Strategic Roadmap for Achieving Scimago Q1 Status: Australian Counselling Research Journal

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I. Introduction: Charting the Course to Q1 Recognition

A. Objective: Achieving Scimago Q1 Status for ACRJ

This report outlines a strategic roadmap designed to elevate the *Australian Counselling Research Journal* (ACRJ) to Q1 status within the Scimago Journal & Country Rank (SJR) system. The ACRJ (ISSN: 1832-1135) serves as the official research publication of the Australian Counselling Association (ACA).[1] Attaining Q1 ranking signifies placement within the top 25% of journals in its subject category, conferring significant prestige and enhancing the journal's ability to attract high-quality submissions from leading national and international researchers.[2] This elevated status directly impacts the perceived influence and credibility of the research published, benefiting authors, the ACA, and the broader counselling and psychotherapy field.

B. Current Position: Addressing the Indexing Gap

A critical initial observation is that ACRJ is not currently indexed in the Scopus database [User Query]. Consequently, it does not appear in the Scimago Journal & Country Rank listings, as Scimago relies exclusively on Scopus data. This indexing gap represents the primary obstacle that must be overcome before any Scimago ranking, let alone Q1 status, can be achieved.

ACRJ possesses several foundational strengths: it is an international, peer-reviewed, open-access, online journal published by the ACA and is listed with the Australian Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST).[1] It likely benefits from indexing in Google Scholar [9] and may be indexed in PsycINFO [16], a key database for its field. While positive, these existing indexing points are insufficient for inclusion in the Scimago rankings.

C. Strategic Overview: A Phased Approach

Achieving Q1 status is a long-term commitment requiring sustained strategic effort.[2] This report proposes a two-phase approach:

1. **Phase 1: Foundational - Achieving Scopus Indexing.** This involves meeting Scopus's rigorous minimum and evaluative criteria (detailed in Section III).

2. **Phase 2: Elevation - Implementing Q1 Strategies.** Once indexed in Scopus, targeted initiatives focused on enhancing content impact, editorial processes, and visibility must be implemented to improve the journal's metrics towards the Q1 threshold (detailed in Section IV).

This strategy is supported by benchmarking against relevant Q1 peer journals (Section V) and culminates in a practical roadmap for implementation (Section VI).

II. Demystifying Scimago Q1 Status

A. The Scopus-Scimago Link: The Indispensable Foundation

Understanding the relationship between Scopus and Scimago is fundamental. The Scimago Journal & Country Rank platform utilizes citation data drawn *exclusively* from the Scopus database.[4] Scopus, curated by Elsevier, is a large abstract and citation database of peer-reviewed literature.[3] Therefore, gaining acceptance and being indexed in Scopus is the absolute prerequisite for ACRJ to appear on Scimago and receive any ranking or quartile designation. Without Scopus indexing, Q1 status is unattainable.

B. Understanding the SCImago Journal Rank (SJR) Indicator

The primary metric used by Scimago to rank journals within subject categories is the SCImago Journal Rank (SJR) indicator.[4] SJR is designed to measure the scientific influence or prestige of a scholarly journal.[4]

Its calculation is based on the average number of *weighted* citations received in a selected year (Year X) by documents published in that journal during the preceding three years (Year X-1, Year X-2, and Year X-3).[4] The concept of "weighted" citations is crucial: not all citations are equal.[25] The SJR algorithm assigns different values to citations based on the prestige (measured by the SJR) of the *citing* journal.[4] A citation from a high-SJR journal contributes more to the cited journal's SJR than a citation from a low-SJR journal. This mechanism, inspired by Google's PageRank algorithm, aims to capture the transfer of prestige within the scholarly network.[4]

The calculation involves an iterative process where prestige values are distributed among journals based on citation patterns until a stable solution is reached.[19] SJR differs from the more widely known Journal Impact Factor (JIF) in key ways: it uses a three-year citation window compared to JIF's two years, and it employs weighted citations reflecting the source's prestige, whereas JIF treats all citations equally.[4] SJR is also designed to be size-independent, meaning it reflects the "average prestige per

article" rather than the total prestige of the journal, allowing for fairer comparisons between journals of different sizes or publication frequencies.[19]

C. Defining Journal Quartiles: The Significance of Q1

Scimago categorizes journals within each subject area into four quartiles (Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4) based on their SJR indicator.[4] These quartiles represent descending tiers of journal prestige, with each quartile containing approximately 25% of the journals in that category.[4]

Q1 comprises the top 25% of journals in a subject category, ranked by SJR.[4] Achieving Q1 status signifies that a journal is among the most prestigious and influential in its field.[4] This recognition significantly enhances a journal's reputation, making it more attractive to high-quality authors and potentially leading to increased funding opportunities and recognition for its contributors.[2]

D. Other Key Scimago Metrics

While SJR determines the quartile ranking, Scimago displays several other metrics that provide valuable context for a journal's performance:

- **H-Index:** This metric reflects both the productivity (number of articles) and the citation impact (number of citations) of a journal. It represents the number of articles (h) published by the journal that have received at least h citations each.[5]
- **Total Cites (3 years):** This is the total number of citations received during the SJR calculation window (current year citing the previous three years' publications).[25] It forms the basis for the SJR calculation.
- **Cites per Document (2 years):** This metric is Scimago's alternative to the Journal Impact Factor, calculating the average citations received in a 2-year period per document published in that period.[19]

Monitoring these related metrics alongside the SJR provides a more holistic view of the journal's performance. Changes in total citations or cites per document can offer insights into the underlying factors driving SJR trends, helping to evaluate the effectiveness of different strategic initiatives aimed at increasing impact. For instance, a rising SJR might be driven by an increase in overall citations or specifically by attracting more citations from high-prestige (high-SJR) journals.

