

Todd Bridgman

# Review of *Policy Quarterly*

*Policy Quarterly* was first published in 2005 by the Institute of Policy Studies to inform policy debate in New Zealand; to engage readers with a style that was lively, well-argued and readable, and to showcase some of the interesting thinking in Victoria University of Wellington's School of Government and its associated research centres. From 2012 the Institute of Policy Studies became the Institute for Governance and Policy Studies (IGPS), with it and *Policy Quarterly* largely funded by an endowment.

Now in its 20th year, *Policy Quarterly* faces an uncertain future, following the disestablishment of the IGPS in 2023. An outcome of the IGPS review was that *Policy Quarterly* would continue until March 2025 with funding by the School of Government Trust pending further consideration of its future. The School of Government Trust is a charitable trust established by the government in 2007 with a gift of several million to support research, teaching and training in public policy, public management, public administration and strategic studies.

In December 2023 an independent committee was established by Professor Jane Bryson (dean, Wellington School of Business and Government, Victoria University of Wellington) and Professor Karl Lofgren (head of the School of Government) to undertake a review of *Policy Quarterly*. The review committee comprised Professor Todd Bridgman (head of the School of Management, Victoria University of Wellington), Dr Kay Booth (executive director, IPANZ), Adjunct Professor Chris Eichbaum (School of Government), Associate Professor Michael Di Francesco (Australia National University) and Dr Julia Talbot-Jones (School of Government).

The review committee was instructed to assess the current strengths and weaknesses of the journal; the journal's purpose and goals; options for funding the journal; options for editing and producing the journal, including the journal's format and contents, peer review processes, copy editing, design, and other relevant matters; and options for marketing and distributing the journal. We were also asked to consider whether a further effort should be made to have the journal indexed by Scopus and the implications of this for the journal's name and purpose. To complete the review, we were asked to consult with the journal's editorial board, the Royal Society Te Apārangi, a selection of the journal's users and other relevant organisations.

We conducted 15 interviews, held an online focus group with members of the editorial board, and circulated a survey to individuals identified as having some involvement with public policy in New Zealand, which generated 366 responses. In this article we provide an overview of our findings and conclusions and assess the future of *Policy Quarterly*.

## Overall conclusions

The review committee concluded that *Policy Quarterly* serves an important

role communicating policy research with practitioners. It provides distinctiveness to the School of Government and Victoria University and occupies a niche that has been recognised by the university as an area for future growth and attention: the nexus of academia, business and government. As such, *Policy Quarterly's* purpose and niche has been upheld for the 20 years it is been published, and interest in and use of the journal continues to grow. We believe *Policy Quarterly* can continue to deliver and should be retained as an online journal with its current purpose and scope.

*Policy Quarterly* is a high-quality publication that is highly valued by scholars, practitioners, and other members of the policy community in Aotearoa New Zealand and internationally. It advances the mission and strategic objectives of the School of Government (and the Australia and New Zealand School of Government) and Victoria University of Wellington. Moreover, *Policy Quarterly* adds significant value to the capacity and capability of the New Zealand public service. In short, when assessing the costs and benefits that accrue from a publication like *Policy Quarterly*, the journal must be viewed in the context of the broader institutional ecosystem in which it is located, and the needs of the stakeholders and partners within that ecosystem.

Nevertheless, change is required in terms of journal arrangements and operations. We concluded that a new editor to succeed Professor Jonathan Boston, who has made an outstanding contribution to *Policy Quarterly* for nearly 20 years, needs to be found to lead an expanded editorial team and editorial board. The journal would benefit from the adoption of a manuscript management system, increasing administration support and greater effort at marketing to expand its readership and impact. Continued

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investment in the journal is needed to maintain its quality, reach and relevance. This will allow it to build on the base that has been established to realise what the review team assesses as material potential full net benefits.

### Survey findings

The majority of the 366 respondents to the survey identified as ‘public sector officials’ (36%), closely followed by ‘researcher’ (32%). Respondents were invited to choose as many categories as applied to them (see Figure 1).

