

Advice to journal editors and publishers: Securing accession for a journal to Scopus

1. The Scopus CSAB and its Role

The Scopus Content Selection & Advisory Board (CSAB), comprises an international and independent panel of experienced editors of peer reviewed international journals, and other experts in the fields of publishing, bibliometrics and library science, who have been invited by Elsevier to advise on the development of the Scopus database. In addition, the CSAB is tasked with defining and securing high quality standards for the journal content of Scopus. For more information about the CSAB and its members, see:

<http://www.info.sciverse.com/scopus/csab/members>

Scopus seeks to distinguish itself from other abstract and citation databases and search & discovery tools by setting quality standards for the accession and retention of journals and their content to the system. It helps users and researchers to find the best and most appropriate content quickly and efficiently.

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 established best publication 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.

There are some 18,500 journals already accrued within Scopus. Estimates of total numbers of worldwide peer reviewed, professional, general and sub-speciality journals range variously from 80,000 to in excess of 100,000 journals and periodicals. The ultimate 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.

Citation data provide measures of the aggregate use of each journal; of the referencing of individual articles; and of the referencing of authors and editors. There are of course limitations to citation data as measures of quality and popularity of content of publications. Newspapers such as The Times of London, the International Herald Tribune, The Economist and Time are read by millions on a daily or weekly basis, and yet no-one would consider judging them on their citation data.

The Scopus Content Selection & Advisory Board has thus been formed to make sense of this complexity and to advise on fair and appropriate ways to define, seek out and promote quality within the vast array of professional journals in the worldwide marketplace. The Board also seeks to be fair to those journals which are not immediately accepted for Scopus, through providing constructive and informative feedback; through offering journals the opportunity to resubmit

when weaknesses have been addressed; or when objective evidence of success and citation rates of a deferred journal becomes persuasive.

Since the creation of the present CSAB, the Board has sought to develop a set of objective and auditable criteria by which to measure the quality of journals which wish to accrue to Scopus and by which to evaluate and retain journals which have already accrued to the system. These criteria are regularly evaluated and revised where necessary.

The work of the CSAB has been focussed through the Scopus Title Evaluation Platform (STEP), which in turn is embodied in an evolving software system. The STEP software allows suggestors to submit their journals on line for consideration for inclusion in Scopus. Once specific requirements for information and compliance have been met, the title will proceed to the evaluation process. Consideration of the criteria for inclusion in Scopus would be advisable for any suggestor. These requirements are set out clearly on the Scopus website:

<http://www.info.sciverse.com/scopus/scopus-in-detail/content-selection>

One marker of quality which has emerged from the work of the CSAB is the requirement that from 2011 onwards, all journals seeking registration and retention on Scopus must publish (and by implication adhere to) a clear policy on Publication Ethics and Malpractice. There are a number of reference resources for such policies from the Major Publishers and from organisations such as COPE and WAME, and links are provided on the Scopus website. For a link to the CSAB's statement on publication ethics, see:

http://www.info.sciverse.com/UserFiles/u4/Scopus_Statement_David_%20Rew_1210.pdf

2. The Evaluation Process

Once a journal has been submitted for consideration, and once it is judged to be compliant with all requisite information, including PDF samples of content, it is sent out for review by the Subject Chairs of the CSAB and their review panels. Following a rigorous peer review process using the STEP evaluation tool a decision will be made as to the journal's acceptance into the Scopus database.

Occasionally, titles from institutional or commercial publishers, with a sustained record of producing journals possessing exceptional academic and production standards, may be rapidly accrued to Scopus. Under these circumstances, the accepted journal will be reviewed by the CSAB after 2 years to ensure that it complies with the Scopus acceptance criteria, and indeed has a quality consistent with the publisher's reputation.

2.1 The Accept, Defer and Reject Decisions

Taking into account the objective measures of quality which are assessed through the STEP software, and the breadth of experience of the reviewers and Subject Chairs, a decision is made as to whether or not the journal under review reaches a quality threshold for inclusion of the applicant journal, and hence whether to Accept, Defer or Reject the application.

The CSAB judges both the quality and the evidence of durability of each journal, and seeks to secure the widest possible accessibility for its content. Every effort is made to help each journal to achieve accession to Scopus over time, if not immediately. Of those titles reviewed, around 40% have been accepted after evaluation, and a small number are rejected outright for a variety of cogent reasons.

Accession for the majority of journals is deferred for between one and five years, according to the amount of work judged to be needed to raise the standards, or to provide sufficient time for a credible citation and usage pattern to emerge. Journals are then encouraged to reapply for accession, at which point we hope that their chances will be substantially improved.

