

Dear AHA Executive,

I have been asked to comment on a draft ranking allocated by the AHA. I write - as invited - in my capacity as Editor but on behalf of the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History (ASSLH) which publishes *Labour History*. I have taken the liberty of consulting members of the ASSLH executive.

We do not dispute *Labour History's* allocated ranking of 1 on the new scale. It does not, however, remove our previously expressed objection to the treatment of Australian-based journals and the discouragement it gives to a diverse, innovative, local and regional publishing culture.

The new scale's reduction of categories has removed any distinction between 'new' journals and 'unrefereed' journals. We believe this unfortunate grouping is particularly damaging to the important scholarly endeavour of fostering intellectual innovation and a broad, enterprising culture, already more difficult for Australian-based researchers.

We continue to be concerned at the AHA's lack of transparency about its procedures. The absence of criteria for what makes a journal 'new' is puzzling. The apparent shift from producing a matrix or fact sheet listing journals with descriptive information and ranking by others - which we understood to be the revised position of the AHA Executive - to one which is a ranking allocated by the AHA to journals edited in Australia, has taken us by surprise. We are also surprised that this matrix should list the ranking produced by the ARC in 2010, given that we understood that a primary reason for the AHA producing its own list was to ensure that such an out-dated list, and one abandoned by the ARC itself for good reasons, would not be further used.

We find the descriptors of journals still unsatisfactory in giving too much weight to crude metrics which undermines respect for the value of qualitative peer review and the promotion of robust and ethical research standards in publishing. This will put undue, unwelcome pressure on Editors and Editorial Boards now compelled to compete for positioning. It will undoubtedly affect our policy and practices.

This evaluation of journals reinforces our view that ranking is likely to inflict serious long-term damage on Australian scholarly publishing. We believe the AHA is sending younger scholars a misguided message about building a scholarly career.

The AHA's disregard for the value of the intellectual work its members do, in preference for the internal pragmatics of some universities, is disappointing to the ASSLH. We contest the use being made of policies within six universities - whose practices are themselves diverse - as representative of the sector. We endorse the ARC's stated view (Sept. 2013) that 'while some universities have continued to use them internally, it is the ARC's firm view that this should stop.'[https://www.arc.gov.au/news-publications/media/feature-articles/great-era-australian-research'](https://www.arc.gov.au/news-publications/media/feature-articles/great-era-australian-research))

We draw to your attention the motion passed at ASSLH's most recent AGM:

That the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History condemns the developing practice by Australian universities of issuing lists of approved and/or ranked journals for publication by academic staff members. By imposing a pernicious system of punishments and rewards, such lists undermine academic freedom, imperil the future of many academic journals, and threaten the study of Australian history. The Society urges its academic members to oppose the practice in their own universities and asks the Federal Executive to consider how the ASSLH might cooperate with other organisations to oppose the practice.

We call on the AHA to abandon this deeply divisive policy of journal rankings. Alternatively, we ask the Executive to delay any further action until a poll can be taken of the entire membership and discussed, openly, publicly at the next AGM.

Diane Kirkby, Editor
Nov. 17th 2019