III. Foundational Step: Achieving Scopus Indexing for ACRJ

A. Meeting Scopus Minimum Criteria: A Readiness Assessment for ACRJ

Before ACRJ can be evaluated for Scopus indexing, it must meet several non-negotiable minimum criteria.[7] Based on available information, ACRJ appears to meet some, but requires verification and potentially action on others:

1. **Peer Review:** Content must be peer-reviewed, and the journal must have a publicly available description of its peer-review process.[7] ACRJ states it is peer-reviewed [1], but the specific process (e.g., double-blind) and policy details need to be clearly published on its website.
2. **Regular Publication & ISSN:** The journal must be published regularly according to a stated schedule and possess a registered ISSN.[7] ACRJ has an ISSN (1832-1135) [1] and appears to publish regularly based on its archive.[56] However, Scopus requires the publication schedule (e.g., bi-annually, quarterly) to be explicitly stated on the website.[50]
3. **International Relevance & English Language Requirements:** Content must be relevant and readable for an international audience. English language titles and abstracts are mandatory.[7] ACRJ aims for international scope and publishes in English [1], fulfilling this criterion.
4. **References in Roman Script:** While recommended rather than strictly mandatory, having references in Roman script is crucial for accurate citation tracking by Scopus.[50] ACRJ's practice regarding reference formatting needs verification.
5. **Publication Ethics Statement:** A publicly available statement outlining publication ethics and malpractice policies is required.[7] Adherence to COPE (Committee on Publication Ethics) guidelines is strongly recommended and often expected.[51] ACRJ's website needs to be checked for such a statement. While its publisher, ACA, has a Code of Ethics [58], and the related PACJA journal adheres to COPE [59], ACRJ needs its own explicit, accessible statement.
6. **Publication History:** Scopus generally requires a publication history of at least two years.[50] ACRJ, having replaced the *Counselling Psychotherapy and Health (CPH)* journal [1] and having published issues since at least 2008 [56], likely meets this requirement. Recent Scopus policy changes might allow earlier submission for exceptional new journals, but this requires strong justification, and the standard expectation remains a 2+ year history.[60]

The key takeaway is that while ACRJ likely fulfills several baseline requirements inherently (ISSN, English content, history), Scopus requires *verifiable proof* through publicly accessible information on the journal's website. Policies regarding peer review, publication frequency, and ethics must be transparently communicated online.[7]

B. Navigating the Scopus Evaluation Criteria (Beyond Minimums)

Meeting the minimum criteria simply makes ACRJ *eligible* for review by the Scopus Content Selection & Advisory Board (CSAB). Actual acceptance depends on a comprehensive evaluation across five categories.[7] ACRJ must demonstrate strength in these areas:

1. **Journal Policy:**
    - **Editorial Policy:** A convincing and clearly articulated editorial policy and scope statement are needed.[51]
    - **Peer Review Type:** The specific model (e.g., double-blind, single-blind, open) must be clearly described online.[51]
    - **Geographic Diversity (Editors):** The editorial board should ideally reflect international diversity.[51] The current ACRJ board appears predominantly Australian with some international representation [61], which likely needs strategic strengthening to meet Scopus expectations for international standing.
    - **Geographic Diversity (Authors):** Similar to editors, a geographically diverse authorship base is viewed favorably.[51] ACRJ's current author distribution needs assessment.
    - **Open Access Policy:** Clear information regarding the OA model (ACRJ is OA [1]), licensing (e.g., CC license type), and any associated fees (ACRJ appears free [1]) should be readily available.[51]
2. **Content:**
    - **Academic Contribution:** Articles must make a clear academic contribution to the field of counselling and psychotherapy.[7]
    - **Abstract Quality:** Abstracts must be clear, concise, and accurately reflect the article's content (in English).[7]
    - **Quality & Scope Conformity:** Published content must be of high quality and align with the journal's stated aims and scope.[7] ACRJ's scope is defined.[1]
    - **Readability:** Articles must be well-structured, grammatically correct, and easily readable.[7]
3. **Journal Standing:**
    - **Citedness in Scopus:** Scopus evaluates whether the journal's articles are already being cited by other journals *within the Scopus database*.[51] This presents a significant challenge for an unindexed journal like ACRJ. Demonstrating impact through citations in other indexed databases (e.g., PsycINFO, Google Scholar) and strength in other evaluation areas becomes crucial to overcome this.
    - **Editor Standing:** The academic reputation and expertise of the

