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Chasing ratings, losing impact: The effects of journal lists on publication patterns in business and management

Chris Brooks [a],*, Miklos Farkas [b]

[a] Henley Business School, University of Reading, Whiteknights, Reading RG6 6UD, UK
[b] University of Bristol, 15-19 Tyndalls Park Road, Bristol, BS8 1PQ, UK

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ABSTRACT

The quality of research papers in business and management is frequently assessed in an automated fashion according to the rating of the journals in which they are published. Using a very large sample of research spanning all fields in business and management studies, we examine the extent to which the prevalence of country-specific journal ratings lists leads authors to focus on ratings, potentially at the expense of the academic influence and article fit of the resulting publication. We find that authors based in the UK or Australia publish disproportionately frequently in journals that have low impact factors within ratings categories measured using their country's journal lists. We argue that such outcomes could have arisen in contexts where measured research performance is prioritised alongside publication in less competitive outlets. We show that this success is on average achieved at the expense of both fit to the journal and citations, which are sacrificed by publishing in lower-impact, higher-rated journals. We find no evidence, however, that work by Australian or UK authors who publish away from their core fields appears in higher rated journals.

1. Introduction

Research assessments are a way of life for academics, particularly in business schools, with appraisals made at the individual, departmental, university, and national levels. Although national research evaluations and league tables are of paramount importance to universities, they typically provide little information that can be used to assess the work of individual researchers, since the scores assigned to each particular publication are not released. Therefore, evaluating the worth of each piece of work must be achieved by other means.

It is common for business school deans, research managers, and various committees to rely on journal ratings lists such as the Academic Journal Guide (AJG), keeping a tally of the numbers of highly rated papers each faculty member produces. This approach implies a belief that the quality of a piece of work is accurately captured by the rating of the journal in which it is published. On average and at the aggregate level, there is arguably some merit in the belief that higher quality work is published in better journals. Pidd and Broadbent (2015), for example, compare the scores assigned to outputs via peer review by REF2014 (Research Excellence Framework)[1] panel members with the corresponding scores of the journals in which the articles were published according to the AJG, a popular journal ratings list that uses the same scale as the REF. They show that around 50% of a random sample of articles received identical REF2014 panel and journal rating scores. Examining data from the more recent REF2021, Blackburn et al. (2024) show that there was approximately a 20% chance that papers in journals rated below 4 according to the AJG would receive the highest possible rating of 4* from the panel. Hole (2017) and Linton and Xu (2022) conduct similar exercises for the Economics REF2014 and REF2021 panels, respectively. Both studies find a high association between the rating of the journal in which the paper was published and the rating implied by the outcome of the REF exercise, the latter study finding a 91% correlation. Battistin and Ovidi (2022) go further to suggest that such high correlations undermine the value of national research assessment exercises such as the REF, which they suggest should focus on publications in lower rated journals where REF panellists views' are more likely to diverge from journal ratings.

Rather than using a journal ratings list, an alternative approach for evaluating the quality of individual outputs would be to establish an internal review group providing judgements on individual outputs that could then be used as an input to hiring, probation, promotion, salary enhancement, and even redundancy decisions. However, such an approach is very time-consuming, requires sufficient local subject matter

* Corresponding author.
E-mail addresses: c.brooks@reading.ac.uk (C. Brooks), miklos.farkas@bristol.ac.uk (M. Farkas).

[1] The REF is the UK's national system for evaluating the quality of research, and in business and management it relies on peer-review of individual outputs rather than the use of metrics or journal rating lists.

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experts across all fields covered in the institution, and may lack transparency. In addition, post-publication reading groups often become anchored to the journal list rating when assessing papers, rendering the outcome largely a duplication of the journal rating (Morgan-Thomas et al., 2024).

The incentive systems created by performance measurement can have unintended consequences. Groen-Xu et al. (2023) show that research appearing just before a REF assessment deadline is published in lower impact journals, is less widely cited, and is more likely to be subsequently retracted, than work published at other times. They suggest that this may be attributed to the work being rushed through prematurely to the detriment of its quality. However, such distortionary effects are not confined to the UK's REF. Civera et al. (2020), for instance, show that the Excellence Initiative in Germany, which sought to improve research quality, ended up generating higher research production, but at the expense of citations per article, and therefore academic impact.

Research performance evaluation through journal lists arose partly a result of a managerial desire to have a common measure of research value across diverse fields in a business school (Aguinis et al., 2020). Lists are now employed as a yardstick in the overwhelming majority of recruitment and annual appraisal decisions in UK and Australian business schools (see Bryce et al. (2020) for the UK; Hair et al. (2019) and Black et al. (2017) for Australia).[2] Researchers who ignore ratings lists run the risk of damaging their career trajectory (Bryce et al., 2020) since employing such lists for performance measurement has become ever more widespread despite the inherent drawbacks of using them in this way (Mingers and Willmott, 2013). Specialised journals will struggle to obtain high ratings despite that they perform an important role in disseminating information to wider audiences (Chavarro et al., 2017). One of the most concerning side effects of all is the danger that, over time, the existence and increasingly widespread adoption of journal ratings lists begins to change the types of research produced and the methods used to conduct them — that is, such lists are performative. For example, there are no highly rated accounting history or accounting education journals (Hudson, 2025), which acts as a deterrent to academics concerned with their career development from producing such research. Moreover, Wang et al. (2017) show that novel papers are typically published outside the top-rated journals.

Journal ratings lists both imbue power to university research managers (by virtue of their ability to rate individuals' research with a veneer of authority and to pronounce on scholars' performance) and render them powerless (since they have no way to change the manner in which their institution is evaluated externally or the relative rankings assigned to other institutions) at the same time (Anderson et al., 2021). Yet the ultimate power in individual scholarly research evaluation lies with list custodians, since university research managers and academics in the UK, Australia and beyond are "list obsessed" (Willmott, 2011) and likely to remain so into the future.

In this study, we provide new evidence on the effects of journal ratings on publication outcomes, making several contributions to this literature. We employ a very large database from Scopus spanning publications in all fields of business and management covering the period 2006–2022 and examining the country affiliations of published authors. We show that, within journal rating bands defined by their country's journal ratings lists, authors based in the UK and Australia publish disproportionately in journals with lower influence, as measured by the SCImago Journal Rank. Further, we find using textual analysis that when those authors publish in highly rated but low influence journals, they do so at the expense of the fit of their article to the journal. These findings are consistent with the publication patterns being driven by the incentive structures that researchers face in those countries, as documented in the references above whereby the focus is on the journal rating and not on the prestige or competitiveness of the journal within the ratings category.

We use data on authors' prior publications to estimate the time since their first such experience. We show that high journal rating-low impact outcomes are more prevalent among scholars closer to the beginning of their publishing careers and we demonstrate that citations are typically being sacrificed in order to obtain a quick hit by way of the journal rating score. Therefore, such publication outcomes are likely to the detriment of the long-term visibility of the work as measured by citations. Novelly, we also examine whether authors from the UK or Australia are similarly publishing out of their usual fields of research in order to gain publication in higher rated journals. While scholars from these countries do publish more across fields than those from other countries on average, we find no evidence that they gain a journal ratings advantage by doing so.

Our findings have implications not only for individual researcher journal selection strategies, but also for journal list custodians. Individual scholars should be mindful that pursuing publications in highly rated but lower-impact or poorly matched journals may reduce the long-term influence of their work and weaken opportunities for international engagement. For custodians of journal lists, our results suggest that it would be beneficial to introduce finer ratings tiers to improve their evaluative precision.

Our research is linked to, but strongly distinct from, several existing studies. In a related article, Hudson (2024), argues that UK-based academics are more focused on journal grades than intrinsic research quality, and that the ratings of the journals they published in increased over time. He examines Academic Journal Guide regradings, and finds that upgrades(downgrades) drive increases(reductions) in the proportion of work published in those journals by UK-based authors compared with journals that did not change rating. We significantly extend this analysis by using a richer dataset that links articles to authors and authors to university affiliations, which enables us to examine a wider array of issues around career stage, article fit, and citations. Our study is also linked with Salandra et al. (2022), who examine whether academics are willing to forgo citations to publish in higher status journals. However, their investigation is based on a survey, whereas we tackle this issue directly with quantitative data on actual publication outcomes, as well as addressing a considerably broader range of questions.

The remainder of this paper is organised as follows. Section 2 formulates several testable hypotheses relating to the extent of exploitation of opportunities created by anomalies in journal ratings systems and to the characteristics of researchers who are more likely to try to take advantage of them. Section 3 outlines the quantitative methods we employ and describes our approaches to data collection and analysis. Section 4 presents the results and finally, Section 5 offers concluding remarks, reflections, and presents some implications of our findings.

2. The journal ratings list landscape and hypotheses development

2.1. Journal ratings lists

In this study, we use the AJG and its Australian counterpart, the Australian Business Dean's Council (ABDC) Journal Quality List, since they are the two most widely adopted lists (Serenko and Bontis, 2024). The lists also have similar methods for revisions and additions of new journals, with formalised sub-committees at the field level responsible for making recommendations to the central committee. We now briefly discuss the development and structures of these two lists. The UK is a particularly interesting focal case because it pioneered national research assessments beginning as early as 1986 (Hicks, 2012), and with the process of individual use of rankings lists also well entrenched (Mingers and Willmott, 2013). Given that the AJG is a

[2] Ryazanova et al. (2017) develop a Global Research Performance tool that can be used as a measure for institutional research evaluation in international business.

UK-based invention, it is most widely applied in the UK (Walker et al., 2019). Likewise, the ABDC list is most widely used in Australia (Serenko and Bontis, 2024).

The AJG is provided by the Chartered Association of Business Schools (CABS), which is the official body representing business schools in the UK. The AJG in its 2021 form rates a total of 1703 journals across 22 subfields.[3] It is the "most widely used of the various lists available" (Rowlinson et al., 2011, p.443), with almost 90% of faculty in UK business schools stating that they use it according to a survey by Walker et al. (2019). Journals are rated on a 1 to 4 scale, with 4 being the highest. In addition, since 2015 some journals from among those rated 4 have been assigned a 4* *Journal of Distinction* (formerly known as "World Elite") designation, representing those that are "recognised worldwide as exemplars of excellence".[4] AJG ratings are "compiled using a range of methods and avoid the mechanistic use of a single metric such as citation impact factors" (Rowlinson et al., 2011). These ingredients still include citation-based metrics, but tempered with qualitative judgements by subject matter experts for each individual field (Walker et al., 2019).

Among the other journal lists that exist, the ABDC list is also used in Asia and has been argued to represent the second most commonly consulted list (Serenko and Bontis, 2024 and see also Hair et al., 2019). The first incarnation of the ABDC list began in 2008, with the latest version released in 2025.[5] The total number of journals covered has been stable over time and is currently 2680. Included journals are rated on a four-point scale from C (the lowest, approximately 36% of journals) through B (32%) and A (24%) to A* (7%). Comparing the AJG and ABDC lists, both underwent major regrading in their second editions – about 20% of ABDC B, A and A* journals were reclassified in the 2013 edition of the ABDC list and around 25% of AJG 3- and 4-rated journals were regraded in the 2015 edition of the AJG – but no major regrading has occurred since. In their most recent editions, 199 journals were rated A* in the 2019 ABDC list, compared with just 43 journals rated 4* in the 2021 AJG edition, the latter also significantly overlapping with the Financial Times Top 50 list. The ABDC list separates journals into 17 fields,[6] although these do not map closely to the AJG subject areas.[7]

2.2. The link between journal lists and publication outcomes

Journal ratings lists are embedded in nearly every stage of the academic lifecycle in the UK — from hiring and promotion to performance reviews and contract renewal (Giles and Garand, 2007; Agyemang and Broadbent, 2015). Despite widespread endorsement of initiatives seeking to limit or contextualise the use of metrics such as DORA (Declaration on Research Assessment) and CoARA (Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment), reliance on journal-based ratings persists, with commitments to responsible assessment often remaining "symbolic rather than substantive" (Morgan-Thomas et al., 2024, p.10). In practice, the perceived quality of research is frequently equated with the rating of the journal in which it appears (Willmott, 2011).

Promotion thresholds have become more focused on publication venue than scholarly contribution (Beattie and Goodacre, 2012; Black et al., 2017; Paradeise and Thoenig, 2013), shifting academia towards a more transactional culture where researchers might be incentivised to pursue activities that maximise measurable outcomes. Given the simplicity of evaluating output by journal rating, this metric-driven environment fosters behaviour consistent with the sociological notion of *reactivity* — focusing on what is being measured rather than the underlying object of interest, which is the intrinsic quality of the research (Espeland and Sauder, 2007; Gendron, 2008; Harley, 2002).