Respondents were asked how valuable *Policy Quarterly* is to people working in, or on, public policy, or with a general interest in public policy. When asked to indicate the level of value between 1 and 10, on average respondents saw *Policy Quarterly* as having a value of 7.61, with the median ‘value’ of 8. The journal was perceived as particularly valuable for those working in New Zealand (avg 8.4), in the public sector (avg 8.24), in academia (avg 8.03), and for those with a general interest in public policy (avg 7.89); however, it was also used by people in the private sector and in NGOs, as well as by people overseas (Table 1).

Respondents were asked how valuable *Policy Quarterly* is to people researching public policy issues. When asked to indicate the level of value between 1 and 10 for people researching public policy issues, on average respondents saw *Policy Quarterly* as having a value of 7.70, with the median ‘value’ of 8 (Table 2). Unsurprisingly, it is considered to have the most importance for academics (avg 8.19), but it also has value for researchers in the public sector (avg 8.13). Many of the supporting comments reiterated the importance of *Policy Quarterly*’s New Zealand focus. It is unsurprising that the journal is more valuable for those in New Zealand than internationally, although some of the comments noted that the journal still holds value for international researchers undertaking comparative research or wanting to understand what was occurring in the New Zealand policy context.

Respondents were asked to choose the frequency that different user groups (i.e., public sector, private sector, NGOs, researchers, people with a general interest

