

Gatekeepers of knowledge production on higher education: journal editorial board networks and working practices

Research report – June 2025

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# Conference output to date

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* VEGA CASTILLO, M.A., HORDÓSY, R., MYERS, M. & BROWN, E. 2024. *Higher education journal editorial board networks and working practices – preliminary results.* Nottingham: SRHE Annual Conference
* HORDÓSY, R., MYERS, M., BROWN, E.& VEGA CASTILLO, MA. 2024. *Knowledge production on higher education: journal editorial board networks and working practices.* Manchester: BERA & WERA

**Disclaimer: The views expressed in this report are the authors’ and do not necessarily reflect those of the Society for Research into Higher Education or the University of Nottingham.**

# Executive summary

This research project explored scholarly production and gatekeeping in the field of higher education, building on our earlier work exploring sociology journals (Brown et al., 2025). Throughout the report we present our **methodological approaches** in detail, and outline some of the **preliminary findings** from the three interrelated approaches.

**Research approaches**

* Given our sampling was limited to **journals indexed by Scimago** and published in English, our findings only cover outlets that are predominantly in the Global North.
* A **snapshot of editorial board membership** (from March 2024) is used to explore geographical patterns (N=1776) and editorial board interlocking (N=179).
* We present a brief **content analysis of the journal aims and scope statements** (N=58), focusing on the notions of ‘quality’ and ‘internationality’ (from March 2025).
* Finally, we discuss the initial findings drawing on **semi-structured interviews with journal editorial members** (N=15) across a range of case study journals (collected between October 2024 and March 2025).

**Key findings**

* Looking at the **geographical spread** of editorial board networks shows that two-thirds of all editorial board members, as well as a similar ratio of interlocked board members (sitting on two or more editorial boards) are located in just three countries, with the primacy of the US, UK and Australia holding across journal rankings as well.
* Taylor & Francis is by far the **biggest publisher** in the field, with Springer and Emerald also publishing important outlets on higher education.
* *Higher Education* displays the highest degree centrality from amongst all journals (on the shortest paths across the network); whereas *Teaching in Higher Education* displays the highest number of network connections.
* The **journal aims and scope statements** are relatively uniform, with a third delineating some sort of specialism for their journal, and a third marking their outlet as explicitly international / global.
* Through the editorial board member interviews we have seen the juxtaposition of focusing on scholarly versus teaching / learning practice aspects of higher education. Further, the **notions of quality and diversity** are often seen to be in tension.
* **Recruitment to editorial boards** takes into account a range of criteria, including scholarly standing and potential to act as ambassador to journal; commitment to the field and broader community; expertise (thematic, conceptual and methodological); as well as diversity on personal characteristics and geography.
* The **interlinked motivators for editorial board members** are to give back to the scholarly community; to keep up with developments in the field; and use this as a signal for scholarly prestige.

# Introduction

The rationale for this research is to understand how knowledge about higher education is selected and curated through academic journal publishing. Using three distinct, but interrelated approaches, this research explores scholarly publishing in the field of higher education through exploring editorial board member networks, journal aims and journal editorial board practices. First, we outline the broader context of scholarly publishing and knowledge production in the field of higher education.

# Literature review

One key measure used to define the trajectory of an academic career is the authorship and publication of research. The aphorism ‘publish or perish’ (Bridges 2011; Baccini et al. 2019; Fejes & Nylander 2014) denotes a well-known relationship between the act of publishing and securing/maintaining academic positions. The currency of academic publications and citations are measured by databases such as the Institute for Scientific Information (currently the Web of Knowledge database), ranking the publications where research is made available across disciplines. The validity of such ranking measures have been critiqued given their implications for academic careers, social mobility and resource allocation as well as the risk of creating a homogenous system for valuing a particular type and form of knowledge. Whilst this highly valorised knowledge-production and ranking system underpins gains in reputation and resources, it does not necessarily allow for diverse voices and viewpoints to appear in the field (Merton, 1957 & 1969; Brankovic, 2018; Csiszar, 2020; Hamann, 2016). Certain scholars are more likely to fit bureaucratic ranking system as they have the resources, methodological orientations and contacts to meet benchmarks of ‘quality criteria’ identified (Amara, 2015; Wróblewska, 2024; Heilbron, 2014; Demeter, 2020; Mills, 2023). For instance, the UK’s most recent Research Excellence Framework (REF) assigned specific values to individual publications ranging from ‘‘Unclassified’ to ‘4\*’, Quality that is world-leading in terms of originality, significance and rigour’ (ref.ac.uk, 2021). Kelly and Burrows (2021) suggest that quality indicators, whilst appearing to assign value objectively, may reinforce inequalities in who publishes in more prestigious journals, with publications in such journals gaining higher value in research assessment systems. Between 1996–2018, ‘the bulk of global higher education research published in elite journals was produced in Anglo-Saxon countries (70.0%), Continental Europe (16.7%), and East Asia (5.1%)’, albeit with a growing importance of other world regions in the observed study-period (Kwiek, 2020: 515). This has raised concerns about inequalities in editing and authorship, prompting calls for more inclusivity and diversity in scholarly publishing (Shahjahan & Kezar 2013; RSC 2020; Liu et al. 2023; Liu et al. 2023; Gomez et al. 2022).

**Editorial Boards and Knowledge Production**

Journal editorial and review processes are a form of gatekeeping, determining what knowledge should be produced, who is capable of producing it and who consumes it. Given the power imbalance between authors on the one hand, and editors and publishers on the other (Saurin 2016; Aczél et al. 2021), the make-up of editorial boards is of high importance. Hamann (2018) uses Merton's (1968) concept of the Matthew effect in science, wherein research prestige attracts more funding and, in turn, more prestige. Similarly, a circular nomination process for editorial board members derives from the criteria used for selection, based on measurable achievements that align with the recruiters' perception of ‘excellence’. This results in predictable inequalities emerging in the higher education field surrounding racial, institutional, geographical, characteristics of those who produce and consume knowledge (Goyanes et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2023; Nyúl et al., 2021; Cummings & Hoebink, 2017). Goyanes et al. (2022) further elaborate on the concept of editorial board interlocking, where academics may serve on several editorial boards, significantly increasing their agenda-setting power. However, this practice also runs the risk of reducing diversity in research themes, approaches and paradigms overall (Goyanes et al., 2022; Zuccala, 2006). Additionally, queries around the legitimacy of editorial practices used to vet the type of knowledge published identify the surreptitious role of funding availability (Amara et al., 2015), misplaced trust in editorial members (Mebane, 2025) and access to renowned and well-established networks (Deem, 2015) which underpin over/under-representation in the higher education field.

**The case of higher education journals**

The publication of research about higher education is particularly significant because this is work that legitimises or potentially challenges understandings, policy and practice of universities, including practices that reproduce social injustices or inequalities. HE is a growing inter-disciplinary field with diverse foci and results relevant for policy (Tight, 2018; Calma & Davies, 2017). However, it is also a field in which universities’ reputation and influence remains remarkably static along geographical/regional and historic lines (Bhopal & Myers 2023). Given the diverse disciplinary underpinnings of the those who publish in the field, higher education journals are varied in their focus areas (Tight, 2012), authorship trends (Deem, 2014) and methodological orientations (Trahar, 2013). Discourse in the higher education research sector indicate that endeavours to push new ideas and evolve knowledge in the sector are key features (Altbach, 2014). Despite this, a clear alignment remains in the interests of universities, publishers, editors, editorial boards and researchers in Anglophone / Western contexts to maintain a status quo in which knowledge produced and disseminated from the West continues to be highly valorised.

# Methodology

This project draws on three distinct, but interlinked approaches to explore the field of higher education through its journals. First, we present the outcomes of a network analysis that focused on the journal affiliations of academics, policy makers and practitioners who are, in some way, gatekeepers to knowledge in the field. Second, we explore the key themes in journal aims, as the key message to prospective authors and readers. Third, we discuss the emergent findings of journal case studies, whereby editorial board members were interviewed to discuss the unique features of their journals. This methodology chapter outlines each in approach in turn.