Editor-in-Chief and key editorial board members are assessed. Providing URLs to their professional profiles (CVs, institutional pages) is required.[51]
    - **Publishing Organization:** The role and reputation of the publisher (ACA) must be clearly communicated.[51] ACRJ's website identifies it as the official ACA journal.[1]
4. **Publishing Regularity:**
    - **Timeliness:** The journal must adhere strictly to its stated publication schedule without delays or interruptions.[51]
    - **Consistency:** A consistent publication history, typically over 2+ years, is required.[51] ACRJ appears to meet this based on its archive.[56]
5. **Online Availability:**
    - **Accessibility:** Full journal content must be available online.[51] ACRJ, being an online journal, meets this.[1]
    - **English Homepage:** An English-language version of the journal's homepage is required.[51] ACRJ's website is in English.
    - **Website Quality:** The homepage should be professional, easy to navigate, and provide clear access to essential information (policies, aims, board, contact).[51] A subjective assessment of acrjournal.com.au is needed.

The Scopus evaluation process is holistic; weaknesses in one area can negatively impact the overall assessment. The 'citedness in Scopus' criterion is particularly challenging for new applicants. Strategies to enhance visibility and gather citations in other reputable indexes *before* applying to Scopus are therefore essential.[18] Building a strong case based on editorial rigor, content quality, international reach (editors/authors), and online presentation is vital.

C. ACRJ Scopus Readiness Checklist

The following table provides a structured assessment of ACRJ's readiness for Scopus evaluation based on available information.

Criterion Category	Specific Criterion	ACRJ Current Status (Evidence/Snippet ID)	Gap/Area for Improvement	Recommended Action
Minimum Criteria	Peer Review Policy Publicly Available	Peer-reviewed stated [1], but specific	Lack of explicit, publicly accessible peer	Publish a clear statement detailing the

		process/policy details likely not public on website.	review policy.	peer review model (e.g., double-blind) and process on the ACRJ website.
	Regular Publication Schedule Publicly Stated	Publishes regularly [56], but schedule not explicitly stated online.	Absence of a clearly stated publication frequency (e.g., quarterly, bi-annually).	Define a regular publication schedule, adhere to it strictly, and state it clearly on the website.[50]
	ISSN Registered	Yes, 1832-1135.[1]	None.	Ensure ISSN is displayed on website.
	English Titles & Abstracts	Assumed Yes, international scope stated.[1]	None (assuming current practice meets requirement).	Continue ensuring all articles have English titles and abstracts.
	References in Roman Script	Unknown.	Potential inconsistency with Scopus preference/requirement for citation tracking.	Verify current practice. Mandate/strongly recommend Roman script for all reference lists in author guidelines.[50]
	Publication Ethics Statement Publicly Available	ACA has code [58], but ACRJ-specific statement likely not prominent/public on website.	Lack of an easily accessible, journal-specific ethics statement adhering to international standards (e.g., COPE).	Develop and prominently display a COPE-compliant publication ethics and malpractice statement on the ACRJ

				website.[51]
	Minimum 2-Year Publication History	Yes, likely via CPH predecessor and subsequent ACRJ issues.[1]	None.	Maintain consistent publication.
Evaluation Criteria	**Journal Policy**			
	Convincing Editorial Policy	Scope defined.[1]	Policy may need refinement for international appeal and clarity.	Review and potentially refine editorial policy statement for clarity, rigor, and international relevance.
	Geographic Diversity of Editors	Predominantly Australian, some international.[61]	Limited international representation on Editorial Board.	Strategically recruit well-regarded international editors from diverse regions.[51]
	Geographic Diversity of Authors	Unknown, likely predominantly Australian.	Potential lack of international authorship.	Actively solicit high-quality submissions from international authors.[51]
	Clear OA Policy Information	Stated as OA [1], likely no APCs.[1]	Licensing details (e.g., CC license type) may not be clearly stated.	Clearly state the specific Creative Commons license used and confirm absence of APCs on the website.[51]

	Content			
	Academic Contribution to Field	Yes, focuses on counselling/psychotherapy research.[1]	None inherently, but quality needs consistent focus.	Maintain high standards for relevance and contribution. Focus on niche strengths (e.g., Indigenous issues).
	Clarity of Abstracts (English)	Assumed, but quality needs monitoring.	Potential variability in abstract quality.	Implement editorial checks/guidelines specifically for abstract clarity and keyword effectiveness.[51]
	Quality & Conformity to Scope	Appears consistent with scope.[1]	Maintaining high quality across all submissions.	Uphold rigorous peer review and editorial standards.
	Readability of Articles	Assumed, but quality needs monitoring.	Potential variability in language/writing quality, especially from non-native English speakers.	Provide clear author guidelines on language and structure. Consider recommending editing services.[63]
	Journal Standing			
	Citedness of Journal Articles *in Scopus*	Zero, as not indexed.	Major hurdle for Scopus evaluation.	Implement visibility strategies (Section IV.C) to gain citations in *other* indexed

				databases (PsycINFO, Google Scholar) pre-application.[1][8]
	Editor Standing	Editor details available [61], but professional URLs/CVs likely needed for Scopus.	Lack of readily available online professional information for key editors as required by Scopus.	Ensure Editor-in-Chief and key board members have updated online profiles (institutional page, ORCID) and provide URLs during application.[51]
	Clear Communication of Publisher	Yes, stated as official ACA journal.[1]	None.	Ensure publisher information (ACA) is clear on website.
	Publishing Regularity			
	No Delays/Interruptions	Appears consistent.[56]	Maintaining strict adherence to schedule.	Strictly adhere to the defined publication schedule. Consider 'publish-as-you-go' model if feasible.[50]
	Online Availability			
	Full Content Online	Yes, is an online journal.[1]	None.	Ensure reliable hosting and access.

