



AUSTRALIAN BUSINESS DEANS COUNCIL

Australian Business Deans Council

CONSULTATION PAPER

ABDC Journal Quality List: Review of Frequency, Methodology, and Scope

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Introduction

In 2007 the Australian Business Deans Council (ABDC) determined that it would establish a Journal Quality List (JQL) for the use of its members — business faculties and schools in Australia and New Zealand. The ABDC established the list to guide researchers to select quality international and regional outlets for publication of their research.

Since the inaugural ABDC JQL was released in 2008, the list has been the subject of three comprehensive reviews of journal rankings and listings (2010, 2013, 2019) and two interim reviews (2016, 2018). The 2016 review was focused on four scenarios — inclusion of new business relevant journals; removal of very low quality and predatory journals; field of research changes; and correction of factual errors. The 2018 review considered questions of process, procedure and methodology.

The ABDC signalled that it would undertake another methodological review in the report that accompanied the publication of the 2019 JQL. Intended to be completed in 2020, this review has been delayed until 2021 as ABDC-member business schools and stakeholders adjust to the impacts of COVID-19.

Terms of Reference governing the conduct of this review were published on the ABDC website in May 2021.¹ The review invites submissions on seven topics that are discussed in this consultation paper:

1. Value and purpose of the JQL
2. Frequency of review
3. Conduct of review
4. Factors that determine journal quality
5. JQL coverage
6. Consideration of other lists
7. Thresholds for journal rankings.

In this review, submissions are invited from:

- Academics with formal affiliations to universities in Australia, New Zealand, and internationally that have a legitimate interest in the disciplines covered by the ABDC list
- Schools or faculties that have a legitimate interest in the disciplines covered by the ABDC list
- Publishers
- Industry and professional associations.

¹ For details, see <https://abdc.edu.au/research/abdc-journal-quality-list/>

Process: 2019 JQL Review

Completing a comprehensive journal rankings review is a multi-stage process involving broad stakeholder consultation and expert review of journal rankings in each field of research (FoR) that the JQL covers. The list is also reviewed by an external Steering Group to ensure validity and consistency of rankings decisions across the list.

The process behind the 2019 JQL Review was indicative of the process adopted by the ABDC in prior reviews.

February	Terms of Reference for 2019 JQL Review endorsed by ABDC Executive Committee and published on the ABDC website.
February to May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expert Panels in each Field of Research (FOR) appointed following a call for expressions of interest. JQL Steering Group comprising representatives from academia and industry appointed.
May	<p>Public online submission process opened. Relevant stakeholders* invited to submit to the ABDC for consideration:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proposed new journal — Form A Downgrade of existing ranked journal — Form B Upgrade of existing ranked journal — Form C Change of Field of Research classification — Form D.
June to August	FoR Expert Panels reviewed submissions from relevant stakeholders to determine Draft 2019 JQL. Panels were required to meet a minimum of three times.
September	Draft 2019 JQL released for consultation on the ABDC website.
October	Feedback on draft 2019 JQL reviewed by FoR Panel Chairs, with recommendations provided to ABDC JQL Steering Group.
November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meeting of ABDC JQL Steering Group to review recommended journal ranking provided by FoR Panels. Endorsement of 2019 JQL and Review Report by ABDC Executive Committee.
December	Publication of 2019 JQL and Review Report.

**Relevant stakeholders* were defined in the 2019 review as belonging to one of the following groups:



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- Business schools or faculties located in Australia or New Zealand (ANZ), or non-business schools or faculties in ANZ deemed to have a legitimate interest in the disciplines covered by the ABDC list.
- Relevant peak bodies representing ANZ academics (where such a body is primarily located in ANZ).
- Individual or groups of like-minded academics with formal affiliation(s) to a university/universities based in ANZ. Each signatory must have a relevant minimum of 0.4 FTE position.

