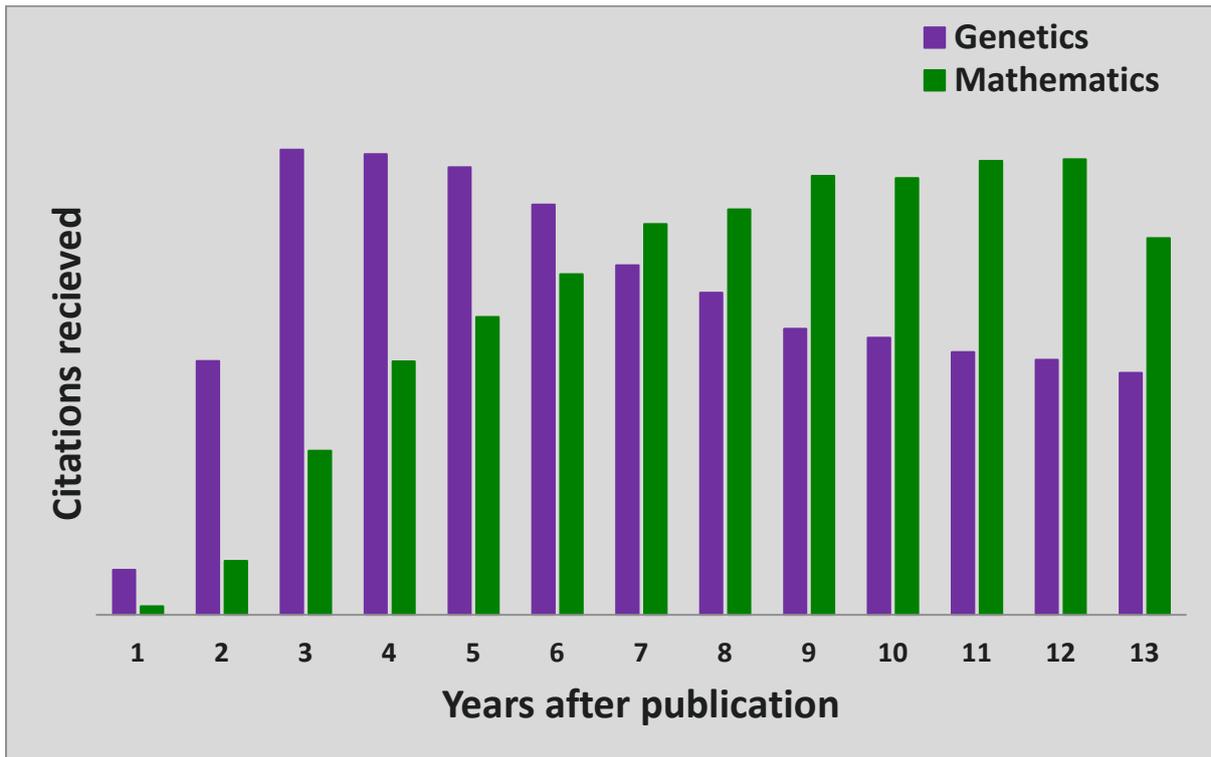
Figure 6: The variation of growth in citation activity in different subjects, as exemplified by Genetics (rapid) and Mathematics (more leisurely) (Courtesy of Ian Rowlands)

Citation growth also varied over time, as between Genetics (rapid) and Mathematics (slow) (Figure 6) Ian Rowlands observed that most information phenomena are heavily skewed with a few rare successes and a long tail.

This phenomenon has serious implications for bibliometrics, in terms of methodology, interpretation and application. The phenomenon include citations, authorships, article downloads per article, Amazon book sales, social media attention, library turnstile data, and research grants.

Metrics Literacy and the Diversification of Metrics

Ian Rowlands noted that the "supply side is beginning to feel crowded, and that bibliometricians are highly inventive of new metrics", including Almetrics and Network based indicators as illustrated in his diagram Figures 7. In the previous essay in this series, I described the growing "Basket of Metrics".

Journal-level citation metrics Impact factors, CiteScore, SNIP...	Article-level citation metrics Cites per paper, Field-normalised impact, Citation percentiles, h-index, Citing patents counts ...
Alternative metrics Altmetric, Plum X, ImpactStory, Scopus views, publisher downloads ...	Network-based indicators SciMago Journal Rank, Eigenfactors, data visualisations ...

Figure 7: "The growth in Supply Side Metrics" (Courtesy of Ian Rowlands)

Ian Rowland's Principles of Emerging Bibliometrics

Ian went on to describe a set of practical principles to govern the development and design of metrics. He noted that the recent explosion of metrics is confusing rather than empowering the market … there's a big job to do around "metrics literacy". He noted that changes in authorship practices are leading to a `**COUNTING CRISIS'**, in which the fundamental unit in bibliometrics is no longer clear; and that Participation and Contribution by researchers in the rationalisation of metrics are important policy considerations.

He noted also that the skewed nature of citation distributions meant we needed to think about confidence intervals and possibly redefining some indicators; and that we also needed a blended approach using both numbers and human judgments, and we needed to be a lot clearer about what the numbers mean. He proposed that such metrics:

- Should be **COMPREHENSIBLE TO ALL;**
- Should be **ALIGNED TO INSTITUTIONAL GOALS;**
- Should have **TRANSPARENT AND CLEAR** reporting protocols and guidance;
- Should be **ROBUST AND RELIABLE;**
- Should **COMPLEMENT PEER ASSESSMENT;**
- Should be **ATTUNED TO DIVERSITY**, with wider and deeperscope and coverage.

The Subject Chairs Meeting , Prague, Czech Republic, 1st - 3rd November 2017

Our next meeting was held at Le Palais Art Hotel, Prague. Policy discussions addressed:

- Data quality in SCOPUS;

- Journal re-evaluation issues;

- Final decision enhancements on journal assessments;

- Challenging journal reviews;

- Conference content and validation;

- CiteScore and Plum Analytics;

- Publication Ethics and Malpractice issues;

- The value of a blogs such as Retraction Watch in alerting us to malpractice;

- Whether Cabell's list worked as a replacement for Beall´s list;

- Internal sources and methodologies to detect publisher malpractice.

A Policy for Publisher Appeals against Journal Rejection

By 2017, we were receiving a small but gradually increasing flow of Appeals against deferment or rejection from publishers whose journals had not been directly accepted into SCOPUS. Subject Chair decisions were intentionally constructive and they were generally based upon a deferment period of up to five years before resubmission.

This period was based upon a subjective assessment of how long it was likely to take for the journal to improve to a standard that would give the journal a better chance of accession to SCOPUS. The "Never Again" recommendation was very rarely invoked for journals which have rise to serious concerns around governance and malpractice.

