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Same places, different spaces

Auckland, 6-9 December 2009 <http://www.ascilite.org.au/conferences/auckland09/>

Editorial 25(4)

Questions about the ranking of refereed conference publications

Prior to the opening of the submissions phase for the *ascilite Auckland 2009* conference [1], some questions arose from prospective authors, seeking from us advice on the relative amounts of "credit" or "recognition" there will be in the future for journal and conference papers. To paraphrase the questions briefly for illustrative purposes, "... 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?"

Here "data" refers to the Australian Government specifications as given each year pursuant to its "Higher Education Research Data Collection" activities [2]. For non-Australian readers, we need to give the explanation:

The Higher Education Research Data Collection (HERDC) comprises research income and research publications data submitted by universities each year.

Data collected will be used, along with data from the Higher Education Student Collection, for determining allocations to universities under ... [a number of Australian Government funding programs for Australian universities] [2]

Over a decade or so, Australian university researchers have become accustomed to the annual submission of "research publications data" under specifications generally similar to the current set [3], in the categories *Books, Book Chapters, Journal Articles and Conference Publications*. For a number of years the Society's editors and Conference convenors have taken great care to maintain our standing in relation to eligibility of accepted articles for inclusion in the "research publications data submitted by universities each year". Especially noteworthy are the Society's conformance with the specifications concerning "meet the definition of research", "substantial scholarly activity", "originality", the "peer review process", "increasing the stock of knowledge", "being in a form that enables dissemination of knowledge" (in our case open access, online publication), and for the Conference, working hard to sustain its "national or international significance" [3].

In the past Australian researchers working in topics encompassed by AJET and the *ascilite* Conferences seem to have supported both avenues, as evidenced by their growth over the years [4]. In general, researchers were not unreasonably constrained when considering a question of the form "whether to submit a research paper to AJET, or to *Proceedings ascilite Auckland 2009*?" They could choose to support both (and they have done so, handsomely, in the past - thank you, authors!), but times are changing, and this kind of question has become pertinent. The pertinence for authors and editors appears in many documents associated with the *Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) Initiative* [5], for example *Tiers for the Australian Ranking of Journals* [6], *ERA Indicator Principles* [7], and *ERA Indicator Descriptors* [8].

We have reported on *Tiers* several times, most recently in Editorial 24(4), *Blood, sweat and four tiers revisited* [9], but in relation to "Refereed conference publications", all that we know from the public documentation is that they will

constitute one of the "Ranked outlets" (the other being "Journals") [7]. The details of a proposed *Tier* system for conferences, with prospectively three tiers, appear to be a work in progress [8]:

Refereed Conference Publications

This measure relates specifically to refereed conference publications other than refereed conference papers published in journals, any form of address (keynote, plenary, member of a panel discussion etc.), poster presentations and/or the facilitation of a workshop.

Conferences are an important venue for releasing and communicating research; however, they only represent the predominant output for publishing research for a small number of disciplines. In conjunction with the relevant disciplines, the ARC has undertaken preliminary work to develop tier descriptors for the ranking of refereed conference publications and will continue to work with these disciplines to develop ranked lists. [8]

The *Principles* document [7] contains an interesting Principle, number 8:

8. **Behavioural impact** - indicators should drive responses in a desirable direction and not result in perverse unintended consequences. They should also limit the scope for special interest groups or individuals to manipulate the system to their advantage. [7, p.2; also 8, p.2]

What may be the "perverse unintended consequences"? Could this be a reference to the angst that society treasurers may feel if conference income declines, due to researchers' reluctance to attend and present at a *Tier B* or *Tier C* conference? How may "special interest groups or individuals... manipulate the system to their advantage"? Who would or may do so?

A part of the documentation of the ERA is contained in ARC (Australian Research Council) presentations, published on their website for *Presentations*, which lists recent presentations and gives access to PDF versions of the *PowerPoints* [10]. For example in one presentation [11], we are informed under the slide heading "ERA: Lessons learned so far" that:

Time needed to adjust thinking to the new approach
 All spent a long time preparing for the RQF
 RQF taught us some things
 Senior administrators and research offices understand the new approach, researchers
 are taking some time to get up to speed
 Workshops held with researchers have shown that once they understand, there is
 strong level of support for the approach [11, p.14]

Perhaps it is disappointing that compared with "Senior administrators and research offices", "researchers are taking some time to get up to speed". From a journal editorial perspective, we are happy to assist authors and researchers generally "to get up to speed", in whatever way we can. So we come back to the initial question,



Auckland, 6-9 December 2009 <http://www.ascilite.org.au/conferences/auckland09/>



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for Institutional Research
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"whether to submit a research paper to AJET, or to *Proceedings ascilite Auckland 2009?*", but there is little that we can say. The best we have been able to do, to date, is illustrated by these quotations from ascilite Conference documentation in 2008 and 2009. Firstly, from *ascilite Melbourne 2008*, two paragraphs that were used in constructing review advice to authors [12]:

Preparing a 'poster summary' version for the Conference, and obtaining feedback upon it, may help you to start developing a full length version for future submission to a journal. Prior presentation at a major international conference usually makes a favourable impression upon journal reviewers and editors.