When journal ratings were initially used as a performance metric, there was considerable heterogeneity in their application, with various institutions having their own lists (see, for example, Morris et al., 2009). However, the AJG subsequently came to dominate in the UK where it is now ubiquitously used in research evaluation and as an ingredient to hiring and promotions (Bryce et al., 2020). For instance, it is quite common in the country's business schools for faculty to be expected to produce "one 3-rated journal paper per year" or to require "three papers in 4-rated journals every five years" with reference to the AJG alongside other indicators to be a credible candidate for promotion (see, for instance, Agyemang and Broadbent, 2015). In North America (and arguably across the highest rated business schools in globally including the UK), however, tenure success or failure is frequently determined by the number of papers a researcher has published in the very top journals (Gendron, 2008) rather than by reference to a longer, graded list of potential outlets (Aguinis et al., 2020). Su et al. (2026) find that almost half of all articles published in Journals of Distinction since 2010 have at least one author affiliated to a QS-Top 50 institution, and the presence of such authors increases after outlets become newly designated as Journals of Distinction.[8]

Researchers internalise the performance measurement process, and the ratings of the journals in which they publish become the primary yardstick with which they evaluate their own scholarly worth (Willmott, 1995). Those lacking top-rated publications face increased teaching loads or loss of research status (Tourish and Willmott, 2015). Researchers may aim to publish in elite journals to enhance both personal and institutional standing (De Rond and Miller, 2005; Gruber, 2014; Macdonald and Kam, 2007), potentially even adjusting submissions in response to rating changes (Śpiewanowski and Talavera, 2021; Hudson, 2024). Qualitative evidence from surveys echoes this: academics report choosing higher-rated outlets even when other journals

[3] These fields are: Accounting; Business and Economic History; Economics, Econometrics and Statistics; Entrepreneurship and Small Business Management; Finance; General Management, Ethics, Gender and Social Responsibility; Human Resource Management and Employment Studies; Information Systems; Innovation; International Business and Area Studies; Management Development and Education; Marketing; Operations and Technology Management; Operations Research and Management Science; Organisational Studies; Psychology (General); Psychology (Organisational); Public Sector and Health Care; Regional Studies, Planning and Environment; Sports, Leisure, Tourism and Sector Studies; Social Sciences; Strategy.

[4] See https://d2wh7r8sprmdcr.cloudfront.net/ajg-2024-methodology.pdf. Accessed on 16/04/2026.

[5] See https://abdc.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/ABDC-2022-Journal-Quality-List-Review-Report-150323.pdf for further details.

[6] These fields are: Accounting, auditing and accountability; Banking, finance and investment; Business systems in Context; Commercial services; Human resources and industrial relations; Marketing; Strategy, management and organisational behaviour; Tourism; Transportation, logistics and supply chains; Other commerce, management, tourism and services; Applied economics; Econometrics; Economic theory; Other economics; Information systems; Commercial law; Statistics.

[7] There is also a French list produced by the French National Centre for Scientific Research (Bryce et al., 2020), a German list, and a Danish list (see Hennig-Thurau, 2009), amongst several others. A list of the various lists and a detailed discussion is given on Ane-Wil Harzing's website: https://harzing.com/resources/journal-quality-list.

[8] The other rating list that is frequently referred to in business schools globally is produced by the *Financial Times*. This list currently comprises 50 journals following an increase in the number and a replacement of four journals in 2016. The FT List is likely to form the basis of performance management at the highest ranked business schools (Bajo et al., 2020). But its relevance for the journal submission decisions of most scholars at other institutions and their performance evaluation is limited due to its narrow coverage and focus on only the very highest rated journals in each field, which many researchers may consider are inappropriate or unattainable for their work (Adler and Harzing, 2009). See: https://www.ft.com/content/3405a512-5cbb-11e1-8f1f-00144feabdc0.

might be better suited to their work (Nedeva et al., 2012; Serenko and Bontis, 2024; Brooks et al., 2023).

Since performance evaluations often occur at the school or faculty level, journal ratings effectively serve as a "universal currency" across disciplines. Yet journals with identical ratings vary greatly in competitiveness. For instance, both the *Journal of Public Economics* and the *Journal of Financial Research* are AJG 3-rated, though their acceptance rates differ dramatically (8% vs. 33%).[9] Such discrepancies create a divergence between the "official" and "market" value of journals, incentivising academics to publish in the least competitive outlets within each rating band.

Given that large numbers of journals possess the same rating in the AJG and likewise large numbers have the same ABDC rating,[10] it will inevitably be the case that some of those journals are considerably harder to gain publication in (by virtue of having much higher rejection rates) than others. Indeed, some specific journals such as *Business History*, *Industrial Relations*, and *The Journal of Supply Chain Management* have vastly different AJG status compared with their rankings on other measures (Mingers and Yang, 2017). This creates an incentive for authors to target the "softest" journals within a rating category, since once published, the "quality" of their output will largely be judged by the journal's rating rather than its intrinsic prestige. We argue that a journal's impact factor – and particularly the SCImago Journal Rank (SJR) indicator, which captures its academic influence – can serve as a useful proxy for the journal's competitiveness.[11]

Although most lists share similar top-tier journals, notable inconsistencies remain. Some journals highly rated on the AJG score lower on other national lists or bibliometric measures (Gruber, 2014; Hussain, 2015). Consequently, national differences in evaluation systems shape strategic publishing behaviour: whereas US institutions emphasise "A-journals" exclusively (Aguinis et al., 2020), UK and Australian academics will be incentivised to optimise outcomes with respect to their relevant national journal list. This leads to our first hypotheses:

> H1a: Within a given AJG rating category, UK researchers publish more in lower impact journals than those with non-UK affiliations.
> H1b: Within a given ABDC rating category, Australian researchers publish more in lower impact journals than those with non-Australian affiliations.

Early career researchers are hit harder by the requirement to publish in "top" journals due to their relatively small number of completed working papers that can be translated into journal submissions and the often lengthy rounds of refereeing and revisions during the review process after submission. Academics who are currently in the later stages of their careers will likely have been socialised into the process of research evaluation prior to the dominance of journal ratings lists that gained momentum in the 2000s. Veterans will therefore likely be less wedded to lists as the primary means to select a publication outlet. Drivas and Kremmydas (2020) find that senior researchers are less likely to concentrate the citations in their studies on those in top journals as a signal — a finding that they attribute to them being less focused on precise journal rankings. Equally, senior academics will typically have a deeper knowledge of the range of appropriate journals available. They will already have sufficient "runs on the board" that will afford them the latitude to prioritise the fit of the work to the target journal and maximising the expected number of citations in the longer run. This places less pressure on them to secure publication in highly rated journals according to a list going forwards, which leads to the hypotheses:

> H2a: Within a given AJG rating category, UK-based researchers earlier in their careers publish more in lower impact journals than those later in their careers.
> H2b: Within a given ABDC rating category, Australian researchers earlier in their careers publish more in lower impact journals than those later in their careers.

Despite the universal currency status of journal ratings, there are considerable variations across fields in the numbers of journals at higher ratings, leading to complaints from scholars in some fields that they are disadvantaged relative to their colleagues in other disciplines (see, for example, the study by Hoepner and Unerman, 2012). To illustrate with the AJG, 42% of psychology journals are rated 4, but this classification is assigned to less than 5% of those in operations management, operational research and information systems. Likewise, in the latest version of the ABDC, 22% of the 32 econometrics journals are given the highest rating, A*, but just 6% of the 299 journals in commercial law field and none of 99 in "other economics" have been designated the highest rating.

Researchers increasingly select target journals based on the outlets' ratings rather than the subject area or methodological specialism (Parker and Guthrie, 2012). There is sometimes sufficient leeway in the scope of research that a journal publishes for authors to modify their study to appeal to the editors of a journal in a different field. Hudson (2025) demonstrates that the proportion of UK-authored work in accounting education and accounting history journals has diminished over time, which he attributes to the lack of any journals in these subfields rated at over 2 by the AJG. Instead, he shows that such research has been directed towards generalist accounting journals, even though the fit of the work there may be weaker. These observations provide evidence that there are incentives for researchers in fields where they believe publishing to be relatively hard to instead submit their work to journals in other related fields where they perceive it to be easier, leading to the following hypotheses.

> H3a: UK-based researchers publish in higher AJG-rated journals across fields than they do in their "home field".
> H3b: Australian researchers publish in higher ABDC-rated journals across fields than they do in their "home field".

Of course, there can be legitimate reasons unrelated to maximising the "star count" for which researchers might submit to out-of-field journals if they consider that a particular study will not be welcomed within field. For instance, Brooks et al. (2019) suggest that much of the critical and qualitative research in finance is published in non-finance journals because mainstream finance journals are largely unwelcoming of studies on such topics. Indeed, a particular paper may fit better out-of-field if it adopts research design or methods that are not standard within the field. There might also be risks for individual scholars when they publish outside their field that their portfolio of work would lack focus and that out-of-field studies are not given the recognition by within-field managers that the stature of their places of publication should merit.

[9] https://douglaslcampbell.blogspot.com/2017/08/ranking-academic-economic-journals-by.html, https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/14756803/journal-metrics.

[10] For instance, there are 67 separate AJG 3-rated journals in the field of "Economics, Econometrics and Statistics" or, similarly, 30 A-rated journals in "Accounting, auditing and accountability" on the ABDC list.

[11] In Section 3 of the Online Appendix we further explore the link between SJR and journal competitiveness by hand-collecting data on acceptance rates and average time from submission to acceptance for each journal. We find that these more direct measures of competitiveness have higher correlations with SJR than journal ratings. This provides empirical support for the notion that a journal's SJR can capture the difficulty of publishing there.

2.3. The effect of publishing in high-rating-low-impact journals on citations

Authors considering publishing in a higher rated journal than the best fitting one for their study — for example, an "out of field" journal – face a trade-off regarding the probable impact on the number of citations their study will garner. On the one hand, higher rated journals typically obtain higher citation counts, and the differences can be stark. As Drivas and Kremmydas (2020) note, not only is work in higher rated journals more likely to be noticed, but more importantly, it also has a higher chance of citation because of a "halo effect" where researchers strategically employ references with the aim to enhance the standing of their work by positioning it within a "higher quality" subset of the literature. Drivas and Kremmydas (2020) show considerably more support for the hypothesis that positioning and signalling are the causes of higher citation rates for papers at higher ranked journals rather than visibility.

However, the distributions of citations substantially overlap between journals of different ratings (Osterloh and Frey, 2020), so it is not necessarily the case that a paper will obtain higher citations merely by virtue of being published in a higher rated journal. A paper published in a poorly fitting outlet merely to gain a higher journal rating category is likely to get less attention, as future researchers might not spot it if they identify relevant literature by browsing through issues of key journals on the topic. Or, researchers may choose to ignore a poorly fitting article because they doubt its relevance. Feenberg et al. (2017) suggest that time pressure encourages researchers to focus on studies ordered first in a search list, whereas papers in poorly fitting journals might appear lower in such searches. As a result, the existing academic literature has identified that poorly fitting papers will not gain as much traction and consequently suffer a "citation penalty" (see, for example, Knight and Steinbach, 2008 or Barrera-Barrera, 2022).

Salandra et al. (2022) provide survey results showing that almost half of business school academics would hypothetically be willing to sacrifice a significant number of citations and the associated academic impact to obtain a paper in a Journal of Distinction, which they refer to as a "golden ticket", rather than a 4-rated outlet with reference to the AJG. This suggests that these survey respondents view journal prestige as more important to them than scientific influence at the article level. This leads to our final hypotheses:

> H4a: Citation counts will be lower for publications by UK-based researchers, who are incentivised to publish in lower impact, higher AJG-rated journals.
> H4b: Citation counts will be lower for publications by Australian researchers, who are incentivised to publish in lower impact, higher ABDC-rated journals.

