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

The Scopus CSAB and its Role

The Scopus Content Selection & Advisory Board (CSAB) advises Elsevier on the accession and accreditation of peer reviewed journals and other publications onto the world's largest commercial citation system.

The Board 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. The Scopus CSAB is tasked with defining and securing objective measures of quality in the journals whose content is held within SCOPUS, such that users of the system can have confidence in the system and in their searches.

The Board of Subject Chairs has been in existence since 2009. It meets twice a year for two days to discuss a range of topics in respect of a complex system which is in continual evolution. Board members are in regular contact with each other for discussion of particular topics.

In general terms, discussions focus upon:

- The definition and setting of quality standards in the peer reviewed literature
- The development of the Scopus Title Evaluation Platform (STEP) and the development of objective and auditable standards for a wide variety of journals, in assessing their suitability for accession to Scopus
- Policies on Publication Ethics and Malpractice
- Advice and support for the Editors and Publishers of applicant journals
- Policies on the review and retention of journals in SCOPUS
- Strategies for broadening the content of SCOPUS, including Books, Conference Proceedings and Trade Publications.
- Strategies for improving the utility and accessibility of the SCOPUS system

The Scopus CSAB thus seeks:

- To simplify the process of journal accession to SCOPUS
- 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.
- To be fair to those journals which are not immediately accepted for Scopus, through constructive and informative feedback; and through offering journals the opportunity to resubmit when perceived weaknesses have been addressed.
- To acknowledge the hard work of editors/editorial boards/publishers that is achieved in preparation of journals for Scopus inclusion by their acceptance for a pre-determined time period

For more information about the CSAB and its members, see:

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

Quality Standards for Journals in SCOPUS

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 aims to help users and researchers to find the best and most appropriate content as quickly and as efficiently as is possible.

There are some 18,500 journals already accrued within Scopus. Estimates of total numbers of peer reviewed journals and periodicals range from 80,000 to more than 100,000 across the world.

There are thus clear advantages to journals to be included in SCOPUS, in that:

- Their content reaches a target audience with a mark of quality;
- They are able to reach new target audiences and secure a high quality authorship;
- They are supported through the selection process with clear advice and criteria for passing the quality thresholds;
- They can be benchmarked for quality against competitor journals

Quality can often be easier to recognise than to define, and there is inevitably a subjective element to the assessment. In general terms, the quality of a journal is defined by:

- Conformity with established best publication industry practice in respect of formatting;
- Conformity with established best publication ethics and malpractice practice;
- Originality of thought and content;
- Credibility and trustworthiness of content;
- Utility of content to a specialist or general readership;
- Easy accessibility of the journal content to the community it serves

The ultimate measures of the quality of a journal include:

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

Citation Data as Measures of Quality

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 alone.

The Impact Factor remains the leading journal citation and quality metric, but the breadth and depth of data within SCOPUS allows the development of new, more timely and informative metrics, such as SCImago journal ranking. This is a fast changing field.

SCOPUS data also helps inform institutional and national measures of academic productivity, as for example, the 2013-14 UK Research Excellence Framework exercise.

The Scopus Title Evaluation Platform (STEP)

The Scopus Title Evaluation Platform (STEP) is a software system in continuous evolution since 2009.

The New Title Suggestion Process

SCOPUS now has an established process for the Registration and Evaluation of applicant journals, which can be accessed through the web portal at:

<http://suggestor.step.scopus.com/index.cfm>

This portal is directed primarily at Publishers and Editors, who are referred to as Suggestors at this point. The requirements are set out clearly on the Scopus website:

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

Figure 1: The Scopus online title suggestion form

The image shows two overlapping screenshots of the Scopus online title suggestion form. The left screenshot displays the 'Title suggestion agreement' section, which includes a 'Title suggestion agreement' heading, a paragraph explaining the need for full title detail information, and an 'Agreement' section with a checkbox and a list of five minimum criteria for Scopus inclusion. The right screenshot displays the 'Scopus Title Suggestion' form, which includes a 'Please read carefully before completing this form' section with a list of instructions, a 'Contact information' section with various input fields and dropdown menus, and a 'Your relation to the title/journal' section with radio buttons and a text input field. A footnote at the bottom right of the right screenshot explains the 'I am the (co-)editor-in-chief and/or the managing editor' option.