In general terms, editors and publishers accepted the advice with good grace, and I have a collection of appreciative letters where re-submitting Editors had engaged effectively and constructively to produce a better journal.

We recognised that there were two general categories for appeal:
Firstly, there were circumstances where the evidence upon which the decision was reached could be shown to be in error.

Secondly, there were appeals out of a sense of "entitlement" to a profitable listing in SCOPUS, where the appellants were not willing to accept the decision or to acknowledge or engage with the recommended grounds for improvement.

However, with the collapsing cost base and increasing profitability of academic publishing for new entrant publishers and titles, the pressures were increasing for early or immediate acceptance of title after its launch. It also appeared that in many cases of new journals, a SCOPUS listing might well be a key element of the business model, rather than the adjunct to the creation and production of a high quality journal.

We therefore recognised that a formal process was needed to deal with appeals. A technical Appeals process was developed within STEP to manage the process, and the policy was posted on the SCOPUS website, as follows:

"*Complaints or objections to review decisions are usually resolved between the publisher and the Scopus team, who will consult with the CSAB if needed. For cases where the decision is still being questioned, we have an appeal procedure.*

Appeals apply only to the question of whether significant factual errors occurred in the review process. To invoke the appeals procedure, the publisher of the journal needs to provide clear evidence of these significant factual errors. By asking for an appeal, the publisher is agreeing to accept the findings of any appeal as final. Valid appeals are submitted to the independent Appeals Officer and the CSAB for their consideration.

If the appeal is warranted, the reviewers of the CSAB will be asked to reconsider the decision. However, a valid appeal case does not guarantee that the CSAB will change its decision. Publishers should submit an appeal within six weeks of receiving a rejection letter".

Such is the financial value of a SCOPUS listing that we have since learned that companies have been formed specifically for the purpose of Appealing Appeals, on a fee based service basis.

Journal Performance after Rejection or Acceptance into SCOPUS

We wished to better understand how rejected journals performed after the final decision, and whether they made good use of CSAB feedback. We wished to understand how journals performed after selection for a listing in SCOPUS, and the impact on the metrics of the journal (the Scopus effect). We therefore asked two questions:

- What demonstrable enefits would "good", ethical journals derive from the listing?

- How quickly and easily could we identify journals which had gone bad?

We now had up to 13 years of data on the performance of the earliest accessions in 2004, but there was no formal system by which Subject Chairs could recall data on any single journal or subject cohort to assess performance in relation to their original decisions. As of December 2025, we had not secured such a review tool.

Content Policy and Data Refinement

We continued to examine policies aorund data quality within SCOPUS. One challenge arose from maintaining an accurate and consistent register of institutional source names for the correct attribution of outputs to Universities, Faculties and Affliated Institutions. Gillian Griffiths, our lead developer for STEP, introduced us to a test system for the Institutional Profile Wizard within the SCOPUS database which allows representatives to update their information through a registration portal.

Policy on the clarity of article processing charges on journals and websites

We were concerned about the lack of clarity on the fact and scale of article processing charges with some journals, and whether we should make this an assessment criterion. The clear display of APCs was made a core assessment element in the initial processing of an applicant journal for its acceptance into the SCOPUS pipeline.

A Policy on the Evaluation of Publishers

SCOPUS lists content from several thousand publishers of academic journals. Academic publishers vary considerably in their origins, business models and operational structures, from small institutional and faculty publishers to major and long established businesses with high global profiles.

The collation and management of records on publishers is therefore a major data management challenge in its own right, with a range of confounding variables, in that:

- Publishers change their headquarters location and contact details over time, or close.
- Personnel who have dealt with SCOPUS move on, or change contact details
- In consequence, corporate memory of publishers in their dealings are lost over time, which extends to more than 20 years for the ear;iest accruals to SCOPUS
- Publishers regularly merge or otherwise change their business models, names and affiliations;
- Publishers may sell journals, which in turn may change titles;
- "Predatory" academic publishers and criminal enterprises may morph and mutate to keep ahead of the regulatory authorities.
- The number of academic publishers with content in SCOPUS has substantially expanded in line with the content expansion of SCOPUS to include book, conference, patent and other content publishers.

The complexities of tracking publishers are compounded by the lack of an authoritative and continually updated register of publishers, of their governance arrangements, of their published titles, and of their key personnel who determine the strategy, ethics and behaviour of each publisher.
.
We therefore asked whether and how we should be evaluating publishers, as well as journals. We felt that richer information on publishers needed to be available in STEP.
I have addressed this topic in greater detail in a separate essay in this series, see
https://eprints.soton.ac.uk/504371/

As of later 2025, this issue has achieved greater prominence with the progressive modernisation of the STEP platform.

Policy Discussions on "Cascade Publishing"

We considered the growing form of "Cascade Publishing", by which published pass rejected articles from their major titles to other titles in their portfolio, including a growing number of profitable open access journals. It was suggested that the nature of cascade publishing may not be clear to submitting authors, and we felt that where a publisher had a cascade policy, the policy should be clearly described in each of the journals from/to which cascading may be offered.

Public Engagement: Charles University and the Czech Academy of Sciences

In Prague in 2017, we continued to engage with loco-regional thought leaders and publishing specialists during our board meeting. We noted that Scopus covered 170 journals from Czech Republic, of which 115 were Scopus-unique.

Martin Srholec and Vitek Machacek of CERGE-EI, the Centre for Economic Research and Graduate Education - Economics Institute of Charles University and of the Economics Institute of the Czech Academy of Sciences, discussed Czech perspectives on predatory and local journals in Scopus. They explored a definition of a predatory journal as an Open Access journal without clear and credible peer-review. In this context:

- They considered that publisher and institutional data was untidy in Scopus;

- They noted that Beall's categorisation was based on the opinion of one individual;

- They noted an upward trend in the number of predatory titles in SCOPUS around 2011 and then again around 2014/2015. They asked whether the barrier for entry of a journal into Scopus had deliberately been lowered (which it had not).

- They felt that predatory publishing was primarily a problem from developing countries;

- They asked whether open peer review might be a solution to prevent predatory journals;

- They asked whether we could evaluate peer-review reports for applicant titles in the Scopus review process, and whether the Scopus selection criteria were based on what journals claimed on their websites.

Daniel Munich of CERGE-EI then discussed national research evaluation. He noted that:

- Research evaluation is often driven by money, and that generally there were not enough people available to work on evaluation.

- Bibliometrics is often misused and that few people really understand it.

- This resulted in a primitive bibliometric analysis, in which the return on capital investment of the research inputs was not considered.