## Network analysis

**Social Network Analysis**

Social Network Analysis (SNA) is a methodological approach aimed at examining the links among players within a network and the underlying framework of these linkages. Social Network Analysis (SNA) is especially useful for elucidating how these ties affect the behaviours and roles of the individuals or groups involved (Wasserman & Faust, 1994). This approach points out the interdependence of actors, highlighting their relationships as essential channels for the exchange of resources, knowledge, and influence (Lattanzi & Sivakumar, 2009; Yang et al., 2022). Affiliation networks typically study two categories of nodes: actors (e.g., persons) and events or groups (e.g., organisations) to whom they are linked (Wang et al., 2009). This study examines editorial board members and their journal ties, examining the social structure established by these affiliations.

**Bipartite Affiliation Networks**

This study utilises a 2-mode network approach, often referred to as bipartite or affiliation networks. This methodology is suitable for this research as the data fundamentally consists of two separate categories of nodes: (1) editorial board members and (2) journals. In contrast to 1-mode networks, which consist of undifferentiated nodes, 2-mode networks encompass interactions between two distinct types of entities, hence preserving the intricacy of linkages without condensing the data into a singular dimension (Borgatti & Everett, 1997; Wasserman & Faust, 1994). In our data, events are delineated by subsets of actors rather than pairings of actors. The group of actors who take part in a certain activity, are members of a particular club, institution, etc., is referred to as a subset of actors affiliated with an affiliation variable. Every affiliation variable possesses a specified group of actors as its target subset (Wasserman and Faust, 1994).

Our analysis concentrates on a specific group of participants - editorial board members - and a particular event - journal affiliation. The primary purpose from the social network approach is to identify editorial board members inside the network who wield significant power through the measures of centrality detailed below. This type of analysis also facilitates exploration of:

1. **Interdependence of editorial board members and journals:** Editorial board members are intrinsically linked to the journals they are affiliated to, beyond mere connections with other members. A 2-mode framework maintains the characteristics of these connections and emphasizes the role of members as intermediaries among journals, promoting potentially the dissemination of knowledge and influence (Breiger, 1974).
2. **Retaining Structural Complexity:** By preserving the differentiation between editorial board members and journals, this methodology facilitates a more refined comprehension of the affiliations that support the network. Reducing the network to a singular mode (e.g., solely editorial board members or solely journals) would neglect the duality of these ties and obscure the dynamics between the two groups (Latapy et al., 2008).
3. **Identifying Cross-Journal Interactions**: A 2-mode network facilitates the analysis of how one set of nodes (editorial board members) connect to a set of events (journals), establishing routes for exchanges (collaboration, promotion, or intellectual exchange). These ideas are especially significant for comprehending the aggregation of publications inside academic or institutional networks (Opsahl, 2013).
4. **Community Discovery and Centrality Metrics:** This framework facilitates comprehensive network metrics, including community discovery and centrality metrics, which are crucial for identifying influential editorial board members and collaborative clusters within the network. Central editorial board members frequently link numerous journals, whereas communities may reveal clusters of journals that share a higher number of editorial board members (Wasserman & Faust, 1994; Borgatti & Everett, 1997).

This analysis does not distinguish between different editorial positions and treats all editorial board members as affiliates of the journal. This is partly due to the approach taken here for network analysis, partly due to the large variety of editorial board approaches to leadership roles and working with their extended board – some of these differences will be reflected in the case studies drawing on semi-structured interviews with editorial board members.

**Fragmentation and Network Components**

A key structural property of a network is its fragmentation, which refers to the division of a network into disconnected subgroups, known as components. Each component consists of nodes that are internally connected but have no links to nodes in other components (Sankar et al., 2015). Analyzing these components provides insights into the network's overall cohesiveness, as well as the existence of isolated sub-networks that may represent distinct clusters of activity or affiliation.

As detailed in the results, this study features a network of 2,171 nodes (denoting editorial board members and journals) and 2,364 edges (indicating affiliations between editorial board members and journals). The network is divided into 14 distinct components highlighting varying degrees of connectivity across the system. The principal component comprises 1,820 nodes, however the remaining components denote two (component two) or one (components 3-14) journals each and differ in size of their editorial boards. This fragmentation signifies that, although a significant interconnected network is there, numerous other smaller clusters also exist (Luoto, 2023).

**Communities in the Network**

Communities within networks are groupings in which nodes have a higher density of connections among themselves compared to their connections with other segments of the network. In affiliation networks, communities may denote groups of individuals who regularly engage in the same events or are members of analogous organisations. Identifying such communities might provide insights on the network's structural coherence and the collaborative tendencies among its participants (Saqr et al., 2018). Analysing community structure enhances our comprehension of how editorial board members congregate around particular journal publications, perhaps indicating shared academic interests or institutional affiliations.

**Centrality Measures**

Centrality measurements offer insights into the significance and influence of specific nodes within a network. This study included two principal centrality measures (Goyanes et al. 2022):

* **Degree Centrality**: This measure refers to the number of direct connections a node has. In the context of this study, degree centrality represents the number of journals to which an editor is affiliated. Higher degree centrality indicates that an editor is connected to multiple journals, suggesting broader influence and visibility within the academic community (Knoke & Yang, 2020). Degree centrality is often used to highlight the most active participants in a network (Yang et al., 2022).
* **Betweenness Centrality**: Betweenness centrality measures the extent to which a node acts as a bridge in the network, lying on the shortest path between other nodes. This measure is particularly useful for identifying editorial board members who serve as intermediaries between different journals or clusters within the network. Editorial board members with high betweenness centrality play a crucial role in the flow of information, as they connect otherwise disconnected parts of the network, facilitating interactions and collaborations across different editorial groups (Freeman, 1977; Williams & Shepherd, 2015).

**Setting the dataset**

The construction of the dataset for this study involved several critical steps to ensure data accuracy and consistency across multiple variables, including journal titles, country affiliations, publisher information, institutional names, and editorial board member details. Below is a summary of how the dataset was developed.

A total of 67 journal titles related to higher education were initially extracted from the Scimago dataset. This initial delineation of journals to those indexed by Scimago generally published in English limits our focus to those outlets that are predominantly in the Global North, as outlined by Demeter (2020). Given the increasing focus on indexed journals in research assessment systems our focus falls predominantly on how these outlets do or do not reflect an international audience through their editorial board make-up.

After a careful review, 9 journals were excluded for various reasons, such as lack of alignment with the research scope, the cessation of publication, missing editorial board data, or duplication. This resulted in a final selection of 58 journals for analysis. Each journal’s website was visited to extract the necessary data on editorial board members and other relevant attributes; our dataset for editorial board networks was constructed in March 2024. The [appendix](#_Standardisation_across_dataset) outlines the standardisation practices that were undertaken across the dataset.

## Higher education journal aims

Journal Aims and Scope statements indicate the purpose of the journal and delineate the types of individuals who are likely to be authors or readers of the journal. To investigate how journals present and advertise themselves and engage with notions of inclusivity and quality, their Aims and Scope statements were extracted from webpages, with the dataset for journal aims constructed in March 2025. Using NVivo, we employed content analysis to identify how the journal presented itself and the HE field in terms of internationality via explicit or implicit references, as well as how ideas of quality interacted with this internationality in the journal’s scope, readership and authorship. Scope, readership and authorship were used as the primary codes as journals typically presented their distinction through these categories. Work by Tight (2017 & 2012) examining the publication focus of higher education journals suggests that patterns in knowledge production are the result of interactions in multiple areas of the research and publication process and can be investigated through examining aims and scope statements. As such, here we focus on the public-facing information which explicitly denotes the type of information the journal produces and the breadth and scope of individuals who read and author this knowledge. Additionally, the notion of quality is examined insofar as it is advertised by journals and how quality is rendered in relation to coinciding aims of inclusivity in knowledge production. The front-facing nature of this information is significant as it is accessible to readers, authors and editorial board members and can set the stage for how the journal is perceived. The analysis presented in the Results section is preliminary and reflects the initial themes which appeared in journal aims.