Title suggestion agreement

We ask you to provide full title detail information: all questions in the suggestion form are mandatory, and you must upload sample articles in order to complete the suggestion.

If you are not the publisher or editor of the title, or otherwise in a position to provide all the information you contact the publisher of the title and request that the publisher complete the suggestion form.

Agreement

I am aware of the general guidelines that Scopus uses to select titles.

Scopus only allows titles to be evaluated when they meet the following minimum criteria:

- The title should publish peer reviewed content.
- The title should be published on a regular basis (i.e. have an ISSN that has been registered with the ISSN Centre).
- The title should have English language abstracts.
- The title should have references in Roman script.
- The title should have a publication ethics and publication malpractice statement.

Scopus Title Suggestion

Please read carefully before completing this form

- Please check the [Scopus title list](#) to determine whether the title you wish to suggest is already in Scopus. Please be aware that active Medline-sourced titles (see column M in the title list) may also be suggested for full Scopus coverage.
- New titles are reviewed on a continuous basis by the independent Scopus [Content Selection & Advisory Board](#) (CSAB).
- We strive to evaluate new title suggestions as quickly as possible, however, please allow for several months up to one year for the review process to be completed.
- The CSAB uses sample documents of published content to evaluate the quality of a title. We recommend that a title has been published for at least two years before it is suggested for inclusion in Scopus and we may reject a title suggestion for review if the publication history is too short to review the title.
- You will be asked to provide sample PDFs as a final step in the title suggestion process. **It is not possible to complete the title suggestion process without uploading PDFs.**
- Be aware that the evaluation of a title is not influenced by the number of times it is suggested. Multiple submissions of the same title will only delay the review process.
- Review of your title suggestion does not guarantee selection of the title.

If you have any questions about the evaluation process, you can contact us at titlesuggestion@scopus.com.

Contact information

* Form of address:

* Your first name and/or initials:

* Your surname:

* E-mail address:

* Function:

* My institution has access to Scopus:

Institute:

Country:

* Your relation to the title/journal:

The users of my library read this title

I am the (co-)editor-in-chief and/or the managing editor ¹

I am a member of the editorial (advisory) board

I am the publisher

Other:

¹ Please also check this option if you are in a position similar to the editor-in-chief / managing editor, i.e. carrying main responsibility for

Before suggesting a title you will be asked to confirm that the title meets all of the five minimum criteria for Scopus inclusion:

- The title should publish peer reviewed content.

- The title should be published on a regular basis (i.e. have an ISSN that has been registered with the International ISSN Centre).
- The title should have English language abstracts.
- The title should have references in Roman script.
- The title should have a publication ethics and publication malpractice statement.