Figure 1: Survey findings

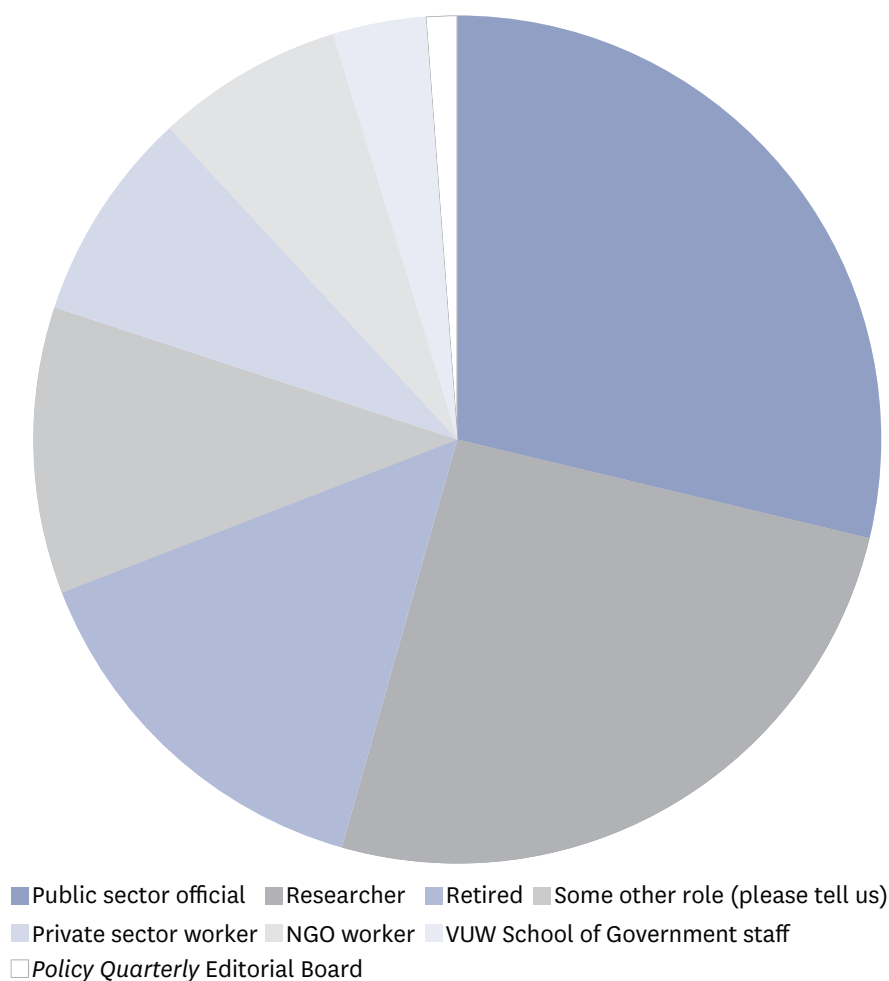


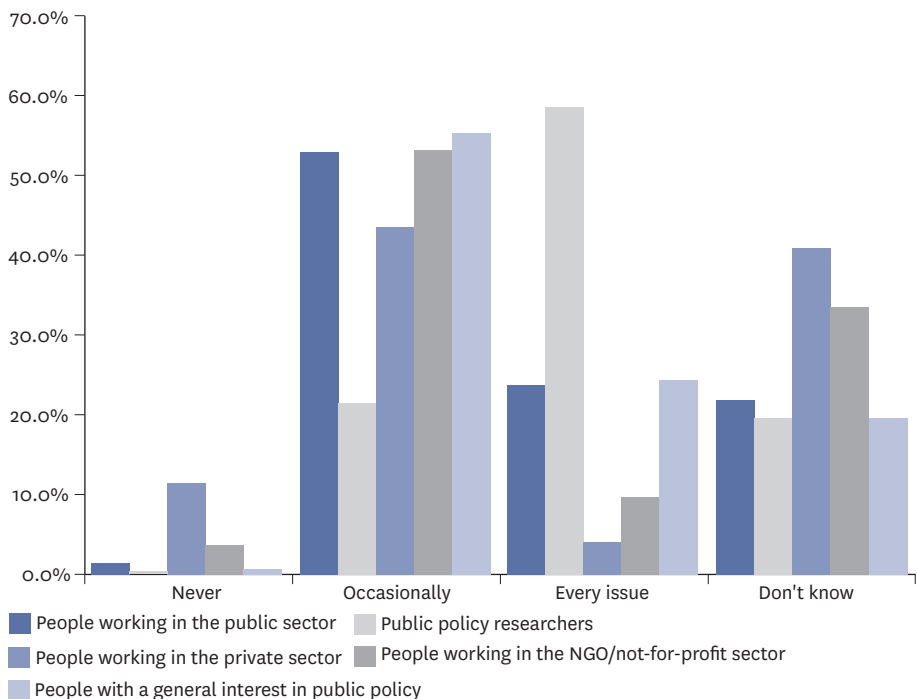
Table 1

Variable	Average	Median
In the private sector	6.30	7.0
Internationally	6.41	7.0
In the NGO/not-for-profit sector	7.38	7.0
People with a general interest in public policy	7.89	8.0
In academia	8.03	8.0
In New Zealand	8.15	8.0
In the public sector	8.24	8.0
Total	7.61	8.0

Table 2

Variable	Average	Median
In the private sector	6.62	7.0
Internationally	6.80	7.0
In the NGO/not-for-profit sector	7.67	8.0
In the public sector	8.13	8.0
In academia	8.19	9.0
In New Zealand	8.25	8.0
Total	7.70	8.0

Figure 2



in public policy) read *Policy Quarterly* : never, occasionally, every issue, don't know (Figure 2). Respondents indicated that most people read *Policy Quarterly* occasionally, except for public policy researchers who were thought to read every issue.

**Evidence of impact**

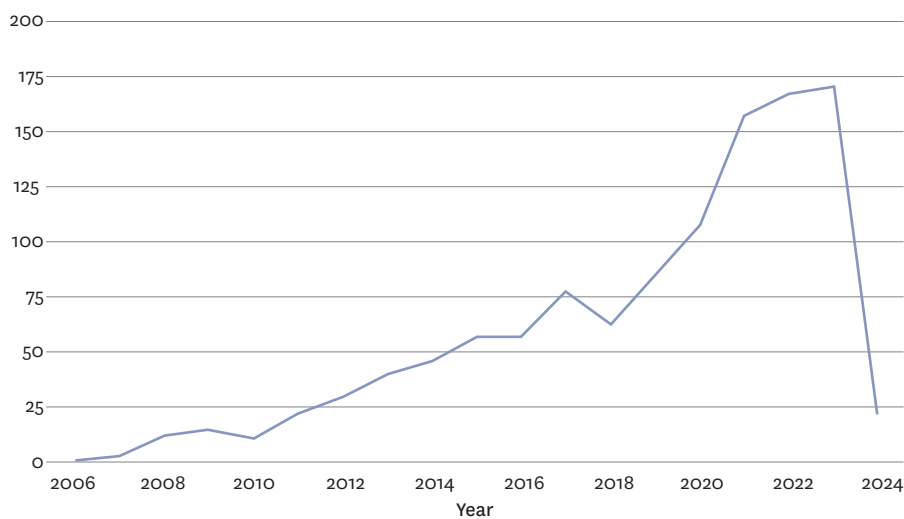
Over the course of the review we gathered data relating to the journal's impact, as measured by usage, citation and other metrics from a range of sources, including Scopus, Dimensions and Overton. The data reveals *Policy Quarterly*'s continued and growing impact.