3. Methods and data

3.1. Data collection

We begin data collection by seeking all journal titles and their ISSNs that have been rated 3 or above in any of the AJG guides released in 2010, 2015, 2018 or 2021 (there are 475 such journals). We follow Hudson (2024) amongst others in focusing on journals rated 3 or higher. This rating appears to be the minimum acceptable performance threshold at many UK business schools (Mingers and Willmott, 2013, p.1063), while publications in journals of a lower AJG rating or with no rating are often viewed by managerial appraisals as irrelevant (Adler and Harzing, 2009).[12]

We use Scopus API via http://api.elsevier.com to download metadata for all the publications between 2006 and 2022 in the above set of journals with the help of the *pybliometrics* Python package of Rose and Kitchin (2019). The metadata includes most of the information that would appear on the front page of an article, such as the names and affiliations of authors, in addition to the title, abstract and keywords. Importantly, Scopus provides author and affiliation identification numbers, which allow us to link an author's different publications and also to track their affiliations over time with high confidence. Besides the name of the affiliation, its location (country and city) is also provided by Scopus.[13]

To address hypotheses H1a and H1b we focus on the sample period 2016–2022 using all the articles retrieved. The reason we focus on this period is that the 2015 edition of the AJG differs considerably from the 2010 inaugural edition: (i) it has significantly increased coverage; (ii) about a third of the 2010 ratings were updated[14]; and (iii) it was the first edition to introduce the 4* rating ("Journals of Distinction"). After cleaning the data, for these seven years we find 262,421 research articles on Scopus written by 377,658 unique authors and published across 452 journals. All of these articles have non-missing author identifiers (*author_ids*), non-missing abstracts (*description*), non-missing or imputed country of author affiliations and the SJR of their journal is available for the respective year of the publication. We also require the journal to have a rating of at least 3 according to the most recent edition of the AJG at the time. This means that if a journal is rated 2 in the 2015 AJG but 3 in the 2018 version, it will only enter our sample from 2019 (we assume a one-year lag between the publication of an AJG edition and the assignment of its ratings to journals to account for the time taken for the peer review process).[15]

We link our sample of journals with ratings of the Australian Business Deans Council (ABDC). The ABDC has been updated every three years since 2010; we use all the editions published between 2013 and 2019. Table 1 cross-tabulates the journals across the two rating schemes. Importantly, approximately 90% of journals in our AJG sample are also rated by the ABDC, enabling us to test our hypotheses in this setting as well. While the positive association between the rating schemes is as expected, there also appears to be meaningful variation between the ratings assigned. In the case of large rating differences, we would expect the shares of articles highlighting only Australian affiliations to systematically vary compared to the proportion of UK affiliations. For example, the *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* is AJG 3-rated (the third highest possible category) but ABDC A*-rated (the highest category), with an SJR of 1.88, which is below the mean SJR of 2.71 for all journals across all ratings in our sample (see Table 2). So, if Australian researchers consider the ABDC Journal Quality List in their submission choices, we would expect to find a relatively

Table 1
AJG 2021 and ABDC 2019 ratings for sampled journals in 2022.
For our sample of journals with at least 15 articles per year we find the respective rating assigned to them by the Australian Business Deans Council (ABDC) and cross-tabulate their frequencies with the CABS Academic Journal Guide (AJG) ratings.

	AJG 3	AJG 4	AJG 4*	Total
Unrated by ABDC	33	9	0	42
ABDC C	3	0	0	3
ABDC B	23	0	0	23
ABDC A	177	22	2	201
ABDC A*	56	60	39	155
Total	292	91	41	424

[12] Moreover, "UK academics … are increasingly urged to focus their energies on the … journals designated as 4" (Tourish, 2011, p.370).

[13] We have created a GitHub repository for our code that downloads and organises the data for analysis: https://github.com/mikifarkas/scopus-download-clean-arrange.

[14] Editions since have not witnessed anywhere near so many rating changes.

[15] We provide further details on our data cleaning and sample selection procedure in Section 1 of the Online Appendix.

Table 2
Average journal SJR by AJG and ABDC ratings and SJR terciles.
Sample period 2016–2022. Within each year and rating category we sort journals into terciles based on their respective annual SJR scores. This sorts journals into SJR low/mid/high categories, where SJR low (high) journals have an annual SJR below the 33rd percentile (above the 67th percentile) of the respective annual SJR distribution for the given AJG or ABDC rating category. The table reports the average journal SJR for each AJG-SJR or ABDC-SJR tercile bin. Based on 2955 journal–year pairs of observations.

	Panel A: CABS Academic Journal Guide			All
	SJR low (AJG)	SJR mid (AJG)	SJR high (AJG)	
3	0.87	1.49	3.01	1.79
4	1.71	3.02	5.80	3.53
4*	3.76	6.58	15.07	8.55
Total	1.28	2.22	4.63	2.71
	Panel B: Australian Business Deans Council			
	SJR low (ABDC)	SJR mid (ABDC)	SJR high (ABDC)	
C/Unrated	0.85	1.48	3.23	1.89
B	0.58	1.20	2.52	1.45
A	0.88	1.44	2.58	1.63
A*	1.75	3.36	8.73	4.62
Total	1.17	2.11	4.83	2.71

large share of articles highlighting only Australian affiliations in this journal. Indeed, while the average share of only Australian affiliation articles was 9.4% between 2016–2022 in this journal, for all journals rated A* by the ABDC, the corresponding share is 2.2%. More broadly, on average, the share of articles by only UK authors is 5.5% higher compared to the Australian-only share across all journal–years. But for journal–years where the AJG rates a journal 3 and the ABDC rates it A* (56 such journals exist), the difference is only 1.8%. This indicates that Australian-affiliated researchers are publishing disproportionately more in journals that are highly rated by their own local metrics but lower on the measures used in other countries and therefore potentially less internationally competitive, providing support for hypothesis H1b.

3.2. Measures

To investigate whether journal ratings lists encourage authors to publish in lower impact journals *within* their AJG rating category, we use the SCImago Journal Rank (SJR), a network-based metric that differs fundamentally from simple citation counts or the ISI impact factor. We employ the SJR as a proxy for journal competitiveness. Importantly, the SJR weights citations by the prestige of the citing journals, capturing a journal's centrality within the global citation network. Further advantages of the SJR include its comparability across fields (Pajić, 2015) and the exclusion of self-citations from its calculation (Falagas et al., 2008).[16]

In Tables A1–A2 of the Online Appendix we provide evidence that SJR is a solid proxy for journal competitiveness by relating it to hand-collected data on journal acceptance rates and days to acceptance from submission.[17] In particular, we obtain acceptance rate data for 44% of AJG 3-, 45% of AJG 4- and 24% of 4*-rated journals. Our results are in line with Sugimoto et al. (2013), who find that the Eigenfactor Score, which is a close relative of the SJR, shows the strongest negative correlation with journal acceptance rates among the measures they consider (including the Impact Factor). Likewise, Davenport et al. (2005) find a correlation of around -0.5 between journal acceptance rates and impact factors in economics and finance.

Since citation measures are one of the ingredients that determines a journal's rating, we might expect that higher rated journals would have higher SJRs. Investigating the extent to which this is the case, Table 2 presents the average SJR for a two-way sort of journals by their ratings and into (low, medium, and high) terciles by their annual SJR. As expected, the table shows that SJR increases with ratings for both rating schemes. However, comparing the columns in the table reveals that there are significant overlaps in the distributions of SJR scores across rating notches, as Osterloh and Frey (2020) also argue. For instance, the average SJR for the top tercile of journals rated at AJG 3 is 3.01, which is considerably higher than the corresponding figure for AJG 4-rated journals in the lowest SJR tercile (1.71), and almost comparable with that for the lowest tercile of 4* journals (3.76). These overlaps are important because they suggest that authors genuinely have choices among journals with different ratings: if there were no overlaps, then idiosyncrasies in rating systems would be far less consequential. An equally strong pattern of overlapping distributions across ABDC ratings categories is evident from Panel B of the table. The results in this table also confirm existing studies that while, on average, papers in higher ranked journals garner greater citation counts (Drivas and Kremmydas, 2020), the most heavily cited papers in mid-ranked journals are referred to much more frequently than the least cited in the very top journals (Oswald, 2007).

Building on these observations, we define *SJR low (AJG)* as an indicator variable equal to one for journal–years in which a journal's annual SJR score falls below the 33rd percentile of the SJR distribution among journals *in the same* AJG rating category in that year. Similarly, *SJR mid (AJG)* is assigned a value of one when the SJR lies between the 33rd and 67th percentile of that distribution. Finally, we define *SJR high (AJG)* as the residual category, such that *SJR high (AJG)* = 1 - *SJR low (AJG)-SJR mid (AJG)*. We define variables *SJR low/mid/high (ABDC)* in the same way using ABDC ratings.[18] When analysing data at the author level, we take advantage of our full sample of articles, which dates back to 2006. The longer period allows us to address our hypotheses H2–H4 with more credibility, e.g., classifying authors' career stages would be impossible with only seven years of data.

We classify authors as *UK-affiliated* (*AUS-affiliated*) if the given author highlights only United Kingdom (Australian) affiliations on all their publications during 2011–2022. We do this to be reasonably certain that the given set of authors work within their respective institutional setting. At the article level, we classify articles as *Only UK* (*Only AUS*) if the given article highlights only UK (AUS) affiliations. We anticipate that the incentives of the co-authors of these articles are most aligned to one another while being shaped by their respective institutional environment.

To measure authors' career stages, we select authors who first appear in our sample between 2011–2016, that is, we drop all authors who have published during 2006–2010 as for these authors we cannot be certain when they have started their publishing careers. On the other hand, for authors who first appear in our sample in 2011 or later, we are reasonably confident that they have not published before (as we did not find them publishing during the five years between 2006–2010). Using this restricted set of authors, we label those author–years "early career" for an author that have occurred within five years to their first publication.[19] While this variable measures precisely what we wish to — namely, the time since an author first published in an AJG 3- or higher-rated journal, it cannot distinguish between authors who enter the profession earlier or later in their working lives — for instance, whether they entered following a period of employment in the private

[16] We follow prior literature in loosely referring to the SJR as an "impact factor" in this study although as noted here it is distinct from the ISI impact factor measure.

[17] We note that both the SJR and citation counts for each journal will be dependent upon the proportion of work published there on an open access basis.

[18] In the Online Appendix we provide variable definitions in Table A16.

[19] For example, if an author first publishes in 2013, they will be considered Early Career between 2013–2018.

sector. This measure is a proxy for an author's experience of publishing in outlets rated at 3 or higher in the AJG, not necessarily for their age or total time as an academic. As such, any mis-classifications (such as academics entering the profession later in their careers following other types of employment) would tend to attenuate the estimated parameters, making estimates of any early career effects that we observe conservative.

We also compute two measures at the author–article level to help classify each author–article observation into publications that are likely to be on topics corresponding to the respective author's home-field (e.g., an economics researcher publishing an article in an economics journal) and to those on topics that are likely to be outside of an author's home-field (e.g., an economics researcher publishing an article in a general management journal). Our first measure purely builds on the AJG's field classification of journals. In particular, each author is assigned to a home-field based on the distribution of their publications across AJG fields. Their home-field is then defined as the field in which they publish the most. If there is no such field (e.g., an author has two publications in economics and two in finance), we leave that author as unclassified. Finally, we classify each author–article level observation as *Cross-field (AJG)* if the publication was in a journal outside the respective author's home-field.

In addition, we apply textual analysis to article abstracts as a second method for finding authors' home-fields. We do this to mitigate the possible concern that many journals implicitly or explicitly accept articles from multiple fields (e.g., *Management Science*). This approach also has the advantage of avoiding the issue of unclassified authors due to ties (as in the example of the previous paragraph).

After standard pre-processing steps,[20] we map each article's abstract onto a vector of terms. The indices of this vector correspond to the 13,000 most important terms occurring across all of the abstracts. The numbers in the vector represent term-frequency–inverse-document-frequency scores (TF–IDFs). TF–IDFs tell us the relative importance of the given word in an abstract, where importance is proportional to the number of times the word occurs in the given abstract and inversely related to the number of abstracts in which the word occurs at least once. In addition, we also find these vectors for the 22 AJG field corpuses, where each field corpus is the concatenation of all the abstracts of all the journals classified in the given field by the AJG. Next, we compute cosine similarity values between each article's abstract and the 22 field corpuses using the above vectors. Intuitively, these 22 cosine similarities for each abstract tell us how closely the given abstract's words align with the distributions of words across the different fields. Computing the average of these across the abstracts of each author, we can define an author's home-field as that showing the largest average cosine similarity with the given author's abstracts.

The measure *Cross-field* then takes the value one if the given article shows a larger cosine similarity with a field other than the author's home-field, and zero otherwise. This implies that, similar to *Cross-field (AJG)*, *Cross-field* is defined at the author–article level, so the same article could be a cross-field publication for one co-author but a home-field publication for another.

3.3. Sample description

The numbers of papers in each field are separated out by our affiliation categories (UK/AUS/Other) in Table 3. The final columns in each vertical panel show the proportions of articles in each field published in the lowest SJR tercile journals within AJG (ABDC) categories for UK (AUS) articles. There are considerable differences across fields, but in most cases (19/22 fields) UK-authors have considerably higher shares in the lowest impact journals within AJG ratings categories when compared to all other articles.[21] These differences are most stark for Business and Economic History (95% of UK-authored work); Ethics, CSR and Management; HRM & Employment (83% of UK-authored work), and Social Sciences. Similar patterns can be observed for Australia using the *SJR low* measure based on the ABDC list, where the differences are largest in the fields of Marketing, Accounting, and Finance. Altogether, these results suggest that researchers are systematically publishing disproportionately more in outlets with low impact factors within their country's relevant ratings scheme. This pattern holds across the overwhelming majority of fields.

To see how UK- and Australian-affiliated authors differ from those based at universities in the rest of the world, we show author level summary statistics in Table 4. To be reasonably confident that we are including research active authors in our sample, we only include authors who publish at least 0.5 articles per year between their first year of publication and the end of our sample period, 2022. In addition, as mentioned above, we only include authors who first published between 2011–2016 so that we can investigate the evolution of an author's publishing profile over time.

In total, we find over 21,000 authors who meet the above criteria, out of which 1517 (728) always highlight "United Kingdom" ("Australia") on all of their articles published between 2011–2022. UK- and Australian-affiliated authors exhibit some common patterns. Compared to their peers elsewhere, they tend to publish somewhat less frequently and their output appears in journals that are generally less competitive, as measured by average SJR. Consistent with this, their publications also receive fewer citations on average. When we compare the breadth of journals in which authors publish, Table 4 suggests that based on both of our measures of cross-field publications, UK-affiliated authors publish more away from their home fields.

