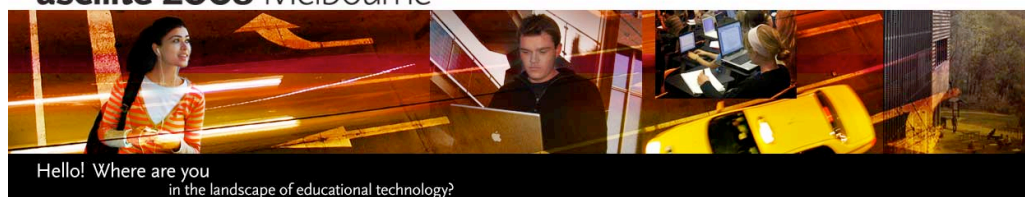




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For editorial inquiries, contact the Editor, Associate Professor Catherine McLoughlin, School of Education (ACT), Australian Catholic University, PO Box 256, Dickson ACT 2602, Australia. Email: C.McLoughlin@signadou.acu.edu.au, Tel: +61 2 6209 1100 Fax +61 2 6209 1185.

For review process, production, website and business matters, contact the Production Editor, Dr Roger Atkinson, 5/202 Coode Street, Como WA 6152, Australia. Email: rjatkinson@bigpond.com, Tel: +61 8 9367 1133. Desktop publishing (PDF versions) and HTML by Roger Atkinson.

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Editorial

Blood, sweat and four tiers revisited

Although the RQF has been replaced by ERA [1, 2], a very significant part of the RQF agenda, from the perspective of AJET, has lived to rule another day: the *Four Tiers!* In AJET Editorial 23(4) [3] we predicted that

As all authors will tend to make the initial submissions of their work to a Tier A* (top 5%) or Tier A (next 15%) journal, the years ahead for editors and journals are likely to be years of blood, sweat and four tiers [4]

Table 1 revisits the matter of *Four Tiers* for educational technology and computing journals, or *For 130306* (note b. for Table 1) in a new classification of research fields.

Table 1: Details for 37 For 130306 journals (Educational Technology and Computing) (a-g)

Journal and URL	Tier	SORTI QScore	OA #	Impact Factor	Internat Board
British J. of Educational Technology (BJET) http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/journal/117984068/home	A*	20.72	No 6	Yes 0.406	Yes
Computers & Education. (C&E) http://www.elsevier.com/locate/issn/03601315	A*	19.98	No 8	Yes 1.602	Yes
Australasian J. of Educational Technology (AJET) http://www.ascilite.org.au/ajet/ [online only]	A	17.86	Yes (5-6)	Start 2007	Pend- ing
ALT-J: Research in Learning Technology. http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/titles/09687769.asp	A	16.96	No 3	No	Yes
J. of Computer Assisted Learning. http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/journal/118532949/home	A	15.81	No 6	Yes 0.532	Yes
Australian Educational Computing. http://www.ace.edu.au/JournalDB/Publication.asp?journalID=1	A	14.28	Yes 2	No	No
Educational Technology & Society. (ETS) http://www.ifets.info/others/ [online only]	A	13.95	Yes 4	Yes 0.469	Yes
J. of Technology & Teacher Education. http://www.ace.org/pubs/jtate/	A	13.61	No 4	No	Yes
Technology, Pedagogy & Education. http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/titles/1475939X.asp	A	12.82	No 3	No	Yes
Educational Technology, Research & Development. (ETRD) http://www.springer.com/east/home/education/learning+%26+instruction?SGWID=5-40666-70-50612191-detailsPage=journal%20description	A	12.81	No 6	Yes	No
E-learning. http://www.wwwords.co.uk/elea/ [online only]	B	12.36	No 4	No	Yes
International J. of Educational Technology http://www.ascilite.org.au/ajet/ijet/ [ceased]	B	12.36	Yes -	No	Yes
J. of Research on Technology in Education. http://www.iste.org/jrte/	B	12.36	No 4	No	Yes
J. of Interactive Learning Research. http://www.ace.org/pubs/jilr/	B	11.86	No 4	No	Yes
Interactive Learning Environments. http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t716100701	B	11.76	No 3	Yes 0.300	Yes
Computer Assisted Language Learning. http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t716100697	C	10.62	No 5	No	Yes
Innovations in Education & Teaching Internat. http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/routledge/14703297.html	B	10.26	No 4	Yes 0.103	Yes
International J. of Computers for Mathematical Learning. http://www.springerlink.com/content/102910/	B	9.83	No 3	No	Yes
Electronic J. for the Integration of Technology in Education http://ejite.isu.edu/ [online only]	B	8.87	Yes 1	No	No

