

Some Guidelines for Assessing Quality and Impact in Business Research

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With increasing emphasis being placed on quality and impact in research output, and in the light of the likely introduction of a formal mechanism for evaluating research quality and impact for individuals and research groupings in 2007 (the Research Quality Framework or RQF) the following information is designed to provide a guide for Business School researchers as they seek to provide evidence of quality and impact in the research they produce.

1. Assessing Quality

Within the Commonwealth Government's Research Quality Framework (RQF), the quality of original research is described as relating to its intrinsic merit and academic impact.¹ The following indicators are often used to provide evidence of quality in respect of a researcher's output.

1.1 Publications weighted by ISI Impact Factor

Most often, an argument of quality for a given piece of published research is made with reference to the citation rates associated with a particular journal. The ISI Impact Factor is a measure of the number of times articles published in a given journal over the previous two years have been cited in the current year. So an impact factor of 1.0 in 2004 means that, on average, the articles published in that journal over the past two years were cited once in 2004.

To look up impact factors for a particular journal, follow the following instructions

- (1) Go to Journal Citation Reports (accessible on the web via the Library) (<http://portal.isiknowledge.com/portal.cgi?DestApp=JCR&Func=Frame>)
- (2) Select Social Sciences Edition. You can search for a specific journal.
- (3) Alternatively, to view journals in a discipline or group of disciplines, select to view journals by Subject Category. You can then select the discipline you wish to view, or specify multiple disciplines (e.g. Business, Management, Industrial Relations). Once you have selected your discipline(s), select View Journal Data by Impact Factor, and click on Submit. This will generate a list of journals ranked by their Impact Factor.

1.2 Citations per publication in ISI indexes

It is increasingly common for researchers to use citation counts as an indicator of the quality of a particular publication. One way to see how frequently an article has been cited is to search by author (e.g. AU=Smith NB) on ISI Web

¹ Expert Advisory Group (2005). Research Quality Framework: Assessing the quality and impact of research in Australia –Final advice on the Preferred RQF Model. December, 2005.

http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/research_sector/policies_issues_reviews/key_issues/research_quality_framework/final_advice_on_preferred_rfq_model.htm

of Science
(<http://portal.isiknowledge.com/portal.cgi?DestApp=WOS&Func=Frame>).

1.3 What about research that doesn't appear in ISI-indexed journals?

In the Social Sciences, it has been estimated that, at best, only 30% of research output appears in ISI-indexed journals, making it harder to provide evidence of quality.

One way to overcome this is to measure the total number of citations (not just those for ISI-indexed journals). One source of such citation counts is Google Scholar (<http://scholar.google.com/>), where typing in the author's name (e.g. NB Smith) gets you a list of a range of publication and citation data.

Another source of information at the level of publications is to look at rankings of journals that have been established by various disciplines. Many such rankings exist, and Heads of Disciplines should be consulted for information on up-to-date and reliable rankings for a specific field of study (e.g. Economics, Finance, Management, Marketing). One reliable source of data on overall rankings in a Business School context is Professor Anne-Wil Harzing from the University of Melbourne. She maintains a consolidated list of business journal rankings performed by a variety of bodies – downloadable from <http://www.harzing.com/resources.htm#/jql.htm>. This includes the ranking used by the University of Queensland Business School. Another easily accessible source of rankings is provided by the Vienna University of Economics & Business Administration at <http://bach.wu-wien.ac.at/bachapp/cgi-bin/fides/fides.aspx?fides.aspx?journal=true;lang=DE>.

1.4 Journal Quality Bands or 'Tiers'

It is common to hear journals described as 'Tier 1' or 'Tier 2' journals. This terminology reflects the fact that there is often widespread agreement within a discipline regarding 'bands' of quality. Thus, while the precise rank ordering of journals based on Impact Factor or Expert Rankings may vary from year to year, certain journals will always be ranked very highly in a discipline and so get labelled as 'Tier 1'.

As a rough guide to 'Tiers', **Tier 1** journals are those that are recognised by a number of sources as being the leading scholarly journals internationally in the business-related disciplines. They almost always have an ISI Impact Factor greater than 1.

Tier 2 journals are still top quality international journals, and good scholars can be expected to publish fairly often at this level. A rough guide to Impact Factor for Tier 2 is that they are typically in the range 0.5 to 0.9.

Tier 3 journals include mainly second-level international journals in established fields, along with the top-level journals in developing fields. It also covers the leading national journals in Australia and New Zealand (many of which are not ISI-indexed). Where they are ISI-indexed, their Impact Factors are generally in the range 0.2 to 0.4.

1.5 What about Books and Book Chapters?

Unlike journals, at the moment no 'easy' way exists to rank non-journal publications. One source that academics might use when making a judgement about which publisher to go with, or which books/chapters to include in their RQF submissions, is the CERES classification scheme² - see <http://ceres.fss.uu.nl>. Once at this site, click

² Centre for Resource Studies for Development, University of Utrecht.

on 'Rating Lists' on the left hand side of the page, under Option 2 select Publishers, then click on Select. You will then get a list of academic publishers ranked from A (highest) to E (lowest).

1.6 'Esteem' Measures

A variety of non-bibliometric indicators may also be used as evidence of the scholarly standing of an individual, an organizational unit, or a particular piece of research³. These may include:

- A count of the number of honours, prizes and awards received by individuals (or pieces of research output).
- Elections to learned academies and academic professional associations
- Invitations to present at conferences (e.g. keynote addresses)
- Service to journals (e.g. as member of editorial board)
- Number of visiting fellowships (both to and from a department or disciplinary group)

2. Assessing Impact

According to the Commonwealth's RQF, "... impact or usefulness relates to the recognition by qualified end-users that quality research has been successfully applied to achieve social, cultural, economic and/or environmental outcomes"⁴

Some possible sources of evidence of research impact are as follows:

- No. of research grants with industry/government/community partners
- No. of media references/appearances
- No. of non-refereed publications intended for user groups
- Technical research reports commissioned by users
- Incorporation of research findings into commercial texts
- Formal presentations to practitioners/users
- Student awareness of research, assessed via SPOT
- Linkages with government
- Citations in government reports and Hansard
- Involvement in policy preparation/research
- Linkages with community
- Advice given to government
- No. of industry consultancies
- Community surveys

³ Donovan, C. & Butler, L. (2005). Testing quantitative indicators of the quality and impact of research in the Social Sciences: A pilot study in economics. REPP Discussion Paper 05/2. <http://repp.anu.edu.au>.

⁴ Expert Advisory Group (2005). Op.cit.