- It was difficult to secure the correct information at the departmental level, as there was no age or gender information available of the person, or its position.

- Citations were only available after a delay and differences between subject fields were not fully recognised. Tools were needed to better understand local research environments.

In summarising the meeting, **Patrick Crisfulla**, our new senior Elsevier manager, reflected on the strategic contributions and on the role of ambassadorship of the Board. He noted the need to make more use of analytical tools in the review process; for further examination of the Re-evaluation process; and for proactive selection of titles for assessment. He recognised the value of our local boards, and the need to incorporate Pre-prints in SCOPUS.

The Work of the Board in 2018

The Subject Chair Meeting in San Francisco of 30th May - 1st June 2018

The meeting was held in the Sir Francis Drake Hotel. Our policy discussions included:

- An Update on the Rejected Journal Appeals Process;
- Development of the STEP system, roadmap and the speed of the STEP pipeline;
- Considerations of the future size and direction of Scopus;
- Gaming publishing ethics statements
- Content strategy, Fast-track journal evaluation and Re-evaluation;
- The expanding roles of the Board members in evaluation and advice on SCOPUS:
- The Evaluation of the Publisher:

Policy Discussions on the Evaluation of Publishers and the Renewal of STEP

We continued our discussions on this subject. When we created STEP in 2009 – 2011, Open Access was in its infancy; Predatory publishers were virtually unknown; Publishers were trusted for their focus on Quality; and that the quality of individual journals was the prime driver of the design on STEP, as publisher probity was a "Given".

in a presentation to the Board, I noted that since 2009, there had been a huge growth in open access publishing, and that profitability in publishing had been sustained through the shift from subscription based models to "author pays" models.

Moreover, market entry costs had collapsed for "low quality" publishers. There was a huge worldwide demand for "pay to publish" services, including those from unscrupulous operators. It was simple and hugely profitable to meet the demand from authors, and it was easy to conceal malign motives and unethical processed from naïve consumers

I was therefore particularly keen that we should be recording data on publishers within STEP and acting upon it, I asked that we consider of each and every publisher whether:

- This publisher is trustworthy;
- The beneficial owners can be identified. Institutional? Private? Public Company;
- The centres of governance and jurisdiction of the company can be identified
- What is the publishing mechanism? On line vs print?
- What is the financing structure? APCs? Society? Subscription? Mixed?
- What evidence do we already have of "bad" journals in its publishing portfolio?
- How would this knowledge influence adjudication of an individual journal?
- Is the named editorial board genuine and operational, or "faked"?

I therefore argued the need for a significant revamp of STEP to account for the quality & trustworthiness of the Publisher, as for the individual journal. These issues of trust were broadly inseparable.

Moreover, many organisations and Universities were seemingly now ahead of us in using versions of the Scholarly Publishing Toolkit, which included:

- Policies and Processes from the Committee on Publication Ethics, COPE;
- Principles of Transparency and Best Practice in Scholarly Publishing from COPE, the World Association of Medical Editors (WAME) and the Open Access Scholarly Publishing Association (OASPA)
- The Open Access Spectrum (OAS) Evaluation Tool from various publishing consortia;
- The Think-Check- Submit programme from various publishing consortia.

I noted that we had ready access to information and influence through the STEP system which was not easily available to "the general academic consumer" and that ultimately, we were (and remain) "The Thin Red Line" in defence of quality in the world's academic literature .

The original STEP structure was now 10 years old, and that it did not map to all of the factors and suspicions which board members took into account in evaluating each journal. Some of the evaluation criteria were outdated, and the STEP process could be made more efficient by re-engineering it to provide Subject Chairs with earlier oversight of submissions in the pipelines.

Better use could be made of SCOPUS data to predict performance comparisons of applicant journals with existing journals in their subject fields, leading to richer feedback.
I also reflected on the core role of the Board, in terms of managing the flow of new content into SCOPUS. I asked whether our policy should be:
- To continue to expand the numbers of journals in the SCOPUS Core Collection;
- To maintain a steady state of numbers at present levels;
- To focus on driving up the quality and trustworthiness in the existing portfolio;
- To manage progressive consolidation to a smaller, higher quality SCOPUS Collection, with more rigorous selection and exclusion criteria.

Policy on the Implementation of the Elsevier Citescore.
The Impact Factor (IF) (owned by Clarivate Analytics) has long been the most widely used journal metric, despite its many limitations.

The CiteScore metric from Elsevier was now being fully adopted across the Elsevier product range. The Citescore reflects the average citations received per peer-reviewed document over a fixed time, based on data in Scopus. Rankings and percentile ranks were also calculated for each journal in any given subject area.

The CiteScore was based on citation counts in a range of (initially three but now) four years. It is based on citations in a wider range of peer-reviewed documents, including book

chapters, which have been published in the same four calendar years, divided by the number of documents in the same time period. The CiteScore is updated annually, but the Citescore Tracker tool provides monthly interim measures of performance.

Policy on the adoption of the Virtual Citescore

The problem with the evaluation of newly submitted journals for the CSAB has been that a journal which has been outside SCOPUS will not have a calculable Citescore, although it may have acquired a significant number of citations, because SCOPUS does not have access to its source data. A very new journal will not have any significant bibliometrics, as it takes time for reputation and citation activity to develop.

The SCOPUS bibliometricians have therefore developed the Virtual Citescore. This is an estimation which is based upon the assessable citation activity of the submitted journal, even though there is no consolidated record in SCOPUS. It helps as a surrogate for quality in assessing a journal which is previously unknown to SCOPUS.

The need for a Virtual Citescore highlights a more fundamental operational dilemma for SCOPUS, and for journal selection policies in that:

The metrics of a journal can only be calculated if it has a data history in SCOPUS, BUT:

Journals which or not listed in SCOPUS cannot generate such a history.

The logical strategy would therefore be to accept all journals into SCOPUS for their data value to the system (including the richer identification of authors and institutions), but this would forfeit the quality filters which provide SCOPUS with its value to its customers.

Professor Don Dingwell (Geosciences) observed that a strategy for a smaller SCOPUS may lead to better in publication quality through competition. Indeed, one Ivy League purchaser of SCOPUS had stated to a marketing team that "we pay you to keep weak titles out".

One policy solution, which is under investigation as of late 2025, is that all applicant journals must contract to provide at least four years of backdated content. This will permit the systematic analysis of its performance and citation patterns as a condition or processing the journal.

The Development of Policy for SCOPUS Content

We re-examined the complexities of quality assurance of Conference outputs. The caveat in choosing a journal in which to publish, , **"Think, Check, Submit"** now had a conference counterpart in deciding whether to attend in: **"Think, Check, Attend"**.

