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## Editorial 26(3)

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### AJET 26(3) published: Matters arising

Roger Atkinson

Here is a complimentary snippet arising from our recent "Advice to authors" email, announcing the publication of AJET 26(3) on 16 May 2010 [1]:

Thanks for the quick turnaround time! I'm already disseminating this through *Facebook* and *Twitter*. From your editorial, I take it you still don't have a value for the impact factor of AJET? [2]

Firstly, it's rather nice to receive a "Thanks for the quick turnaround time!", though to put the praise into context, it's probable that the author was referring to a quick, 'same night' correction of an error in the spelling of one author's name. You have to be quick with such corrections, a *Google* bot seems to scan AJET at intervals of about 5-7 days! On the matter of turnaround times for AJET's review process, a full report will appear later in 2010, but to give a brief summary, we are overcoming the backlog that arose from a larger than expected commitment to *ascilite Auckland 2009* [3], a 46% increase in the number of AJET submissions in 2009 compared with 2008 [4], and reduced availability of reviewers during the summer break. Currently the review process turnaround times are mostly in the range 5-7 months, trending slowly towards our desired benchmark of three months maximum. We expect to attain benchmark by about the end of July, notwithstanding the current indication that the number of submissions in 2010 will be 15% larger than the number in 2009. The main corrective measure to date has been "Withdrawing the Production Editor from *ascilite* Conference duties...", as announced in AJET Editorial 25(5) [5].

Secondly, AJET's *Impact Factor* is "pending". No change, we regret, it has been "pending" for some years, as detailed in a number of AJET Editorials [6, 7, 8]. We are uncertain about the starting year for Thomson Reuters' listing of AJET, and therefore we are uncertain about the date for first appearance of AJET's *Impact Factor*.

The *Impact Factor* for AJET has not been on our minds in recent times, mainly because the Australian Research Council's "ERA" process [9] adopted Elsevier's *Scopus* [10] as the "Citation Supplier" [11], a change away from the ARC's earlier learning towards

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the Thomson Reuters products, which include the *Impact Factor* [12]. We could hypothesise that the ARC is beginning to distance itself from the problems of trying to derive a research excellence metric from a metric for the journal in which the research was published. Perhaps it is moving towards *citation counts* for individual authors as the basis for a research excellence metric [13]. To put it into a somewhat journalistic frame, the ARC may be moving away from the negativist implications in “judging you by the company you keep”, towards a more positivist perspective that recognises the numbers of readers who have indicated (by their citations) that “your work helps to progress my research”.

Nevertheless, revisiting the Thomson Reuters *Impact Factor* could be useful, in order to check the goodness of correlation between the ARC’s *Tiers* ranking [14] and the rankings according to the *Impact Factor*. To begin with, we have to explain why Table 1 below does not quote any *Impact Factor* data. We noted the following paragraph on the website *Journal Quality List* [15] published by Anne-Wil Harzing, Professor in International Management at the University of Melbourne:

Note - The editor regrets to inform users of the Journal Quality List that Thomson Scientific Inc. have requested removal of the Journal Impact Factor scores from the JQL. Please destroy any previous versions of the JQL in your possession. Thomson Scientific Inc. remind academics and universities that they do not permit any republication or re-use of their Impact Factor lists. [15]

The Note appears to be dated March 2005, and contains an earlier name, Thomson Scientific. Heeding the Note, in Table 1 we do not quote any *Impact Factor* data. To obtain the data, readers may use the hypertext links to the individual journal sites listed in Table 1. It’s OK for journals to quote their own *IFs*, just do not quote any other journal’s *IF*!

Table 1 is only a small sample from the ARC’s listing of some 20712 *Tiers* ranked journals [17]. Nevertheless it may indicate that the correlation between *Impact Factor* ranking and *Tiers 2010* ranking is “reasonably good”, though with a small proportion of poor correlates such as *Educational Technology & Society*. Of course, a



MoodleMoot AU 2010, Melbourne, 11-14 July. <http://moodlemoot.org.au/>

“reasonably good” correlation is what we could expect to find. Also, as it does seem to us that Thomson Reuters is working on reducing the number of “Not ranked” journals, we cannot place emphasis upon those gaps. We can surmise perhaps that Thomson Reuters were a little slow to accelerate away from “selectivity” (with a scientific, technical and medical orientation) and into “comprehensiveness” of coverage.