## Case studies of journals practices

Further to the network analysis and exploring journal aims, we also look at journal practices in higher education through semi-structured interviews with several editorial board members from a selection of case-study journals. The research aimed to select a total of 10 HE journals from amongst the “education” journals listed in Scimago where the title contains either “higher”; “university”; “college”; or “tertiary” (n=67). As above, our initial sifting excluded several journals due to lack of alignment with the research scope, the cessation of publication, missing editorial board data, etc. and we utilised the list from the network analysis as above (n=58). Our case study selection was stratified to include a range a) newer and more established journals, b) generic and specialised journals, and c) reach a range of geographical locations.

We conducted online semi-structured interviews with up to four editorial board members from each journal, including editorial teams, established and newer editorial board members to reflect the different compositions of editorial boards. Interviews were auto-transcribed using the University of Nottingham’s secure automated transcription service. Transcriptions were subsequently manually checked by the interviewer for accuracy. Interviews focused on a range of broader areas of how editorial boards work, for instance how the editorial leadership works with the editorial board, reviewers and publishers; how new editorial board members are selected; what is a relevant and high quality publication for the journal. The interview schedule is available in the [appendix](#_Interview_schedule).

We used thematic analysis of interview data facilitated by NVivo. ***The results presented in this report are preliminary, given analysis of the interview data is still ongoing.*** Two journal papers are planned from this data in 2025 / 2026.

Table 1 outlines the interview sample as well as the number of individual editorial board members contacted across a total of seven journal editorial boards. This shows that we reached a roughly 30% response rate. We had particularly low response from journal editorial boards located in the USA, presumably partly due to political upheaval throughout the duration of our data collection period of October 2024 – March 2025. Despite repeated attempts to initiate contact, no publisher representative was willing to be interviewed for this study. All attempts to get in touch with three publishers of journals in higher education went unanswered or were declined.

Table 1: Interviews conducted (from contact initiated) amongst highly/mid ranked, generic and specialised journals in Higher Education

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Interviews conducted (from contact initiated)** | **Highly ranked journal editorial board members** | **Mid ranked journal editorial board members** |
| **Generic journal editorial board members** | 3 (6) | 2 (8) |
| **Specialised journal editorial board members** | 9 (28) | 1 (8) |

## Ethical concerns

This project received ethical approval from the University of Nottingham, School of Education (ethics approval reference: MyersM\_272); the [participant information sheet](#_Participant_information_sheet), [consent form](#_Participant_Consent_Form) and the [data privacy notices](#_Data_Privacy_Notice) are available in the appendix. The data used for the network analysis (administrative data on editorial board membership) and content analysis of journal aims are in the public domain. For reporting, a clear line of separation is drawn between discussion of findings in the public domain and interview data. The relatively small number of well-known journals associated with the higher education field means that significant care needs to be taken to anonymise individual editorial board members and also individual journals. Instead of pseudonyms, individuals will be differentiated by the characteristics (as per Table 1) of the journal with which they are associated to a) suppress editorial board member’s gender identity, and to b) un-link editorial board members from others sitting on the same journal boards. Although our original plan was to create case-studies of journals, due to the risk of de-anonymisation we have decided against presenting our data as such. Any sensitive personal or journal-level data will be suppressed in reporting to maintain anonymity. Although some conceptual and thematic depth might be lost through moving focus away from journal as cases, our interest is not in specific journal practices, but the *overall picture* of how higher education journals perform gatekeeping to academic publishing. The data will be stored for seven years on password protected computers and institutional cloud-storage. Personal details, such as name and contact information of interviewees will be stored in an encrypted and separate file from the data.

## Limitations

There are a number of limitations to this research, including the overall focus and delineation of journals through Scimago, using a snapshot in a dynamic and changing context, and the limitations deriving from the case study approach and response rates.

A key limitation of this project derives from our overall focus on journals that are indexed in Scimago, meaning we necessarily focus on outlets that are predominantly in the Global North publishing in the English language (Demeter, 2020; Mills, 2023). As such, our research cannot discuss journal communities in higher education outlets that are published in more locally focused journals. Further, our selection criteria focused on journal titles, rather than aims and purpose, and as such will have excluded journals that might indeed be predominantly focusing on higher/tertiary education, but do not have our key terms in their tiles.

The results presented here are based on a cross-sectional design, for both the network analysis (dataset constructed in March 2024), for the analysis of aims and purpose (dataset constructed in March 2025), and for the case studies of journals (interviews collected between October 2024 – March 2025). As such, our results cannot reflect a variable and dynamic context beyond these snapshots. Similarly, we base our analysis of editorial board member country affiliation on current institutional affiliation, and do not attempt to trace international migration patterns.

Although our initial plan was to analyse editorial networks over time, sourcing historical data for editorial boards proved difficult. Digital tools such as an internet way-back machine did not produce reliable results, whereas online editorial board lists only give account of the current members. Datasets on former members could have been sourced from journals themselves or their publishers; however, given the response rates for editorial member interviews and no response from publishers, this would have yielded a very limited dataset. Finally, we have considered digitising hard copies of journals with the editorial boards generally printed in them but decided against this approach due to resource and time limitations.

As discussed above, our case studies use semi-structured interviews with editorial board members for each journal. The results presented here necessarily only capture a fraction of the higher education journals. Further, as discussed above; to maintain participant anonymity we removed some information that could identify journals or editorial board members – this means potentially losing some valuable insights a stronger adherence to a case study design would have yielded.

Finally, our project is not looking at authorship of higher education journals that would potentially further illuminate collaboration patterns and global inequalities in publishing.

# Results

The results are presented in turn, focusing on higher education journal editorial board membership and networks; on journal aims; and on editorial board workings as discussed by members. The discussion then draws the threads of the results to conclude this report. This report presents a summary of the initial findings; two research papers based on this data are to follow in 2025-2026.

## How are higher education journals interlinked? – Network analysis

### Components of higher education journal network

A fundamental structural characteristic of a network is its fragmentation into components. Analysing the components yields insights into the overall cohesiveness of the network and reveals the presence of isolated sub-networks that may indicate distinct clusters of activity or affiliation. This study's network object consists of 2,171 nodes, representing editorial board members and journals, and 2,364 edges, indicating affiliations between them. The network comprises 14 distinct components, each exhibiting unique connectivity patterns.

The largest component consists of 1,820 nodes (1776 unique editorial board members and 44 journals), representing the predominant portion of the network. This component functions as the core of the network, representing a highly interconnected assembly of editorial board members and journals. This component's prominence indicates the significant influence of a select group of journals and editorial board members in shaping the higher education research landscape. In addition to the principal component, there are 13 additional components, each corresponding to distinct, smaller clusters of nodes. Only one of those components contains multiple journals (two journals), while the other components each contain a single journal. Analysing these components yields insights into the distribution of influence and collaboration in academic publishing.

**Diversity of Network Components**

The network components demonstrate significant variability for H-Index, SJR Quartiles, journals, and publishers. The largest component, comprising the majority of nodes (1,820), has a notable concentration of high-impact journals, primarily in the Q1 and Q2 SJR Quartiles, with journals that generally possess elevated H-Index scores. This component represents a strong and integrated foundation of the academic publishing ecosystem, led by prominent publishers like Taylor & Francis, Springer, and Wiley-Blackwell. The smaller components demonstrate increased variability in such characteristics. These components typically include more regionally orientated or specialised journals, frequently linked to Q3 and Q4 SJR Quartiles. These journals are often issued by smaller or regionally focused publishers and typically exhibit lower average H-Index values, indicative of their specialised emphasis and restricted worldwide influence. This fragmentation underscores the presence of a prevailing, globalised editorial network in conjunction with more localised or specialised clusters.