We noted that coverage for Academic Books would now predate 2005, and that it would include the outputs of the major university presses. We also discussed:

- Non-English language publications; Pre-prints, with particular reference to 1.4M preprint documents in the Computer Sciences, the Social Science Research Network (SSRN) and BioArxiv preprints publishing platforms.

- The inclusion of Patents; Data sets and data software; and Institutional repositories.

- The inclusion in Mendeley of user-loaded Conference abstracts, Pre-prints, content of Institutional repositories and some Data and software deposits.

- Whether "internationality" should be a requirement for Scopus indexing.

Public Engagement: The University of California, Berkeley

Kortney Rupp of the University of California, Berkeley (UCB) discussed the challenges of Knowledge Management in the Physical Sciences at UC Berkeley and LBNL: from her perspective as a Chemistry Librarian. She noted that:

- At UCB, ~3k searches per month were undertaken on SCOPUS, primarily to look at people and profiles. Scopus was mostly used for citation searches, and to find documents, affiliation profiles, author profiles, and subject contributions.

- *At* The Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory Library (LBNL) of the US Department of Energy, 686 searches were being performed on SCOPUS per month. The focus of usage was on individual and research outputs, and literature search was not main purpose.

Kortney valued the fact that Scopus filtered out much low quality research which would get the in way of efficiency. This function distinguished SCOPUS (and WoS) from Google Scholar, as did the ability to perform more targeted and advanced searches. She commended **Research Data Management (RDM)** as another user case for SCOPUS. RDM involves the collection, organisation, storage, sharing, and preservation of research data to ensure its integrity, accessibility, and reusability throughout and beyond the research lifecycle.

She stressed the value of content selection, noting that the rate of new journal creation "is insane" and that "I am happy that people (ie the CSAB) are evaluating them. The information flood is real. A further problem lies with journal names that are similar and websites that are identical".

She would like to be able to calculate & show the amount of grant funding that is secured and lost. She noted that the User Interface for SCOPUS was more intuitive than that of WoS. She felt that CiteScore needed more granularity, more trending information, and the history of the quality of the data.

She also noted the value of data visualisation tools, as were being pioneered by Google Science. She noted how the new Dimensions product helped to keep track of funding agencies; and to find researchers and their publishing outputs, along with copies of data management plans, on a single screen.

Ann Connolly introduced her employer and **local publisher BEPress** (formerly Berkeley Electronic Press) as an Institutional Repository which was also a publishing platform for ~1500 journals. Most of these journals were publishing in niche subjects and serving small communities. Most were not indexed in Scopus, which she felt would act as a springboard to help Bepress portfolio journals to become more internationally recognised.

She noted that customers were using Scopus to get a sense of the "who is doing what and where" in a subject field, and for **"Landscape of research"** analysis.

Ann also introduced the BEPress **Digital Commons** product. She noted that the librarian had become the curator (gate keeper) of the institutional content for Digital Commons, by vetting the journal, supporting indexing services, and developing library publishing programs.

The Digital Commons product was integrated into Elsevier's product portfolio in August 2017. Digital Commons is now advertised by Elsevier to perform these functions:

- To act as a discoverable **Institutional Repository (IR) for** search engines;

- To manage open-access **Journal** publishing and workflows;

- To help share research data;

- To create curated online exhibitions of digital content.

- To index Content in the [Digital Commons Network](#).

- To provide Metrics, (PlumX Metrics), and Analytics to track usage;

- To manage Workflow, Preservation**,** DOIs, and long-term archiving;

Professor Jaya Raju from the University of Cape Town, South Africa, who served on the Board as our recently appointed Subject Chair for Library and Information Sciences and Multidisciplinary journals, summarised the San Francisco meeting as follows:

"I now see my role as extending beyond the quality review of academic literature in my research field and on the African continent in general. It is also about refinement of the SCOPUS system and most of all its objectivity. I am impressed by the level of commitment. The meeting is fun, sharp and there is a willingness to disagree, but it is always fair. My experience has been akin to a heuristic educational program."

The CSAB meeting in Bangkok, Thailand of 30th October– 2nd November 2018

The Autumn meeting of the Board in 2018 was held at the Anantara Riverside Hotel in Bangkok. It was combined with a meeting with members of the Thai Citation Index (TCI) and the newly formed ASEAN Citation Index, in keeping with our poiciy on public engagement.

The meeting was organised by Professor Narongrit Sombatsompop of King Mongkut's University of Technology in Thailand, and lead for the Thai Journal Improvement Project.

Narongrit explained to us how his Thai project was focussed upon Editorship as a career; on reducing turn-around times for suitable candidate journals for SCOPUS; and on reviewing 60 selected candidate journals for SCOPUS over three years (April 2017 to April 2020). The project included training and workshops, mentoring, improvements to quality of the presentation of the journal and the suggestion of candidate journals.

Peter Brimblecombe, our Subject Chair for Environmental Sciences, emphasised how the quality of a journal is measured by more than the number of citations. There are many clues to content quality in the layout of an article, the use of diagrams and figures, and the quality, clarity and focus of article abstract. These must provide a clear summary of hypotheses, methods, results and realistic, supportable conclusions.

- In the matter of Citations: he opined that the **quality** of the citations is more important than the **number** of citations, in terms of How recent are they; who is citing and from where.

- Ethics statements were increasingly important and should be attuned to subject of the journal, for example Medicine vs Engineering.

The new ASEAN Citation Index (ACI) in 2018

A regional ACI steering committee had been formed to determine the characteristics of the ASEAN database, to design the selection criteria and to form sub-committees. The ACI currently listed some 400 journals.

We considered a proposal to establish a unitary ASEAN regional board representing the ten cooperating ASEAN countries; covering all 31 major subject areas, and mentored by the Thai Local Board). The proposal some early traction under Narongrit's leadership, but it proved difficult to manage trans-nationally and it was formally discontinued in January 2025.

The Launch of the SCOPUS China Advisory Board in 2018

In the context of Advisory Board developments in Asia, we were advised of the creation of the new 'China Academic Board', in collaboration with the China National Publications Import and Export Corporation (CNPIEC) in August 2018, so as to help Chinese publications to make more impact on a global scale.

The Chinese government and media were focusing on Publication ethics, resulted in a project by the Institute of Scientific and Technical Information of China (ISTIC). The China Board would pre-select titles for Scopus evaluation, in line with our established policies for working with Local Boards.