Consultation topics

1. Value and purpose of the JQL

The ABDC Journal Quality List (JQL) was first published in 2008. The rationale for establishing a journal quality list was to promote the calibration of research quality expectations among ABDC-member business schools through the establishment of peer-driven rankings with a distinctly Australian and New Zealand focus. While valuable resources, available international lists had shortcomings such as regional biases, insufficient coverage of Australian and New Zealand journals, and in some cases evaluation criteria that worked against specific disciplines. The ABDC recognised that establishing a JQL would go some way toward building a consensus on publication quality applicable to Australian and New Zealand business schools.

The ABDC JQL is intended as a starting point for assessing publication quality, providing a valuable indication of how highly regarded a journal is by peers. The ABDC does not intend for the list to constrain researchers to a particular domain. In the end, there is no substitute for assessing individual articles on a case-by-case basis.

For the ABDC, a motivation for conducting the current review is to gain a deeper understanding of the list's value to a broad spectrum of users including ABDC-member business schools, publishers, industry and professional bodies, and other international stakeholders.

Consultation question:

1. What value does the ABDC JQL provide?

For example:

- *Do the benefits of having the list outweigh the costs to stakeholders of undertaking the review?*

2. Frequency of review

Since the first ABDC JQL in 2008, the list has been the subject of three comprehensive reviews that considered revision of journal rankings and listings (2010, 2013, 2019) and two interim reviews that considered revisions based on four defined scenarios (2016: see p. 2), and questions of process, procedure and methodology (2018).

The ABDC's approach to journal rankings reviews is to undertake whole-of-list reviews periodically, rather than allow for constant, iterative changes to the list. The rationale for this approach is to:

- Ensure a high level of procedural consistency by convening review panels to assess journal rankings across FoR codes at a single point in time.
- Recognise the inherent stickiness of journal rankings — changes to the ABDC JQL from the 2008 list have been incremental in nature, building the list's robustness over time.
- Appropriately manage the resources of the ABDC and its stakeholders — to deliver procedural consistency and methodological rigour, reviews of journal rankings and listings necessarily are very resource intensive.

The limitations of this approach include:

- Possible prejudice against new publications — review panels manage this by ranking new journals where there is compelling evidence of a journal's trajectory.
- Journals remaining on the list that have been identified as predatory, or precipitously dropping in overall quality.
- Textual changes, such as new titles or changes of publisher, not being promptly captured.

In respect of the next full list review, two approaches are proposed in the Terms of Reference for the current consultation:

1. Undertake a full review in 2022
2. Carry out an interim review in 2022 and defer the next full review to 2024

Taking account of the above, including the options for the next full review, the ABDC seeks stakeholder views on whether the current approach to frequency of list reviews is appropriate.

Consultation question:

2. How frequently should the JQL be subjected to review?

For example:

- *Is the current approach of conducting interim and comprehensive reviews sufficient?*
- *Should an interim or comprehensive review be conducted in 2022, and what factors should determine this?*

3. Conduct of review

A central feature of the methodology of previous ABDC JQL reviews is that journal quality ratings are validated by Expert Panels. For the 2019 review, expert panels were appointed for each FoR that the JQL covers, with panel members identified through an expression of interest process open to academics in Australian and New Zealand business schools.

Recommendations for Expert Panel appointments were made by the BARsNet Chair and endorsed by the ABDC Executive Committee. Factors such as institutional affiliation, subject matter expertise, and gender diversity were taken into account to ensure that panel deliberations captured a broad-based peer assessment of journal quality.

As described on pp. 3–4, the ABDC invited submissions from relevant stakeholders, being Australian and New Zealand business schools and academics, and peak bodies representing ANZ academics. In the initial phase, which led to the publication of a draft 2019 ABDC JQL, submissions were invited to collect information about proposed new journals (Form A), downgrade of existing ranked journal (Form B), upgrade of existing ranked journal (Form C), and change of Field of Research classification (Form D).

In applying relevant stakeholder criteria, some submissions to the 2019 review were rejected. Primarily, these were submissions made by academics with no recognised affiliation with an ANZ business school. Anonymous and/or frivolous submissions were likewise rejected.