Scopus is a great source for analysing citation trends and publishing patterns and is used by international rankings systems such as THE and QS. Citation of *Policy Quarterly* articles in Scopus-listed publications has grown from fewer than 25 per year in 2011 to 170 per year (Figure 3).

Citations of *Policy Quarterly* articles in Dimensions, a scholarly database similar to Scopus, have increased from fewer than 25 per year in 2011 to 220 per year, an impressive rate of growth (Figure 4).

Overton gives an overview of the policy impact the works from a journal has had. It revealed that *Policy Quarterly* articles are cited in 15 countries, most often in Australia (156 citations), followed by New Zealand (132 citations); 48% of *Policy Quarterly* articles are cited more than once in policy documents.

Figure 3



**Data comparison with comparable publications in New Zealand and Australia**

To help contextualise consideration of *Policy Quarterly*'s purpose and goals, it is instructive to understand its positioning in the 'ecosystem' of public policy and public administration publications in New Zealand and Australia.

This can be done in various ways. One is to examine current comparable publications only, all of which are now principally online journals or platforms; another is to also consider comparable publications that have over recent times ceased publication (which itself could be taken as an indicator of *Policy Quarterly*'s viability and longevity).

*Policy Quarterly* is currently 'targeted at readers in the public sector, including

Figure 4

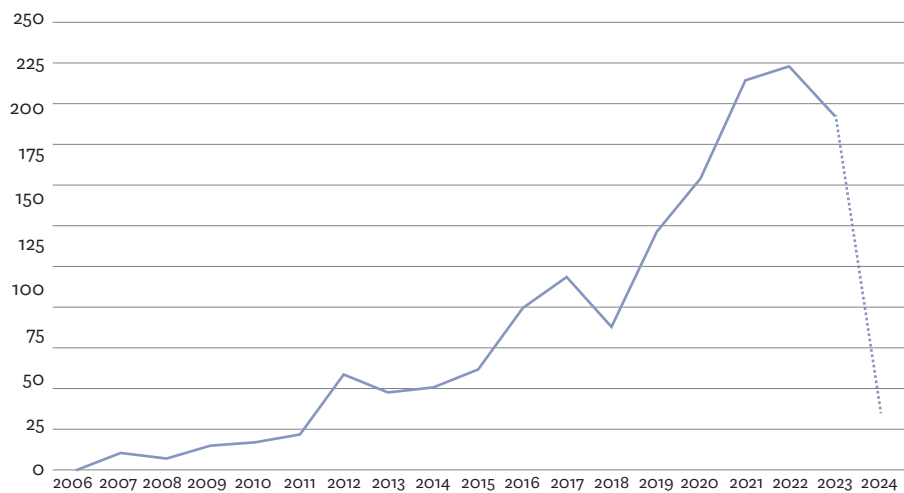
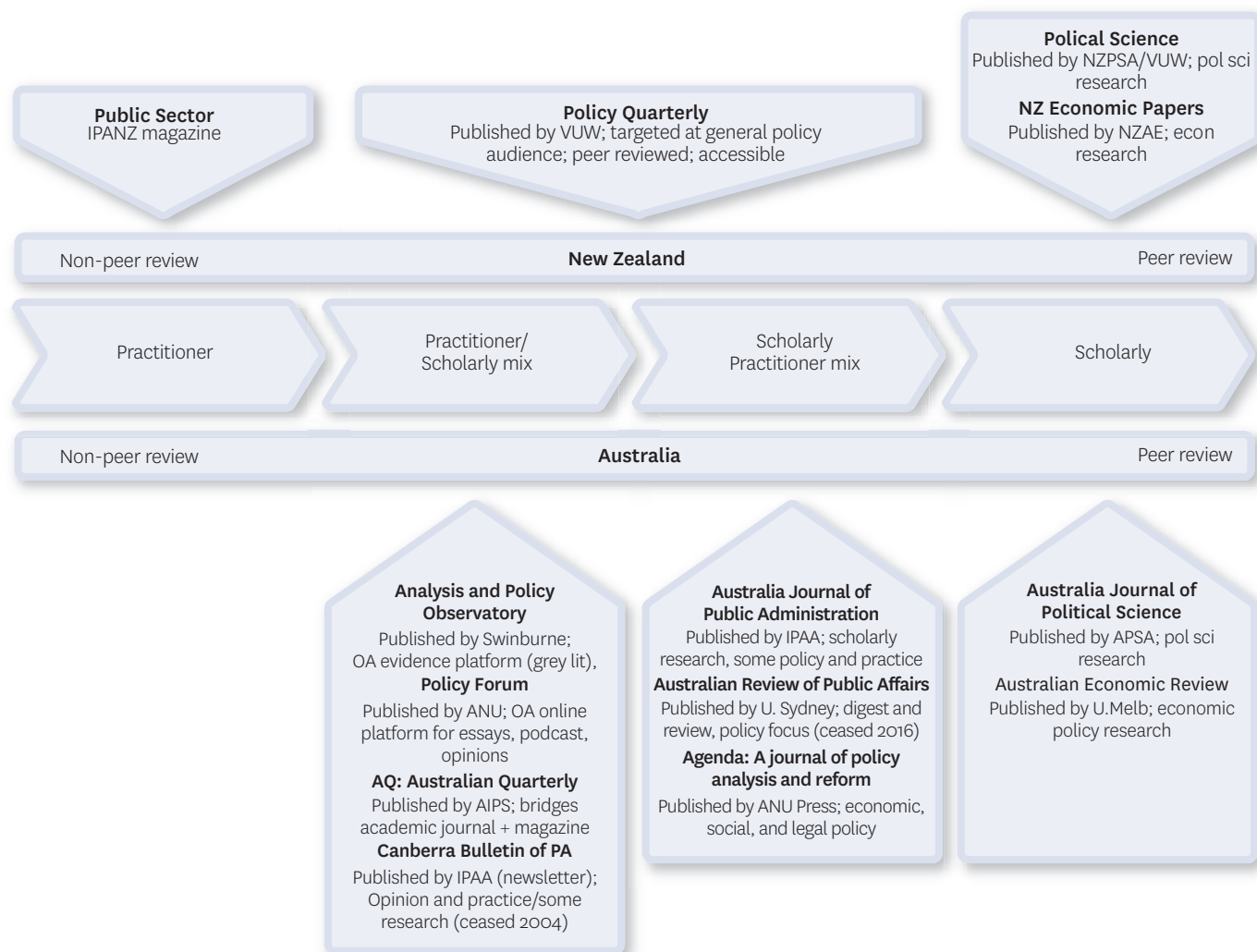


Figure 5: A map of the policy journal landscape across Australia and New Zealand.