Another significant feature to note concerning the variation among the components is that Taylor and Francis represent the highest quantity of journals throughout the components (25 journals). In Component 1, Taylor and Francis exclusively publish almost half (48.5%) of journals; their market dominance in particular in areas pertaining to higher education is noteworthy. Other major publishers in HE are SAGE (6), Emerald Group (4), Springer (3) and Wiley-Blackwell (2), with Figure 1 listing all further publishing houses, learned societies and universities.

Figure 1: Number of Journals per Publisher across full network of 58 HE journals

A graph with colorful bars

Description automatically generated with medium confidence

### Top Journals

The largest and most significant component of the network reveals the influence of journals through centrality measures. Betweenness Centrality highlights journals that serve as essential connectors, facilitating the exchange of knowledge between separate sub-networks and promoting interaction among otherwise isolated clusters. These journals serve as essential connectors, facilitating the cohesiveness and production of the academic network. In contrast, Degree Centrality emphasises journals that exhibit the highest level of connectivity, functioning as the centres associated with a wide range of editorial board members. The positioning of these journals at the centre of the network facilitates the attraction of a diverse array of contributors and promotes collaborative efforts.

It is important to recognise that a journal's significance in one centrality measure is not necessarily indicative of superiority in another. For example, "Higher Education" demonstrates the highest betweenness centrality, highlighting its crucial function as a connector, yet it is less significant in terms of degree centrality, which assesses direct connections. Conversely, "Teaching in Higher Education" demonstrates consistent performance across both metrics, highlighting its function as both a hub and a bridge. This balance highlights its strategic role within the network as a significant contributor.

Table 2: Top ten most influential journals by degree centrality, with corresponding betweenness centrality, H-index and SJR (Component 1)

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Journal Title** | **Degree Centrality** | **Betweenness Centrality** | **H-Index** | **SJR** |
| Higher Education | 0,063 | **0,494** | **118** | **1,952** |
| Teaching in Higher Education | **0,074** | 0,298 | 69 | 0,941 |
| Innovative Higher Education | 0,041 | 0,220 | 50 | 0,606 |
| Higher Education, Skills and Work-based Learning | 0,019 | 0,215 | 20 | 0,439 |
| International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education | 0,073 | 0,138 | 72 | 0,752 |
| Journal of Higher Education | 0,042 | 0,136 | 100 | 1,55 |
| Higher Education Research and Development | 0,037 | 0,132 | 83 | 1,462 |
| College Teaching | 0,060 | 0,120 | 47 | 0,278 |
| Research in Higher Education | 0,041 | 0,070 | 98 | 1,246 |
| Journal of College Student Development | 0,036 | 0,065 | 87 | 0,844 |

A Pearson correlation analysis was performed to investigate the connection between centrality measures and academic impact indicators. Pearson's method was chosen because it quantifies the strength and direction of linear relationships between continuous variables, including centrality metrics (Degree Centrality, Betweenness Centrality, Eigenvector Centrality) and academic indicators (H-Index, SJR).

Degree Centrality shows a moderate correlation with H-Index (0.5), indicating that journals with a higher number of direct connections might possess increased academic influence. In the same way, Betweenness Centrality demonstrates a notable correlation with H-Index (0.6) and a moderate correlation with SJR (0.3), highlighting the significance of bridging roles in enhancing scholarly impact. However, SJR exhibits weaker correlations with centrality measures, including a low correlation with Degree Centrality (0.1). This suggests that journal prestige, as indicated by SJR, may not be closely associated with network position in this dataset. The results highlight the interrelated aspects of centrality metrics and academic indicators, with each reflecting unique dimensions of a journal's impact in the academic field.

Table 3: Correlations centrality measures, H-Index and SJR

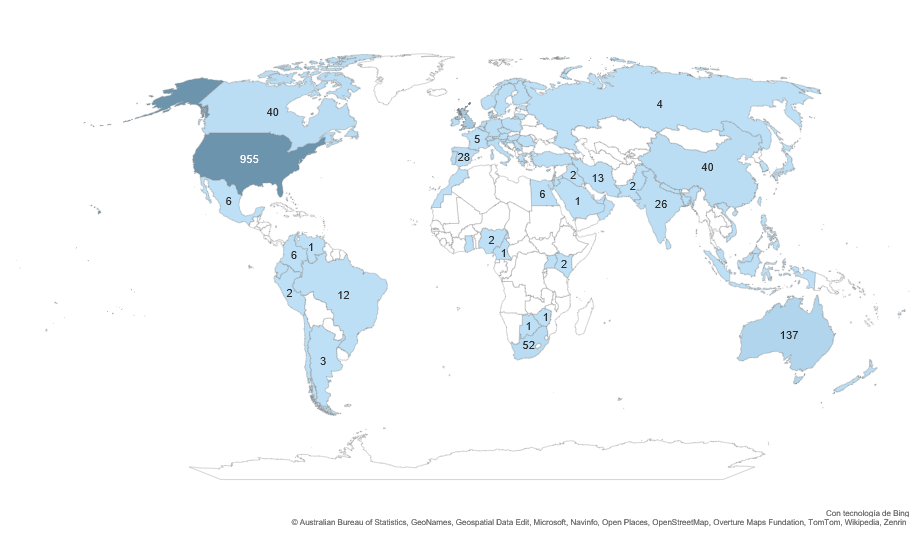
|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Degree Centrality** | **Betweenness Centrality** | **H-Index** | **SJR** |
| **Degree Centrality** | 1,0 | 0,7 | 0,5 | 0,1 |
| **Betweenness Centrality** | 0,7 | 1,0 | 0,6 | 0,3 |
| **H-Index** | 0,5 | 0,6 | 1,0 | 0,7 |
| **SJR** | 0,1 | 0,3 | 0,7 | 1,0 |

### Editorial board membership globally

The geographical distribution of unique editorial board members reveals a significant concentration within the anglophone world. The United States emerges as the leading country, holding 955 (45%) unique editorial board members, followed by the United Kingdom with 287 (14%) members, followed by Australia with 137 (7%) members – totaling two-thirds of the editorial board membership across the 58 journals. This dominance highlights the primacy of the U.S. in shaping editorial boards within academic publishing in higher education.

Figure 2 presents an interactive map with the number of editorial board members in each country, with the underlying data available in the [appendix](#_Editorial_board_members). Furthermore, this trend remains consistent across all SJR quartiles (Q1–Q4), underscoring the pervasive influence of US-based editorial board members regardless of journal ranking or impact. This pattern reflects broader dynamics of academic publishing, where anglophone countries, particularly the United States, hold a central role in knowledge production and dissemination.

Figure 2: Heatmap editorial board members across the world (interactive map; underlying data in [appendix](#_Editorial_board_members))

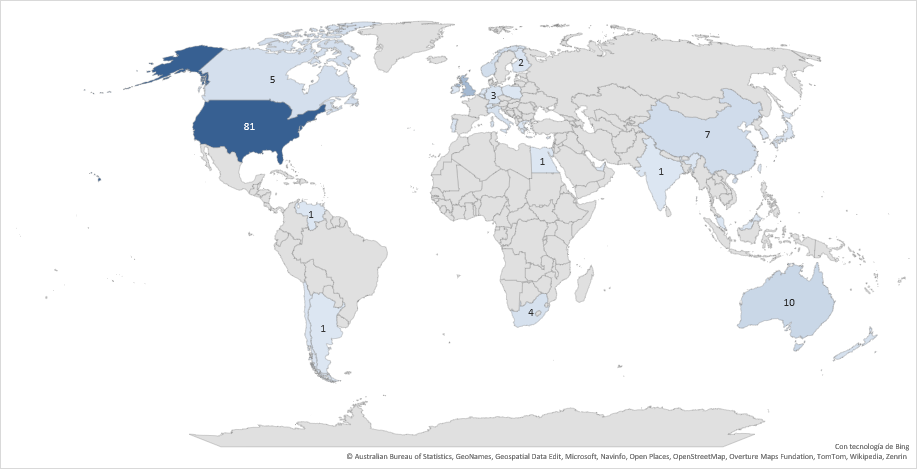


### Editorial board interlocking

This study defines interlocked editorial board members as the 179 individuals who hold positions on at least two editorial boards of higher education journals. Among these, 177 editorial board members are included in the largest and most significant component (Component 1), whereas 2 members are associated with Component 2. Interlocking offers a distinct perspective for pinpointing key editorial board members who play a vital role in enhancing the cohesion and connectivity within the academic network.

