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COMMENTARY



## Revisiting sport management journals in the Academic Journal Guide 2024: no improvement ... this time?

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### ABSTRACT

The Academic Journal Guide (AJG) 2024 was recently released. There is no change in the evaluation of sport management journals. Yet, Scelles [(2023). Sport management journals should be rated higher in journal ranking lists! Towards a better international recognition of the field. *Managing Sport and Leisure*, Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23750472.2023.2216212>] argued that sport management journals should be rated higher in journal ranking lists. This commentary aims to offer potential reasons for the stability in the rankings for sport management journals since 2015. It identifies that one reason may be an unchallenged legacy of thought, which arises by the absence of a sport management expert sitting on the AJG Scientific Committee. Therefore, the commentary calls for the addition of a sport management expert to the Committee. This would contribute to a better international recognition of sport management which would, in turn, enhance business education and research.

### ARTICLE HISTORY

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### KEYWORDS

Journal list; journal quality;  
journal ranking

### Why no change for sport management journals in AJG 2024?

The Academic Journal Guide (AJG) 2024 – that is, the 2024 evaluation of business and management journals by the UK-based Chartered Association of Business Schools (CABS) – has been released late October 2024 (CABS, 2024a). There is no change in the rankings for sport management journals. Yet, Scelles (2023) statistically demonstrated that sport management journals should be rated higher in journal ranking lists and, in particular, AJG, based on the previous (2021) edition. His

regression analyses showed that sport management journals were rated lower in journal ranking lists, compared to other fields, than what their citation impact indicators predicts. Scelles (2023) also found more specifically that 11 out of 17 sport management journals are rated higher based on citation impact indicators than in AJG, while the other six journals perform like in AJG. These results suggest that the AJG ranking process has some degree of subjectivity, leading to sport management journals being undervalued, and raise a need to further consider the AJG methodology.

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The methodology applied by AJG for its 2024 list focused on a specific and fairly limited remit of the review process (CABS, 2024b). This remit only addressed three types of journals: (1) journals with significant shifts in metrics, (2) journals with a significant development or change in the nature of the journal, or (3) journals new to AJG. The first two did not apply to sport management journals, while sport management journals absent from AJG 2021 do not appear to have been considered. Regardless, the AJG 2024 remit did not question whether some journals should have been re-evaluated earlier based on the criteria applied in 2024. For example, a journal like *Sport Management Review* had a significant upward shift in metrics after 2015, yet its ranking did not change since then. A key question is whether the methodology for the next edition (2027) will adopt a more open approach with a full re-evaluation, in particular for sport management journals. There is an opportunity to do this as the “2024 edition is an intermediate review of the Guide [...] rather than being a full evaluation of the complete set of journals contained in the Guide” (CABS, 2024b, p. 10).

In this commentary, we argue that one of the key factors in the undervaluation of sport management journals by AJG 2024 is likely to be a legacy of historical developments that have been unchallenged. Moreover, the lack of representation in the AJG Scientific Committee may be a contributing factor, which would be ameliorated with the inclusion of a sport management expert sitting on the AJG Scientific Committee. This is important because the undervaluation of the research contributions made by the sport management community, as illustrated by the empirical findings of Scelles (2023), reduces the international recognition of sport management within the academic community. Addressing this would manage the risks identified in Scelles (2023) such as sport management scholars being incentivised to publish in other outlets, their research not covering issues specific to sport

management to fit with expectations from journals outside the field, and sport management suffering from brain drain, losing its identity, and jeopardising its development. We acknowledge that these considerations should not diminish the agency of the sport management community in terms of meaningfully engaging with mainstream management discussions and debates. Nevertheless, they are of significant importance in a context where, despite calls for responsible assessment not solely relying on research metrics such as journal rankings, there is still a strong association between journal rankings and expert evaluations (Morgan-Thomas et al., 2024).