	English Language Homepage	Yes [acrjournal.com.au].	None.	Maintain English homepage.
	Quality of Homepage	Needs assessment (subjective).	Potential issues with navigation, clarity, accessibility of policies.	Review website for user-friendliness, ensure all key policies (peer review, ethics, scope, board, contact) are easily findable.[51]

D. Actionable Recommendations for Meeting Scopus Standards

Based on the assessment above, the following actions are recommended as prerequisites for a successful Scopus application:

1. **Publish Clear Policies:** Develop and prominently display detailed policies on the ACRJ website covering:
    - **Peer Review:** Specify the model used (e.g., double-blind), the process steps, typical timelines, and criteria for reviewers.[51]
    - **Publication Ethics:** Adopt and state adherence to COPE guidelines. Include specific policies on authorship, conflicts of interest, data handling, plagiarism, corrections, and retractions.[7]
    - **Publication Frequency:** Clearly state the intended publication schedule (e.g., "Published Quarterly in March, June, September, December") and adhere to it rigorously.[50]
    - **Open Access:** Detail the specific Creative Commons license used (e.g., CC BY) and confirm the absence of Article Processing Charges (APCs).[51]
2. **Standardize Formatting:** Update author guidelines to mandate or strongly recommend the use of Roman script for all reference lists to facilitate Scopus citation tracking.[50] Ensure all articles consistently feature English titles, abstracts, and keywords.
3. **Enhance Website Quality:** Conduct a review of the acrjournal.com.au website focusing on user experience. Ensure easy navigation, professional design, and prominent placement of all essential information (Aims & Scope, Editorial Board, Submission Guidelines, All Policies, Contact Information).[51]
4. **Strengthen International Standing:**
    - **Editorial Board:** Actively recruit respected international researchers,

particularly from diverse geographical regions, to join the Editorial Board. Ensure their affiliations are listed and encourage them to maintain updated online professional profiles (e.g., institutional webpage, ORCID).[51]
    - **Authorship:** Develop strategies to attract high-quality submissions from international authors. This could involve targeted calls for papers, promotion at international conferences, and leveraging the networks of international board members.[51]
5. **Build Pre-Scopus Visibility and Citations:** Implement the visibility strategies outlined in Section IV.C *before* applying to Scopus. Focus on securing indexing in PsycINFO and DOAJ, optimizing for Google Scholar, and actively promoting content to generate citations that, while not *in* Scopus, demonstrate the journal's impact and relevance within its field.[18]

IV. Strategic Pillars for Elevating ACRJ Towards Q1

Once indexed in Scopus, the focus shifts to elevating ACRJ's performance metrics, primarily its SJR, to reach the Q1 threshold. This requires a multi-pronged strategy built on enhancing content impact, strengthening editorial processes, and maximizing visibility.

A. Pillar 1: Enhancing Content Impact and Quality

The type and quality of content published are paramount for attracting citations, especially weighted citations from high-prestige journals, which drive SJR.

- **Cultivating High-Citation Potential Content:**
    - **Review Articles:** Systematically commission or solicit high-quality review articles from leading experts in key areas of counselling and psychotherapy. Reviews often synthesize existing knowledge and serve as essential references, typically attracting significantly more citations than original research articles.[32] Identifying emerging trends or consolidating knowledge in established areas through reviews can position ACRJ as a key resource.
    - **Methodological Papers:** Publish rigorous papers addressing methodological advancements, challenges, or best practices specifically relevant to counselling research (e.g., qualitative methods, outcome measurement, culturally appropriate research designs). Such papers can become foundational references for researchers in the field.
    - **Targeting 'Hot Topics':** Proactively identify and solicit research on timely and impactful topics within the field. This could involve monitoring citation trends, conference themes, or using tools like Altmetric to gauge current discussions.[2] ACRJ's existing focus on Indigenous issues [1] represents a

significant area of potential impact and could be strategically developed further with targeted calls or commissioned papers.