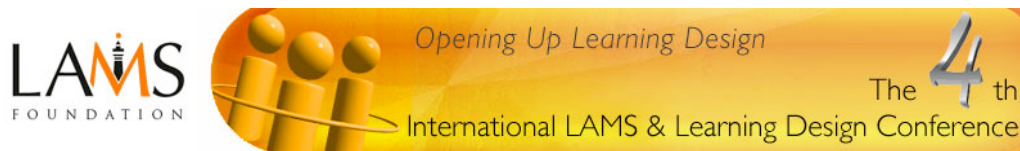
For the published Proceedings, you may revise to x pages in the specified formatting (current length y pages). Please note that if you plan to develop this work further and submit a full version to a journal at a later date, it may be especially important to conform with our advice about length. [12]

Secondly, the *ascilite Auckland 2009 Call for proposals* included the following published paragraph [13], adapted and refined from the words used in 2008:

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. [13]

Here we are tending towards reinforcing a suggestion that we offered in Editorial 24(4), "... in our view international conference presentation and proceedings publication constitute an important developmental path for authors and the reporting of their research" [9]. There are two aspects to a "developmental path", one being the "working up" of a particular research project or topic, the other being the academic and scholarly growth of the authors as researchers. That is, we see research and the reporting of research to peers as a *process* and not only as a *product*.

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>ATN Assessment Conference 2009</p> | <p>Assessment in Different Dimensions A conference on teaching and learning in tertiary education</p> |
| <p>19-20 November 2009 at Storey Hall, City Campus, RMIT University http://emedia.rmit.edu.au/atnassessment09/</p> | |



Macquarie University, 3-4 December 2009. <http://lams2009sydney.lamsfoundation.org/>

A second concern may be illustrated from some recent correspondence:

>I have an enquiry if it's possible to send our previous ASCILITE conference
>paper to be submitted for publication to AJET?

I looked again at ["Please cite as" details deleted]. It's a full paper, so I'm afraid there is not much scope for satisfying the criteria for republication that we have for AJET, at:

<http://www.ascilite.org.au/ajet/about/ref/faqs1.html#republication>

I suggest that you ... [a paragraph containing detailed suggestions deleted]. Then you would have "an expanded, updated, ... version".[14, 15]

We anticipate an increasing number of inquiries about republication of conference papers, based on a guess that authors will tend to perceive the status of "journal" publication as rising relative to "conference" publication. Attempting to fulfil as best we can a professional society's dual roles in the "process" of *developing persons* and, on the "product" side, the *publishing of "Ranked outlets"* ("ERA-new-speak" for journals and refereed conference proceedings [8]), we are trying to devise an avenue that combines the best features of journal and conference opportunities for furthering academic endeavour and careers. The difficulty lies in ascertaining what to say and how to say it!

The Future of Learning Design conference

University of Wollongong
10 December 2009
<http://sites.google.com/site/2009uowldconf/>
Submissions close 7 Sept 2009

Idle Moment 38: ALT's repository strategy

The UK's Association for Learning Technology (ALT) [16], one of ascilite's closest counterpart associations, has adopted a novel approach to the problem of attaining open access to its journal. Previously known as *ALT-J*, and now known as *ALT-J: Research in Learning Technology*, the journal joined the Taylor and Francis Group in 2004 [17]. Normally this would mean subscriber only access to the journal's full text, except to the extent that individual authors may place copies in their institutional repositories, in accordance with the limited permission granted by T&F under their policies concerning "rights that you retain as author" [18], after "... assigning Taylor & Francis or the journal proprietor copyright, or granting an exclusive licence to publish" [19].

Now it appears that ALT has developed an interesting new avenue for *ALT-J* in the *ALT Open Access Repository* [20], in which one of the "divisions" is *ALT-J Journal* [21]. It seems to be full text, including PDF files from Routledge/ Carfax for 2004-2006,



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and from the previous publisher (The University of Wales Press) for 1993-2003 (links to some articles result in "file not found" errors). As strong supporters of open access repositories, we applaud this step taken by ALT. We hope that it is a sustainable initiative setting a good precedent for other societies that have "outsourced" their journals to a commercial publisher. It is important, because self archiving by individual authors using their institutional repositories seems to cover only a small proportion of the journal literature [22, 23], whereas the ALT repository offers literature searchers a near full coverage of *ALT-J* archives.

However, we will have to wait and see on the question of "sustainability", since the ALT repository action is not fully compliant with T&F's published policy [18]. The repository contains PDF files from Routledge/T&F, but the policy stipulates "that you do not use the PDF version of the Article prepared by the publisher" [18]. The policy on permissions relates only to certain classes of server, namely "your own website for personal or professional use, or on your institution's network or intranet or website, but not for commercial sale or for any systematic external distribution by a third party (for example a listserv or database connected to a public access server)", but is ALT a "third party" or something akin to "your institution"? The ALT repository does conform with the T&F embargo period, namely "an embargo of ... 18 months after first publication for SSH (social science, arts and humanities) journals." [18]; indeed the repository could proceed now to add *ALT-J* Volume 15, 2007, as it is "out of embargo". We will watch with interest to see whether that happens!

Roger Atkinson and Catherine McLoughlin
AJET Production Editor and AJET Editor

Endnotes

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Quality Connections - Boundless Possibilities:
Through Open, Flexible and Distance Learning

25-28 April 2010, Wellington
<http://www.deanz.org.nz/>

Distance Education Association of New Zealand

4. AJET's growth is recorded in various Editorials, most recently in Editorial 25(3), <http://www.ascilite.org.au/ajet/ajet25/editorial25-3.html>. The conference's growth is recorded in *Proceedings* Editorials, see <http://www.ascilite.org.au/index.php?p=conference>
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<http://aace.org/conf/glearn/>

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