Information Technology, Education & Society. http://www.jamesnicholaspublishers.com.au/itesjrnl.htm	B	8.87	No 2	No	Yes
International J. on E-learning. http://www.aace.org/pubs/ijel/	B	8.87	No 4	No	Yes
The Internet and Higher Education. http://www.elsevier.com/wps/find/journaldescription.cws_home/620187/description#description	B	8.87	No 4	No	Yes
J. of Educational Multimedia & Hypermedia. http://www.aace.org/pubs/JEMH/	B	8.87	No 4	No	Yes
J. of Computers in Mathematics & Science Teaching. http://www.aace.org/pubs/jcmst/	B	8.87	No 4	No	Yes
J. of Computing in Higher Education. http://www.jchesite.org/	B	8.87	No 2	No	Yes
Journal of Instructional Science and Technology http://www.ascilite.org.au/ajet/e-jist/ [ceased]	B	8.04	Yes -	No	Yes
International J. of Artificial Intelligence in Education http://aied.inf.ed.ac.uk/	C	7.64	No 4	No	Yes
Internat. J. of Information & Communication Technol Educ. http://www.igi-pub.com/journals/details.asp?id=4287	C	7.64	No 4	No	Yes
J. of Information Systems Education http://www.jise.appstate.edu/	C	7.64	No 4	No	Yes
Contemporary Issues in Technology & Teacher Educ. http://www.aace.org/pubs/cite/ [online only]	C	7.61	Yes 4	No	?
Computers in the Schools. http://www.haworthpress.com/store/product.asp?sku=J025	C	6.82	No 4	No	No
Learning, Media & Technology. http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/titles/17439884.asp	C	5.92	No 4	No	Yes
Computers in Education Journal. http://www.asee.org/publications/divisions/coed.cfm	C	5.86	No 4	No	No
International J. of Interactive Technology & Smart Education. http://www.troubador.co.uk/itse/	C	5.92	No 4	No	Yes
J. of Interactive Media in Education. http://www-jime.open.ac.uk/ [online only]	C	5.92	Yes n.a.	No	Yes
J. of Asynchronous Learning Networks. http://www.sloan-c.org/publications/jaln/	C	4.63	Yes 4	No	Yes
J. of Educational Computing Research. http://www.baywood.com/journals/previewjournals.asp?id=0735-6331	C	4.63	No 8	No	Yes

Notes:

- An earlier version of Table 1, based upon *Esteem ranking*, was presented in AJET Editorial 23(4). <http://www.ascilite.org.au/ajet/ajet23/editorial23-4.html>
- Field of Research data (FoR) obtained from Australian Bureau of Statistics (2008). 1297.0 - *Australian and New Zealand Standard Research Classification (ANZSRC), 2008*. <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/A9212546B8AF3694CA2574180004A055?opendocument> (several journals belong in categories other than 130306 Educational Technology and Computing)
- Tier values from http://www.arc.gov.au/zip/era_journal_Ranking.zip (extracts to ERA Research Journal Ranking Workbook.xls, dated 13 June 2008)
- SORTI Q scores from SORTI (2007). Education journals listed alphabetically showing QScore and Area. http://www.newcastle.edu.au/centre/sorti/files/QScore_Nov_2007.pdf
- OA indicates open access status; # indicates the number of issues per year.
- Impact Factor* values are for 2006 or 2007 and are as quoted on each journal's website.
- 'Internat Board' indicates whether the journal has an international editorial board. Data from journal websites.



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There is uncertainty over the intriguing question of whether *Four Tiers* will offer journals a mechanism, perhaps a *Tier review process* (what else, we exclaim!), for earning promotion from *Tier A* to the heights of *Tier A**, or from *B* to *A*, or from *C* to *B*. Like the English Football League [5], each promotion will have to be accompanied by a relegation in order to preserve the percentages for each *Tier* (*A**, top 5%; *A*, next 15%; *B*, next 30%; and *C*, bottom 50% [6]). Quintessentially normative!