Importantly for our study, UK-based authors place a considerably larger share of their publications in AJG 4-rated journals (25% vs. 20%) and Australia-based researchers publish more in ABDC A*-rated journals (37% vs. 28%).[22] When looking at our (inverse) measures of journal competitiveness across all rating notches, the results confirm the patterns of Table 3: Australian-affiliated authors publish disproportionately more in *SJR low (ABDC)* journals while UK-affiliated researchers publish disproportionately more in *SJR low (AJG)* journals. This provides initial support for hypotheses H1a and H1b.

We zoom into these patterns with the help of Fig. 1, which uses all the articles in our sample between 2016–2022. For each year and journal we compute the shares of articles that only highlight UK affiliations (*Only UK*), similarly, we compute the shares of articles where the majority/minority of highlighted affiliations are UK. We then sort journal–years into nine groups: within a year and AJG rating categories we form SJR terciles, and we compute average shares within these nine categories. We repeat this for our Australian application and ABDC ratings in the right panel. Note that, for expositional clarity, the left(right) panels exclude shares from outputs where there are no authors affiliated to UK(Australian) institutions and that the shares from the four groups (e.g., *Only UK*, *Majority UK*, *Minority UK*, and *No UK* affiliations) must sum to 100% in each case.

The left panel of Fig. 1 shows that for AJG 3- and 4-rated journals, the share of articles written by *Only UK* authors is steeply declining within AJG categories as we move from *SJR low* to *SJR high* journals. The steepest decline is within AJG 4-rated journals where the share

[20] Details of this procedure are in Section 2 of the Online Appendix.

[21] Other articles in this case include all articles less those that only highlight UK or only highlight AUS affiliations.

[22] Authors of all three affiliation types have very low success rates in placing their work in AJG 4* outlets (Journals of Distinction), although the percentage of work in such journals is larger for UK-based authors (2.7%) than for Australia-based authors (2.0%). If we only consider articles published after the introduction of the 4* category, these shares increase to 3.9% and 2.5%, respectively.

Table 3
Numbers of articles by field and country affiliation. Articles in the left panel highlight only UK affiliations while those in the middle highlight only Australian affiliations. The final three columns include all other articles. The shares of articles published in "SJR low (AJG)" journals: those with an SJR below its 33rd percentile value within journals that have the same AJG rating. Similarly, "SJR low (ABDC)" journals: those with an SJR below its 33rd percentile value within journals that have the same ABDC rating. The final row gives the column totals for article frequencies and the overall article shares published in "SJR low" journals. Sample period: 2016–2022.

Field	Only UK affil		Only AUS affil		Other affil		
	N	Share SJR low (AJG)	N	Share SJR low (ABDC)	N	Share SJR low (AJG)	Share SJR low (ABDC)
ACCOUNT	476	0.502	333	0.682	5388	0.454	0.515
BUS HIST & ECON HIST	272	0.952	24	0.792	1029	0.737	0.683
ECON	2189	0.344	816	0.499	44,638	0.248	0.405
ENT-SBM	223	0.022	33	0.000	2842	0.013	0.000
ETHICS-CSR-MAN	928	0.268	318	0.057	10,535	0.085	0.043
FINANCE	1115	0.654	378	0.765	16,042	0.490	0.573
HRM&EMP	678	0.826	170	0.476	2961	0.553	0.450
IB&AREA	320	0.256	56	0.089	2826	0.354	0.141
INFO MAN	593	0.351	306	0.418	14,059	0.249	0.290
INNOV	336	0.158	61	0.016	4941	0.140	0.011
MDEV&EDU	615	0.481	172	0.262	1196	0.278	0.278
MKT	331	0.269	245	0.563	6600	0.203	0.298
OPS&TECH	475	0.318	77	0.260	10,138	0.218	0.213
OR&MANSCI	772	0.424	330	0.391	30,276	0.355	0.344
ORG STUD	372	0.242	86	0.221	2448	0.183	0.159
PSYCH (GENERAL)	989	0.347	487	0.320	14,326	0.407	0.320
PSYCH (WOP-OB)	352	0.489	428	0.792	9210	0.312	0.485
PUB SEC	396	0.306	91	0.088	5020	0.263	0.052
REGIONAL STUD...	955	0.268	265	0.577	5754	0.212	0.498
SECTOR	738	0.156	507	0.483	13,470	0.066	0.349
SOC SCI	3425	0.462	957	0.149	34,485	0.247	0.103
STRAT	48	0.000	5	0.000	1494	0.000	0.000
Total	16,598	0.403	6145	0.418	239,678	0.274	0.303

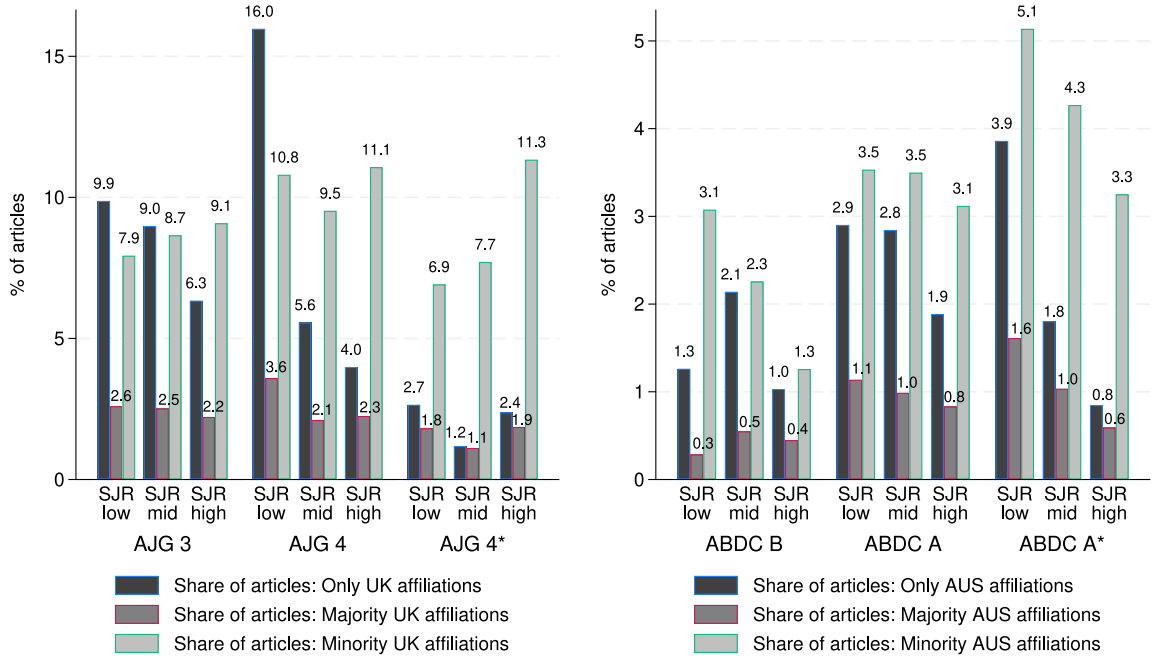

Fig. 1. Shares of articles and co-author composition across journals sorted by ratings and SJR scores.
Sample period 2016–2022. Within each year and rating category (AJG on the left and ABDC on the right panel), we sort journals into terciles based on their respective annual SJR scores. This sorts journals into SJR low/mid/high categories, where SJR low (high) journals have an annual SJR below the 33rd percentile (above the 67th percentile) of the respective annual SJR distribution for the given rating category. On the left panel an article has "Only UK affiliations" if all of the highlighted affiliation countries on an article are "United Kingdom". An article has "Majority UK affiliations" if at least half of the highlighted affiliation countries are "United Kingdom". An article has "Minority UK affiliations" if less than half of the affiliations are "United Kingdom" (but their share is strictly positive). For expositional clarity we omit the shares of articles that do not highlight any UK affiliations. The right panel repeats this for articles with Australian-affiliated articles. We only include journal–years when we have at least 15 articles in our sample from the given journal and year.

Table 4
Means and standard deviations of author level data.
Using Scopus publications data from 2006, we select authors who first published between 2011 and 2016 and have also published at least 0.5 articles per year. "AUS-affiliated" ("UK-affiliated") are authors that only highlight Australian (UK) affiliations on all of their publications during the sample period 2011–2022. "Articles per year" is the number of publications of the given author divided by the difference between 2023 and the first year of their publication. For the remaining variables we first compute the averages of the measures including all the articles of a given author and then report the means and associated standard deviations of these author-level averages in parentheses. "Cross-field" is an indicator for an article being outside of an author's home-field applying textual analysis to article abstracts. Cross-field (AJG) is an indicator if a publication's AJG field differs from the author's home-field, which is given by the AJG field she publishes most frequently. "Citations per year" is the number of article citations as of June 2023 adjusted by the number of years since publication and winsorised at the 99th percentile for each year. The final two columns report the differences of means and the associated *t*-values are in parentheses. In the final column, *, **, and *** denote significance at the 10%, 5%, and 1% levels, respectively.

Number of unique authors	AUS-Affiliated	UK-Affiliated	Other	AUS-Other	UK-Other
	728	1517	19,562		
Articles per year	0.869	0.853	0.914	−0.045*	−0.061***
	(0.44)	(0.48)	(0.63)	(−1.93)	(−3.73)
Share AJG 3	0.784	0.723	0.721	0.063***	0.002
	(0.26)	(0.28)	(0.31)	(5.43)	(0.24)
Share AJG 4	0.195	0.250	0.211	−0.016*	0.039***
	(0.25)	(0.26)	(0.24)	(−1.69)	(5.91)
Share AJG 4*	0.020	0.027	0.068	−0.047***	−0.041***
	(0.07)	(0.09)	(0.16)	(−8.11)	(−10.01)
Share ABDC B/C/unrated	0.229	0.215	0.216	0.012	−0.001
	(0.34)	(0.28)	(0.33)	(0.98)	(−0.15)
Share ABDC A	0.397	0.504	0.401	−0.005	0.103***
	(0.31)	(0.30)	(0.31)	(−0.38)	(12.27)
Share ABDC A*	0.374	0.281	0.382	−0.008	−0.101***
	(0.33)	(0.27)	(0.34)	(−0.61)	(−11.43)
SJR	2.027	2.029	2.702	−0.675***	−0.673***
	(0.97)	(1.38)	(1.89)	(−9.59)	(−13.59)
SJR low (AJG)	0.329	0.406	0.244	0.085***	0.162***
	(0.27)	(0.28)	(0.24)	(9.26)	(24.87)
SJR low - SJR high (AJG)	0.032	0.149	−0.153	0.184***	0.301***
	(0.49)	(0.48)	(0.48)	(10.07)	(23.35)
SJR low (ABDC)	0.418	0.382	0.289	0.129***	0.093***
	(0.31)	(0.28)	(0.27)	(12.49)	(12.81)
SJR low - SJR high (ABDC)	0.165	0.104	−0.101	0.266***	0.206***
	(0.52)	(0.48)	(0.53)	(13.26)	(14.62)
Citations per year	5.451	5.396	6.019	−0.568***	−0.624***
	(3.51)	(3.71)	(4.31)	(−3.52)	(−5.48)
Cross-field	0.481	0.540	0.480	0.001	0.060***
	(0.27)	(0.24)	(0.25)	(0.12)	(8.85)
Cross-field (AJG)	0.224	0.272	0.210	0.014*	0.062***
	(0.21)	(0.21)	(0.20)	(1.77)	(10.94)

of articles that only highlight UK affiliations is 16% among *SJR low* journals but just 4% among *SJR high* journals. Similar, though less steep patterns can be found for *Majority UK* written articles, which is in line with our expectations to the extent that the incentives of these authors are still largely aligned. On the other hand, for the shares of articles with *Minority UK* co-authors, the patterns are not present or even slightly reversed, which shows that for collaborations where UK researchers are a minority, the factors influencing the choice of target journals are likely to differ based on the (potentially divergent) motivations of the non-UK co-authors.

Very similar patterns emerge on the right panel for our Australian application. However, a key difference can be observed between the highest and second-highest notches across the two applications. While there is no sharp increase in the shares of Only UK publications when moving from the SJR high & AJG 4 to the SJR low & AJG 4* category, the share of Only AUS articles doubles as we move from SJR high & ADBC A to SJR low and ABDC A*. This divergence likely reflects structural differences in the two ranking systems. The AJG 4* category comprises a very small and highly restricted set of journals, which are extremely competitive and tend to attract publications primarily from a narrow group of elite institutions.[23] By contrast, the ABDC A* category encompasses a much broader range of journals. Indeed, there are almost five times as many journals rated A* by the ABDC than 4* by the AJG. The breadth of the former may dis-incentivise Australians from pushing for publications in the very top field journals since they are not higher rated. By contrast, in the UK, the highest rated category is much narrower and contains only elite journals, aligning with the higher number of UK business schools in the QS Top 50 in the world (two in Australia and seven in the UK, of which three are in the top 10).[24]

Taken together, the information in Fig. 1 aligns with the idea that researchers prioritise journals rated more highly on their respective national or disciplinary lists. While the figure supports hypotheses H1a and H1b, alternative explanations are possible. For example, UK- and Australia-based researchers may publish more frequently in lower-impact journals (as measured by the SJR) either because their research outputs are, on average, of lower quality than those of authors elsewhere, or because they tend to work in fields with relatively few high-impact outlets. To address these potential confounding factors, the following sections employ multivariate regression models incorporating relevant control variables and fixed effects.

