Reasons journals are not found in DOAJ

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Abstract

DOAJ (Directory of Open Access Journals) is considered by many the authoritative database of scholarly open access journals. Still, many such journals are not found there. Based on rejection data from DOAJ this article tries to shed light on some of the major reasons journals have their applications rejected. Understanding why applications are rejected can inform us as to what can be done to improve the situation. The data point to lack of resources as a major problem. Many applications are from journals that do not meet the criteria or are predatory, but many are also from journals that could very well deserve a listing in DOAJ – they just are not able to complete an application with all relevant information in place.

1. Introduction

The Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) is perceived by many as the authoritative database of scholarly open access journals. As of February 20th 2026, it contained 22,640 journals according to the homepage, https://doaj.org/, which is dynamically updated.

In informal contexts I have observed that many wonder why this or that journal is not there, and I also hear that there are many more open access (OA) journal in this or that country, than what is found in DOAJ. Why is this so? Can data on rejections enlighten us with regards to this? And can these data also inform us about the actual number of peer-reviewed OA journals, a number that never can be precise but for which there are many disagreeing estimates? An overview of different possible estimates based in various sources for 2020 is given in (Bosman et al. 2021:25–27).

2. The data

As part of preparations for an analysis of non-overlap between DOAJ and other sources of information on OA journals, primarily Scopus and Web of Science (WoS), I was allowed access to a spreadsheet documenting 50,367 rejections from DOAJ over a span of many years. The first entry is dated March 2014, the last September 2025. The start date corresponds well to 19th March 2014 being the launch of new inclusion criteria in DOAJ (Frantsvåg 2019). This means the data cover a period of more than 11 years, in that time DOAJ criteria and practices have changed, and the publishing landscape has also changed. Journals have changed publishers, publishers have moved – e.g. the large OA publisher Hindawi moved from Egypt to the UK during this period and was acquired by Wiley in 2021. This all calls for caution when trying to make broad conclusions from the material.

Due to confidentiality considerations, I am unfortunately not at liberty to share the rejection data with my readers. Here I will try to present some analyses based on what I have been able to find of interesting information in the data, primarily in the "Comment" field that contains DOAJ's notes. I will also try to compare journals that have been rejected with journals that are listed in DOAJ, based on what information is available in the rejection data.

A journal may apply to DOAJ and be rejected a number of times. To create some meaningful sort of statistics or overview I found it best to use the last rejection as a source of information – my assumption was that an applying journal would change information between unsuccessful applications, which means that the current situation and the last rejection was most interesting.

Much work needed to be done to the data before they could be analysed, including exclusion of journals' previous rejections except the last, exclusion of journals that have been accepted after a previous rejection, deduplication of entries. I refer the interested reader to the appendix for further information.

After the cleaning, we are left with 25,050 in our final selection of journal rejections. These journals have been rejected from DOAJ and not been accepted at a later date.

It is quite interesting to note that after sorting out duplicates and obviously bogus applications, we still have more rejected applications to DOAJ (25,050) than DOAJ has journals that have been approved (22,640 as of 20th February 2026).

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3. Reasons for rejection

The data we have contain both standard information about the journals applying, and a comment field that DOAJ personnel have used to note down information from the process, including problems observed and communication with the applicant. I used this comment field to find reasons for rejections. The other fields have been used when comparing those journals that have had their applications rejected, with those who have been accepted into DOAJ.

Searching the comment field for relevant text strings, I have tried to code the reasons. Note that the numbers sum to more than 25,050, this is because an application may have had more than one problem that has showed up as a text string match in my searches. A problem is that the reasons are given as free text, so that variations in grammar, ways of expressing thoughts, and typos may hamper efficient search. Also, some entries lack information or have only a conclusion like "Reject" without giving a reason. The entries lacking information are generally from the first years, and the policy is that there should be a reason. Applications with missing, incorrect or wrong information are summarily rejected, this could be the reason for only "reject" in the field.

Table 1 presents some problem areas that were observed in the free text and counted using Excel text filtering (note that an application may be listed under more than one problem). The short information is meant as a shorthand for the problem areas, which are discussed in more detail in the paragraphs following the table.

The method used to look at the text – the filtering mechanism in Excel – has a number of problems. The main is that when searching for text strings, alone or with two strings combined, we do not see the context. We will have a number of false positives where the strings are used in a context not denoting a problem. For example, "ISSN" can be mentioned as a problem, but also as being OK or checked. The searches performed have tried to adjust for this problem, but were most likely not fully successful in this respect. It is also quite likely that the very manual process may have overlooked problems that might be larger than most of the problems listed here. So, table 1 possibly indicates only a subset of existing problem areas, and the numbers must be treated as very rough estimates of the size of the identified problem areas.

