



SAJIM and accreditation

The *SA Journal of Information Management (SAJIM)* has been in existence for almost five years. It reached a significant milestone recently when it was accorded accreditation status by the Department of Education. Henceforth, all articles published in SAJIM will be subsidized by the Department, thus making the journal an even more attractive – and potentially lucrative – vehicle for the dissemination of research results than it has been thus far.

This is the first edition of the SAJIM as an accredited journal. There are many reasons to celebrate the elevated status accreditation has bestowed on the journal. In the first instance, it serves as confirmation that the journal complies with the quality criteria set by the Department for so-called 'approved journals'. In its policy document published towards the end of 2003, *Policy and procedures for the measurement of research output of public higher education institutions*, the Department defined approved journals as 'peer reviewed periodical publications devoted to disseminating original research and new developments within specific disciplines' and proceeds to list seven criteria against which a journal is measured. Since electronically published journals are still very much the exception in the world of scientific publication, it is a source of some satisfaction that our journal measured up to the criteria set.

There is yet another, perhaps more important, reason why this first edition of the newly accredited *SAJIM* is cause to celebrate. It enables the journal to make a significant contribution towards improving not only research productivity, but also the quality of research results. Since articles published in the *SAJIM* will receive subsidy in future, this will encourage researchers to utilize the journal as a vehicle for the dissemination of their research results. As the demand to publish in the journal increases, so more scope is provided to the editorial board to become ever more selective in the articles they choose to publish, and more incentive is provided for authors to produce publications of only the highest quality. Healthy competition, as in so many other spheres of life, elevates and improves, and in the long the major beneficiary is South African scholarship.

Indeed, sustaining and enhancing scholarship in South Africa is one of the primary goals of the National Plan for Higher Education, published in 2001. The Department of Education has not only preached the importance of research to promote scholarship, it has also put its money where its collective mouth is. The formula for the subsidization of higher education institutions in South Africa has recently been substantially revised, the result of a protracted process of deliberation and consultation. The new subsidy formula is operative from 2004. Although it has not met with universal approval from higher education institutions (there is a pervasive sense that it seeks to accomplish too much with too little), there is general acclaim for the manner in which it recognizes the importance of research output.

A sizable portion of the annual subsidy allocation (research intensive institutions would that it were more) is devoted to rewards for institutions whose academic authors publish often and publish well and who dedicate time and effort to postgraduate students engaged in research. The new formula effectively introduces an incentive scheme for publications (journal articles, books and conference proceedings) as well as for master's dissertations and doctoral theses. A benchmark of 1,25 publication units (a journal article or equivalent

represents one unit, as does a master's dissertation completed within the minimum period; a doctoral thesis represents three units) per year is set per permanent full-time academic at a higher education institution. Each unit bears a rand value of roughly R95000. This means that every article published in the *SAJIM*, for example, earns R95000 for the academic institution to which the author is attached (it also means that every doctoral candidate that graduates within the minimum prescribed time span can earn R285000 for the institution!). Each institution can earn a maximum of R95000 x 1,25 x number of permanent full-time academic staff per annum.

Such an output-driven incentive scheme, conditioned by quality assurance indicators, has much merit and is a considerable improvement on the 'blind' research allocation that was a feature of the old subsidy formula. It will place enormous demands on the capacity of institutions to manage and support research optimally and to maximize their potential earnings from research publications. It is also apparent that the importance of the role to be played by accredited journals such as the *SAJIM* in the new subsidy dispensation cannot be overstated.

The recent policy initiatives of the government to strengthen and promote research as a core value of the development needs of South African society are to be welcomed. The old system, for a number of reasons, had threatened to become dysfunctional, and the order and guidance the new policies provide have been universally welcomed. The new policies on the accreditation and subsidization of research output discussed above are but some of the research-related policy initiatives adopted in recent times.

Other government departments have introduced incentive schemes for innovation and commercialization of intellectual property, programmes to enhance capacity to manage and develop intellectual property within higher education institutions and schemes to create mutually beneficial private-public partnerships within higher education. All serve the same goal: to encourage research productivity and innovation and to reward research that can make a significant contribution to South Africa's development needs.

Too often, governments who hold sway over emerging market economies tend to allocate resources for the alleviation of social ills at the lower end of the economic scale, to the detriment of high-level activities such as scholarly research. Attempts to recognize, encourage and reward scholarly research and innovation, as an important pre-condition for meeting the developmental needs of an emerging economy, are to be welcomed.

Such initiatives are opportune. There are disturbing indications that South African research productivity has declined in recent years and, more disturbing still, that South African research is not having the impact on the international scholarly community that it should have and that those researchers who are most productive and most authoritative are also in the close-to-retirement age group. The reasons for these trends – a scarcity of resources to support high-level research – are the subject of close and anxious scrutiny by research analysts and need not be discussed here. Although this decline in research productivity and research impact is cause for concern, it is equally evident that the decline trend can be reversed. It is, indeed, essential that it be reversed. In the ultra-competitive modern international scholarly arena, a country's scholarly community does not readily recover from relegation to the minor leagues, and there is ample evidence to suggest that scholarly decline has a direct correlation to economic decline.

It will, however, require extraordinary effort from academics already overburdened by heavy teaching and administrative loads. The *SAJIM* is a case in point. Its success is the result of extraordinary effort on the part of individuals who recognized the value of such a journal and who pursued the ideal of accreditation for the journal. Effort and perseverance stood it in

good stead in the preceding five years, and effort and perseverance will continue to stand it in good stead as it promotes the cause of good and relevant scholarship in the dynamic and varied world of information management. The success of the journal, now that it has attained its elevated status, can only result from a concerted effort on the part of the editorial board and contributors alike to pursue excellence.

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