- **Attracting Leading National and International Contributors:**
  - A journal's reputation is significantly enhanced by its contributors. Actively invite well-established national and international researchers known for high-impact work to submit original research, editorials, or commentaries.[17] The ACA network [74] and the personal networks of the Editorial Board members are crucial resources for this outreach.[63]
  - Targeting authors from regions with high research growth or specific expertise relevant to ACRJ's scope can broaden the journal's reach and potential citation base.[63]
  - Addressing potential language barriers for international authors, perhaps by recommending reputable editing services or providing enhanced editorial support, can encourage submissions from a wider pool of researchers.[63] Attracting international authors directly addresses a Scopus evaluation criterion [51] and is fundamental to increasing global visibility and the likelihood of attracting citations from diverse, potentially high-impact international journals, thereby boosting SJR.
- **Strategic Use of Special Issues and Thematic Collections:**
  - Publish focused special issues or thematic collections on emerging or highly relevant topics (e.g., teletherapy effectiveness, trauma-informed practice in specific populations, advances in specific therapeutic modalities, cross-cultural counselling challenges).[17] These attract concentrated attention from researchers interested in the specific theme, often leading to higher readership and citation rates for the collected articles.
  - Inviting respected researchers with expertise in the chosen theme to serve as Guest Editors can enhance the quality and profile of special issues.[64]
- **Ensuring Relevance to an International Audience:**
  - While leveraging its unique Australian perspective, particularly regarding Indigenous counselling practices [1], ACRJ must ensure its content resonates internationally.[51] This involves encouraging submissions that frame research questions, methodologies, and discussions in ways that are relevant beyond the local context.
  - Avoid overly localized framing or titles that might deter international readers or signal regional focus to indexing services.[51] Encourage comparative studies or discussions that link Australian findings to global trends or theories.

B. Pillar 2: Strengthening Editorial Processes and Reputation

Rigorous, ethical, and efficient editorial processes are essential for building author trust, attracting quality submissions, and establishing a strong reputation.

- **Optimizing Peer Review:**
  - Maintain a consistently rigorous, fair, and objective peer review process.[51] The chosen model (e.g., double-blind) must be clearly stated and adhered to.[51]
  - Emphasize providing constructive, high-quality feedback that helps authors improve their work, even if the manuscript is ultimately rejected.[77] This builds goodwill and encourages future submissions.
  - Strive for efficient turnaround times. Prompt decisions and publication are highly valued by authors [63] and allow articles a longer window to accrue citations within metric calculation periods (e.g., the 3-year SJR window).[32] Track metrics like 'submission to first decision' and 'acceptance to publication' and potentially publish averages.[89]
  - Develop clear guidelines for reviewers outlining expectations regarding review quality, timeliness, and ethical conduct.[32]
  - Implement robust processes to identify and manage potential peer review manipulation, ensuring the integrity of the review process.[83]
- **Adhering to Publication Ethics Best Practices:**
  - Explicitly state adherence to COPE guidelines on the journal website.[7] This is a baseline expectation for reputable journals and a Scopus requirement.
  - Ensure comprehensive and easily accessible policies cover all key ethical areas: authorship criteria (including contributorship roles [94]), handling of conflicts of interest [59], data sharing and reproducibility [81], plagiarism detection and consequences [81], procedures for corrections and retractions [80], and ethical treatment of human participants (including informed consent and confidentiality).[81]
  - Establish clear procedures for handling suspected misconduct, following COPE flowcharts.[96]
- **Building a Diverse and Influential Editorial Board:**
  - The composition of the Editorial Board is critical for journal prestige and attracting quality submissions. Recruit internationally recognized researchers with strong publication records, expertise covering the journal's scope, and active professional networks.[17]
  - Prioritize geographical diversity to meet Scopus criteria and enhance international perspective.[51] The current ACRJ board [61] should be benchmarked against Q1 competitors [132] and strategically expanded.
  - Actively engage the board in soliciting manuscripts, promoting the journal, and advising on strategic direction.[63]

- **Maintaining Transparent and Robust Editorial Policies:**
  - All journal policies (Aims & Scope, Peer Review, Ethics, Open Access, Copyright, Archiving, Data Sharing, Conflict of Interest, Corrections/Retractions) must be clearly written, comprehensive, easily located on the website, and applied consistently.[17]
  - Periodically review and update policies to align with evolving best practices from organizations like COPE and ICMJE [94] and in response to community feedback.[80]
  - Clearly define the roles and responsibilities of editors, authors, and reviewers.[94]
  - Vigilantly uphold editorial independence, ensuring decisions are based solely on academic merit and free from undue influence.[90]

C. Pillar 3: Maximizing Visibility and Discoverability

Excellent content and editorial processes are ineffective if potential readers and citing authors cannot find the journal's articles. Maximizing visibility is crucial for increasing readership, citations, and ultimately, SJR.