politicians and their staff, public servants and a wide variety of professions, together with others interested in public issues? It is, therefore, a university publication that publishes both research and policy analysis/commentary in an accessible way for those working or interested in public policy, broadly defined.

*Policy Quarterly's* position within a broad spectrum of existing and historical publications in public policy in Australia and New Zealand is detailed in Figure 5. This summary is stylistic (and necessarily selective). Our review sought to capture key attributes of public policy publications across the following dimensions:

- practitioner focus and/or scholarly research focus;
- public policy and/or public administration or political science;
- non-peer reviewed and/or peer-reviewed;
- domestic and/or international;

- open access or paid subscriber;
- current or defunct.

In our analysis, *Policy Quarterly* is unique within its ecosystem for bridging both the practitioner/scholarly and scholarly/practitioner mix. This finding is supported by a range of respondents to our survey.

We investigated changing the positioning to be exclusively practitioner focused or exclusively scholarly focused, but recommend no change. These would eliminate a critical success factor of the journal – its current niche positioning as an academic/practitioner bridge, which most of those who contributed their views to the review considered to be a genuine and major strength of the journal.

Table 3 (p.84) provides supplementary classification information for the policy journals identified in Figure 5. It clearly shows *Policy Quarterly's* unique niche and positioning within public policy journals within Australia and New Zealand.

