

## A romp around the United Kingdom research centres

SIR,—Mr Richard Wakeford and Mr Robin Adams (28 January, p 297) make unjustified statements about the *Science Citation Index*. They claim that citation analysis is "readily open to manipulation by authors by excessive, mutual, or self citation." There is no evidence given to support this claim. They also claim that "off quoted well known bad papers could distort results." This speculation is not documented. Indeed, it is ironical to make such claims when doing large scale statistical studies since the evidence mainly shows that none of these effects are relevant when evaluating institutions. And especially when comparing individuals it is well known that many items published are rarely cited. Why then focus on the few bad ones that attract attention. Such "bad" papers are often controversial and create important impact in research.

Mr Wakeford and Mr Adams further assert that the *Science Citation Index* was not used because its medical coverage "is not as broad" as that of the two principal specialist databases. There is no definition of "medical research." We could assert that the term includes pre-clinical research and therefore the coverage of *Science Citation Index* is broader than either *Index Medicus* or *Excerpta Medica*. In fact the only advantage in using *Index Medicus* or *Excerpta Medica* is to increase representation from low impact clinical journals. Were the *Science Citation Index* to be used there would be no doubt as to the coverage. All substantive items in the journal are indexed.

A final erroneous assertion is that the *Science Citation Index* is expensive to use. I find this incomprehensible. It is available in every major university library in the UK. Furthermore, each annual and five year cumulation of the *Science Citation Index* includes a corporate (institutional index). It is quite feasible to count the entries in the geographic section. If the implication is that only the on line version of the *Science Citation Index*, called *SCISEARCH*, is convenient for their purpose, then the claim is equally untrue. All customers who buy the *Science Citation Index* receive a preferential rate that costs about one dollar per minute.

A search on, for example, Glasgow could be done in several minutes at most. I might add that the *Science Citation Index* file is not limited to first author addresses. All institutions in a multi-institutional study are included. Since Mr Wakeford and Mr Adams made no attempt to do a citation count, in contrast to a publication count, their comments about citation analysis seem misplaced. Should their sponsors be interested, we can, of course, do such institutional analyses. These require the use of separate files.

Once each published UK paper was identified, a match would be obtained for the citation file, tabulated, and sorted by institution. Such studies have been done for many countries and form the basis of well informed policy decisions. The database can be used to analyse entire countries, regions, or institutions.

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