The prevailing trend within the network of editorial board members associated with academic journals in higher education indicates that the United States remains the most prominent, with 81 interlocked editorial board members – 45% of the total interlocked editorial board members (Figure 3). This is followed by the United Kingdom with 28 (15% of the total interlocked editorial board members) and Australia with 10 (6% of the total interlocked editorial board members) – with these three countries again totalling two-thirds of all interlocked editorial board members.

Figure 3: Heatmap interlocked editorial board members across the world (interactive map; underlying data in [appendix](#_Editorial_board_members))



## Who are higher education journals for? – Journal aims

Journal Aims and Scope statements were useful to conceptualise a journal's distinction from others as reflected in their thematic scope, their readership and their authorship. In drawing more or less ambiguous boundaries around these three elements, journals delineate who they are for. The focus of this research centres around the accessibility and ownership of knowledge; thus scope, readership and authorship are examined as devices which signal in/exclusivity through statements about what knowledge belongs in the pages of the journal, who produces it and who consumes it. Upon examining Aims and Scope statements, quality indicators were an additional feature worthy of investigation as these indicators tended to appear in Aims and Scope statements and were constructed in a standardised manner despite variation between journals on topics, readers and authors.

As work by Tight (2017) and Altbach (2014) suggests, the higher education field is expansive – indeed, journals tended to recognise the expanse of the field through more or less ambiguous references to an international scope of information . *Journal of Higher Education Theory and Practice* wrote *“Articles of regional interest are welcome, especially those dealing with lessons that may be applied in other regions around the world. Accepted manuscripts should make strong empirical and/or theoretical contributions and highlight the significance of those contributions to the higher education field*”; whilst *Higher Learning Research Communications* introduced the journal as *“an open-access journal with an international focus”* encouraging submissions about *“The role of institutional, local, national, and international policy on tertiary education”.* Such statements reflected an international range of subject matter which was deemed relevant to be disseminated within the pages.

Internationally-relevant information was not always welcomed with an international audience in-mind, as the case of *Perspectives: Policy and Practice in Higher Education* shows – a journal predominantly dedicated to UK HE practice, hence *“Contributions may be focused on the UK higher education system, or overseas higher education systems. The journal will remain focused on providing content to inform UK higher education practice, and therefore international contributions will be expected to explicitly acknowledge the potential implications for a UK readership.”* Such a specialised readership stands in contrast with statements which emphasise a global community of readers who could benefit from journal consumption such as *Active Learning in Higher Education’s* statement that *“To be fully considered for publication, submissions must therefore be relevant to faculty and others involved in learning and teaching in all disciplines and in all countries (i.e. submissions should aim to avoid being overly discipline-specific or context-specific).”*

Sometimes, appeal to a broad audience was advertised despite a seemingly limited scope of relevant readership, as was the case with *Community College Review’s* statement that *“CCR serves a national and international audience, which includes presidents, community college faculty and administrators, university researchers, graduate students, policymakers, and others interested in the role of community colleges in higher education”.*

Of the 58 journals examined 17 included explicit references to an international authorship. Sometimes, this internationality was emphasised despite a seemingly limited relevance to the journal. For instance, *Teachers College Records* show that *“We invite research from international scholars who illuminate productive counterpoints to the mainstream U.S. experience and provide new ways of thinking, seeing, and being in conversation with each other about the past, present, and future”.* These stood alongside explicit references to international authorship, such as *Journal of Geography in Higher Education’*s statement that it *“is committed to promote, enhance and share geography learning and teaching in all institutions of higher education throughout the world, and provides a forum for geographers and others, regardless of their specialisms, to discuss common educational interests, to present the results of educational research, and to advocate new ideas.”*

The international, or at least broad nature of topics, authors and readers involved with the journal were frequently highlighted in journal aims and scope statements and indicators of specialisation only appeared in approximately a third of these statements. This suggests that journals tend to position themselves as part of a community that integrates ideas and individuals from around the world to explore a common field. For instance, *Tertiary Education and Management* recognised that *“Articles submitted should (…) be written for, understood by, and be relevant for a multicultural, multifaceted and international audience, consisting of both the international academic community and the field of practice within higher education.”* Aims and Scope statements still engaged with this global scholarly community, even if their journal itself focussed on a small subset of the HE field, such as *Journal of College Counselling* stating that their work *“advances the college counselling research base and informs the practice of counsellors working in higher education settings”.* Each of these elements of scope and relevance could be seen to work in conjunction with the ideas of making knowledge accessible to this broad community.

Despite frequent engagement with ideas of internationality, boundary-setting and practices were still present in Aims and Scope statements, largely, through delineations about what could be considered a high-quality contribution. Journal delineations around what type of knowledge can be featured in its pages attached value to certain presentations of information which tend to reflect the long-held, well-established trends of research being critical, relevant and in well-written English (Bridges, 2011; Hamann, 2016, 2018).

For instance, the *Journal for Higher Education Outreach and Engagement* wrote that, *“Articles are evaluated on the criteria outlined below. The appropriateness or fit for the mission of the JHEOE; the significance in contributing new knowledge (advancing a field of study; or providing best practices or lessons-learned); the rigor and appropriateness of the scholarship; and the readability and flow of the information and ideas presented.”* Sometimes, this information is presented in somewhat ambiguous ways, such as in *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education’*s note that, “the journal will not publish purely descriptive accounts of data collection or uncritical reports of teaching and course delivery methods.” Such statements leave much up to the reader’s interpretation about what constitutes a “critical” report and favours authors who share understandings of quality that reflect the journal’s; a phenomenon which has been emphasised by Lillis (2010).

Seeing how quality criteria influence the type of knowledge produced in the journal and how an ability to abide by these criteria may be unequally distributed offer insight into large-scale issues around how journals gatekeep knowledge. By producing a standardised form of scholarship, journals risk consistently representing certain types of individuals and information in their pages. This can reinforce normative conceptualisations of knowledge which may not reflect the dearth of available scholarship, and indeed, may not be representative of the scope of topics, authors and readers which are engaged with the journal.

## How do higher education journals operate? – Editorial boards

Journals, and thus editorial board members, serve as community-builders, collecting, evaluating and distributing knowledge within these communities. In delineating the type of knowledge in circulation, they also broaden *and* limit the community associated with their journal as information is presented as more or less relevant to particular groups. Gatekeeping the types of knowledge that enter their community requires editorial board members to act as assurers of scientific quality. As novel information and reflections on higher education are accumulated, journal editorial board members recognised their role as purveyors of scholarship integral to maintaining the scholarly integrity of their communities by identifying research worthy of circulation. Both of these roles are spoken about in relation to conventions in academia and the higher education discipline, but also in relation to the journal itself. Editorial board interviewees spoke of the role of journals as creators of communities, harbingers of new knowledge, and gatekeepers of quality beholden to both the broader academic community and the mission of their journal communities.

### What are journals in higher education for?

Here we focus on how editorial board members introduced their journals and the role their outlet plays within scholarly communication. Similarly to the discussion of journal aims, a key focus point was the creation and the maintenance of a community around a) higher education as a diverse field of study drawing on a range of disciplinary settings, or b) more specifically discussion of policy and practice across the sector. The key constituents for journals then are the editorial board itself, as well as potential authors, reviewers, and readers / users of published outcomes. Given the disciplinary, thematic and theoretical diversity mapped as an archipelago and a seascape of higher education by Macfarlane (2012 & 2022), journals create communities both through engaging with particular types of information, but also further creating – or hoping to create – a community through engagement of those sitting on the editorial board and writing for, as well as reading the output.

