

Editorial

Universities are increasingly faced with new funding environments (variously termed the Research Assessment Exercise in the UK, the Performance Based Research Fund in New Zealand and Australian equivalents). As West, Smith, Feng, and Lawthom et al. (1998) note “It is a form of evaluation that has brought university departments firmly into the economic marketplace and into the political arena” (p. 261). There is an increasing worldwide trend for university departments to be allocated specific research monies or some overall proportion of the total state-funded income on a competitive basis associated with research productivity. This evaluation process concerns itself to a considerable extent with “hard” endpoints such as research publication. As Kennedy (1997) wrote “In the world of scholarship, we are what we write. Publication is the fundamental currency ... Research quality is judged by the printed word”(p. 186).

Most rehabilitation counsellors and related professionals working in academic settings will be aware of these research productivity pressures. Their academic reputations, research ratings and potential promotion prospects will be influenced to greater or lesser extents by the “quality” of their research output. Where they submit their research for consideration for publication is likely to be influenced by what other industries might call the “branding” or “brand value” of the particular academic journal. Whether the *Australian Journal of Rehabilitation Counselling* (AJRC) scores highly among researchers in terms of “brand value” is hard to know. The citation rates of articles published in the journal are low (acknowledging that citation rates and the quality of research are not necessarily or inevitably correlated). The readership of the journal is small (in international terms). Adding to the mix is the fact that there are long delays in getting journal issues and relatively few submissions to the journal. Editorial response times and article feedback/turnaround times are similarly slow, which is likely to feed into a sense of frustration among some researchers. There are an enormous number of peer reviewed outlets for research on rehabilitation related issues. I noted some 12 print based and 30 electronic journals in my library alone which focus on the sorts of rehabilitation related issues with which the AJRC concerns itself.

Does this augur well for the future of the journal? Obviously, no one knows. Obviously, one would hope so. The importance of communicating research findings to a wide audience does not need to be defended. The development of sound rehabilitation policy and associated service delivery has to be informed by rigorous scientific evidence and debate.

From my perspective, the ASORC members might want to consider how they want to deal with the journal in the future. Is it an adjunct to the “core business” of the Society? Does it have a more central and pivotal role? If the status quo continues I think that the journal will remain somewhat delicately poised. If it is to survive and thrive then the Society needs to give additional consideration to its goals for the journal. Do the members really want this academic journal or would they prefer the old style Bulletin with its more journalistic style?

References

- Kennedy, D. (1997). *Academic duty*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.
West, M.A. Smith, H., Feng W.L., & Lawthom, R. (1998). Research excellence and departmental climate in British universities. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 71, 261–281.

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