4. Results

4.1. Aggregate level results

Table 5 repeats the analysis of Fig. 1 with the help of OLS regressions that allow us to make statistical inferences while including various controls. In particular, all specifications include year fixed effects[25] and the annually standardised SJR of journals to control for the average quality differences between Only UK (or Only AUS) affiliation articles versus the rest. Based on column (1) of Table 5, the proportion of articles that only highlight UK affiliations is about 40% higher in *SJR low (AJG)* journals compared to *SJR high (AJG)* journals, the latter being the benchmark group in the regressions. In column (2), we add further controls to see whether the above result is driven by differences between fields or whether our *SJR low (AJG)* measure is confounded by journals with UK-affiliated senior editors. Perhaps unsurprisingly, journals with UK-affiliated editors publish a significantly larger share of articles that only highlight UK affiliations.[26] While there is some evidence of editor home bias in the literature (Rubin et al., 2023), which is in line with our results, our estimates likely capture broader journal-level patterns in author composition and topic selection, including that some journals may have editorial priorities or scopes that align more

[23] For instance, the share of articles that only highlight U.S. affiliations increases from 32% to 42% when moving from the SJR high & AJG 4 to the SJR low & AJG 4* category, which is indicative of a crowding out effect. We further discuss this in Section 4.1.

[24] We note that as the sampling of our journals is based on the AJG, we are missing some journals that are A*-rated by the ABDC. E.g., in the 2019 edition of the ABDC there were 199 A*-rated journals out of which we only capture 155, implying that the A* category is even *less* restrictive than suggested by our sample.

[25] While we do not tabulate the coefficients of the year fixed effects, we note that for both the UK and Australia, the overall shares show a declining trend, which is consistent with the steep growth of Chinese university-affiliated research during this sample period.

[26] We have browsed journal websites to determine whether any of the senior editors hold UK or Australian affiliations during December 2025. We have identified 119 journals with at least one UK-affiliated senior editor and 27 journals with at least one Australian-affiliated senior editor. We list these in Tables A17–A18 of the Online Appendix.

Table 5
Journal–year level regressions of article shares by UK and Australian authors.
The dependent variable, "Only UK affiliations" ("Only AUS affiliations") is the share of articles in a journal–year that only highlight UK (Australian) affiliations. Only journal–year observations with at least 15 articles are included. "z(SJR)" are SJR scores winsorised at the 99th percentile and standardised by year. "SJR low (AJG)" is an indicator for journals that have an SJR lower than the annual SJR distributions' 33rd percentile within AJG categories. "SJR mid (AJG)" is an indicator for journals that have an SJR higher than the annual SJR distributions' 33rd percentile and lower than the annual SJR distributions' 67th percentile within AJG categories. ABDC rating-based variables are constructed similarly. Field FE are indicators for the field of a journal as classified by the AJG. UK (AUS) Editor is an indicator for journals that have a senior editor with a UK (Australian) affiliation as of December 2025. While columns (3) and (6) include SJR mid-rating class interactions we do not report these for presentation purposes. We provide *t*-statistics in parentheses that are based on standard errors clustered at the journal level, *, **, and *** denote significance at the 10%, 5%, and 1% levels, respectively.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	Share of articles with Only UK affiliations			Share of articles with Only AUS affiliations		
z(SJR)	−0.017***	0.002	−0.002	−0.004***	−0.003***	−0.003***
	(−6.685)	(0.488)	(−0.453)	(−5.984)	(−3.664)	(−3.031)
AJG 3 × SJR low (AJG)			0.029***			
			(3.305)			
AJG 4 × SJR low (AJG)			0.053***			
			(2.881)			
AJG 4* × SJR low (AJG)			−0.009			
			(−0.470)			
UK Editor		0.082***	0.081***			
		(8.529)	(8.434)			
SJR low (AJG)	0.029***	0.035***				
	(2.891)	(4.200)				
SJR mid (AJG)	0.007	0.012**				
	(0.985)	(1.967)				
SJR low (ABDC)				0.013***	0.010***	
				(4.504)	(3.853)	
SJR mid (ABDC)				0.005***	0.004**	
				(2.932)	(2.287)	
AUS Editor					0.027***	0.025***
					(3.548)	(3.368)
ABDC B × SJR low (ABDC)						−0.002
						(−0.387)
ABDC A × SJR low (ABDC)						0.005
						(1.594)
ABDC A* × SJR low (ABDC)						0.015***
						(3.376)
Constant	0.070***	0.043**	0.047**	0.021***	0.050***	0.053***
	(11.839)	(2.304)	(2.473)	(10.046)	(5.179)	(5.498)
Observations	2793	2793	2793	2793	2793	2793
R-squared	0.068	0.430	0.433	0.064	0.227	0.233
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Field FE	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
AJG rating FE	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
ABDC rating FE	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes

strongly with UK-affiliated research. Importantly, the *SJR low (AJG)* measure remains statistically significant after including these controls. In column (3), we interact *SJR low (AJG)* with AJG rating classes and find that the results are only present for AJG 3 and 4-rated journals, which again supports the intuition of Fig. 1.

Columns (4)-(6) of Table 5 present the results for Australia. The patterns are similar to those for the UK, but with a notable difference: while *SJR low (ABDC)* is economically and statistically significant in columns (4)-(5), only when interacted with the ABDC A*-rated journals does it show up significantly in column (6). This suggests that Australian co-author groups publish disproportionately more in those ABDC A*-rated journals that are least competitive as measured by SJR.

In the Online Appendix, we perform additional robustness checks. First, we employ nearest neighbour matching to estimate the influence of rating schemes on article shares. In particular, within year and field we match journals based on SJR to a set of journals with a different rating (but overlapping SJR). In line with the results of Table 5, Table A3 shows that when matching ABDC A*-rated *SJR low* journals to ABDC A-rated journals, the *Only AUS* article shares are significantly larger among the former, supporting H1b. For the UK application, Table A4 reveals that the shares of *Only UK* articles are significantly larger in AJG 4-rated *SJR low* journals compared to the matched AJG 3-rated journals. Also in support of H1a is the finding that *Only UK* article shares are significantly lower in AJG 3-rated *SJR high* journals when matched to 4-rated journals.

However, the results also show that the shares of *Only UK* articles is significantly *smaller* in AJG 4*-rated *SJR low* journals compared to the matched AJG 4-rated journals, which would contradict H1a. To put this in context, we carry out two further tests: first, we match 4*-rated *SJR mid* journals to 4-rated journals and find an almost identical estimate. Second, for fields and years where there is more than one 4*-rated journal, we estimate the within field difference of *Only UK* article shares between the lowest SJR journal of the given field-year and the remaining 4*-rated journals of the given field-year. This latter exercise reveals that *Only UK* article shares are actually larger in the lowest SJR journals compared to the rest (1.88% vs. 1.55%), though the difference is not statistically significant.

These results suggest that the matching is picking up differences between the 4 and 4*-rated segments unrelated to our hypotheses. In addition to the tables discussed above, upon closer examination we find

that 60% of 4*-rated journal publications with only UK-based authors have at least one of them affiliated to just eight universities.[27] This finding ties with a substantive body of existing literature suggesting that the pages in this small number of very top journals in each field are predominantly filled with articles written by author's from the world's "leading" business schools. These researchers form an "elite alliance" based predominantly in the US (Hodgson and Rothman, 1999; Walsh et al., 2017) and control the editorial boards of the top-rated journals (Fogarty and Liao, 2009). They operate in a largely separate labour market where articles in very top tier journals are required for tenure, and papers in lesser rated journals are ignored (Gendron, 2008). This implies that such institutions will have incentive and reward mechanisms that are not aligned with the wider AJG (Su et al., 2026), which for them might be irrelevant.

As a second robustness test, we repeat our main analysis but using 20th and 80th percentile cutoffs to define the SJR-low, -medium, and -high categories, and these results are presented in Table A5. We find very similar results to those presented above using tercile sorts. Third, we estimate a series of placebo tests where the specification of columns (1) and (4) of Table 5 are retained but the dependent variable is now the publication shares of other countries. We find, in Tables A6–A7 that *SJR low* does not systematically predict the publication shares of other countries, confirming that the effects are specific to the UK and Australia where the AJG and ABDC journal ratings lists are most deeply embedded.

Finally, we estimate a Heckman model using a much broader and independent sample of journals to address potential concerns of endogeneity in sample construction (see the Online Appendix for details). This approach mitigates concerns about selection bias, as the custodians of the AJG are unlikely to select journals for evaluation in a random manner. While we do find that SJR is the strongest predictor of obtaining an AJG rating, journal characteristics such as publisher size, journal age and English language also significantly predict the selection into being AJG-rated. However, the results reported in Tables A9–A11 are virtually unchanged relative to our benchmark specification, implying that endogeneity arising from sample selection is unlikely to be an important concern for our findings.

Overall, the results are suggestive of UK- and Australian-affiliated authors publishing relatively more frequently in journals that are less competitive within their respective national journal rating systems — that is, within a given notch of the AJG in the UK and the ABDC in Australia, even after accounting for the possibility that this is only driven by certain fields or by the quality of the outputs, providing strong evidence in favour of H1a and H1b.

However, an alternative explanation of this result is that journals traditionally associated with the UK and Australia have been persistently over-rated by the AJG and ABDC, respectively. In order to examine this alternative mechanism, in Table A8 of the Online Appendix, we report estimates of the same specification as above but excluding all journals with UK (or Australian) senior editors. This allows us to examine whether the effects we observe can be attributed to authors from the UK or Australia being over-represented in low-impact, highly rated journals according to their country's ratings list because they publish more in "home" journals that have been over-rated on the country-specific list relative to their ratings based on other measures. The results for the Australian application are almost identical as the corresponding estimates above, likely due to the very low number of journals that have Australian-affiliated editors. For the UK application, the results are economically smaller, but remain statistically significant. This suggests that "home biases" in journal lists are a partial, but limited explanation of our key finding.

Table 6
Publication metrics of early career and post early career publications.
Using Scopus publications data from 2006, we select authors who first published between 2011 and 2016 and have also published at least 0.5 articles per year, then split their publications into "early career (EC)" publications (those within five years of their first publication) and post early career publications. "UK (AUS) affil" are authors who only highlight UK (Australian) affiliations on all their publications between 2011–2022. We pool AJG 4-rated and 4*-rated publications as the 4* category was introduced during the sample period with the 2015 edition of the AJG. We report means and the associated standard deviations in parentheses.

Number of authors	UK affil 1391		AUS affil 656		Other 17,763	
	EC	Post EC	EC	Post EC	EC	Post EC
Articles per year	0.804	0.975	0.808	1.009	0.838	1.087
	(0.45)	(0.81)	(0.47)	(0.73)	(0.56)	(1.10)
Share AJG 3-rated	0.723	0.706	0.770	0.784	0.712	0.704
	(0.33)	(0.34)	(0.32)	(0.31)	(0.35)	(0.36)
Share AJG 4/4*-rated	0.277	0.294	0.230	0.216	0.288	0.296
	(0.33)	(0.34)	(0.32)	(0.31)	(0.35)	(0.36)
SJR low (AJG)	0.435	0.396	0.382	0.298	0.241	0.258
	(0.35)	(0.36)	(0.35)	(0.35)	(0.29)	(0.32)
Share ABDC B/C/unrated	0.208	0.200	0.219	0.197	0.204	0.191
	(0.31)	(0.32)	(0.35)	(0.35)	(0.34)	(0.35)
Share ABDC A-rated	0.516	0.505	0.421	0.405	0.408	0.407
	(0.35)	(0.37)	(0.37)	(0.38)	(0.36)	(0.38)
Share ABDC A*-rated	0.277	0.295	0.360	0.398	0.388	0.402
	(0.32)	(0.34)	(0.37)	(0.39)	(0.37)	(0.39)
SJR low (ABDC)	0.418	0.357	0.457	0.388	0.298	0.287
	(0.34)	(0.36)	(0.37)	(0.38)	(0.32)	(0.34)
SJR	1.930	2.172	1.959	2.123	2.656	2.857
	(1.58)	(1.58)	(1.23)	(1.13)	(2.10)	(2.27)

As an additional, more focused test of the potential for a "home journal effect", in Section 6 of the Online Appendix we examine the ratings and SJR terciles of all journals with "British", "Australian", or "Australasian" in the title. We find in Table A9 that not only are authors from the UK and Australia, respectively, vastly overrepresented in such journals, but moreover they fall predominantly into the low SJR terciles within their ratings categories. These results, as for those in the previous paragraph, are supportive of this reverse mechanism holding, but the small number of journals means that it is not plausible that it fully explains the primary result of UK and Australian authors publishing disproportionately in low-impact journals within ratings categories.