Journal editorial board members discussed the role of their outlets in **showcasing new ideas** that evolve our collective understanding of higher education by pushing the frontiers of knowledge in the field, whilst also potentially informing and prompting policy and practice change. However, editorial members often raised the issue of communicating it to potential authors and reviewers how much these novel ideas could be incorporated into the journal without destabilising the overall thematic focus, aims and scope of the journal or losing the favour of the intended audience. Oftentimes, editorial board members discussed gatekeeping as demarcating what types of information could feature in their journal and how notions of relevance were communicated and understood in the editorial board community. The knowledge community seemed to be the divided into those focusing on the scholarly *or* the practice aspects of higher education. This member discussed the issues of whether potential authors are indeed aware of these delineations as reflected in the aims and debates of particular journals:

We [as the editorial board for this journal] like to define ourselves as the scholarly dimension, the scholarly side of higher education. The other side is the applied journals that are dedicated to the applied, practitioner side of higher education. So (…) the topics are the same, but sometimes we reject papers on the basis of unsuitability. Generic, High-Impact Journal

Editorial board members discussed the issues of **different and competing quality criteria** and the process of drawing boundaries for their particular journals, especially in light of accelerating rates of submissions to higher ranked outlets. Excellent academic knowledge was demarcated as novel, underpinned by robust and transparent methodology and conceptual / theoretical framing. However, some editorial board members reflected on how relevant knowledge is often implicitly defined as being Anglophone/Western regarding thematic, conceptual relevance or understandings of research quality. As such, authorship, thematic and conceptual diversity became juxtaposed with narrow understandings of quality publications. As an editorial board member of a mid-impact journal suggested, their personal focus tends to be on diversity of voices across the field of higher education:

As a scholar and as a person, I have a great commitment to ensuring that diverse voices are speaking in our field, and so if I have any ability to support that, I will... The most valued currency in academia is publishing... [if] we're not making that available for all the wonderful voices in the field [then] we're - we're sort of shooting ourselves in the foot. Specialised, Mid-Impact Journal

This issue is a sticking point regarding understandings of quality in scholarly publishing and how “international” journals regard their thematic focus and authorship, and to what extent it was easy to recognise good scholarship from more diverse settings. Journals that were highly ranked often felt pressure to not only ensure commitment to missions to diversify the field, but also to maintain their position in the prestige economy of academic publishing.

### How are journal editorial boards made?

A key question explored in the interviews pertained the making of editorial boards. There is considerable diversity in how editorial boards are set up, both in terms of leadership roles and responsibilities, and the use of the broader editorial board *or* boards. Importantly, although there is some path-dependency in these structural questions, considerable change occurs over time with new editorial teams.

A key concern of course is **knowledge of the broader or more specialised field** of higher education, providing some form of methodological, thematic and conceptual expertise for the journal community. Beyond the knowledge and skills potential editorial board members bring, some other characteristics might also be considered regarding geographical, sectoral and institutional diversity, or balancing of personal attributes of gender and ethnicity in particular. Recruitment of editorial board members often involves identifying suitable candidates who display a particular set of characteristics that indicate their suitability to sit on the board including being a “big name” in the field, displaying expertise and enhancing reputation. As discussed here by an editorial board member of a generic, mid-impact journal, a new member should be:

Someone that has a good standing in academics. That they are relatively known to the community. That they’re active scholars and do contribute towards publishing. Generic, Mid-Impact Journal

Another concern of quality assurance for the journals centred around identifying individuals who were committed to and invested in the field, with good personal and professional connections across the broader community. As seen in the network analysis, there is considerable interlocking between higher education journal boards with academics, institutional leaders and policy makers often sitting on two or more journal boards. Inclusion of the founders of a broader higher education field on journal editorial boards is often used to signal prestige and aspiration, hoping that they will act as ambassadors to the journal. Indeed, the flip side of the importance of personal and professional connections is a system contingent on these links – *“my experience of [recruitment] has been who you know”* (Generic, Mid-Impact Journal)

In any case, **personal and professional networks matter**, with trust being a key currency: trust in professional judgement that fits with the journal’s often ill-defined conceptions of quality; trust in providing timely and high-quality feedback; and trust in wanting to help build the scholarly community. This, however, results in the well-documented skew towards editorial board members being located in the Anglophone / Western world for journals indexed in Scimago.

### How do journal editorial boards work & what motivates members?

There is considerable diversity in the setup and functions of editorial boards, especially in a) how the editorial boards / advisory boards / international editorial boards are utilised, and b) how roles and responsibilities are distributed within the editorial team. The **function of the broader editorial board** is based on historical practices and changes with new editors’ preferences, ranging from acting as a review panel, as arbitrators on differing external reviews, as special issue reviewers, setting the overall policies of the journal, advising the editorial team, and being ambassadors for the journal. Especially editorial teams of highly ranked journals discussed the need to add new editorial capacity to deal with the acceleration of submissions to their journals. However, larger editorial teams bred concerns around quality maintenance. Some boards maintain a collective decision-making approach to gauge the amount of trust they can put in a new member, others use broader metrics to assess rejection rates between team members and over time.

We discussed the core motivation of editorial teams and editorial board membership with our interviewees. There are somewhat differing reasons for taking on either a leadership position or joining a board as a member. Being invited or being hired to join a journal board / editorial team in the field is considered both a signal for prestige and esteem, *and* as currency in career progression. Members often spoke of their roles on boards as points of pride in their career which *perhaps* counteracted the lack of / minimal remuneration. In most cases activities such as reviewing and editing academic journals are not specifically included in institutional workload models but are considered one aspect of academic citizenship and contribution to the broader research community.

Indeed, **giving back to the community** and interpreting their roles as academic service was one key motivating factor; an understanding that without journals as venues for academic outputs there is no space to share new knowledge on higher education. Feeling a sense of community can prompt motivation to engage with the journal, as board members feel they have a stake in the maintenance that community. Several editorial board members discussed their main motivation to be keeping up with the developments across the sector, gaining insider insights of the most recent research outcome, methodological and conceptual developments. This aspect was especially important to senior academics whose major policy and leadership roles took them away from the broader higher education research community.

Editors in leadership posts are remunerated for their work, though the contractual arrangements with publishers or journal owners are opaque and can differ considerably between journals. Given editorial positions are not generally included within the workloads of academic posts, journal editing might well be above and beyond academic roles of teaching and research, and in the case of highly ranked journals with large volumes of submissions, this often means considerable sacrifices – as suggested by a board member: *“be mentally prepared it is going to kill your time, your free time”* (Generic, High-Impact Journal). Editorial board members, just as external reviewers, work free of charge, their time paid for by their universities and research institutions – this constitutes a major donation to the publishing industry, as Aczél et al. (2021) estimate for US, UK and China:

We found that the total time reviewers worked on peer reviews was over 130 million hours in 2020, equivalent to almost 15 thousand years. The estimated monetary value of the time US-based reviewers spent on writing reviews was over 1.5 billion USD in 2020. For China-based reviewers, the estimate is over 600 million USD, and for UK-based, close to 400 million USD. (Aczél et al., 2021: 5)

The unease of working with / for the publishing industry was palpable, as interviewees recognised the interdependencies within the prestige economy they as academics inhabit, in light of the main publishing models. This is especially a concern due to the usability-issues of underlying online platform many editorial boards use: *‘that'd be an interesting outcome if you [researchers of this SRHE project] could find a single person who likes ScholarOne’* (Generic, High-Impact journal).

# Discussion

Throughout this report, we presented some of the initial findings from three distinct research approaches exploring how scholarly gatekeeping functions within the field of higher education. **Here we summarise some takeaway points, albeit tentatively – our analysis is still ongoing**. Journals create and maintain communities, with editorial boards acting as gatekeepers for these communities, delineating the type of knowledge exchanged within their community and vetting those that produce it. In doing so, they draw boundaries around who is likely to engage with the information based on interest and relevance of the information being exchanged to the readership. The underlying currency for journal editing and reviewing seems to be *trust*: in each other’s rigorous judgments, timely and helpful reviews, consistency over time, and acting with integrity for the good of the field.