3. Advice for Editors and Publishers for Title Suggestions to Scopus

In order to support the application process and enhance the opportunity for inclusion in Scopus the CSAB offer the following guidance. These general observations are based upon our experience with the STEP system and recent Board discussions and review of data. They are not comprehensive and nor can they cover every eventuality, but they are offered in good faith out of a collective wish to raise standards and international communicability in the world's peer reviewed literature, regardless of subject matter, country or institution of origin.

3.1 Assessing the Viability of Journals

The CSAB recognises that there is a wide range of business and funding models for Journals and their publication methods. There is an unresolved debate about the relative merits of on-line, conventional print, open access, pay to publish, publicly funded and subscription based models of funding. We note the explosion of titles as new publishers test new commercial on-line models, which are based in part upon securing as wide recognition as possible by the various international citation indices.

We make no prior judgement on these models, but in general we look for objective evidence of durability of the journal in respect of:

- A track record of publication and citation over at least two years, and preferably longer;
- Evidence of consistency and frequency of publication on time;
- Evidence of a reasonable volume of material per issue. Where online journals are published on an annual basis, we look at the annualised flow of content.

3.2 The Language of Publication

The CSAB recognises the wide diversity of languages and cultures in the journals submitted for consideration, and the wish and needs of publishers and editors to address specific linguistic and cultural groups.

Nevertheless, Scopus is focussed upon international communication and utility of its content. It is a matter of history, utility and practice that the English language has emerged as the world's common language of cross-boundary communication. It is a matter of observation that those organisations and publications which adopt English as the language of dissemination reach a wider international audience than those which do not.

For these reasons, we request that as a minimum, journals provide English language abstracts of their content, preferably for each and every article, as a condition of accrual to Scopus. Moreover, we encourage journals to consider the provision of full text English language translations on their websites, if not in the printed issues, to help authors to reach a wider audience.

3.3 Journal Websites

Few journals are now published without a journal website. However, the quality of content and presentation of each website varies considerably. Editors and publishers are encouraged to look at their websites and to consider whether they communicate the information about their journal and

its content in the most effective way. The quality of the journal websites also inform us about Editorial Board members, international advisory boards or similar and the important aims and scope of the journal, its publisher and journal ethics statements. Being able to traverse and link across sections of the on-line information is important for dissemination and readership. For those journals publishing in languages other than English, multilingual versions of the website can be a powerful marketing and communication tool.

3.4 Institutional, National and Regional Journals

Application for SCOPUS inclusion can come from many different sources, and demonstrates the growth of scholarly activity and outputs internationally. This has resulted in an exponential growth in journals being published outwith the major publishing companies worldwide. These are often important developments for the countries who submit their journals for SCOPUS inclusion, but which often do not have the same potential resources to develop their overarching publishing quality. Guidance is offered here for institutional, national and regional journals.

3.4.1 Institutional Journals

Many of the Journals which are referred to the CSAB for adjudication for Scopus originate from sub-national institutions (primarily Universities). Institutional journals may fail to secure accession to Scopus, because:

- Their primary purpose is as a repository for material generated within the institution or by authors affiliated to the institution. The quality threshold for acceptance of papers is thus relatively low;
- They cover a very broad subject range;
- They lack the competitive drive for the selection of papers which is enjoyed by more widely sourced journals.

The Scopus Board recognises that such journals may serve an important institutional purpose for local historical and political purposes, and in encouraging local researchers onto the publication ladder. However because of their localised approach to the dissemination of scholarly outputs this does not then translate into the broader expectations and requirements for inclusion in an international database.

Many institutions worldwide do have their own publishing companies and some institutional journals have seen the value of working together with other local institutions to create a more regional journal approach. There can also be national support for some institutions to develop a journal which would then represent a specific field / discipline in that country. These decisions are of course dependent on local, regional and national developments and not within the scope of the CSAB to determine. It is noted however that there is less opportunity for single institutional submissions where there is no evidence of external collaboration and international perspective to be considered for inclusion in the Scopus database.

3.4.2 Regional and National Journals

These journals are often noted by the inclusion of a regional or national focus in their title and are therefore immediately identifiable as such. They do not project themselves as an international journal nor include international content.

This regional and national focus gives the journals their competitive advantage over international journals if the material is well written and well presented and often has the potential to make a significant contribution to the wider scientific community in various disciplines and fields.