Although we do not have any information to date, it would be prudent for AJET to work towards promotion, for several reasons. Firstly, as all journals strive continually to improve their rankings, relying upon staying in the status quo is not a safe option. Secondly, there is the possibility that relegations could occur in the future, owing to journals deciding to cease publication. For example, two of Table 1's *Tier B* journals, *International Journal of Educational Technology* and *Journal of Instructional Science and Technology* have ceased publication, and have merged with AJET [7]. For *FoR 130306*, there is already some deviation from the ideal norms (*A**, top 5%;, etc), which will be exacerbated as sapling journals that have not reached forest canopy height die out. How many lesser *Tier* journals will have to be relegated in the next 4-7 years to maintain norms, as the total number of *FoR 130306* journals decreases?

To explore another interesting angle, one not disallowed by *Four Tiers*, there is an alternative for "sapling journals". Rather than die out, attach your journal to a "canopy height" journal, analogous to the way that vines attach to tall trees in tropical rainforests. A *Tier B* or *Tier C* journal could get into *Tier A* or *Tier A** by a merger, in which it becomes an annual or biennial "special edition" of the *Tier A* or *Tier A** journal (assuming, probably quite reasonably, that *Four Tiers* cannot evolve quickly enough to close that niche in the new ecosystem that it has created). No doubt, this direction (or perhaps the term "ecological succession" could fit?) will be explored by journal editors and managements in the next few years. From AJET's perspective, we can assure readers, authors, society stakeholders, and persons who have roles in publishing activities for kindred societies or journals, that AJET will be receptive and proactive towards any opportunities that may be generated for Australasian based journal publishing, by the impact of the *Four Tiers*.

Table 1 lists open access status, *Impact Factor* status, and international Board (as in the previous version, see notes for Table1), and adds frequency of issues, as we believe that these topics will continue to be important, though to varying extents, as Australian and international practices in academic journal publishing evolve in response to changing environments. In particular, we have listed AJET's frequency as "5-6 issues per year". Time saved from print retirement [8], and freedom from the constraints of print and postal expenses [8], has enabled AJET to complete four issues at a significantly earlier date, 13 August 2008, compared with 31 October in 2007, 22 November 2006 and 19 December, 2005. Also, we have good increases in numbers of submissions (for the period 1 January to 7 August, 90 submissions for 2008, compared with 73 in 2007, 59 in 2006, 49 in 2005, 58 in 2004, and 31 in 2003). In Editorial 23(4) we provided data on "Growth rates for some leading journals" [9], and Table 1 reinforces the feeling that it is timely to match the 'growth spurt' recently made by these competitors with AJET.

IM 32: BJET and C&E subscription rates

Another of the many "matters arising" from Table 1 is the question, how significant is open access as a differentiation between AJET and the two ahead of it in the SORTIQ Score rankings, BJET and C&E? Taking a little liberty with mathematical concepts, one could say "infinitely significant", because AJET's annual subscription rate is now \$0 (thus not displayable in Figure 1). If, for example, we calculate C&E annual rate/AJET annual rate, we get "infinity"; is that close enough to "infinitely significant"? Of course that is wishful thinking, we are well aware that the SORTIQ survey process did not mention *open access*, or any other criterion, as a contributor towards a respondent's selection of "quality" journals. Instead, it left criteria as a matter for optional, open ended comment by respondents, "Please indicate the criteria you used to make this selection" [10]. As far as we can ascertain, no analysis of the survey's open ended comments has been published and we can only presume that useful insights into "criteria" were not found. That is unfortunate, and we will have to look to other studies to fill the gap, for example the *OAK Law Project* at the Queensland University of Technology [11].