The Policy of Inclusion of Book Series in SCOPUS

Academic Book Series are collections which have a common theme, discipline, or methodology, under the direction of series and volume editors. Each book contains a series of commissioned chapters or papers on an aspect of the theme from invited authors. Springer Nature is a particularly prolific publisher of book series, as for example with its series on Lecture Notes on Computer Sciences.

Book Series may be time limited or open ended, depending on the breadth and dynamism of the topic which is covered, and they may be published regularly or irregularly. Book series vary considerably in the quality of the individual book, of the authors and of the editorial input. Chapters carry reference lists which link topics to the wider citation ecosystem, but in general terms the collections secure fewer citations than academic journals.

The quality of the peer review process is also variable, given that most authors are invited directly by the editor of the volume or the series.

We agreed to process Book Series data through SCOPUS. We proposed to process them through STEP as journals, even though STEP was not designed to accommodate the vagaries and irregularities of book series. We noted the citation activity and the trusted reputation of major book series publishers. Unfortunately, book series are also vulnerable to malpractice behaviours and citation manipulation, and they are particularly dependent upon the integrity of the Editor in Chief.

The Policy on the inclusion of Preprints in SCOPUS

Preprints are the completed drafts of academic papers which have yet to be subjected to Peer Review. There are an increasing number of globally branded Preprint Servers, including ArXiv (physical sciences), SocArXiv (social sciences), bioRxiv (biology) and MedRxiv (Medicine and Health). Preprint servers offer authors a number of advantages in securing fast publication and in establishing prior art in a fast moving subject field. Also:

- They provide fast access and bypass long and unpredictable journal review times.
- They are independent of Peer Review;
- Access is Free from paywalls.

- Articles are Citable and may use a DOI (Digital Object Identifier) to aid discovery.
- They permit Feedback in advance of final publication, where intended.

We discussed the growth in the use of Preprints and preprint servers, and noted the general concerns that preprints should be clearly distinguishable from peer-reviewed content in Scopus. We also discussed whether and how to distinguish pre-prints from institutional repositories, and whether a pre-print should be removed from the archive if and when it was re-published as a "definitive" journal article. We noted that there may therefore be overlap between pre-prints, conference papers and journal articles.

Evan Bieske (Subject Chair for Chemistry) noted that pre-prints were used widely in Chemistry and Physics. He would want to find these in Scopus and would not want censorship or selection on pre-prints. Pre-prints are also important for claiming prior art and have it stamped with a date of publication." He felt that "We have to do it. .. Discovery is immensely important, evaluation is not".

Ashok Raina (Subject Chair for Mathematics, noted that pre-prints are also very important in Maths for securing credit for the work.

Jorg Sack (Subject Chair for Computer Sciences) agreed that for prior art, then ownership of the idea is established if it is in Arxiv. This is important for granting agencies with Open Access mandates. However, preprints needed to be distinct from peer reviewed literature to sustain the credibility of Scopus.

A Diversion into the Noble Multidisciplinary Art and Science of Basket-Weaving
During a spirited debate in Bangkok in 2018, Evan Bieske introduced us to the hypothetical *Journal of Basket Weaving* as a shorthand exemplar of a poor quality journal.

This prompted both synthetic outrage and a spirited defence of the noble art and science of basket wearing, for which a rich historic literature can be traced on the Internet.
One anonymous correspondent wrote threateningly to (or from) our Curator for Extreme Appeals and Criminology to the effect that:

" I demand that this new proposal from our online university, which has the gold standard endorsement of the High Commission of the Basket Weaver's League is given the full, correct and proper consideration it deserves. If not, I shall personally ensure that none of you who are involved in so called Scopus are ever again able to obtain baskets."

Another correspondent requested kind consideration of the Multidisciplinary Journal:
BASKET WEAVING: THEORY, APPLICATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS, stating that:
" We explain why basket weaving is important in all areas is research covered by Scopus.
In the field of Particle Physics, a new particle has been discovered at CERN whose orbits, when visualized as a probability density function, resemble those of a woven basket.

The discovery of **the Basket Spin (BS) Particle** opens a new sub-field within topology.
Moreover; a basket built according to these new findings could have exceptional strength.

- Engineers are already carrying out preliminary structural tests.
- Computer Scientists are studying how to model basket topology…
- Chemists are investigating whether molecular bonds could have basketoid features.
- Humanities and Social Science researchers hope to discover new weaving societies.
- Archaeologists intend to revisit ancient drawings and artefacts of Old Baskets
- Economists wish to study weaving-based economies in greater depth.
- Surgeons see strength in the new patterns for hernia repairs.
- Nurses see many applications in supporting patients.
- Psychologists and psychiatrists see value in using weaving to slow dementia.
- Neuro-scientists will study the relevance of weaving patterns to basket cases.
- Geologists are intrigued by the form, origins and reshaping of basket eruptions.
.

Other disciplines will certainly follow. We therefore submit the case for a truly multi-disciplinary journal for fast-tracking into Scopus."

On 4th November 2018, Ashok Raina, our principal Subject Chair for Analytical Sanity, noted his surprise at the belated but gratifying interest in Maths among his colleagues on the

CSAB. He put us with rigorous Einsteinian logic to evidence- based shame. He wrote on the Subject of **"THE MATHS OF WEAVING",** that:

"On my return to Mumbai in 2018 I was surprised to find much interest in one of the lesser known branches of mathematics, which made me wonder if indeed my CSAB colleagues' new found enthusiasm for the subject was backed by authentic knowledge...

I approach mathematics from a broad cultural perspective, rather than in the way that the subject that is pursued rigorously in university departments. In the consideration of Basket Weaving, I refer of course to the subject of Ethno-Mathematics and to the following texts:

-Geometry from Africa: Mathematical and Educational Explorations (Classroom Resource Materials): by Paulus Gerdes: 9780883857151: was published by the Mathematical Association of America, and is available on Amazon.com: Books

Those with a real thirst for knowledge about Basket Weaving are referred to a more detailed account by the same author:
- African Basketry: A Gallery of Twill-Plaited Designs and Patterns: by Paulus Gerdes: 9781435726253: also available from Amazon.com: Books

This cultural approach, however, does not fully satisfy the professional mathematician's need for a rigorous framework. Fortunately, two very eminent and well known mathematicians have stepped into the woven breach. I refer, of course, to a classic paper which I have attached below with a brief review of this fundamental article--.

Grünbaum, Branko; Shephard, Geoffrey C.: Satins and Twills: an introduction to the geometry of fabrics. *Math. Mag.* 53 (1980), no. 3, 139–161.