The ABDC also cross-checked journal titles in the proposed list against the Cabells' Predatory Reports to ensure that they were not predatory.

Recommendations of the Expert Panels were subject to external validation in two stages. First, the ABDC released the draft 2019 JQL for a one-month consultation period. Second, the final draft list, incorporating changes made by the Expert Panels following public consultation on the draft 2019 JQL, was reviewed by an independent Steering Group comprised of representatives from academia (including one international academic) none of whom were members of any of the Expert Panels. The Steering Group was tasked with ensuring that rankings decisions were made consistently and in accordance with the Terms of Reference across all FoRs.

Consultation question:

3. How should reviews of journal rankings be conducted?

For example:

- *Should reviews be conducted by panels of academic experts in each field of research that the list covers? If so, how should these panels be appointed?*
- *Who should qualify to make submissions to the review?*
- *Is there an alternative process to conduct rankings reviews that the ABDC should consider?*

4. Factors that determine journal quality

While citation metrics and impact factors are valuable tools for assessing journal quality, peer judgments also play a critical role in adducing the quality of a journal. It is these peer-based assessments of journal quality that the ABDC JQL and similar lists seek to capture.

In the 2019 JQL review, and prior reviews, Expert Panels were expected to be informed by globally recognised and externally validated journal ranking lists (e.g., CABS, FT, and UT Dallas Top 100), appropriate and select citation metrics (e.g., SCImago) and, if required, expert peer review.

As noted in the report accompanying the 2013 JQL review, marginal decisions on inclusion and ranking of journals are made through the lens of ABDC members, being the primary users of the list. This approach has endured in subsequent reviews. For this reason, non-inclusion in the ABDC JQL should not necessarily be interpreted as a reflection of journal quality — it may reflect other issues such as the title not meeting the ABDC's criteria for inclusion.²

Consultation question:

4. What factors should determine journal quality ratings?

For example:

- *How should citation metrics and impact factors be used to inform a peer-based review of journal quality?*

5. JQL coverage

The 2019 JQL and previous editions of the list adopt the Australian and New Zealand Standard Research Classification (ANZSRC) codes to categorise journals according to their field of research at the 4-digit or group level. The 2019 JQL covers all 4-digit codes in division 14 (Economics) and division 15 (Commerce, Management, Tourism and Services). In

² This point is also made by the CABS Academic Journal Guide <https://charteredabs.org/academic-journal-guide-2018/>



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addition, the 2019 JQL covers FoR codes 0104 (Statistics), 0806 (Information Systems), 180105 (Commercial and Contract Law), and 180125 (Taxation Law), recognising the substantive relevance of these disciplines to business research.

Approaches to the JQL's coverage have changed over time, allowing for greater flexibility in incorporating journal titles with demonstrated relevance to ABDC-member business schools. The first iteration of the JQL included an interdisciplinary category. This category was removed in the 2010 review, with many of the titles previously classified as interdisciplinary moved to a field of research code with broad alignment. For example, Actuarial Sciences titles were listed under 1502 (Finance), and Applied Psychology titles listed under 1503 (Business and Management).

In 2013 the criteria for inclusion of new titles were further clarified through the introduction of the "substantial business element" test. This test is met when a journal publishes >50% of articles over 3 years written by business faculty, or >50% of articles over 3 years being of a business nature. The substantial business element test has been adopted in subsequent list reviews.

After the release of the 2019 JQL, the ANZSRC classifications were reviewed, resulting in changes to the FoR codes not captured in the current list.³ As explained under "Frequency of review" (above), there are two possible approaches to incorporating these classification changes: either through a full review in 2022, or an interim review in 2022 followed by a full review in 2024.