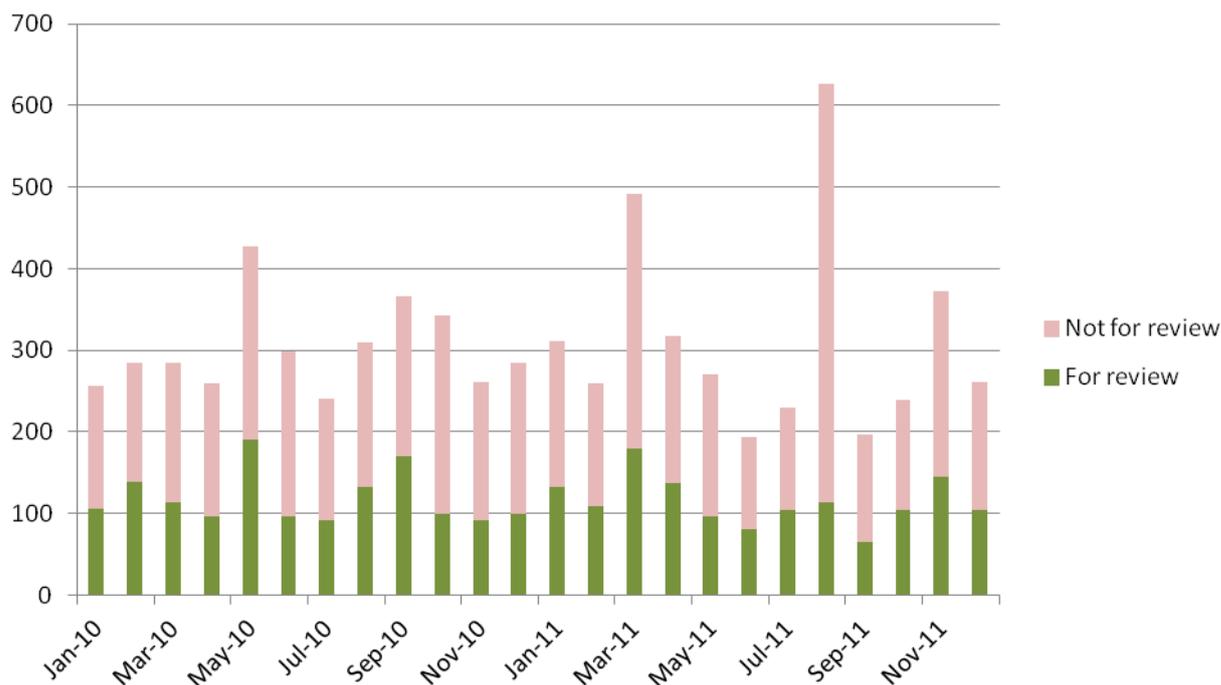
Once these requirements for information and compliance have been met, the Suggested Journal/Title proceeds through the valuation process.

Compliance with international best practice in Publication Ethics

From 2011 onwards, all journals seeking registration and retention on Scopus have been obliged to publish (and by implication to 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

Figure 2: Number of titles suggested for Scopus coverage per month. Titles “For review” do meet the minimum criteria and are processed further for review (2011).



Further Processing of Applicant Journals on STEP

The SCOPUS Administrative Team looks at each application and may request additional information or clarification. When it is satisfied with the information provided, the applicant journal is admitted to the STEP system, where it is reviewed under the direction of the most appropriate CSAB Subject Chair using a combination of quantitative and qualitative measures.

STEP includes a set of objective and auditable criteria by which to measure the quality of applicant journals and those which have already accrued to the system. These criteria are

regularly evaluated and revised where necessary. It also allows reviewers to study a range of metadata about the Journal, and to look at the Journal’s website, the Editors, the members of the Editorial Board, and sample articles in greater detail

Figure 3: A view behind the scenes; the Scopus Title Evaluation Platform (STEP)

The screenshot displays the Scopus Title Evaluation Platform (STEP) interface. At the top, there are logos for SciVerse and Scopus, and the text 'TITLE REVIEW'. Below this is a navigation bar with links: Home | Mailing | History | Preferences | Profile | Help | Logout.

The main content area shows a message: 'This page gives you an overview of the titles currently assigned to you in your role as Subject Chair. Titles for which you have already taken a final decision can be found in the History.' Below this is a section for 'Subject Chair assignments (10)' with a legend:

- ! Finalize date is overdue.
- ⚠ At least one reviewer is overdue.
- ✓ At least one reviewer has finalized his/her vote.

On the left, there is a table of journal assignments:

Title	Primary field	Pub
Revista Romana de Jurnalism si Comunicare (ISSN 1842-256X)	MULTIDISCIPLINARY	Facultatea de Jurnalism si Comunicare, Universitatea din Bucuresti
Journal of Development Communication (ISSN 0128-3863)	MULTIDISCIPLINARY	Asia Pacific Communication Center, The Chinese University of Hong Kong
Open Applied Linguistics Journal (E-ISSN 1874-9135)	MULTIDISCIPLINARY	Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Beer-Sheva
Revista de Gestao (REGE) (ISSN 1809-2276, E-ISSN 2177-8736)	MULTIDISCIPLINARY	Universidade Federal de São Carlos, Faculdade de Engenharia, Departamento de Engenharia de Produção, São Carlos
Quality Innovation Prosperity (ISSN 1335-1745)	MULTIDISCIPLINARY	Tecnological University of Kos, Greece
V Mire Nauchnykh Otkrytiy (ISSN 2072-...)	MULTIDISCIPLINARY	Institute for Information Technologies and Robotics, National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine

The main part of the screenshot shows a detailed view of a journal titled 'International Journal of'. It includes sections for 'General Information', 'Publisher information', and 'Title review'. The 'General Information' section contains:

- Journal subtitle: [Not applicable]
- Released for review: 30-Jul-2012
- Finalize before: 27-Aug-2012
- Publication language(s): [Not applicable]
- Primary field (as determined by Scopus): MULTIDISCIPLINARY
- Main Field(s): MULTIDISCIPLINARY
- ISSN: 2040-2040
- E-ISSN: 2040-2040
- ISBN: [Not applicable]
- Open Access: No
- Subject Chair: [Not applicable]

The 'Publisher information' section includes:

- Primary publisher: [Not applicable]
- Country of publisher: United Kingdom
- Region: Western Europe (incl. Israel)
- Published by learned society: [Not applicable]
- Society acronym: [Not applicable]
- Publishing Ethics statement: Yes (Open publishing ethics statement)

The 'Title review' section on the right shows a 'Subject Chair Decision' and a 'Your scoring progress' bar. Below this is a 'Your review' form with a checkbox 'I will not review this title'. The form includes:

- Journal policy** section with a text area for 'Purpose of the journal (according to publisher/editor):' and a 'Remarks:' field.
- Convincing editorial scope** section with radio buttons for: Not convincing, Poor, Fair, Good, Excellent.
- Type of peer-review** section with radio buttons for: No peer-review, Main-editor peer-review, Open peer-review.
- Fields for 'Start year of current title:' (2010) and 'Start year of first predecessor:' (2010).
- 'History of title:' field with value [Not applicable].

At the bottom right, there is a 'Show notepad' button and a progress bar for 'Your scoring progress'.

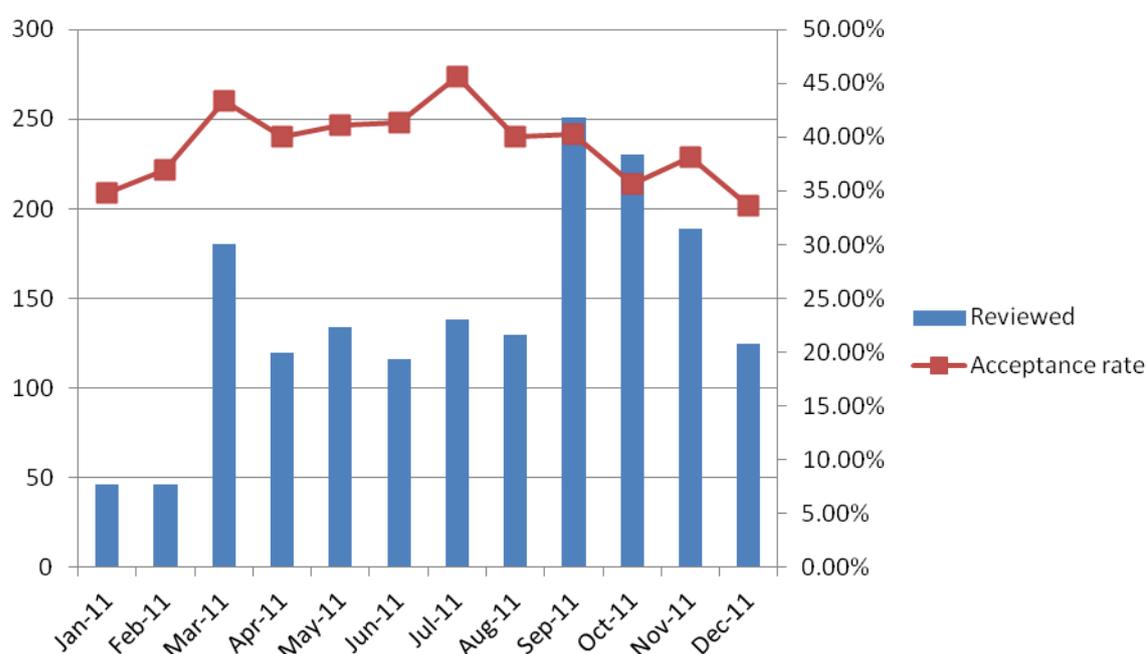
We recommend that a title has published for at least two years before it is suggested for inclusion in Scopus and a title may be rejected for review if the publication history is too short to review the title. Occasionally, titles from institutional or commercial publishers, with a sustained recorded of producing journals possessing exceptional academic and production standards, may be fast tracked to Scopus. Such journals will be reviewed by the CSAB to ensure that they comply with the Scopus acceptance criteria, and that the quality is consistent with the publisher’s reputation.