## Conclusion

The review committee went into this project with an open mind about the journal's future. Having completed the review, we are in no doubt that under the dedicated stewardship of Professor Boston, it has played a vital role in communicating policy research to practitioners for nearly 20 years. It is an important publication for Victoria University, and particularly its School of Government, and helps position the university at the nexus of academia, business and government. We thank all those who contributed to the review, and to the journal's ongoing success in varied ways. With continued financial support from the School of Government Trust, and a refreshed editorial team and editorial board, the future of *Policy Quarterly* is bright.

Table 3 Australia and New Zealand policy-relevant journals categorised across the practitioner-scholarly spectrum.

Practitioner Non-peer reviewed	Practitioner / scholarly mix	Scholarly / practitioner mix	Scholarly Peer reviewed
<p><i>Public Sector</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Published by IPANZ (magazine)</li> <li>• Practitioner focus (opinion and practice)</li> <li>• Public administration / management</li> <li>• Domestic</li> <li>• Subscriber (professional association)</li> <li>• Current</li> </ul>	<p><i>Analysis and Policy Observatory</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Australian Policy Online (until 2017)</li> <li>• Published by Swinburne and Susan McKinnon Foundation</li> <li>• Open access evidence platform (grey literature)</li> <li>• Mix of non-peer and peer reviewed</li> <li>• Domestic and International</li> <li>• Open</li> <li>• Current</li> </ul>	<p><i>Australian Journal of Public Administration</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Published by IPAA / Wiley</li> <li>• Scholarly research (some policy and practice)</li> <li>• Public policy / administration disciplines</li> <li>• Peer-reviewed (indexed)</li> <li>• Domestic and international</li> <li>• Subscriber</li> <li>• Current</li> </ul>	<p><i>Political Science</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Published by VUW / NZPSA / Taylor &amp; Francis</li> <li>• Scholarly research</li> <li>• Political science discipline</li> <li>• Peer-reviewed (indexed)</li> <li>• Domestic and international</li> <li>• Subscriber</li> <li>• Current</li> </ul>
	<p><i>Policy Forum</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Published by ANU</li> <li>• Online platform for essays, podcasts, opinions</li> <li>• Non-peer reviewed</li> <li>• Domestic and International</li> <li>• Open</li> <li>• Current</li> </ul>	<p><i>Australian Review of Public Affairs</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Published by Sydney University</li> <li>• Two parts: Digest (non-peer review) and Review (peer review)</li> <li>• Cross-disciplinary (policy focus)</li> <li>• Domestic and International</li> <li>• Open</li> <li>• Defunct (2016)</li> </ul>	<p><i>Australian Journal of Political Science</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Published by APSA / Routledge</li> <li>• Scholarly research</li> <li>• Political science disciplines</li> <li>• Peer-reviewed (indexed)</li> <li>• Domestic and international</li> <li>• Subscriber</li> <li>• Current</li> </ul>
	<p><i>Canberra Bulletin of Public Administration</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Published by IPAA (newsletter)</li> <li>• Practitioner focus (opinion and practice / some research)</li> <li>• Non-peer reviewed</li> <li>• Public administration and management</li> <li>• Domestic</li> <li>• Subscriber (professional association)</li> <li>• Defunct (2004)</li> </ul>	<p><i>Agenda: A journal of policy analysis and reform</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Published by ANU Press</li> <li>• Peer-reviewed (indexed)</li> <li>• Economic, social and legal policy</li> <li>• Domestic and International</li> <li>• Open</li> <li>• Current</li> </ul>	
	<p><i>AQ: Australian Quarterly</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Published by AIPS</li> <li>• Bridges 'academic journal and magazine'</li> <li>• Non-peer reviewed</li> <li>• Policy and ideas focus</li> <li>• Domestic</li> <li>• Subscriber</li> <li>• Current</li> </ul>		
	<p><i>Policy Quarterly</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Published by VUW (hosted on OJS)</li> <li>• Targeted at anyone interested in public issues / writing style makes journal accessible to busy non-specialist readers</li> <li>• Peer reviewed</li> <li>• Public policy and public administration</li> <li>• Domestic</li> <li>• Open</li> <li>• Current</li> </ul>		