4.2. Journal rating, journal impact, and author experience

Early career researchers may feel higher pressure to build a track record of publications that count towards fulfilling the requirements of their probation. If the probation criteria contain references to AJG ratings as is common in the UK (Bryce et al., 2020) or to ABDC ratings in Australia, then we would expect those at the early stages of their career in the UK and Australia to publish in *SJR low* journals within ratings categories relatively more.

To test this, we carefully select a sample with the following objectives: (i) we should be reasonably confident in identifying authors' early career stage, which we define as the first five years since their first publication; (ii) for each author we require observation of publications both during and after their early career stages so we can analyse within-author changes; and (iii) have a sample of authors who are active over an extended period of time. To achieve (i) we collect articles from Scopus published since 2006 in journals rated at least 3 by the AJG in line with our main sample.[28] Next, we retain only those

[27] These institutions are: City, University of London; Imperial College; LBS; LSE; Warwick; UCL; Cambridge; Oxford.

[28] For 2006–2015, we apply the 2010 edition of AJG ratings, for 2016–2018, the 2015 edition, and so on.

Table 7
Author experience and journal impact.
Using Scopus data from 2006, we find each author's first publication date and only include those who first published between 2011–2016 in our sample. Then, we further restrict the set of authors to those who publish on average at least 0.5 articles per year between their first publication's date and 2022 (the end of our sample period). Finally, we retain only authors who have published at least once as a post early career researcher (by construction, all authors have at least one publication during their early career stage). We aggregate each author's articles into two observations: one for their early career stage (publications within five years since an author's first publication) and another for their post early career stage (the rest) and we compute all variables over this grouping. The dependent variable is the difference between the shares of an author's SJR low and SJR high publications within the above groups, e.g., a value of −1 would indicate that the author only has SJR high publications in the given period. UK affil (AUS affil) are authors who only highlight UK (Australian) affiliations throughout 2011–2022. We pool AJG 4-rated and 4*-rated publications as the 4* category was introduced during the sample period with the 2015 edition of the AJG. Robust *t*-statistics are in parentheses. *, **, and *** denote significance at the 10%, 5%, and 1% levels, respectively.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	SJR low (AJG) - SJR high (AJG)			SJR low (ABDC) - SJR high (ABDC)		
Citations per year		−0.002***	−0.001***		−0.002***	−0.001***
		(−19.478)	(−12.607)		(−17.581)	(−13.594)
Cross-field (cossim)		0.027***	−0.055***		−0.011	−0.054***
		(2.930)	(−5.002)		(−1.146)	(−4.920)
Share AJG 4/4*-rated		0.211***	0.339***			
		(23.851)	(20.873)			
UK affil	0.264***	0.259***				
	(15.405)	(15.506)				
Early career	0.028***	0.028***	0.048***	0.068***	0.082***	0.093***
	(4.580)	(4.339)	(8.789)	(10.698)	(12.619)	(17.399)
UK affil × Early career	0.069***	0.064***	0.071***			
	(2.969)	(2.827)	(4.038)			
AUS affil				0.230***	0.226***	
				(9.150)	(9.353)	
AUS affil × Early career				0.037	0.042	0.045*
				(1.077)	(1.288)	(1.772)
Share ABDC A-rated					0.445***	0.154***
					(41.891)	(7.277)
Share ABDC A*-rated					0.530***	0.530***
					(50.679)	(23.022)
Constant	−0.152***	−0.174***	−0.184***	−0.111***	−0.457***	−0.323***
	(−33.374)	(−24.728)	(−25.714)	(−23.786)	(−47.906)	(−18.549)
Observations	39,620	39,620	39,620	39,620	39,620	39,620
R-squared	0.017	0.055	0.039	0.008	0.100	0.069
Author FE	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes

authors who first published during 2011 or later — i.e., we do not observe them publishing during the five years between 2006–2010.[29] Finally, we require authors to have their first publication during or before 2016, so we can satisfy (ii), i.e., if an author first publishes in 2016, their publications during 2016–2020 are classified as early career publications, while their 2021–22 publications (2022 being the end of our sample period) are classified as post early career publications. Finally, to achieve (iii) we require authors to publish, on average, at least 0.5 articles per year in our sample of journals between their first year of publication and 2022. Together, these criteria leave us with 1391 (656) authors who highlight only UK (Australian) affiliations on all of their publications during 2011–2022.

To address the unbalanced nature of our panel of articles, we gather each author's articles into two groups: articles published during the author's early career stage (first five years after first publication) and those following the early career stage. This gives us two observations per author and we compute all variable averages over this grouping.[30]

Table 6 presents descriptives of publication metrics split by affiliation and career stages. There are three noteworthy patterns. First, both the quantity and the quality of publications improve with experience for all affiliation groups (UK/AUS/Other), though the latter may partially be explained by longer review processes at more competitive journals. Second, there is a large difference between the levels of the *SJR low (AJG)* and *SJR low (ABDC)* measures between affiliation groups that is independent of experience and consistent with the results above. Third, our *SJR low* measures notably decline in the post-early career stage for UK and Australian-affiliated authors compared to the Other group, which is in line with hypotheses H2a and H2b.

Using the framework described above, in Table 7 we formally test hypotheses H2a and H2b using regressions. Columns (1)-(3) focus on the UK and the Academic Journal Guide. In all three specifications, we find that Early Career researchers are more likely to publish in *SJR low (AJG)* journals than in *SJR high (AJG)* journals regardless of affiliation. In addition, the coefficients on the interaction term "UK affil × Early Career" is statistically significant in these specifications ($p < 0.01$), which is evidence in favour of H2a. Specifically, our estimates

[29] Inevitably, we will misclassify some authors as Early Career researchers if they have published before 2006 or outside of our sample of considered journals. However, this noise is likely to attenuate our results.

[30] We chose a specification that is transparent, clearly interpretable, and can be applied consistently across our hypotheses on experience, cross-field publications, and citations. This specification ensures that each author meeting our selection criteria receives equal overall weight, allowing us to learn about the behaviour of the average author without relying on opaque weighting schemes that would be necessary with an author-year panel due to the highly unbalanced nature of the data. We also avoid a publication-level specification because it prevents a clean identification of within-author effects via fixed effects, given that many authors publish only once and a publication-level approach would require dropping many articles and introduce non-trivial sample selection issues.

Table 8
Authors relocating to UK and Australia.
Using Scopus data from 2006, we find each author's first publication date and only include those who first published between 2011–2016 in our sample. Then, we further restrict the set of authors to those who publish on average at least 0.5 articles per year between their first publication's date and 2022 (the end of our sample period). To identify authors who relocate, we look for a relocation year as the earliest year (restricted to 2014–2020) in which the author reports only an affiliation in the destination country (UK or Australia), having reported no destination-country affiliations in any prior year and continuing to report only destination-country affiliations in all subsequent years. We report means and the associated standard deviations in parentheses, except in the "After–Before" columns where we report *t*-statistics in parentheses. *, **, and *** denote significance at the 10%, 5%, and 1% levels, respectively.

	Authors relocating to UK			Authors relocating to Australia		
	Before	After	After–Before	Before	After	After–Before
	Relocation			Relocation		
Number of authors	250			127		
Articles per year	0.660	0.993	0.333***	0.638	1.003	0.364***
	(0.41)	(0.62)	(7.09)	(0.34)	(0.51)	(6.73)
Share AJG 3-rated	0.668	0.656	−0.011	0.677	0.689	0.012
	(0.40)	(0.33)	(−0.35)	(0.40)	(0.32)	(0.27)
Share AJG 4/4*-rated	0.332	0.344	0.011	0.323	0.311	−0.012
	(0.40)	(0.33)	(0.35)	(0.40)	(0.32)	(−0.27)
SJR low (AJG)	0.290	0.306	0.016	0.252	0.309	0.058
	(0.37)	(0.29)	(0.55)	(0.37)	(0.29)	(1.40)
Share ABDC B/C/unrated	0.122	0.110	−0.012	0.105	0.112	0.007
	(0.28)	(0.22)	(−0.54)	(0.26)	(0.23)	(0.24)
Share ABDC A-rated	0.485	0.442	−0.043	0.406	0.377	−0.029
	(0.43)	(0.33)	(−1.25)	(0.42)	(0.33)	(−0.61)
Share ABDC A*-rated	0.393	0.448	0.055	0.490	0.511	0.022
	(0.42)	(0.34)	(1.60)	(0.44)	(0.36)	(0.43)
SJR low (ABDC)	0.325	0.346	0.021	0.328	0.396	0.068
	(0.40)	(0.32)	(0.66)	(0.40)	(0.32)	(1.50)
SJR	2.543	2.770	0.227	2.523	2.396	−0.127
	(2.13)	(2.27)	(1.15)	(1.82)	(1.38)	(−0.63)

imply an increase of approximately 0.15 standard deviations in the dependent variable (see Table 4), which is the difference in shares of *SJR low* and *SJR high* articles.[31] Columns (4)-(6) mirror the analysis for the Australian application, where we find weaker results, although our preferred specification with author fixed-effects in column (6) highlights a marginally significant estimate ($p < 0.1$) for the coefficient of interest, i.e., "AUS affil × Early Career".[32]

An equally important question is whether scholars who begin publishing outside the UK or Australia adjust their publication patterns after relocating to these systems. To investigate this, we use similar sample selection criteria for authors as above and also require that there is a clearly identifiable relocation year during 2014–2020. In particular, we require that (i) from the year of relocation the author only highlights affiliations from the destination country (UK or Australia) and (ii) before the relocation the author never highlights affiliations associated with the destination country. Since we retain our existing sample selection criteria, the "before relocation" publications largely capture early career publications, while publications after the relocation will largely coincide with post early career publications. In total, we find 250 (127) authors relocating to UK (Australia) with these criteria.

We compare the publications for relocating authors in Table 8. Due to the small sample sizes, we only compare means and test for their differences. While the results show no evidence of authors systematically changing their behaviour after relocating to the UK or to Australia, there are a few noteworthy patterns indicative of the underlying selection process. For instance, the average SJR of relocating authors is about 20%–30% higher when compared to UK or

Table 9
Publication metrics of home-field and cross-field publications.
Using Scopus publications data from 2006, we select authors who first published between 2011 and 2016 and have also published at least 0.5 articles per year, then split their publications into "Home-field" and "Cross-field (AJG)" (see the definition of "Cross-field (AJG)" in Section 3.2). "UK (AUS) affil" are authors who only highlight UK (Australian) affiliations on all their publications between 2011–2022. We pool AJG 4-rated and 4*-rated publications as the 4* category was introduced during the sample period with the 2015 edition of the AJG. We report means and the associated standard deviations in parentheses.

Number of authors	UK affil 1026		AUS affil 433		Other 11,443	
	Home-	Cross-	Home-	Cross-	Home-	Cross-
	Field		Field		Field	
Articles per year	0.571	0.341	0.595	0.316	0.634	0.320
	(0.36)	(0.30)	(0.34)	(0.26)	(0.46)	(0.34)
Share AJG 3-rated	0.735	0.735	0.759	0.789	0.703	0.709
	(0.32)	(0.34)	(0.33)	(0.33)	(0.35)	(0.38)
Share AJG 4/4*-rated	0.265	0.265	0.241	0.211	0.297	0.291
	(0.32)	(0.34)	(0.33)	(0.33)	(0.35)	(0.38)
SJR low (AJG)	0.422	0.375	0.348	0.294	0.256	0.267
	(0.34)	(0.37)	(0.33)	(0.35)	(0.29)	(0.35)
Share ABDC B/C/unrated	0.190	0.158	0.159	0.152	0.136	0.153
	(0.31)	(0.30)	(0.31)	(0.30)	(0.28)	(0.31)
Share ABDC A-rated	0.526	0.572	0.421	0.501	0.442	0.474
	(0.36)	(0.38)	(0.37)	(0.39)	(0.36)	(0.40)
Share ABDC A*-rated	0.284	0.270	0.420	0.348	0.422	0.373
	(0.33)	(0.34)	(0.39)	(0.38)	(0.37)	(0.40)
SJR low (ABDC)	0.408	0.359	0.452	0.363	0.318	0.286
	(0.35)	(0.36)	(0.38)	(0.39)	(0.33)	(0.36)
SJR	1.944	1.972	2.023	2.013	2.701	2.534
	(1.45)	(1.12)	(1.15)	(1.00)	(2.05)	(1.96)

[31] We use this difference as it corresponds to the results presented in Table 5 where the benchmark is the *SJR high* group. It also provides a sharper test than using *SJR low* as the dependent variable. Consider an author with a 1/3, 1/3, 1/3 split between *SJR low/mid/high* groups and another with a 1/3, 2/3, 0 split. While one could argue that the former is not influenced by ratings, the latter has greater tilt towards lower impact journals. We would miss this difference if we were to use *SJR low* as a dependent variable.