Table 1: Comparing *Impact Factor* and *Tiers* rankings for some journals

Journal	<i>Impact Factor</i> (a)	Rank order (b)	<i>Tiers</i> 2010 (c)	URL for obtaining <i>Impact Factor</i>
Computers & Education	Yes	1	A	<a href="http://www.elsevier.com/locate/issn/03601315">http://www.elsevier.com/locate/issn/03601315</a>
J. of Computer Assisted Learning	Yes	2	A	<a href="http://www.wiley.com/bw/journal.asp?ref=0266-4909">http://www.wiley.com/bw/journal.asp?ref=0266-4909</a>
British J. of Educational Technology	Yes	3	A	<a href="http://www.wiley.com/bw/journal.asp?ref=0007-1013">http://www.wiley.com/bw/journal.asp?ref=0007-1013</a>
Instructional Science	Yes	4	A	<a href="http://www.springer.com/education+%26+language/learning+%26+instruction/journal/11251">http://www.springer.com/education+%26+language/learning+%26+instruction/journal/11251</a>
Educational Technology & Society	Yes	5	B	<a href="http://www.ifets.info/others/">http://www.ifets.info/others/</a>
Educational Technology, Research & Development	Yes	6	A	<a href="http://www.springer.com/east/home/education/learning+%26+instruction?SGWID=5-40666-70-50612191-detailsPage=journal%2Fdescription">http://www.springer.com/east/home/education/learning+%26+instruction?SGWID=5-40666-70-50612191-detailsPage=journal%2Fdescription</a>
ALT-J: Research in Learning Technol.	No	Not ranked	A	<a href="http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/titles/09687769.asp">http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/titles/09687769.asp</a>
Australasian J. of Educ. Technology	No (pending)	Not ranked	B	<a href="http://www.ascilite.org.au/ajet/">http://www.ascilite.org.au/ajet/</a>
J. of Technology & Teacher Education	No	Not ranked	B	<a href="http://www.ace.org/pubs/jtate/">http://www.ace.org/pubs/jtate/</a>
Technology, Pedagogy & Education	No	Not ranked	B	<a href="http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/titles/1475939X.asp">http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/titles/1475939X.asp</a>
Australian Educational Computing	No	Not ranked	C	<a href="http://www.acce.edu.au/JournalDB/Publication.asp?JournalID=1">http://www.acce.edu.au/JournalDB/Publication.asp?JournalID=1</a>
Asia-Pacific J. of Teacher Education	No	Not ranked	A*	<a href="http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/titles/1359866X.asp">http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/titles/1359866X.asp</a>
Higher Educ. Res. and Development	No (pending)	Not ranked	A	<a href="http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/titles/07294360.asp">http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/titles/07294360.asp</a>

Notes:

a. Based on statements appearing (or not appearing!) on journal websites.  
 b. Ranked according to *IF* values as published at the URLs listed in column 5 (May 2010).  
 c. ARC *Tier* rankings may be obtained conveniently from [16].

However, a “reasonably good” correlation between *Impact Factor* ranking and *Tiers* 2010 ranking provides no help at all with the all important correlation: “What is the correlation between the real merit of a research work and the tier ranking of the journal in which the work was published?” [18]



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[http://www.flexiblelearning.net.au/  
content/e-portfolios-australia](http://www.flexiblelearning.net.au/content/e-portfolios-australia)

### The ranking of refereed conference publications: Matters arising

In Editorial 25(4), *Questions about the ranking of refereed conference publications*, we outlined a dilemma for authors, illustrated by the question, "... shall I submit my research paper to AJET, or to ascilite Auckland 2009? Which one will be better for my research profile when 2009 data is collected?" [19]. In Editorial 25(5) we reported that an attempt by ascilite's Executive to obtain clarification and guidance from the Australian Research Council was unsuccessful [20]. Now we need to reiterate that the matter is also a dilemma for reviewers, editors and senior academics. This is illustrated by the following comment from Professor Alan Farley, after AJET had declined a submission from members of his department because it was deemed to be an insufficient advance upon a refereed full paper already published in an *ascilite Conference Proceedings*:

- >In the past I have always encouraged my staff to present papers at
- >conferences whenever possible. I did this on the basis that I saw
- >conferences as a good way to get feedback on a paper aimed at journal
- >publication, and to network. I had also done that on the basis that I
- >had never before encountered a case where a journal article had been
- >rejected solely on the basis that it was too similar to a conference
- >paper.
- >
- >With the new ERA and its refusal to accept most conference papers as
- >publications I am very disturbed by the possibility that what has
- >happened in this case might become a common practice. If it were to do
- >so I would have to start insisting that my staff refuse conference
- >organisers the right to publish their papers to avoid any risk that they
- >might lose a recognised publication as a result (both ERA and internally
- >as universities align their internal processes to the ERA). [21]

The review advice to the authors in this case included an additional paragraph:

Normally we aim for "double blind" reviewing, but in this case we felt that it was appropriate to ask the Reviewer to read your ascilite [year deleted] paper in order to give an opinion on the question of whether the AJET submission makes a sufficient advance upon the [year deleted] paper. [22]