### **Historical developments and composition of the AJG scientific committee leading to unchallenged (negative) legacy for sport management?**

AJG, initially known (and often still referred) as the ABS list, was first released in 2009 then updated in 2010. It rates journals on a scale of 1–4\*, with 1 corresponding to the lowest rated journals, 4 some of the best rated journals but not the very best, and 4\* the very best rated journals. In ABS 2009 and 2010, sport management journals were largely absent, the three exceptions being the *Journal of Sport Management* (evaluated 1 in 2009, then 2 in 2010), the *Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sport and Tourism Education* and *Managing Leisure: An International Journal*, known as *Managing Sport and Leisure* since 2015 (both journals were evaluated as 1 in 2009 and 2010). These three journals have remained in the list with the same rating since 2010. In AJG 2015, 12 sport management journals were added to the list, namely, *European Sport Management Quarterly* (evaluated 3), the *Journal of Sports Economics*, *Sport Management Review* (both journals evaluated 2), the *International Journal of Sport and Society*, the *International Journal of Sport Finance*, the *International Journal of*



*Sport Management*, the *International Journal of Sport Management and Marketing*, the *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, the *International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship*, *Journal of Sport Tourism*, *Sport Marketing Quarterly*, and *Sport, Business and Management: An International Journal* (all of the latter nine journals were evaluated 1).<sup>1</sup> These 12 journals have remained in the list with the same rating since 2015. One may read this with a positive lens in the sense that sport management journals have continued to gain recognition as a growing sub-field and therefore warrant further interest in and investigation by and with broader disciplines. Nevertheless, in line with Scelles (2023), the stance taken in this commentary is less positive and insists instead on the rating of sport management journals having been unchanged since 2015 despite some evidence of increasing impact for some of them. For example, despite a significant upward movement in metrics-based rankings since AJG 2015, *Sport Management Review* has never been upgraded in AJG. While we acknowledge a significant upward movement in metrics-based rankings alone is not enough to be upgraded in AJG, this at least raises the question as to whether the journal has even been considered for potential upgrading.

One potential reason for the unchallenged legacy applying to the rating of sport management journals in AJG is that there is no sport management expert in the Scientific Committee. Sport management journals are part of the AJG field “Sector Studies” (CABS, 2024a), alternatively named “Sports, Leisure, Tourism and Sector Studies” (CABS, 2024b). The members of the Scientific Committee in this field in AJG 2024 are Professor Peter McKiernan who has sectoral expertise but not in sport management, and Professor Steven Page who has expertise in tourism and leisure management but again not specifically in sport

management despite some publications (not published in sport management journals) with relevance to sport management. Both members represented the field in AJG 2021, together with Professor Colin C. Williams who has expertise in public policy but again not in sport management. While our intention is of course not at all to question the seriousness of the work undertaken for AJG by these colleagues, the absence of a sport management expert in the relevant field in the AJG Scientific Committee nevertheless raises a potential issue in terms of the ability to properly appreciate the quality of sport management journals and therefore to identify a potential need for reconsideration of the rating attributed for some of them. This suggests a need to further investigate why there is no sport management expert in the AJG Scientific Committee and whether the reason identified is justified or, on the contrary, should be challenged.

### **Adding a sport management expert in the AJG scientific committee to challenge the (negative) legacy ...**

While a potential justification for the absence of a sport management expert in the AJG Scientific Committee could be that sport management tends to lie outside business schools in the UK, as opposed to tourism largely residing in business schools, another potential explanation could be that sport management as a (sub)field is deemed too small, that is, the potential number of journals to be considered in sport management is not high enough compared to other fields or subfields. In order to verify whether this is the case or not, further examination of the number of journals and the number of Scientific Committee members for other fields is useful. Among the 22 fields in AJG 2024, “Economics, Econometrics and Statistics” is by far the most represented in

<sup>1</sup>Another sport journal was added in AJG 2015, namely, *Sport, Exercise and Performance Psychology* (evaluated 1) in the field “Psychology (Organisational)”. However, it is a sport psychology journal, not a sport management journal.



terms of journals with a total of 355 vs. 126 for the second-best represented field, that is, “Finance”. With 108 journals, the field of “Sector Studies” to which sport management belongs is one of only six fields with at least 100 journals. Similar to most (17) fields, it is represented by only two Scientific Committee members in AJG 2024 (instead of three in AJG 2021) vs. three for “Accounting” (89 journals) and “Economics, Econometrics and Statistics”, and four for “Finance”, “General Management, Ethics, Gender and Social Responsibility” (111 journals) and “Human Resource Management and Employment Studies” (58 journals). Yet, we would argue that having a third Scientific Committee member in the field of “Sector Studies” who is specifically expert in sport management would be fair.