- **Leveraging Open Access:**
  - ACRJ's existing Open Access model is a significant advantage.[1] OA demonstrably increases visibility, readership, and citation rates compared to subscription-based models.[2]
  - Ensure the specific Creative Commons license (e.g., CC BY is often preferred for maximum reuse) is clearly stated on the website and in published articles.[67] Confirm and communicate the absence of APCs.
- **Search Engine Optimization (SEO) for Academic Content:**
  - Optimize article components for discovery by search engines like Google Scholar, PubMed, Scopus, etc. This includes strategic, natural use of relevant keywords in titles, abstracts, and author-assigned keywords.[2] Authors should consider how peers would search for their work.[69]
  - Ensure the website's technical structure (metadata, site map, etc.) is optimized for search engine crawling.[71] Implement structured metadata (e.g., using standard schemas like Dublin Core or JATS) for each article, including title, authors, affiliations, abstract, keywords, publication date, volume/issue, DOI, and references.[17]
- **Digital Presence: Website, Metadata, and Author Profiles:**
  - Maintain a professional, high-quality website that is easy to navigate and provides clear access to all essential information.[51]
  - Ensure comprehensive and accurate metadata is associated with every

published article and submitted to relevant indexing services.[17] Assigning Digital Object Identifiers (DOIs) to all articles is essential for persistent linking and tracking.[51]
    - Encourage authors, reviewers, and editorial board members to create and maintain profiles on platforms like ORCID, Google Scholar, Scopus Author Profiles (once indexed), ResearchGate, and LinkedIn, and to link their ACRJ publications to these profiles.[68] This increases individual and journal visibility. Address potential author name ambiguity issues proactively.[109]
- **Active Dissemination:**
    - Proactively promote published content. Utilize social media platforms relevant to the academic community (e.g., X/Twitter, LinkedIn) to announce new articles, highlight key findings, share special issues, and engage in relevant discussions.[2] Use visuals and relevant hashtags to increase engagement.[115]
    - Empower authors to promote their own work. Provide them with shareable links, information about the journal's OA policy, and perhaps pre-written social media posts or suggestions for dissemination through their networks (email signatures, institutional repositories, academic networking sites).[68] Offering free eprints can facilitate sharing.[72]
    - Promote ACRJ at relevant national and international counselling and psychotherapy conferences. This can include presentations by editors, flyers in delegate bags, or potentially sponsoring a session.[63]
    - Consider developing supplementary content to enhance engagement, such as blog posts summarizing key articles, interviews with authors, or short video abstracts.[17]
    - Implement email alerts to notify registered users of new issues or articles matching their interests.[17]
- **Expanding Indexing Footprint (Pre-Scopus & Concurrent):**
    - Achieving indexing in relevant, respected databases beyond DEST is crucial for visibility and building a citation record prior to and alongside Scopus indexing.
    - **PsycINFO:** Confirm ACRJ's indexing status in APA PsycINFO.[16] Given its focus, this is arguably the most important subject-specific database for ACRJ's target audience.[22] If not currently indexed, application should be a high priority.
    - **DOAJ (Directory of Open Access Journals):** Apply for indexing in DOAJ.[62] Inclusion signals adherence to open access best practices and significantly boosts discoverability among the global research community seeking OA content. ACRJ's OA status makes it eligible.[1]
    - **Google Scholar:** Ensure optimal indexing by Google Scholar through website

structure, metadata provision, and potentially depositing articles in compatible repositories.[9]
    - **Other Databases:** Investigate potential inclusion in other relevant databases such as CINAHL (Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature) [24], ProQuest databases [116], EBSCO databases (e.g., Academic Search) [116], depending on scope alignment and submission requirements.
    - This sequential indexing strategy, starting with key subject and OA databases before or concurrent with a Scopus application, is advisable.[18] It builds the journal's visibility within its core research community, generates citations trackable via platforms like Google Scholar, and provides tangible evidence of the journal's reach and relevance to support the Scopus evaluation, particularly helping to address the 'citedness in Scopus' criterion.[51]

V. Benchmarking Against Q1 Peers

To effectively strategize for Q1 status, ACRJ must understand the landscape and performance of current Q1 journals in relevant fields.

A. Identifying Relevant Q1 Journals

Using Scimago Journal & Country Rank (scimagojr.com), Q1 journals can be identified in categories pertinent to ACRJ's scope. Key categories and examples of Q1 journals include:

- **Psychiatry and Mental Health (Cat. 2738):** *World Psychiatry, JAMA Psychiatry, Clinical Psychology Review, American Journal of Psychiatry, Molecular Psychiatry, Journal of Affective Disorders, Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry and Allied Disciplines*.[34]
- **Psychology (General, Cat. 3201):** *Annual Review of Psychology, Psychological Bulletin, Nature Reviews Psychology, Perspectives on Psychological Science, American Psychologist*.[35]
- **Applied Psychology (Cat. 3202):** *Journal of Applied Psychology, Personnel Psychology, Leadership Quarterly, Journal of Counseling Psychology, Counselling Psychology Quarterly, Counselling and Psychotherapy Research*.[13]
- **Clinical Psychology (Cat. 3203):** *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology, Clinical Psychology Review, Psychotherapy and Psychosomatics, Health Psychology Review, Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*.[34]
- **Health (social science) (Cat. 3306):** *Social Science & Medicine, Tobacco Control, SSM - Population Health*.[128]

For benchmarking purposes, it is recommended to select 3-5 journals with the closest

scope overlap and representing achievable aspirational targets. Based on title and field, the following appear highly relevant as benchmarks:

1. **Journal of Counseling Psychology (JCP):** Published by APA, consistently Q1 in Applied Psychology.[13]
2. **Counselling Psychology Quarterly (CPQ):** Published by Taylor & Francis, Q1 in Applied Psychology.[89]
3. **Clinical Psychology Review (CPR):** Published by Elsevier, consistently high Q1 in Clinical Psychology and Psychiatry/Mental Health.[34] Provides a benchmark for review-focused content.