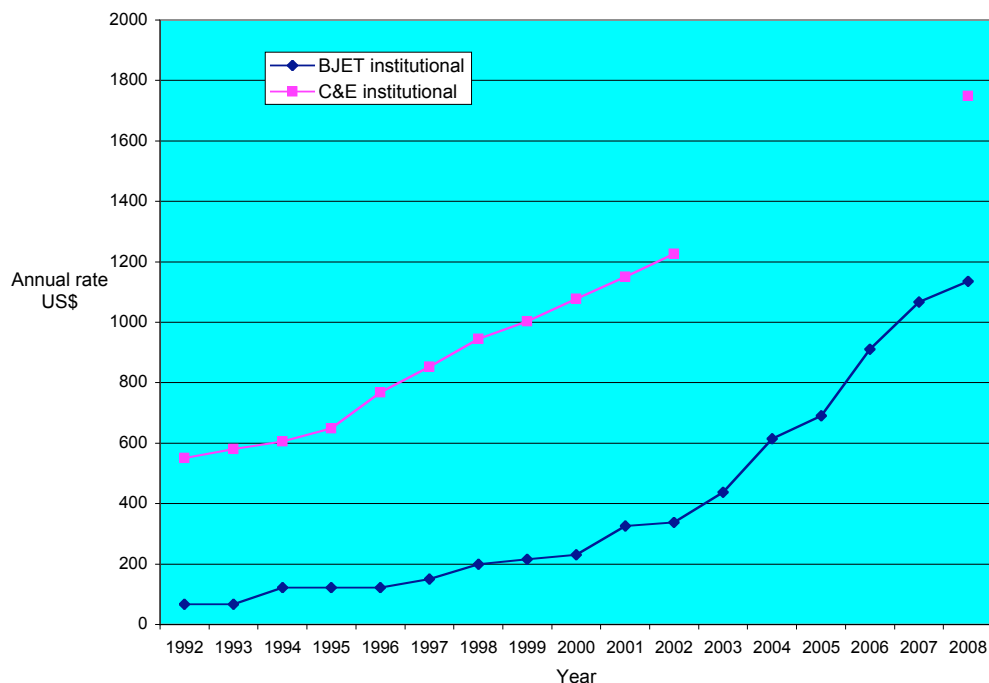


Figure 1: Institutional subscription rates for BJET [12] and C&E [13] 1992-2008
 Data sources: For 2008, journal websites. For other years, inspection of hard copy. We thank Stuart Hughes, ACER Library, for looking up BJET data, 2003-07, and Curtin University Library for access to 1992-2002 hard copy.

Figure 1 helps us to emphasise that open access is a major differentiating feature between AJET and its *Tier A** rivals. One interesting irony in Figure 1 is the absence of 2003-07 data for C&E. By the beginning of 2003, the university libraries in Perth had changed their BJET and C&E subscriptions (along with many others) to online only,

with no printed versions. Of course we have a supportive attitude towards that decision, although we do not have information on the extent of the discounts offered to them. If any reader has ready access to C&E hard copy 2003-07, we would appreciate receiving information on C&E's subscription rates for those years. That's just for the sake of completeness, we do not expect C&E 2003-07 to deviate from a very consistent trend line. Unlike our recently devastated *All Ords* [14], subscription rates for commercial journals are very reliably on a forever upwards growth path.

IM 33: Internationalisation revisited (again)

The reason for revisiting the topic of *internationalisation* so soon after the last visit [15] is that *Four Tiers* will increase the pressure upon journal editors to decline articles that are likely to attract poorer than average citation rates. If you manoeuvre your journal towards papers that attract higher than average citation rates, and away from lesser papers, you will, over time, improve your *Impact Factor* [16]. That's important, because *Impact Factor* seems to be entrenched as the most influential bibliometric, or even the only bibliometric known to most academics. However, a dilemma arises, which we may examine using the data in Figure 2.