G. Ewald generously reviewed this paper in MathSciNet Mathematical Reviews , Copyright American Mathematical Society in 2018, writing that:
"This is a thorough mathematical analysis of weaving, or the geometry of fabrics. Only a few partial results have been found up to now, the last one published in 1935.
First, a mathematical meaning is given to concepts such as strand, fabric, warp, weft,

satin, twill, etc. Generating principles are presented (using groups); furthermore, certain types of fabrics are classified. In some cases numbers of possible types of fabrics are given by formulae. Example:

The number t(n) of distinct twills of period n is given by

$$t(n) = 2^{(n+\rho(n))/2-2} + (1/4n) \sum \varphi(d)\rho(d)2^{n/d} - 1,$$

where φ is Euler's phi-function, $\rho(n) = \frac{1}{2}(3 + (-1)^n)$, and summation is over all positive integer divisors d of n. Further research is stimulated by discussing open problems.

Ashok further noted that the importance of this paper may be judged by the speed with which it was followed up by a paper in the Bulletin of the London Mathematical Society v12, 61-64, 1980 with the title ``**When a fabric hangs together'',** in which the question posed is studied through associating a matrix to the fabric.

He observed that "Naturally, linear algebra and group theory are the obvious tools in this kind of study. However, as anybody familiar with the mathematical theory of knots would expect, topology is also involved and the notion of isotopy plays an important role here."

Ashok concluded that "If members of the CSAB wish further to pursue the topic of basket weaving, I most warmly encourage them to do so. However, I do advise those who gave up the study of mathematics at an early stage to first acquire knowledge of abstract algebra and topology"….

Here (should have) Endeth the Lesson in Double Maths for Basket Weaving for the Board. or so we thought until global politics entered the conversation!

On February 20th 2026, Jorg Sack reported from Ottowa that the Premier of Ontario , Doug Ford, had leapt into the debate with Evan Bieske-style aplomb, in telling students who were expressing concerns over recent cuts to the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP) advising them to invest in education that gives people in-demand jobs. Specifically, "You're picking basket-weaving courses, and there's not too many baskets being sold out there."

See https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/doug-ford-osap-cuts-9.7094009

Our London Legal Eagle leapt to the defence of Belittled Basket Weavers everywhere with an extract from the UK Hansard Gazette from the House of Commons, which diarises verbatim all parliamentary debates. Hansard records that on April 29, 1948, at 10:34 p.m., Mr. David Eccles (Chippenham) raised a debate in the House of Commons regarding the basket and willow trades. He begged to move:

"That an humble Address be presented to His Majesty, praying that the Order, dated 8th March, 1948, entitled the Control of Willow Rods and Willow Sticks Order, 1948 (S.I., 1948, No. 461), a copy of which was presented on 9th March, be annulled."

This order imposes a system of controlled marketing and maximum prices on willow rods and sticks. The House will know that these willows are mainly used for the manufacture of baskets, and it is not possible to see the effect of the order unless one considers the industry as a whole, from the growing of the willows right to the making of the baskets.

After Mr Eccles had described the workings of the Willow Growing Industry and Markets in detail, The question arose as to *" who is going to get a licence from the Board of Trade which will enable him to be one of the exclusive buyers of willows in the future? We do not know from the order, but we have it on the authority of the hon. Member for Taunton (Mr. Collins), who is such a prominent figure in this industry, who said that the intention of the Board of Trade was to grant these licences only to the merchant-growers and the merchants.*

I do not know whether the Minister is going to confirm that statement; but that is the suspicion in Somerset. If that is actually the case, there will be only a small number of licensed dealers in willows, possibly not more than 15. It is understandable, therefore, that all those men who from time immemorial have been dealing in this product, should be suspicious that so small a ring of licensed dealers might fix the price and hold them to ransom. In future they will have to go to one of these licensed merchants to get any willows for preparation for the market..."

If only our own debates on the SCOPUS Board could reach such standards of erudition and be minted so clearly!

This lighthearted sequence of exchanges nevertheless unwittingly anticipated the very important role that mathematics would play in our future SCOPUS deliberations. Advanced analytics would support the work of the Board through the outputs of the expanding SCOPUS Radar system, and as we sought to understand the further complexities of the algorithms and principles which underpinned the SCOPUS AI tool.

Professor Sack closed the discussion in early 2026 with a magisterial contemporary self portrait which had been crafted from very little willow but a forest of electrons.

The Work of the Board in 2019

The CSAB Meeting in Berlin, May 22nd – 24th 2019

The Spring meeting in 2019 was held in the Mövenpick Hotel in Berlin. Policy discussions were wide ranging, with particular emphasis on the development of "entity to entity" evaluation models in SCOPUS and on the trustworthiness of Conference outputs.

Development of the Entity-to-Entity Assessment Model for SCOPUS

Max Khan of Elsevier explained how the Scopus database development programme was exploring the concept of the "entity-to-entity assessment" matrix (also known as an Entity-Relationship (E-R) Matrix/Model) in database modelling. The model is a grid which is used to visualise various types of relationships between data entities, including many-to-many, one-to-many, or many-to-one and other relationships. Research entities include institutions, researchers, and countries.

Max's presentation led us to consider a range of academic entity relationships, including:

- Researcher to researcher;

- Ranking body to institution;

- Institution to document; and

- Researcher and Editor to journal.

This led us to consider three content types that we could influence that might be useful in such evaluations, including CSAB selected journals; Regional journals which had not yet been selected; academic books and conference proceedings. Max also asked us to consider:

- The variation in national academic assessments from one country to another;

- What targeted content strategies might be helpful to different countries;

- How language and script affects international comparators.

For example, Japan has a very rich academic output whose global impact is constrained by language and script. The Elsevier SciVal analytical tool allows users to define their entities, to identify connections and to compare their publication metrics, journal percentile rankings, and collaborative activities. (see reference Makarenko et al 2021).

The Entity Relationship Matrix now permitted:

- The visualisation of relationships using graphical tools;

- The identification of types of relationship (eg many-to-many);

- The determination of cardinality, which is the number of instances of one entity that can be related to an instance of another entity;

- The assessment of mandatory components, which indicate whether a particular entity must be associated with another for a record to be complete;

- The avoidance of duplication.

I develop this theme in a separate essay in this series (see eprints.soton.ac.uk/508082/)

Policies on Conferences and Conference fraud

In Berlin, we held a workshop on Conferences and Conference fraud, which was led by Jorg Sack CSAB Computer Sciences) , and by Judy Salk, who was the Elsevier Executive Lead for Conference Content. The local speakers were:

- Aliaksandr Birukou, an Executive Editor for Springer-Verlag GmbH

- Stephanie Hagemann-Willholt: of the German National Library of Science and Technology;

- Chris Hartegerink of the *QUEST* Centre for Biomedical Research , also based in Berlin;

- Marcel Ackermann of the Fraunhofer Heinrich Hertz Institute, Berlin, Germany.