Negotiations between quality and diversity were seen both in the content analysis of journal aims and in our interviews with editorial board members. In journal aims and scope statements, quality and diversity were addressed in a public-facing format, whilst interviews with editorial board members revealed that editorial members themselves were aware of these pressures in their day-to-day practices. Names of individuals who sit on boards signalled prestige and had the potential to attract both authors and readers, as the degree of board interlocking shows. Within the prestige economy of scholarly production editorial board membership signals academic standing *and* the standing of an academic is used to signal journal prestige.

Regarding the work of editorial boards, ideal members bring expertise regarding theme, conceptual underpinnings or research approach; have personal connections and are embedded in the broader network (academic / policy / institutional levels); and bring geographical coverage to warrant descriptors of being “international”. As seen both in our analysis of the journal aims and the interviews, such claims for being “global” or “international” are often nebulous and could be regarded as tokenistic, either due to lack of (substantive) international input into the work of the editorial boards, or due to the delineation of very specific, locally relevant topics.

Throughout the 58 journals we have drawn into our network analysis, there is a large group of people who are involved in editing, reviewing and making decisions for academic journals in the field. Their geographical spread is hugely skewed along the known lines of scholarly publishing, with the USA (46%), UK (14%) and Australia (7%) together commanding two-thirds of both the overall editorial board member positions *and* the same ratio amongst those sitting on multiple editorial boards. The editorial board interlocking of course also indicates the existence of a range of scholarly communities, drawing on thematic and/or geographical lines. Through the interviews with editorial board members we draw a distinction of some higher education journals oriented towards conceptual, scholarly work, *and* those oriented towards the practice of higher education (teaching and learning, policy, management, leadership, etc) more specifically.

A key question remaining is how inclusive these scholarly communities are to scholars producing knowledge on higher education from diverse contexts, whether that is becoming an author in highly prized journals or becoming an editorial board member. Moving away from the current publishing model and prestige economy would mean moving away from the collective interests of academics, publishers, universities currently benefitting from this system. Collective and individual complicity in precarious times seems to ensure that knowledge is skewed along predictable inequalities (Bhopal & Myers 2023; Brown et al., 2025). Perhaps a deeper engagement with Demeter’s work situated in the field of media and communication would benefit higher education scholars as well:

"Well-intentioned Western scholars, former peripheral academics currently working at the center and the legions of peripheral scholars could all help each other to build a more inclusive, more diverse, more just and more effective global knowledge production system that is free from the global knowledge hegemonies that are alien to the concept of a meritocratic and autonomous international academic field." (Demeter, 2020: 177)

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# Appendices

## Standardisation across dataset of editorial board members

**Standardizing Country Names and Affiliation**

One of the variables collected for the editorial board members was their country of affiliation. Given the variations in how countries are named across journal websites, we standardized country names to ensure consistency. For example, references to "Netherlands," "The Netherlands," or "Caribbean Netherlands" were unified under "Netherlands." Similarly, "Republic of Ireland" became "Ireland," and all references to the United Kingdom’s constituent countries (England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland) were merged under "United Kingdom." Additional variations, such as "South Korea" and "Hong-Kong," were also standardized.

**Handling Dual Affiliations**

Some editorial board members held dual nationalities or affiliations with more than one country. After reviewing their employment details and academic affiliations, it was determined which nationality should be used in the dataset. For example, individuals with affiliations in both the "United Kingdom" and "China" were categorized under the "United Kingdom," while those with ties to "United States" and "Slovenia" were assigned to the "United States."

**Publisher Standardization**

The dataset also required the careful verification and standardization of publisher names. Journal websites often use inconsistent naming conventions for publishers, sometimes referencing different divisions of the same organization. To ensure uniformity, variations such as "Taylor and Francis Ltd." and "Taylor and Francis Inc." were consolidated under "Taylor and Francis." Similar adjustments were made for publishers such as "SAGE Publications," "Springer," and "Wiley-Blackwell."

**Institutional Affiliations**

Institutional names were standardized to address variations in how different journals presented the names of universities and other organizations. For example, references to "University of Oxford," "Oxford University," and "The University of Oxford" were all standardized to "University of Oxford." This process required manual verification against each institution’s official website. Additionally, names of institutions with specific locations (e.g., "University of Wisconsin Madison") were standardized to include their location. Instances where individuals were listed as independent researchers or consultants were categorized as "missing" and excluded from further analysis.

**Editorial Member Names**

The editorial board member names were also verified and standardized. This step was essential because inconsistencies in name formatting could affect the accuracy of social network analysis calculations. Using tools like SPSS, the dataset was reviewed for unique values to ensure that no editor was duplicated or missed. A total of 108 inconsistencies were identified and corrected. Variables such as "Affiliation" and "Country" were used to cross-check and verify editorial members’ details.

This meticulous standardization process, particularly of names, affiliations, and institutions, is crucial for accurate social network analysis, where individual actors (e.g., editorial board members) can significantly influence network structures. These steps ensure that the dataset is both comprehensive and reliable, ready for the network analysis.

## Editorial board members and interlocked editors by country

Table 4: Editorial board members and interlocked editors by country

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Country | Number of editorial board members | Number of interlocked editorial board members |
| United States | 955 | 81 |
| United Kingdom | 287 | 28 |
| Australia | 137 | 10 |
| South Africa | 52 | 4 |
| Italy | 43 | 4 |
| Canada | 40 | 5 |
| China | 40 | 7 |
| Malaysia | 38 | 1 |
| New Zealand | 35 | 4 |
| Spain | 28 |  |
| Germany | 26 | 3 |
| India | 26 | 1 |
| Netherlands | 26 | 1 |
| Portugal | 25 | 2 |
| Ireland | 20 | 1 |
| Hong Kong | 16 | 4 |
| Finland | 14 | 2 |
| Turkey | 14 |  |
| Iran | 13 |  |
| United Arab Emirates | 13 | 1 |
| Belgium | 12 | 1 |
| Brazil | 12 |  |
| Sweden | 12 |  |
| Chile | 11 | 2 |
| Japan | 11 | 2 |
| Norway | 10 | 6 |
| Switzerland | 10 | 1 |
| Denmark | 8 |  |
| Greece | 8 | 1 |
| Taiwan | 7 | 1 |
| Colombia | 6 |  |
| Egypt | 6 |  |
| Mexico | 6 | 1 |
| France | 5 |  |
| Israel | 5 |  |
| Ghana | 4 |  |
| Hungary | 4 |  |
| Lithuania | 4 |  |
| Poland | 4 | 1 |
| Russia | 4 |  |
| South Korea | 4 | 1 |
| Argentina | 3 | 1 |
| Estonia | 3 |  |
| Mauritius | 3 |  |
| Oman | 3 |  |
| Philippines | 3 |  |
| Qatar | 3 |  |
| Slovenia | 3 |  |
| Vietnam | 3 |  |
| Austria | 2 |  |
| Bahrain | 2 |  |
| Bangladesh | 2 |  |
| Cyprus | 2 | 1 |
| Ecuador | 2 |  |
| Iraq | 2 |  |
| Kenya | 2 |  |
| Korea | 2 |  |
| Malta | 2 |  |
| Nigeria | 2 |  |
| Pakistan | 2 |  |
| Peru | 2 |  |
| Romania | 2 |  |
| Singapore | 2 |  |
| Botswana | 1 |  |
| Cameroon | 1 |  |
| Croatia | 1 |  |
| Czech | 1 |  |
| Fiji | 1 |  |
| Indonesia | 1 |  |
| Jordan | 1 |  |
| Kosovo | 1 |  |
| Kurdistan | 1 |  |
| Lebanon | 1 |  |
| Morocco | 1 |  |
| Nepal | 1 |  |
| Palestine | 1 |  |
| Saudi Arabia | 1 |  |
| Serbia | 1 |  |
| Sri Lanka | 1 |  |
| Tasmania | 1 |  |
| Uganda | 1 |  |
| Venezuela | 1 | 1 |
| Zimbabwe | 1 |  |
| Total Unique Editors | **2073** | **179** |

## Participant information sheet

Before you decide to take part in this study it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.  
 **The Research**The project is funded by the Society for Research in Higher Education (SRHE). It explores the production of academic knowledge about higher education (HE) by the editorial boards of HE journals. It will identify the range of different approaches adopted when recruiting new editorial board members; the extent to which editorial boards appear to be exclusive or open networks of scholars; and, the degree to which editorial boards overlap or interlock. The research will be completed by the end of 2024.