The Accept, Defer and Reject Decisions

Through STEP, the reviewer(s) will judge both the quality, the durability of each journal, and the accessibility of its content to an international readership. Every effort is made to help each journal to achieve accession to Scopus over time. Of those titles so far reviewed, around 40% have been accepted after evaluation, and a small number are rejected outright for a variety of cogent reasons.

Accession for the other 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.

Figure 4: Number of titles reviewed for Scopus coverage per month and acceptance rate of reviewed titles (2011)



Advice for Editors and Publishers for Title Suggestions to Scopus

We offer the following guidance to enhance the chances of any journal in securing accession to STEP. 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.

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.

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.

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.

Journal websites also inform us about Editorial Board members; the aims and scope of the journal; its publisher and its approach to Publication Ethics and Malpractice. For those journals publishing in languages other than English, multilingual versions of the website can be a powerful marketing and communication tool.

National and Regional Journals

A regional, national or continental focus can sometimes give journals a competitive advantage over truly international journals. Well written, locally orientated material has the potential to make a significant academic contribution to the wider scientific community, whereas "copycat" material which imitates that published in better established and better resourced journals is rarely persuasive. Conversely, international collaboration often improves the impact of a journal.

Institutional Journals

Many of the Journals which are referred to the CSAB for evaluation 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.
- They have a narrow authorship, from within a single institution

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. Evidence of external collaboration and an international perspective improve the chances of inclusion in the SCOPUS database.

Regional and National Journals

A regional, national or continental focus gives such journals a competitive advantage over truly international journals. Well written, locally orientated material has the potential to make a significant academic contribution to the wider scientific community, whereas “copycat” material which imitates that undertaken in better established and better resourced institutions is rarely persuasive. Conversely, international collaboration often improves the impact of a journal.

Broad Content Coverage versus Specialisation

There are a number of international journals which have built their reputations on broad subject coverage within their readership communities. However, for most publishers and their journal editorial boards, subject specialisation offers considerable advantages, in that:

- it defines a target authorship
- It defines a target audience
- it focuses the thinking of the Editors and Publishers

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 XXXXXXX. In practice, this approach is not persuasive as it often seeks to disguise evident weakness in quality, subject coverage, editorship and authorship.

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, in particular if there is also directional similarities. 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 translates into clarity in the journal's aims and scope, editorial direction, editorial board membership, journal authors, author guidelines and publishing ethics standards.

Editorial Vision, 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.

This issue of the specific choice of editorial direction for any one journal is not the remit of this guidance. However, excellence and clarity in the Editorial Strategy determines the publication standards and long term success, and editors are encouraged to develop their professional skills through wide reading around the subject area and through the attendance at Editorial Courses. The CSAB intends to develop access to such resources through the SCOPUS CSAB website.

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
- Concerns about repeated breaches of publication ethics and evidence of publication malpractice.

Criteria and procedures for the review, retention and re-evaluation of failing journals are currently being developed and reviewed by the CSAB. These criteria will be publicised and reported in due course.

Summary and Key Points

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.

- The Scopus Content Selection & Advisory Board, including its international Subject Chairs, advises Elsevier on issues of quality and content arising from accrued and accruing journals.
- Scopus is an abstract and citation database, which seeks competitive value for its users through pre-selection of quality journals and their content.
- The Board seeks to define objective measures of quality with which to prioritise applicant Journals for accession to Scopus, and for retention in it.
- The Board acknowledges the contribution that quality journals make to Scopus as a database through their acceptance following a rigorous review process
- 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 time we anticipate the shortcomings 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 review 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 by email to: titlesuggestion@scopus.com

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Editor, Nurse Education and Practice

On behalf of the Scopus Content Selection and Advisory Board