Fraudulent Conferences and the OMICS judgement

On 29th March 2019, Gloria M. Navarro, District Judge for Nevada, had ruled on behalf of the Federal Trade Commission against the OMICS company for false representation in conferences and publications to the value of $50 million, thus highlighting the global concerns about the problem of conference fraud.

Jorg Sack discussed the minimal acceptable criteria for conference indexing, and the criteria for a typical evaluation. He discussed the Open Conference Persistent Identifier (PID), and the Think-Check-ATTEND moniker to pre-empt attending a fraudulent conference.

Aliaksandr Birukou had chaired the joint Crossref/DataCite working group on Conference PIDs since 2017. He further discussed DOI's and PIDs for conferences and conference publications, and issues around peer review of conference content. He noted that:

- there were currently ~5 Million digital object identifiers for Conference Proceedings in Crossref,
- there were 9.2 Million conference items in SCOPUS, including 641,000 for Medicine.
- ~70% of books from Springer were now related to conference output.

He also reviewed the EU New Frontiers of Peer Review (PEERE) programme; the (now lapsed) CONFREF Project and the Springer Nature Scigraph project for linked open data.

Stephanie Hagemann-Willholt introduced the work of the ORCID Deutschland Foundation; and the application of FAIR (Findability, Accessibility, Interoperability and Reusability) to conference data; and the work of The Alliance of Science Organisation in Germany, under the jurisdiction of the German Federal Ministry for Education and Research.

Chris Hartgerink introduced the work of the QUEST (Quality, Ethics, Open Science and Translation) Centre of the Berlin Institute for Health (BIH), with a general mission to to Increase the value and impact of biomedical research by maximizing the quality, reproducibility, generalisability, and validity of the Institute's work.

Marcel Ackermann introduced the work of *DataBase systems and Logic Programming, or Digital Bibliography & Library Project for the computer sciences*. https://dblp.uni-trier.de/ This was originally created at the [University of Trier](#) in 1993. dblp is now operated and further developed by [Schloss Dagstuhl](#). It now lists some 2.3M author profiles, 4.6M publications, 5.7K conferences, and 1.6K journals.

In Summary, The Berlin workshop allowed us to review progress in the rationalisation of the international information architecture around academic conferences, and the framework for further cooperation between the major publishers and leading public sector bodies. It also highlighted the characteristics of wilfully fraudulent Conferences. It explored the **CounterMock Strategy,** and it highlighted the adverse impact of fake conferences on unsuspecting stakeholders, along with the need for cross-sector education and training in these matters.

We noted the emerging judicial response to overtly fraudulent activity by publishers and conference organisers, and it provided broad Guidelines for the development of reporting standards for academic conferences and publications, including the more rigorous application of Permanent Digital Identifiers for Conferences and Conference Publications.

The Subject Chairs meeting in Beijing, China 30th October – 1st November 2019
Our meeting at the Beijing Hotel NUO unknowingly paralleled the early stirrings of the Covid 19 virus in Wuhan in China.

The key element of the meeting was to advance the Elsevier Policy of engagement with the Chinese academic community and publishing market, and upon the development of a China Academic Board (CAB) to support the work of the SCOPUS CSAB. Chinese publishing outputs were very extensive, but so were publication malpractices among a large and driven academic workforce in a competitive career structure and with no background in global ethical practices.

The Chinese government had recognised the importance of establishing standards and regulation across this key sector of the economy, and in focusing outputs on quality and performance measurements to global standards. The China Academic Board was one element of this strategy.

Wednesday, 30th October 2019 was therefore dedicated to a Symposium for Increasing the Impact of Chinese Journals; to receiving a presentation from the Chinese Academy of Science and Technology; and to convening a Joint Meeting of the Global SCOPUS CSAB and the China Board members.

Delegates to the Symposium on the sharing of Chinese initiatives to improve journals quality and internationalisation included senior representatives from the Chinese Association of Science and Technology, the National Science Foundation China, the China Periodical Association, the Chinese Academy of Science, the Chinese Academy of Engineering, and various Publishing Houses.

Mr. Jun Li from the Chinese Periodical Association shared the Chinese government's strategy in enhancing collaboration to resolve global problems, having recognised that academic Journals were important vectors of knowledge in this process.

Professor Wei Yang, lead for the China Board, shared his government's initiatives in supporting basic research, and its aims in supporting the progression and recognition of world class Universities. His initial ambition was to secure quality assured recognition for 1000 nationally sourced journals in Scopus from some 5,052 known STM journals in China. 679 Chinese journals were already active in Scopus. He also noted that Chinese journal numbers were now under tight control by the government, with only 17 new journals receiving an official number in 2019.

Professor Wei noted that Google Scholar was not easy accessible in China, and that Scopus might be developed as a useful alternative, along with a Mobile version. We recognised that Scopus would benefit from the simplification and redesign its interfaces, with particular reference to the development of a mobile app.

Mr. Jun Song of the Chinese Association of Science and Technology highlighted the importance in generating national progress with research integrity and the adoption of modern code of conduct by various Publishing Societies. He noted China had peaked around 2010 in terms of article retractions, with subsequent improvements in behaviours. However, it was recognised that the Publisher landscape in China was characterised by scattered, small, scrambled and weak publishers, hence an action plan for excellence of Chinese journals to create leading journals in selected fields.

Professor Henry Wai-chung Yeung of the SCOPUS CSAB discussed the challenges of increasing Journal Impact in the Social Sciences. He noted that the Social Sciences are about ideas and debates, and about original, unique, theoretical and methodological contributions with hypotheses and arguments on why relevant data matter.

Professor Junmin Wei of the China Medical Association, described the ambitions for Journal Internationalisation around his own organisational portfolio of 143 journals, of

which three were listed in the Science Citation Index (SCI) and the Science Citation Index Expanded (SCIE): 26 were listed in Medline and 21 in Scopus. The discussion touched on the future role of automatic translation systems for Chinese content, and the quality assurance of Open Access (OA) content in China.

Professor Niu Yi of CNPIEC described the local process which had been established for journal evaluation; for the review of research results, and in the creation of a Pre-submission website.

Professor Chris van Kessel (CSAB Agricultural Sciences) explained the expectations of the global CSAB. He discussed the advice that he was seeking from the local board on their journals, including:

- Evidence of a convincing editorial concept;
- The regional academic contribution to the subject field;
- The quality and conformity with the aims and scope;
- The readability (in Chinese) of articles; and
- The standing of the Editorial team.