B. Comparative Analysis

A comparative analysis of ACRJ against these selected Q1 journals should examine key dimensions influencing ranking and reputation. This requires data from Scimago and analysis of the journals' websites and published policies. (Note: Website analysis for benchmark journals relies on publicly available information and general standards observed in reputable publishers like APA, Taylor & Francis, Elsevier, as direct access for deep analysis is limited).

C. Comparative Analysis Table: ACRJ vs. Selected Q1 Journals

Feature Dimension	ACRJ (Current/Projected)	Journal of Counseling Psychology (JCP) [APA]	Counselling Psychology Quarterly (CPQ)	Clinical Psychology Review (CPR) [Elsevier]
Scope Focus	Counselling & Psychotherapy research; Practitioner-driven; Indigenous issues; Student research [1]	Counseling activities, career/vocational psych, diversity, assessment, professional issues [13]	Counselling psychology globally; psychotherapy; non-pathologizing approaches; practical relevance [89]	Comprehensive reviews of research/theory in clinical psychology [34]
Key Content Types	Empirical studies (quant/qual/mixed), theoretical essays, experiential	Primarily empirical research (quant/qual), theoretical/methodological	Empirical research, systematic reviews, research-informed conceptual	Primarily review articles, meta-analyses, theoretical papers.

	reports, case studies, student research [1]	contributions [13]	papers [89]	
Editorial Board Diversity (Geographic)	Limited international representation; Mostly Australia, some US/HK/Nigeria/Hawaii [61]	Primarily US-based, some international (e.g., Netherlands, Australia, China, Portugal) [132]	Appears internationally diverse (UK, Hong Kong, Australia, Israel, China, USA, Korea, Norway, Singapore, NZ) [133]	Highly international (US, UK, Europe, Australia, Canada, etc.)
Stated Peer Review Process	Peer-reviewed [1], details likely not public.	Likely double-blind (APA standard), process details available on website [*Inferred APA standard*]	Likely double-blind, process details expected on website	Rigorous peer review, details available on website [*Inferred Elsevier standard*]
Ethics Policy Visibility & COPE Adherence	Needs explicit, public statement. ACA code exists.[58]	Yes, APA adheres to COPE, policies visible [13]	Yes, T&F adheres to COPE, policies visible	Yes, Elsevier adheres to COPE, policies visible [*Inferred Elsevier standard*]
Open Access Model	Fully Open Access, likely no APCs [1]	Hybrid (Subscription + OA option) [135]	Hybrid (Subscription + OA option) [89]	Hybrid (Subscription + OA option) [*Inferred Elsevier standard*]
Key Metrics (Scimago 2024)	**N/A (Not Indexed)**	**SJR:** 1.794 (Q1) **H-Index:** 162 **Cites/Doc (2y):** 4.38 [34]	**SJR:** 1.012 (Q1) **H-Index:** 53 **Cites/Doc (2y):** 3.09 [89]	**SJR:** 6.617 (Q1) **H-Index:** 269 **Cites/Doc (2y):** 13.66 [39]
Indexing (Beyond	DEST listed [1],	PsycINFO, MEDLINE, SSCI,	PsycINFO, Scopus,	PsycINFO, MEDLINE,

Scopus)	likely Google Scholar, possibly PsycINFO.[16] Needs DOAJ.	Google Scholar, etc. [134]	CINAHL, EMBASE, etc. [89]	Scopus, SSCI, etc. [*Inferred Elsevier standard*]
Website Quality	Needs assessment.	High (APA standard) [*Inferred*]	High (T&F standard) [*Inferred*]	High (Elsevier standard) [*Inferred*]

D. Lessons Learned and Strategic Positioning for ACRJ

The comparison highlights several key characteristics of Q1 journals in this space:

- **Strong Editorial Processes:** Clear, rigorous, ethical (COPE-compliant), and publicly stated policies are standard.
- **Internationalization:** Diverse international editorial boards and likely significant international authorship are common.
- **Content Focus:** While empirical work is central (JCP, CPQ), high-impact reviews are critical for top-tier journals (CPR). Methodological contributions are also valued.
- **Visibility Infrastructure:** Robust indexing in major databases (Scopus, PsycINFO, WoS/SSCI, MEDLINE) and professional, informative websites are essential.
- **Open Access:** While ACRJ's full OA model is an advantage for accessibility, leading journals often operate hybrid models, indicating that OA alone doesn't guarantee Q1, but maximizing its visibility benefits is key.[72]

ACRJ's unique value proposition lies in its potential focus on the Australian context, particularly Indigenous counselling research, and its role as the ACA's official journal.[1] To reach Q1, ACRJ should leverage these strengths while strategically addressing the gaps identified:

- **Positioning:** Position ACRJ as the leading international outlet for high-quality research on counselling and psychotherapy *with relevance to or originating from the Australasian region*, including its unique Indigenous perspectives, while also welcoming high-impact international contributions on broader themes.
- **Priorities:**
  1. Achieve Scopus indexing by addressing all minimum and evaluation criteria, especially policy transparency and website quality (Section III.D).
  2. Strengthen the Editorial Board's international profile and expertise.
  3. Develop a content strategy that balances high-quality Australian research with commissioned international reviews and papers on globally relevant

topics.
4. Invest in maximizing visibility through broader indexing (DOAJ, PsycINFO) and active dissemination efforts.