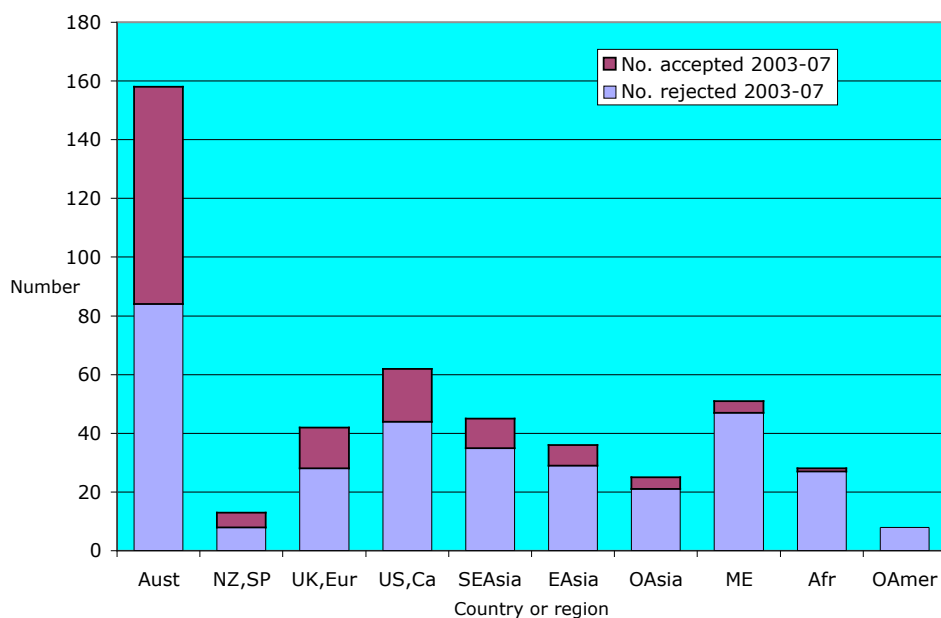


Figure 2: Number of rejections and acceptances for AJET submissions, 2003-2007, by country or region

Aust Australia only.

NZ, SP New Zealand, South Pacific countries including Papua New Guinea.

SEAsia Including Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines.

EAsia China incl Hong Kong and Taiwan, Japan, Korea, Vietnam, Thailand.

OAsia Other Asia including India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka.

ME Middle East including Israel, Turkey, Syria, Iran.

Afr Africa including Egypt, Mauritius.

UK, Eur Europe including Eastern Europe, Balkan countries, Russia.

US, Ca USA and Canada only.

OAmer Mexico, Caribbean countries, Central and South America.

All countries in the 'NZ,SP, SEAsia, EAsia, OAsia' categories are in Australia Post's 'Asia-Pacific' zone. All others are in Australia Post's 'Rest of World' zone: Australia Post. *International Post Charges Easy Guide*.
<http://www1.auspost.com.au/download/ms160.pdf>

Figure 2 updates Figure 2 in Editorial 23(4) [15], by adding year 2007 data, separating the Middle East and Africa counts, and arranging the regions in order of acceptance rates, highest at left to lowest at right.

The dilemma for journals publishing in English is that papers from the non-Western, non-native English speaking parts of the world (the middle and right side of Figure 2) will attract lower citation rates than papers from Western, native English speaking parts of the world (the left side of Figure 2). Owing to the large differences in populations in these two different parts of the world, there are correspondingly large differences in the numbers of readers and authors that a journal may obtain. If a journal increases its rejection rate, with a view to improving its *Impact Factor* or other bibliometric, will that become counter productive because it impacts especially upon authors who are not in the Western, native English speaking category? English language journals other than the oldest, largest, best known and most prestigious, have to look to the middle and right side of Figure 2 for their growth areas in terms of numbers of readers, authors and submissions.

Of course, as any reader who is used to research based analyses may be quick to point out, the preceding statements are 'hearsay', not sound, scholarly evidence. However, consider these as hypotheses to be tested, or hypotheses that may have prospects for advancing from 'hearsay' to documented, established knowledge. Figure 2 is presented in that spirit. The pattern of Figure 2 for the Asian region groups is consistent with the generally low acceptance rates noted by Latchem and Jung [17] in a forthcoming book, *Open, distance and blended learning in Asia*. They present some helpful insights into the kinds of steps that journal editors may take to improve acceptance rates for papers submitted by authors from Asian countries, and we intend to explore these steps vigorously. We see reasons for optimism about educational technology, ICTs and related areas of research publication arising from good acceptance rates attained for asilite's highly successful Singapore 2007 Conference held at Nanyang Technological University. Acceptance rates reported by the Program Committee [18] show much smaller contrasts, as least for Singapore, Malaysia and China Hong Kong. This is encouraging, as in our view international conference presentation and proceedings publication constitute an important developmental path for authors and the reporting of their research.

Roger Atkinson and Catherine McLoughlin
AJET Production Editor and AJET Editor



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