Our argument that a sport management expert should be part of the AJG Scientific Committee is based on the differences between the sectors represented in “Sector Studies” – with sport management being arguably peculiar compared to other sectors (Mills, 2021) – as well as the significance of sport management with 15 journals represented in AJG 2024 and possibly four to six journals that could be added to the list based on the analysis by Scelles (2023), namely, *Communication and Sport*, the *International Journal of Sport Communication*, the *Journal of Applied Sport Management*,<sup>2</sup> the *Journal of Global Sport Management*, *Sport Management Education Journal*, and *Women in Sport and Physical Activity Journal*. For context, a potential of around 20 sport management journals listed is comparable to the 20 journals listed in the field of “Strategy” alone back in AJG 2021 (27 journals in AJG 2024). This tends to support our point that the sport management field (or sub-field if considered part of the sector field) has some significance in business and management. The addition of a sport

management expert in the AJG Scientific Committee would contribute to the legacy of the rating for sport management journals – that dates back to AJG 2015 and has been unchallenged since then – being at least questioned, and hopefully lead to an overall improvement for sport management journals, in line with Scelles (2023).

### **... and being provided with the opportunity for a full rather than light review of the list**

While our commentary is centred on one specific dimension (that is, the addition of a sport management expert in the AJG Scientific Committee as potentially contributing to an overall improvement for sport management journals in AJG), we acknowledge that sport management scholars should explore potential strategies for further enhancing the visibility and impact of sport management research and proactively address the factors influencing journal rankings. This can be favoured by well targeted special issues (Scelles, 2024), as well as informed by a better understanding of the factors influencing impact at the publication level, as recently discussed by Scelles and Teixeira da Silva (2025) with sport management (journals) selected as an exemplar field. Nevertheless, there may not be an opportunity for much improvement for sport management journals in AJG if the methodology applied for the next edition is too restrictive, in particular if it only considers journals that have recently encountered significant shifts in metrics, a significant development or change in the nature of the journal, or new to AJG. For example, such approach would not consider the possibility that a journal like *Sport Management Review* should maybe have been upgraded earlier, when it benefited from a significant upward movement in metrics-based rankings

<sup>2</sup>Scelles (2023) was not necessarily supportive of the journal being listed in AJG, however he mentioned that it was listed in the Australian Business Deans Council (ABDC) 2019 Journal Quality List, confirmed in ABDC 2022 (ABDC, n.d.).



that it is now less likely to demonstrate since it has already reached a high level previously and maintained it since then. This calls for a less restrictive methodology applied by AJG for the next edition, when there is a full evaluation (CABS, 2024b). However, in the case of sport management journals, no proper review seems to have been conducted since 2015. Therefore, a full evaluation (at least in fields where there is potential suspicion of an unchallenged legacy of historical developments) for the next AJG edition is one of our two key suggestions to the AJG Scientific Committee, together with adding a sport management expert in the Committee. We hope these suggestions will be considered and implemented, hence contributing to a better international recognition of sport management that we aim to support with the help from sport management colleagues in the future.

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## Declaration of interest statement

The authors are in the editorial board of several sport management journals. Both are in the editorial board of *European Sport Management Quarterly* (the second author is the former editor) and the *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*. The first author is also in the editorial board of *Management &*

*Organisations du Sport*, *Managing Sport and Leisure*, and *Sport, Business and Management: An International Journal*. The second author is also in the editorial board of the *International Journal of Sport Finance*, the *Journal of Global Sport Management*, *Journal of Sport & Tourism*, the *Journal of Sports Economics*, and *Sport Management Review*.

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