The research will be conducted within the University of Nottingham’s (UoN) *Code of Research* (https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/research/documents/ethics-and-integrity/code-of-research-conduct-and-research-ethics-v9.0-27-march-2023.pdf ) which provides governance and direction about research ethics. The research has been approved by the UoN School of Education Ethics Committee.

On completion of the research findings will be presented at academic conferences including the annual SRHE conference and published in academic journals.  
  
**Your participation**You have been invited to take part in the research because of your role as an editor or editorial board member of an academic journal that publishes work on higher education. Participation is entirely voluntary and you may choose to withdraw from the research at any time.

If you choose to participate we will arrange a time and date convenient to yourself to conduct an interview with one of the research team to discuss your experiences of being an editor or editorial board member. Interviews will be conducted on a digital platform such as Teams (though if preferred we could make arrangements to conduct the interview in person). Interviews will be recorded as an audio mp3 file. Audio files will be anonymously coded and stored on a password protected university drive. Interviews will be transcribed anonymously to ensure that no individuals or journals are identifiable. Following transcription the original audio files will be destroyed. A Data Privacy Notice accompanies this information sheet giving more detailed information on how data will be stored in relation to General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR).

We would hope that the nature of this research would be of interest to yourself and the wider academic community because of its focus on journals and knowledge production. The main disadvantage we would identify in your participation would be the time involved in conducting an interview. We would hope that would be offset by your own interest in our research.

**For further information please contact either:**

Dr Martin Myers, [Martin.Myers@Nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:Martin.Myers@Nottingham.ac.uk)   
Dr Rita Hordósy, [Rita.Hordosy@Nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:Rita.Hordosy@Nottingham.ac.uk)

If you have concerns relating to the research please contact the UoN School of Education Ethics Committee: [educationresearchethics@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:educationresearchethics@nottingham.ac.uk)

## Participant Consent Form

**Project title: *Gatekeepers of knowledge production on higher education: journal editorial board networks and working practices***

* I have read the Participant Information Sheet and the nature and purpose of the research project has been explained to me. I understand and agree to take part.
* I have read the project’s Privacy Notice
* I understand the purpose of the research project and my involvement in it.
* I understand that I may withdraw from the research project at any stage and that this will not affect my status now or in the future.
* I understand that while information gained during the study may be published, I will not be identified and my personal results will remain confidential.
* I understand that I will be audio recorded during the interview.
* I understand that data will be stored as an mp3 file on a password protected university drive. Only the research team will have access to that data. Following anonymised transcription of the data the original audio files will be deleted.
* I understand that I may contact the researcher team if I require further information about the research, and that I may contact the Research Ethics Coordinator of the School of Education, University of Nottingham, if I wish to make a complaint relating to my involvement in the research.

**Signed** ………………………………………………………………………… (research participant)

**Print name** ………………………………………………………………… **Date** …………………………………

**Contact details of interviewers:**

Dr Rita Hordósy, [Rita.Hordosy@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:Rita.Hordosy@nottingham.ac.uk)

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## Data Privacy Notice

**Data Privacy Notice**

For information about the University’s obligations with respect to your data, who you can get in touch with and your rights as a data subject, please visit: [www.nottingham.ac.uk/utilities/privacy/privacy.aspx](http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/utilities/privacy/privacy.aspx).

**Why we collect your personal data**We collect personal data under the terms of the University’s Royal Charter in our capacity as a teaching and research body to advance education and learning. Specific purposes for data collection on this occasion are to conduct research exploring academic journal editorial practices to better understand knowledge production.

**Legal basis for processing your personal data under UK GDPR**  
The legal basis for processing your personal data on this occasion is Article 6(1a) consent of the data subject .

**Where the University receives your personal data from**In addition to data obtained from yourself we will also collect data prom publicly available sources e.g. academic journal websites listing the names of editors and editorial board members.

**How long we keep your data**The University may store your data for up to 25 years and for a period of no less than 7 years after the research project finishes. The researchers who gathered or processed the data may also store the data indefinitely and reuse it in future research. Measures to safeguard your stored data include anonymisation of all data identifying individuals and journals and the deletion of original audio files recording interviews following their anonymised transcription.  
  
**Contact Details**Dr Martin Myers, [Martin.Myers@Nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:Martin.Myers@Nottingham.ac.uk)   
Dr Rita Hordósy, [Rita.Hordosy@Nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:Rita.Hordosy@Nottingham.ac.uk)

## Interview schedule

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **#** | **Question** | **Prompt** |
|  | **ABOUT THE JOURNAL** |  |
|  | **How would you describe your journal?**  What is the key focus / USP of this journal? | Use prompts from AIMS  Mission statement |
| 1 ½. | **Who is the audience for the journal?** | Audience interaction: conferences, social media, academic associations, Special Interest Groups |
|  | What types of publications does the journal have? | Review, short pieces, research papers, etc |
|  | What is a relevant article for this journal?  **What is a high quality paper for this journal?** |  |
|  | Who are the authors for the journal?   * How are articles commissioned? * How are special issues invited? |  |
|  | What are the links of this journal, if any, to…   * Membership organisations * Other journals in higher education? * Other journals in other fields / disciplines? | IF: What is the role of the membership organisation in relation to the journal? |
|  | Does the journal commission special issues? – TWO A YEAR What is the process? How are SI articles reviewed? |  |
|  | **ABOUT THE EDITORIAL BOARD** |  |
|  | How is the editorial board(s) made up?  How many people serve on the different boards?  **Editorial Team / Editorial Advisory Board** | E.g. international board; main editorial board;  Logic of editorial board make-up: institutional; network of people; changes termly |
|  | **What is the relationship between the different boards?**  What are different types of boards used for? | Dynamic within the editorial board |
|  | What are the key leadership roles for this journal?  How many people are in leadership roles? Are they specialised?  How have these roles changed over time?  **Editor in Chief / Senior Editor / Associate Editors  / Special Issues Editors** | Division of labour?  Who gets paid?  Dynamic within leadership  Hierarchy and decision-making power |
|  | **Who is a good editorial board member?**  What are the benefits of being an editorial board member? | Working practices; values; personal qualities, etc. |
|  | **What are the policies of recruiting new members for the editorial board?**  What considerations go into choosing new people for board? | Criteria?  Diversity (individual characteristics / international coverage / research interest or approach / seniority)? |
|  | What is the process of selecting new members for the editorial board? | Open call?  Invitation?  Role of networks? |
|  | **SUBMISSIONS AND ISSUES WITH REVIEWING** |  |
|  | What is the process of journal submissions? (From submission to review to acceptance / rejection) | Indication of rejection rates: desk / after 1st review / after 2nd review |
|  | Has the process of inviting reviewers changed over the past 5 years? |  |
|  | **RELATIONSHIP TO PUBLISHER** |  |
|  | Which publisher?  What sort of day-to-day/administrative relationship between publisher and editorial board?  Are their expectations from the publisher about the journal management? Have these ever clashed with editorial line? | Awareness of other editorial/publisher relationships/practice |
| 17. | Is the publisher involved in selection of editors | e.g. Suggest names e.g. Suggest type of editors |
| 18. | What sort of metrics do publishers provide? Citations? Journal rankings? How are these used in the relationship between publisher and editors? |  |
| 19. | Does the publisher have expectations about the ranking of journal?  Of the ‘prestige’ of the journal? | Do these match expectations of editor?  Pressure to raise ranking? Prestige? |