The dilemma for senior academics is to discern the best advice to give to junior colleagues, under the conditions of uncertainty engendered by the ARC's ERA initiative [9]. The dilemma for reviewers is receiving a "non-blind" review, though AJET always states that reviewers may opt out if they feel that their objectivity has been compromised by knowing the identities of the authors. For editors, there are two dilemmas. Firstly, whether to advise reviewers about the previous publication, or not advise? The latter option is unattractive because a reviewer may recognise the paper, from attendance at the conference or a knowledge of the conference proceedings



in which the paper was first published. Secondly, whether to change or not change journal guidelines about republication? AJET's guidelines on republication [23] include the clause:

... the first publication was not subject to an ARC-compliant peer review process and the author deserves a chance to get the 'brownie points' (applicable only for authors employed at Australian universities) [23]

We agree wholeheartedly with Alan's comment about "conferences as a good way to get feedback on a paper aimed at journal publication". Therefore we do need to review AJET's republication guidelines, though we are likely to continue to place weight upon another clause, "an expanded, updated, corrected or otherwise improved version" [23]. In the past we have suggested or even recommended that authors of *ascilite Conference* papers consider the following advice [19, 24]:

We offer a general recommendation to authors who in the future may wish to submit a version of their work to a journal. This is, please consider the concise paper and poster categories. We expect that acceptance in these categories will optimise your scope for a subsequent submission of an expanded, later version to a journal. In general, journal editors are likely to be impressed favourably by your disclosure (e.g. in an acknowledgment paragraph) that a preliminary version was accepted at *ascilite Auckland 2009*. Whilst editorial policies vary considerably, and for definitive advice authors should consult the editors of the journal concerned, in general, publication of a full paper in *ascilite Proceedings Auckland 2009* is likely to preclude publication of the same work in a journal. [19, 24]

To summarise, there are unresolved dilemmas in refereed conference publication and its relationship to journal publication. We thank Alan for a broadening of the dimensions of the dilemma, although at this stage we cannot offer any definitive or really helpful advice for junior researchers. As we acknowledged in our reply to Alan [25]:

Your email summarises very well one group or class of "perverse unintended consequences" in relation to conference registrations and the problem of journals being swamped with a deluge of conference papers. [25]

Roger Atkinson and Catherine McLoughlin  
AJET Production Editor and AJET Editor

## Endnotes

1. AJET 26(3) was published during the evening of 16 May 2010, and "Advice to authors" was emailed same night. <http://www.ascilite.org.au/ajet/>
2. Email to the Production Editor, dated 16 May 2010.
3. *Same places, different spaces. Proceedings ascilite Auckland 2009.* <http://www.ascilite.org.au/conferences/auckland09/procs/>
4. For numbers of submissions to AJET and review process outcomes see Editorial 25(2). <http://www.ascilite.org.au/ajet/ajet25/editorial25-2.html> (the next edition of the review outcomes data table will appear in AJET 26(4), together with the Special Issue Editorial advice).
5. AJET Editorial 25(5) (2009). <http://www.ascilite.org.au/ajet/ajet25/editorial25-5.html>
6. AJET Editorial 25(3) (2009). Report on progress with *Abstracted & Indexed In ...* <http://www.ascilite.org.au/ajet/ajet25/editorial25-3.html>
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16. Lamp, J. (2010). ERA Current Rankings Access. <http://lamp.infosys.deakin.edu.au/era/> [viewed 17 May 2010; John Lamp's service is helpful for those who find the ARC's 5.27 MB file [17] too cumbersome and slow to handle on their personal computers].
17. ARC (2010). [http://www.arc.gov.au/xls/ERA2010\\_journal\\_title\\_list.xls](http://www.arc.gov.au/xls/ERA2010_journal_title_list.xls) (Excel format, 5.27 MB, apparently dated 9 February 2010)
18. AJET Editorial 26(2) (2010). Beauty is in the eye of the beholder. <http://www.ascilite.org.au/ajet/ajet26/editorial26-2.html>
19. AJET Editorial 25(4) (2009). Questions about the ranking of refereed conference publications. <http://www.ascilite.org.au/ajet/ajet25/editorial25-4.html>
20. AJET Editorial 25(5) (2009). Revisiting *Questions about the ranking of refereed conference publications*. <http://www.ascilite.org.au/ajet/ajet25/editorial25-5.html>
21. Email to AJET Editors, from Professor Alan Farley, Victoria University, 2 Feb 2010 (quoted by permission).
22. Extract from AJET running files, date withheld.
23. AJET: FAQs - frequently answered questions. <http://www.ascilite.org.au/ajet/about/ref/faqs1.html#republication>
24. ascilite Auckland 2009. Call for proposals -> Review procedure. <http://www.ascilite.org.au/conferences/auckland09/?m=Call-for-proposals>
25. Email from Production Editor to Alan Farley, 2 Feb 2010. For the source of the phrase "perverse unintended consequences", see references cited in [19].



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