[32] In Table A14 of the Online Appendix we also present a specification that adds the average year of the publications for the author–article groups as a control variable. Our results are unaffected by this.

Australian authors who have also started their publishing careers there. Similarly, their shares of top-rated publications are also larger: about 50% of the publications of authors moving to Australia are ABDC A*-rated (both before and after relocating), while those only highlighting Australian affiliations publish about 40% of their articles in A*-rated journals. Taken together, these patterns suggest that relocation to the UK or Australia is more likely among authors who already publish in more competitive journals, and that – consistent with early-career imprinting (Marquis and Tilcsik, 2013) – their research and publication behaviour remains stable after relocation, implying that adaptation is not necessary for their continued success.

4.3. Do authors go outside their home-field to publish in a higher AJG-rated journal?

Evidently, scholars may have different motivations for publishing outside of their usual field. For instance, it might be because they are conducting interdisciplinary research as part of a team, or their work spans the divide between two or more fields, giving them the natural option to select journals in either area. However, a further reason for publishing across fields is if authors believe that in other fields there exist higher AJG- or ABDC-rated journals that are relatively easier to publish in. To test this, we start with the same sample and follow a similar approach as above with author experience, but instead of grouping articles between early career and post early career categories, we group each author's articles into either their respective home-field or their cross-field, based on the "Cross-field (AJG)" variable introduced in Section 3.2. We only consider authors who have at least one cross-field publication in this analysis, leaving us with two observations per author. In total, we find 1026 (433) authors who highlight only UK (Australian) affiliations between 2011–2022 and meet all the previous criteria.

Descriptives of home-field and cross-field publications split by affiliation groups are presented in Table 9. The descriptives do not seem to support the idea that authors gain higher-rated publications by publishing cross-field. For instance, the combined share of AJG 4/4* rated publications is almost identical for the home-field and cross-field publications of UK authors (26.5%), and for Australian authors, the share of A*-rated publications are larger among their respective home-field publications (42% vs. 35%). At the same time, the *SJR low* measures suggest that UK- and Australian-affiliated authors tend to publish more in less competitive journals within a given rating notch, regardless of whether the publications are inside or outside their usual fields, compared to other authors.

In Table 10 we present our regression results to test H3a and H3b. The coefficients of most interest are those on the interaction terms between UK-affiliated authors and the Cross-field (AJG) indicator in columns (1)-(3). In all specifications, these coefficients are negative and significant, which contradicts H3a. That is, all else equal, UK-affiliated authors' publications that are outside their home field do not appear in less competitive journals. Columns (4)-(6) mimic the analysis for our Australian application, and the results are qualitatively and quantitatively similar, contradicting H3b.[33]

While most of our evidence shows that UK- and Australian-affiliated authors do not gain higher rated publications by going out of field, thus contradicting H3a and H3b, they could still sacrifice academic impact by publishing in relatively highly rated journals that may not align closely with their research's primary audience. We explore this idea in Table 11. The dependent variable for the regressions is a standardised similarity index that measures how well the article fits within its journal compared to other articles published in the same journal.[34] Reassuringly, citations enter the regressions with a positive and highly significant estimate, suggesting that articles fitting well within a journal (or likely speak to the core topics of the respective field) gain more citations and articles with co-authors outside the respective field have significantly lower fit.

The coefficients of most interest are those on the interaction terms involving the various journal impact tercile and ranking bins with the Only UK (or Only AUS) indicator variable. We observe that the interaction terms involving the *SJR low* terms always have negative signs and are always significant (albeit sometimes only at the 10% level). This means that when UK or Australian co-author groups publish in less competitive journals within the relevant rating notch, they do so at the expense of fit relative to other affiliations. For instance, column (2) shows that articles exclusively highlighting UK affiliations in SJR low AJG 4 and 4* journals have a fit measure 0.09 standard deviations lower than articles highlighting other affiliations. Since fit is inferred using article abstracts only, the resulting measurement error likely attenuates the estimated coefficient, implying that the true effect may be larger in magnitude.

4.4. The evidence on ratings and citations

Examining the link between journal ratings, citations and author affiliations in more detail, Fig. 2 shows average citations per year for each published article, separated by rating category and SJR tercile. It is interesting to note that publications with a single country authorship (UK only or Australia only) are typically the least cited compared to other constellations, irrespective of the journal impact or rating bucket, while mixed-country affiliation articles appear most successful. It is evident that the citation penalty from publishing in *SJR low* journals compared to publishing in a notch lower rated *SJR high* journals is considerable for all boundaries with the exception of the AJG 4/4* boundary, which again likely reflects that only the very few top journals make it to the 4* category. For instance, Fig. 1 reveals that ABDC A**-SJR low* is the group of journals with the largest shares of articles with Australian affiliations. Yet, Only AUS articles gain 23% more citations in the lower rated but perhaps more competitive ABDC A-*SJR high* category (6.3 vs. 5.1 citations per year on average). For the UK, the potential citation gains are even larger: publishing in AJG 3-*SJR high* journals instead of AJG 4-*SJR low* journals (which are again the ones with the largest Only UK shares) is 50% (6.0 vs. 4.0 citations per year on average).

While the magnitude of the observed effects are economically large, this interpretation hinges on the strong assumption that the same authors are able to consistently produce research that meets the standards and topical fit of these alternative (lower rated but higher impact) journals. To relax this assumption, we next focus on within-author variation. Specifically, we estimate within author differences to investigate whether citation and SJR penalties are larger for UK and Australian-affiliated researchers when they choose to collaborate with home colleagues — an implication we would expect due to incentives being coordinated by the respective national ratings lists.

For these tests, we only include authors who have a constant home country, i.e., similar to how we define UK and Australian-affiliated authors, they are required to highlight the same country of affiliation on all of their publications during 2011–2022. Then, to be able to investigate within author differences, we retain only authors who have

[33] In Section 6 of the Online Appendix we repeat this analysis with our textual analysis-based Cross-field measure and find that the results are sensitive to the choice of cross-field measures. Specifically, in Table A15, we find a weak and positive association for the UK application and statistically insignificant estimates for the Australian application.

[34] "Within Journal Article Fit" is the cosine similarity between a given article's abstract and the respective journal's corpus, defined as the abstracts published between 1–3 years before and after the focal article (excluding the given article's publication year). It is then standardised within journal–years with its respective mean and standard deviation.

Table 10
Cross-field publications and journal impact.
Using Scopus data from 2006, we find each author's first publication date and only include those who first published between 2011–2016 in our sample. Then, we further restrict the set of authors to those who publish on average at least 0.5 articles per year between their first publication's date and 2022 (the end of our sample period). Finally, we retain only those authors who have at least one "Cross-field (AJG)" publication (see Section 3.2 for the definition of the "Cross-field (AJG)" variable). We aggregate each author's articles into two observations: one for their home-field publications and on for their Cross-field (AJG) publications and we compute all variables over this grouping. The dependent variable is the difference between the shares of an author's SJR low and SJR high publications within the above groups, e.g., a value of −1 would indicate that the author only has SJR high publications in the given group. UK affil (AUS affil) are authors who only highlight UK (Australian) affiliations throughout 2011–2022. We pool AJG 4-rated and 4*-rated publications as the 4* category was introduced during the sample period with the 2015 edition of the AJG. Robust *t*-statistics are in parentheses. *, **, and *** denote significance at the 10%, 5%, and 1% levels, respectively.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	SJR low (AJG) - SJR high (AJG)			SJR low (ABDC) - SJR high (ABDC)		
UK affil	0.287***	0.281***				
	(15.475)	(15.620)				
Citations per year		−0.002***	−0.002***		−0.001***	−0.001***
		(−14.605)	(−9.494)		(−12.751)	(−8.471)
Share AJG 4/4*-rated		0.270***	0.525***			
		(25.410)	(32.586)			
Mean year		−0.021***	−0.023***		−0.031***	−0.034***
		(−10.933)	(−9.126)		(−15.301)	(−13.165)
Cross-field (AJG)	0.024***	0.000	0.003	−0.069***	−0.074***	−0.058***
	(3.176)	(0.056)	(0.441)	(−8.717)	(−9.453)	(−8.027)
UK affil × Cross-field (AJG)	−0.114***	−0.107***	−0.109***			
	(−4.190)	(−4.085)	(−4.704)			
AUS affil				0.249***	0.241***	
				(8.325)	(8.589)	
AUS affil × Cross-field (AJG)				−0.118***	−0.107***	−0.097**
				(−2.678)	(−2.587)	(−2.537)
Share ABDC A*-rated					0.396***	0.744***
					(26.698)	(35.611)
Share ABDC A-rated					0.183***	0.168***
					(12.500)	(8.374)
Constant	−0.107***	42.611***	45.637***	−0.020***	62.492***	67.563***
	(−21.622)	(10.903)	(9.091)	(−3.645)	(15.251)	(13.098)
Observations	25,804	25,804	25,804	25,804	25,804	25,804
R-squared	0.012	0.061	0.092	0.007	0.058	0.154
Author FE	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes

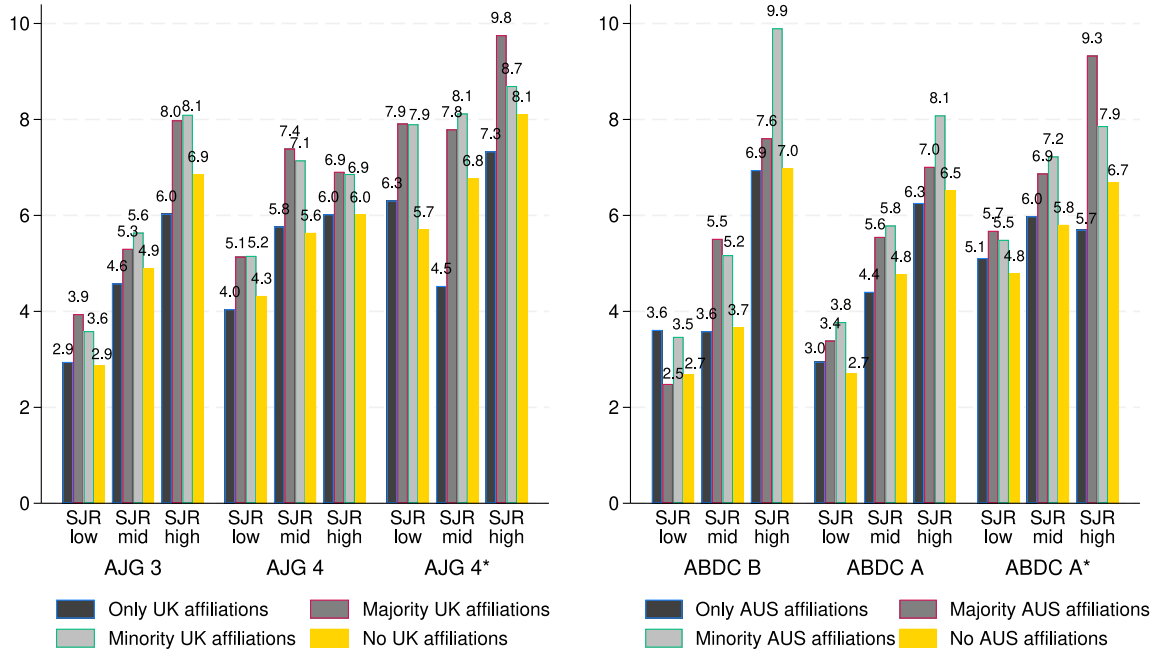

Fig. 2. Article citations per year for articles sorted by ratings and SJR scores.
See the caption of Fig. 1 for details. Citations per year are computed as the number of article citations as of June 2023 on Scopus divided by the number of years between the year of publication and 2023. In addition, for each year of publication we winsorise citations per year at the 99th percentile.