In the closing exchange of courtesies, Professor Jorg Sack noted the importance of strategic patience in the evaluation process, in that *"Some journals will grow from flower to fruit in international sunlight, while other journals will take time to blossom and to come back the next season."*

Professor David Nelken discussed the challenges of assessing excellence in the social sciences and A&H, and the limitations of citation measurements in exercises such as the UK REF, where panels look at the significance, originality and rigour of outputs.

Max Khan of Elsevier discussed the strategic relevance to the work of the CSAB to the SCOPUS project, given that "Academic quality" can be considered in terms of the ultimate impact that the published information has on society. We further considered:

- How the pursuit of knowledge about research impacts might affect the CSAB.

- Whether we were overlooking other knowledge sources,

- Whether we needed to adjust our selection policies to add value to SCOPUS.

- The UN Social Development Goals (SDG) indicators, and

- Whether the policy helped to match Scopus content to relevant SDG metrics.

- The binary nature of CSAB decisions, ie inclusion or exclusion for SCOPUS.

- Approaches to collect data on rejected journals, their authors, editors and metrics. ,

Max observed that to preserve the integrity of the SCOPUS collection, only those journals which meet formal Quality Assurance criteria are included in the primary SCOPUS.com commercial product. These criteria may change from time to time according, for example, to evidence of previously unsuspected publication fraud.

I have previously explained how the selectivity and exclusiveness of the data within SCOPUS is also a handicap, because it excludes data on many sources and authors whose work is not listed in SCOPUS but which may be of considerable value in future products which are tailored to specific needs of such as Governments which wish to understand the performance of national academic systems, or for forensic enquiry purposes (Figure 8).
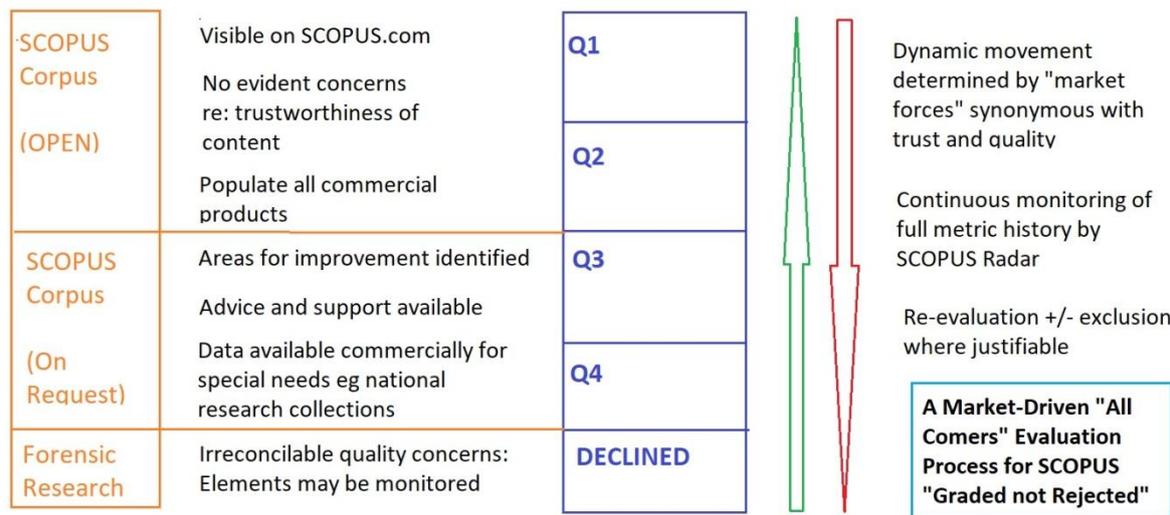

Figure 8. A model for the SCOPUS data collection which would be enriched by content which is presently excluded by the quality assurance process, but which would be of value in encouraging dynamic and transparent competition to improve performance, and to provide richer data for specific national purposes and for forensic analytics (image: the author)

I introduced this model in a previous essay in this series (see eprints.soton.ac.uk/508986/).
It remains unrealised at the end of 2025. However, the recent evolution of the SCOPUS
Radar system, the development of Insight Graphs, and the migration of the SCOPUS Title
Evaluation Platform, provide a technical basis for the future development of this model, to
which I will return in a later essay in this series.

A Summary of the Beijing Meeting

Max Khan concluded the Beijing meeting with an appreciation for the passion, diversity and
breadth of insight of Board Members; the willingness to engage with any type of topic and
to express strong and coherently argued point of view.

He acknowledged the value in providing the Board with more context behind the strategic
thinking and planning for SCOPUS and its associated products. He noted that our
contributions extended well beyond the review of journals to consultancy. Indeed, we were
now being used as sounding boards for a number of concept products which did not always
survive first contact with the rigours and vigour of our discussions. He also noted the
ambassadorial representation of Scopus to the outside world.

I have a personal mental model of the friendly and collaborative working of the board in the
exploration of complex ideas, which likens the discussion to a wild game of table tennis.
Board members sit around the horseshoe shaped conference room table. An idea or
debating topic may be represented as a ping pong ball,

This is firmly struck back and fore across the room, until it finally comes to rest somewhere
on the floor within the table horseshoe and in a wholly unpredictable place. The position of
the final idea may be at a distance from every protagonist but it is much stronger for the
energy which it has absorbed. The intellectual pleasure derives from teasing out (or
parrying) the many different perspectives, opinions and energies that guarantee the
debates and discussions.

Max Khan's kind words nevertheless highlighted a perennial challenge for board members
individually and collectively. We are continuously and constructively challenged to balance

the obligations of independence and integrity to the academic corpus with the Board with recognition and accommodation of the commercial needs of Elsevier and its publishing teams.

Max also proposed that we should hold more frequent on-line, topic-specific meetings between main board meetings. This proposal innocently anticipated the upheaval of the Covid pandemic which was to reach the UK early in 2020, but that is a story for the next essay in this series.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, covering the general work and the policy contributions of the SCOPUS Content Selection Advisory Board over the period 2017-2019, I have addressed a number of themes which have underwritten the maturation and adaptation of the SCOPUS Title Evaluation Programme and broader challenges in the quality assurance of academic outputs over this period. These issues have included:

- The expansion in Responsible Publication Metrics and Altmetrics;
- Content Expansion in SCOPUS, to include Conference Proceedings Book Series;
- Journal Re-evaluation and Appeals against the Rejection Decision;
- The Entity to Entity Assessment Model for SCOPUS;
- Fraudulent publication and Fraudulent Conferences;
- The Creation of the CHINA Advisory Board.

In the next essay, I describe the productive work of the Board and the development of policy and systems through the Covid Pandemic.

Acknowledgements

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