VI. Roadmap and Sustained Effort

A. Prioritized Action Plan

A phased approach is recommended:

- **Phase 1: Scopus Readiness (Target: 0-12 months)**
  - **Immediate (0-3 months):**
    - Publish clear Peer Review Policy on website.
    - Develop and publish COPE-compliant Ethics & Malpractice Statement.
    - State Publication Schedule clearly on website.
    - Update Author Guidelines re: Roman script references.
    - Conduct website review and implement improvements for navigation/clarity.
    - Apply for DOAJ indexing.
    - Confirm/Apply for PsycINFO indexing.
  - **Ongoing (0-12 months):**
    - Strictly adhere to publication schedule.
    - Begin strategic recruitment of 2-3 international Editorial Board members.
    - Initiate efforts to solicit international submissions.
    - Implement basic SEO and social media promotion for published articles.
    - Ensure all editors have accessible online professional profiles (e.g., ORCID, institutional page).
  - **End of Phase 1 (approx. 12 months, or when ready):** Submit application for Scopus indexing, providing all required documentation and evidence of meeting criteria.
- **Phase 2: Q1 Trajectory (Target: 12+ months post-Scopus indexing)**
  - **Content Enhancement:** Actively commission high-impact review articles and special issues on trending topics. Continue soliciting high-quality international contributions.
  - **Editorial Strengthening:** Continue diversifying Editorial Board. Focus on efficient peer review turnaround times. Regularly review and update policies.
  - **Visibility Maximization:** Intensify SEO efforts. Expand social media engagement. Promote journal heavily at conferences. Encourage author self-promotion. Monitor citations and altmetrics.
  - **Metric Monitoring:** Closely track Scopus CiteScore and Scimago

SJR/Quartile ranking annually. Analyze citation patterns to inform content strategy.[72]

B. Monitoring Progress: Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

Regular monitoring is essential to gauge progress and adapt strategy:

- **Reach & Readership:** Website unique visitors, article downloads/views, geographic distribution of readership.[17]
- **Submissions & Authorship:** Number of submissions, acceptance rate, geographic diversity of submitting authors, turnaround times (submission-to-first-decision, acceptance-to-publication).
- **Citations & Impact:** Citation counts (Scopus, Google Scholar), Altmetric scores, H-index (Scopus/Scimago), Cites per Document (Scopus/Scimago).[17]
- **Indexing & Ranking:** Status in target databases (Scopus, PsycINFO, DOAJ). Scopus CiteScore, Scimago SJR and Quartile ranking (annual updates).[17]

C. The Importance of Continuous Improvement and Adaptation

Achieving Q1 status is not a one-time project; it requires a sustained commitment to quality and strategic adaptation.[2] The editorial team and the ACA must:

- Regularly review KPIs and adjust strategies accordingly.[80] If certain initiatives (e.g., specific types of special issues) prove highly effective at attracting citations, double down. If others show little return, reconsider resource allocation.
- Stay informed about changes in the academic publishing landscape, including Scopus evaluation criteria updates [60], evolving ethical guidelines (e.g., AI use in publishing [60]), and bibliometric trends.
- Foster a culture that prioritizes editorial excellence, author service, and impactful research within the journal's community.

VII. Conclusion: Achieving Prominence in Counselling Research

A. Summary of Key Strategies

Elevating the *Australian Counselling Research Journal* to Scimago Q1 status requires a focused, multi-year strategy. The cornerstone is achieving Scopus indexing by ensuring all minimum and evaluative criteria are met, particularly regarding the public availability and clarity of editorial policies (peer review, ethics, schedule) and enhancing the journal's online presence and international standing (editorial board, authorship). Following successful indexing, sustained efforts must concentrate on publishing high-impact content (especially reviews and timely special issues),

attracting leading international authors, maintaining rigorous and efficient editorial processes aligned with global best practices (COPE), and maximizing the visibility and discoverability of published research through strategic indexing (DOAJ, PsycINFO), SEO, and active dissemination.

B. Reiteration of the Path to Q1 Status

The path to Q1 is sequential and demanding: first, establish the foundations for Scopus indexing; second, implement targeted strategies to consistently improve the journal's citation impact and prestige metrics, particularly the SJR. Benchmarking against successful Q1 journals like the *Journal of Counseling Psychology* and *Counselling Psychology Quarterly* provides clear targets and highlights areas for improvement. While challenging, achieving Q1 status is feasible with dedicated resources, consistent implementation of the outlined strategies, and a commitment to continuous improvement from the ACRJ editorial team and the Australian Counselling Association. Success will not only enhance the journal's reputation but also significantly benefit its authors, the ACA, and the advancement of evidence-based counselling and psychotherapy knowledge both within Australia and internationally.

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