Table 11
Article fit, author affiliations and journal metrics.
This table shows article level OLS regression results using our main sample of articles from 2016 to 2022. "Within Journal Article Fit" is a textual analysis-based similarity index between an article's abstract and all the abstracts published in that journal one to three years before and after the given article's publication. It is then standardised within journal–years with its respective mean and standard deviation. "Co-authors' productivity" is co-authors' average number of publications per year in our sample. "Share of co-authors active prior 2011" is the average share of co-authors who have published at least once in our sample during 2006–2010. "Cross-field (AJG) co-author" is an indicator for articles where we can identify a co-author whose home-field differs from the respective journal's AJG field. "Additional controls" are the second terms of the interactions, e.g., SJR low AJG 3, SJR high AJG 3, SJR low AJG 4&4*, SJR high AJG 4&4* in column (2). Robust *t*-statistics are in parentheses. *, **, and *** denote significance at the 10%, 5%, and 1% levels, respectively.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Within Journal Article Fit			
Citations per year	0.012***	0.012***	0.012***	0.012***
	(38.651)	(39.315)	(38.783)	(39.178)
Co-authors' productivity	0.026***	0.028***	0.027***	0.027***
	(9.909)	(10.121)	(10.091)	(9.821)
Share of co-authors active prior 2011	−0.045***	−0.047***	−0.047***	−0.054***
	(−7.411)	(−7.401)	(−7.628)	(−8.321)
Cross-field (AJG) co-author	−0.086***	−0.085***	−0.086***	−0.088***
	(−18.858)	(−18.572)	(−18.908)	(−19.008)
UK affil	−0.046***	−0.034**		
	(−5.855)	(−2.501)		
UK affil × SJR low AJG 3		−0.035*		
		(−1.655)		
UK affil × SJR high AJG 3		−0.014		
		(−0.656)		
UK affil × SJR low AJG 4&4*		−0.056**		
		(−2.321)		
UK affil × SJR high AJG 4&4*		0.055		
		(1.313)		
AUS affil			−0.004	0.017
			(−0.323)	(0.864)
AUS affil × SJR low ABDC A&B				−0.070*
				(−1.785)
AUS affil × SJR high ABDC A&B				0.041
				(1.042)
AUS affil × SJR low ABDC A*				−0.084**
				(−2.566)
AUS affil × SJR high ABDC A*				0.045
				(0.461)
Constant	−0.050***	−0.042***	−0.053***	−0.038***
	(−13.511)	(−5.958)	(−14.444)	(−4.922)
Observations	260,408	260,408	260,408	260,408
R-squared	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01
Additional controls	No	Yes	No	Yes
Year FE	No	Yes	No	Yes
AJG rating FE	No	Yes	No	No
ABDC rating FE	No	No	No	Yes

at least one publication with their respective home country's co-authors and also at least one where they are the only co-author from their respective home country. With this grouping we aim to capture the differences in the extent to which incentives are aligned between the authors of a given article. We aggregate the data to the author–co-author category level, leaving us with two observations per author (similar to the analysis in Tables 7 and 10).

Table 12 presents the results. The coefficients on "Home co-authors" reveals that compared to working with international co-authors, collaborating with home colleagues typically results in outputs that are published in less competitive journals and also generate fewer citations. Similar to Tables 7 and 10, the dependent variables in columns (1)-(2) are the differences between publication shares in *SJR low* and *SJR high* journals. Consistent with our earlier results, UK and Australian-affiliated authors publish disproportionately more in less competitive journals given their relevant AJG/ABDC ratings when working with home co-authors. These results confirm that the national lists play an important coordinating role for the respective home authors. To account for the possibility that international co-authors are systematically different compared to home ones, we control for co-authors' productivity (average number of outputs per year of the co-authors excluding the focal author) and also for their seniority (share of them publishing prior to 2011).

Importantly, the penalties associated with working with home co-authors appear to be larger for both UK and Australia-affiliated researchers, as shown by the coefficients on the interaction terms in columns (3)-(4). UK (Australian) authors on average lose 0.29 (0.50) citations per year per article more than authors of other countries when working with their respective home peers. While these numbers correspond to a 5%–10% loss compared to average citations, this difference is equivalent to about 50% (88%) of the citation gap when comparing UK (Australia) affiliated authors with "Others" in Table 4. Thus, incentives associated with national ratings lists could potentially account for a significant fraction of the observed citation gap.

Taken together, these results suggest that authors face a trade-off when deciding on the collaborations they seek out and contribute to: working with international co-authors is more likely to lead to higher citation counts and less likely to lead to articles being published in relatively uncompetitive journals. Moreover, the results on a carefully selected sub-sample suggest that the price for working with home co-authors is steeper for UK and Australian-affiliated authors than those from other countries, providing support for H4a and H4b.

Table 12
Co-author affiliations and citations.
Using Scopus data, we find authors who only highlight publications from a single home country on all of their publications between 2011–2022. Then, we further restrict this sample to authors who have at least four publications during this period. Finally, for each author we aggregate their publications into two groups: in the "Home co-authors" group all co-authors share the same home country affiliation, while in the international co-authors group (the benchmark in the regressions) the given author is the only co-author from the given home country. We only include authors who have at least one publication in each of the above groups published between 2011–2022. E.g., an Australian-affiliated author has to have at least one publication where all other co-authors are also Australian-affiliated and also has to have at least one publication where none of the other co-authors are Australian-affiliated. "Co-authors' productivity" is co-authors' average number of publications per year in our sample leaving out the focal author. "Share of co-authors active prior 2011" is the average share of the co-authors who have published at least once in our sample during 2006–2010. Robust *t*-statistics are in parentheses. *, **, and *** denote significance at the 10%, 5%, and 1% levels, respectively.

	(1) SJR low-SJR high (AJG)	(2) SJR low-SJR high (ABDC)	(3) Citations per year	(4) SJR
Home co-authors	0.022***	0.024***	−0.333***	0.007
	(3.833)	(4.264)	(−6.347)	(0.384)
Co-authors' productivity	−0.027***	−0.025***	0.891***	0.036***
	(−4.505)	(−4.145)	(12.321)	(2.655)
Share of co-authors active prior 2011	−0.085***	−0.117***	−0.262	0.270***
	(−4.006)	(−5.561)	(−1.447)	(4.837)
AUS affil × Home co-authors		0.073***	−0.499**	−0.244***
		(3.224)	(−2.374)	(−5.828)
Mean year	−0.004***	−0.011***	−0.140***	0.019***
	(−2.681)	(−6.771)	(−10.157)	(4.371)
Share ABDC A-rated		0.132***	0.011	−0.008
		(6.769)	(0.066)	(−0.273)
Share ABDC A*-rated		0.429***	1.371***	1.060***
		(20.340)	(7.491)	(26.166)
UK affil × Home co-authors	0.028*		−0.290**	−0.119***
	(1.830)		(−2.196)	(−3.714)
Share AJG 4/4*-rated	0.263***		1.078***	1.854***
	(18.607)		(8.460)	(38.240)
Constant	8.908***	22.663***	285.495***	−36.557***
	(2.650)	(6.711)	(10.299)	(−4.190)
Observations	45,336	45,336	45,336	45,336
R-squared	0.023	0.040	0.047	0.229
Author FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

5. Conclusions and implications

5.1. Summary and suggestions for further research

Using a large database of publications across business and management fields, this paper examines how differences in journal outcomes between the UK, Australia, and other countries may relate to the journal ratings lists employed in the UK and Australia. We find that UK-based authors publish more than average in the lowest impact factor journals within the 3- and 4-AJG ratings categories, and likewise Australian authors publish disproportionately more frequently in the lowest impact factor journals within the A and A* ABDC categories. These patterns are consistent with authors maximising the journal ratings of their publications while also targeting the less competitive outlets. Colleagues early in their publishing careers are even more likely to exhibit these publication outcome characteristics while they may be on probation and their places of publication are subject to close scrutiny. On the other hand, we find no evidence that researchers are similarly publishing work out-of-field in order to attain a higher rated journal, though the tendency for UK authors to publish more across fields is notable.

Our findings lead naturally to several possible agendas for future research. First, building on our result that scholars earlier in their careers are more likely to publish in low impact, highly rated journals, it would be worthwhile to investigate whether this divergence in publication outcomes also applies between other groupings — such as across fields, by gender, or between institutions dependent on the local research culture. For instance, it is possible that the differences in the relative publication success rates of men and women in finance observed by Brooks et al. (2025) could be linked with gender differences in strategic behaviour within that specific field. If targeting low impact, highly rated journals is successful in supporting the career development of researchers who achieve this at the expense of those who publish in higher impact, lower rated journals, this could be consequential for the relative development of these groups. More generally, when research managers rely on lists to assess performance, groups that have behaved strategically will benefit from a superficially superior set of outputs. If these groups align to fields, for example, resources are likely to flow disproportionately to those who adopted this strategy, creating distortions by facilitating their growth relative to other areas where researchers are more inclined to select the most appropriate outlet for their work irrespective of the ranking. Relatedly, it would be valuable to conduct a longitudinal study at the author level of the effects of journal selection behaviour on the career trajectories of the academics concerned. Were researchers who targeted low impact journals in higher ratings categories damaged in terms of lower future chances to publish in higher impact journals or even regarding their promotion prospects?

Second, it would be worthwhile to determine the effects that the strategic positioning of research to exploit anomalies in journal ratings lists have on the visibility and subsequent citations to the research once published. We have shown that, on average, work in low-impact, high-ranking journals will garner fewer citations in many cases than in higher-impact, lower-ranked places. But it is also expectable that specific outputs where researchers publish out-of-field or in particularly poorly fitting journals given their work's subject matter might suffer a greater citation penalty than would have been the case if they had

selected the most relevant (even if lower rated) journal due to the increased difficulty for other researchers working on the same topic to find it.

5.2. Implications

The results presented in this study have implications for individual scholars and for those responsible for issuing and updating journal ratings lists. Regarding the former, our findings are consistent with national journal rankings being the crucial factor influencing individual academics' paper submission venues, but they should be aware of the trade-offs involved in their choices. Scoring a "hit" in a highly rated but low-impact journal might be to a scholar's long-term detriment, and they should consider the expected readership of their paper and effect on expected citations, not just the journal rating, when establishing a submission strategy. Especially later in their careers, their influence on the development of the subject measured through their cumulative citations will be a more lasting reflection of the importance of their work than the rating of the journals. Particularly given that citations beget further citations (e.g., Oppenheim and Renn, 1978), publishing less visibly or in poorly fitting journals could have a considerable damaging effect on a researcher's lifetime footprint on the profession.

A further downside to chasing ratings by UK- and Australia-based researchers is that, by playing a different game to most of the rest of the world, their publication incentives are misaligned, reducing the opportunities for UK and Australian researchers to participate in international collaborations. This is most unfortunate given the benefits of external collaborative networks for publication success (Vogel et al., 2017) and our findings that such relationships are the most fruitful in generating the greatest academic impact, and it likely limits overseas career opportunities for UK researchers.

Turning now to the wider implications for institutions and the profession, our research adds to an emerging body of evidence on the negative consequences for scholarship of strategic behaviour in the research publication process. The virtual domination of academic managerial decision-making in the UK's and Australia's business schools by just two ratings measures – the AJG and ABDC lists – is particularly dangerous since incentive structures become homogenised. This outcome accords with the predictions of new institutional theory made more than 40 years ago by DiMaggio and Powell (1983) that isomorphic processes lead to homogenisation in incentives and organisational structures.

However, given their deep embeddedness as performance and ranking measures, it seems implausible that journal lists will be replaced or supplanted. Indeed, as Osterloh and Frey (2020) note, given the significant skew across papers within journals in citation numbers, many individuals benefit from publishing in journals with high ratings to a greater extent than their contribution. This arises by virtue of the journal's stature despite their own work in it receiving relatively few citations. Therefore, recommendations for journal ratings list discontinuation or even diminished use are likely to fall on deaf ears. Therefore, we adopt a pragmatic approach with two recommendations directed squarely at journal list custodians.

First, we recommend greater granularity in the journal ratings systems – specifically, refining distinctions between the AJG's 3- and 4-rated journals (approximately 400 in total) and around the ABDC's A/A* boundary (approximately 800 journals are rated A* or A). These points in the scales appear to present the greatest challenges for consistent evaluation. The publication outcomes we have described and examined in this paper lead rating lists to be less useful for the very purpose for which they are most frequently employed – namely, robotic performance appraisal by university managers. AJG and ABDC ratings, which comprise only five-point and four-point scales respectively, provide insufficient granularity for effective performance evaluation even if the assessor believes that the ratings are sufficiently accurate within category. This lack of differentiability results in ineffective performance measures that will have systematically rewarded the anomalies we document and render illegitimate any comparisons between those who maximised their publications' journal ratings at the expense of academic impact and those who did not.

Second, the ratings assigned to journals within the AJG and ABDC initially emerged from their country-specific communities, which may have led to some notable "home biases" in the lists, where journals that are common publication outlets in their respective countries were awarded higher ratings than justified by other metrics or awarded by other countries' ratings lists. There is also a belief that the ratings in current versions of the lists, while having been altered and extended over the years since inception, nonetheless remain anchored to their original incarnations (Serenko and Bontis, 2024). We note that journal list custodians have dual roles as providers of information upon which individual author and managerial decisions in the UK, Australia and beyond are made, and they have mandates to further the cases of business schools in their specific countries. Indeed, the ABDC created its initial journal quality list in 2007 partly as a way "to overcome the regional and discipline bias of international lists" (ABDC, 2016, as cited in Krueger, 2017). These dual roles would render the removal of "home biases" controversial and would require a more radical approach to revision than has taken place hitherto.

Our two core recommendations (that journal lists be made more granular and "home biases" removed) would diminish perverse incentives in journal selection and encourage international collaborations. In so-doing, our suggestions provide a pragmatic and achievable route towards a more "responsible" use of ratings lists alongside other, more radical calls to discontinue their use altogether.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Chris Brooks: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Validation, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Conceptualization. **Miklos Farkas:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Validation, Software, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary material related to this article can be found online at https://doi.org/10.1016/j.respol.2026.105514.

Data availability

The authors do not have permission to share data.

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