Consultation question:

5. Which specific fields of research should be covered in the JQL?

For example:

- *Does the list adequately reflect the breadth of research undertaken by business academics?*
- *Is the >50% threshold in the business element test appropriate?*

6. Consideration of other lists

As noted, a motivation for developing the ABDC JQL was to address the issue of inadequate coverage of Australian and New Zealand journals in established international journal lists, such as the CABs and FT lists, by creating a measure of journal quality applicable to ABDC-member business schools.

³ For details, see <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/classifications/australian-and-new-zealand-standard-research-classification-anzsrc/2020>

Given the geographical and discipline focus of the ABDC JQL, a consideration for previous JQL review panels has been the extent to which they weight comparable journal quality lists in their deliberations over rankings. Because the JQL has been developed for ABDC-member business schools, expert panels across list reviews have been cognisant of the list's ANZ focus where competing objectives are in conflict.

Consultation question:

6. To what extent should other journal quality lists (e.g. FT, CABs) be taken into account in reviews of the ABDC JQL?

7. Thresholds for journal rankings

Thresholds for rankings in the ABDC JQL are expressed as a percentage of titles across the list as a whole:

- A* journals should comprise between 5 and 7% of listed titles
- A journals should comprise between 15 and 25% of listed titles
- B journals should comprise between 25 and 40% of listed titles
- C journals should comprise the remainder of listed titles

The ABDC does not publish indicative criteria of journal attributes for each ranking. Rather, in methodology approved for the 2019 JQL review, all listed journals must have met the following criteria:

- Have reached the necessary quality threshold level, as determined by the Expert Panel using globally accepted, externally validated journal ranking lists, journal citation metrics and expert peer review.
- Adhere to general scholarly principles, including scholarly peer review.
- Be relevant to the discipline areas of the ABDC, which include Management, Accounting, Economics, Information Systems, Business and Taxation Law and other agreed Fields of Research (FoRs).
- Not appear to be a predatory journal.

Following the 2018 Methodology Review, the ABDC did not endorse the recommendation that the JQL add a new category A** to recognise elite journals.

Over time, the number of titles in the ABDC JQL has expanded. The ABDC has sought to guard against ranking inflation, by keeping the percentage of A* journals generally consistent across iterations of the list.

Year	Total titles (#)	A* (%)	A (%)	B (%)	C (%)
2010	2671	5.5	19.5	27.6	47.4
2013	2767	6.9	20.8	28.4	43.9
2016	2777	6.9	21.1	29.0	42.9
2019	2,682	7.4	24.3	31.7	36.6

Consultation question:

7. Are the current percentage thresholds for A* (5–7% of listed journals), A (15–25%), B (25–40%), and C (remainder) journals appropriate?



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Make a submission

You are invited to make a submission on the questions raised in this Consultation Paper through the online form on the ABDC website <https://abdc.edu.au/research/abdc-journal-quality-list/>.

Responses are limited to 300 words per question. **Anonymous submissions will not be accepted.** The ABDC will disregard submissions that:

- Propose changes to the 2019 JQL or seek to contest or recontest ratings under the 2019 JQL.
- Propose revised journal ratings, new outlets, or removal of specific outlets in any future review.
- Engage in any commentary directed at individuals involved in, or the process surrounding, previous JQL exercises.

Submissions are invited from:

- Academics with formal affiliations to universities in Australia, New Zealand, and internationally that have a legitimate interest in the disciplines covered by the ABDC list
- Schools or faculties that have a legitimate interest in the disciplines covered by the ABDC list
- Publishers
- Industry and professional associations.

Submissions will close at 11:59pm AEST on 18 August 2021.

Consultation questions

1. What value does the ABDC JQL provide?
2. How frequently should the JQL be subjected to review?
3. How should reviews of journal rankings be conducted?
4. What factors should determine journal quality ratings?
5. Which specific fields of research should be covered in the JQL?
6. To what extent should other journal quality lists (e.g. FT, CABs) be taken into account in reviews of the ABDC JQL?
7. Are the current percentage thresholds for A* (5–7% of listed journals), A (15–25%), B (25–40%), and C (remainder) journals appropriate?