What is considered important for these journals is the visibility and inclusion of international input at some level of their journal information, thus providing evidence of a link between their regional

or national scientific output and the international literature. This broader outlook also enhances the potential for citation and usage of the output by international researchers and others.

3.5 Broad Content Coverage versus Specialisation

There are a number of international journals which have built their reputations on broad subject coverage and a general readership albeit for specific scientific communities. It is also important to note that local, regional and indeed national journals often start their journey to successful publication by adopting this route, due to a variety of factors beyond the remit and scope of this guidance.

However, for most publishers and their journal editorial boards, subject specialisation offers considerable advantages. In particular is their application to the specific scholarly community in which their authors work in or are affiliated to, and the nature of their specific research. Defining the aims and scope of the journal clearly becomes a crucial element of the review process, as it is a measure against which the reviewer can determine whether the content of the journal over time does meet its objectives. Some journals make a feature of being all inclusive in their content and direction and it works well. However it is important for editors and publishers who submit their journals to Scopus to ensure that the direction and content of their journal is made very clear to both potential authors and readers.

3.6 The Choice of a Meaningful Title

The Board recognises that a range of publishers seek commercial and reputational advantage by selecting a name for the journal which appears to communicate authority and breadth of coverage, as for example, the International Journal of XXXXXXXX but which in fact disguises weakness and which is also not convincing because the actual overarching discipline itself, such as sociology, medicine or physics is so vast.

It is also evident that branding a journal as international in its title or sub-title, and subsequently not following this up with either international authors nor international editorial / advisory board membership will mitigate against a positive outcome.

We also recognise that from time to time, some journals may also seek to capitalise on the brand recognition of well established journals with similar and confusing titles. We consider this practice to be unacceptable to our publishing ethics code and advise caution for new journals in this regard.

Just as with the title of individual papers, we recommend that the journal title should reflect as accurately as possible the specific intent and / or sub-speciality coverage of its content, as well as either its international intentions or regional/national direction.

This would then be visible throughout the journal's aims and scope, editorial direction, editorial board membership, journal authors, author guidelines and publishing ethics standards, all clearly visible through the journal website.

3.7 Quality, Originality and Uniqueness of Content

Many of the journals which we are asked to assess are characterised by repetition and similarity of content to more highly cited international journals which are already within Scopus. In seeking to emulate success with “me too” material, many editors of smaller, less well established and regional journals often appear to be missing an opportunity to report and publish locally sourced and relevant material which could be of interest and value to a much wider audience.

The issue of editorial direction is of course outwith the remit of this guidance. However for a new journal in its early stages of development, consideration of these issues are of value in

determining its publication standards and development , with the outcome of being seen as publishing rigorous peer reviewed scholarly outputs as well as other types of publications which inform scholarly debate and collaboration. This process can sometimes be constrained by a variety of external influences over which editors and their publishers have no control over. Despite this it is encouraging to see the development of new and developing journals being submitted which will make an important contribution to the Scopus database and by inference the wider international scholarly community.

4. Retention of a Journal in Scopus

The CSAB recognises that for a variety of reasons, journals reach the end of their natural life or decline to a point at which inclusion in Scopus may no longer be justified, at which time a view will need to be taken as to whether the title should be retained and promoted within Scopus. Reasons for review might include:

- The journal is no longer published
- Objective measures of citation and usage are very low
- A high incidence of concerns about breaches of publication ethics and evidence of publication malpractice.

Material from these journals already included in Scopus however will be retained.

Given the extent to which the number of journals being submitted to Scopus is growing this next stage of the internal review process will be a staged approach.

Criteria and procedures are currently being developed by which the performance of journals accrued within Scopus will be regularly reviewed. These will be publicised and reported in due course.

5. Summary and Key Points

The CSAB Subject Chairs work together with the wider CSAB members to ensure the quality of the publications submitted and accepted for inclusion in Scopus, which is now a part of the much larger SciVerse platform. We hope that this brief overview and the guidance notes of some of the issues considered in the review process are of value to editors, publishers and other organisations. Further information about our work and that of the Scopus application process can be found online at: <http://www.info.sciverse.com/Home>

- 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, including its international Subject Chairs, exists to advise 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 success and utility of Scopus, and 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.
- Systems which bring content to the widest possible audience will in turn help advance the citation measures and utility of individual journals and their content.
- Before suggesting a journal for Scopus, please consider the selection criteria as set out on the Scopus website:
<http://www.info.sciverse.com/scopus/scopus-in-detail/content-selection>

The work of the Scopus CSAB is evolving, as is the system itself. The Board is happy to consider any constructive feedback which is received through contentenquiries@elsevier.com

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