"Comment field empty" occurs for 892 applications, meaning there was no information in the comment field. This is not a sign that the application has been rejected for no reason, but that this information has not been recorded. There are indications that these are mostly from the first years, I understand DOAJ's current policy to be that a reason should be entered here. I think it a reasonable assumption that these applications would belong in one or more of the other groups.

"Previous reject" for 1,478 applications indicates that the last application was received before an application embargo had passed (applications may have been given an embargo for a number of months or years, I have seen no definitive pattern in the length of embargoes). The real reason for the rejection lies in one of the records sorted out because it was not the last application. So, there is a more fundamental reason for the rejection, probably belonging in one of the other groups.

We see that many problems are connected to copyright and licensing, where information is either lacking, unclear or self-contradictory. For an OA journal, copyright and licensing is what defines its OA status. Not presenting such information, or providing such information in one place that contradicts similar information elsewhere, makes it impossible to know that this is really an OA journal. This could indicate either a lack of understanding or an inability to structure and state the relevant information in a transparent way. This kind of incomplete or unclear information on APCs is also a reason for rejection.

Another cluster of problems is with filling in the application, for example by providing URLs that do not lead to the information sought, providing URLs that do not work, providing the same URL irrespective of what information is required – or just not providing an answer. DOAJ has a number of criteria and also asks for information beyond the criteria in order to create an informative database. For many questions there is not necessarily a right or wrong answer, but not answering the question is not a valid response. When it comes to indexing though, claiming to be indexed in services where you are not indexed, or being listed in bogus indexes, will most likely result in a rejection.

ISSNs are a cause of difficulties for applicants: 6,909 applications were rejected for problems with ISSNs. While this number may be inaccurate due to the tools available to me (see above), there are clear

Problem area	Short info	Count
Copyright	Info missing, unclear or self-contradictory	9,580
URLs not giving information	URLs provided do not give the information required	9,390
ISSN	Not registered, does not match title, missing	6,909
Exclusion	Journal or publisher excluded (often for 2 or 3 years)	3,198
Fake claims	Fake indexing claims or bogus metrics employed	1,504
Endogeny	Editors as authors, local authorship dominant	1,495
Previous reject	Journal has had application rejected or has been removed, embargo time not expired yet	1,478
Not enough research	Has not published enough research content to merit inclusion	1,312
Editorial board	Too small, affiliations lacking,	929
Comment field empty	No information in the comment field	892
Peer review not robust	Information indicates lack of robust and fair peer review process	841
Predatory[1]	Journal/publisher found to be predatory	722
Publishing practices	Journal does not employ good publishing practices	699
URL does not work	URL(s) to journal or info does not work	641
No answer	No answer provided to questions	578
Same URL	Same URL used as response where different URLs needed	516
No licensing info	License information lacking	462
Not OA	Information indicates journal is not OA	261
Self-contradictory licensing	Licensing information contradicts itself	188
APC info	Lacking, unclear or incomplete	128
Not enough reviewers	Information indicates too few reviewers involved	120
Sum	Number of matches to searches made	41,843

Table 1: Reasons for rejections.

indications that ISSNs are a problem area. Many applications give non-existent ISSNs or ISSNs belonging to other titles than the journal applying. Having a real ISSN (or several) is a sine qua non for being registered in any journal database. An editor (or a member of a journal's support team) submitting the application should be able to find out what the journal's ISSN is, and giving incorrect answers to this question is without doubt a good reason for being summarily dismissed.

Scholarly quality indicators also create difficulties for applicants. Endogeny – editors publishing extensively in the journals they edit or too local authorship – is one problem. Indicators of peer review that is not robust, or using too few reviewers, are other problems. Too small an editorial board or lack of affiliation information for the board another. Indications the journal is not employing good editorial practices yet another. These are all indications that the journal does not meet DOAJs criteria of a journal being scholarly.

That the information given indicates the journal is not OA, should be a self-evident reason for rejecting an application.

On a more technical level, not having published enough research content to merit inclusion is given as a reason for rejection for 1,312 applications. Defining how much and how regularly a journal needs to publish, in order to be a journal and not a serial, is a problem, and I have not seen any definitive answer to this. DOAJ lists journals, not serials, and has (currently) a criterion of having published at least 10 open

[1] The term "predatory" is used in the data and in other sources to denote journals who charge APCs but do not deliver on their promise of securing scholarly quality. I will also use this term as a shorthand.

access research articles and publishing at least 5 research articles per year (*Guide to applying*, DOAJ 2026a). I am uncertain if this criterion has been the same over the period we are looking at, the version history of the DOAJ's *Guide to applying* has no indication this criterion has been changed since this information was first published in November 2021.

Application history follows the journal and the publishers. Quite a number of applications are summarily turned down due to "Journal or publisher excluded" (3,198), "Journal has had application rejected or has been removed, embargo time not expired yet" (1,478), "Journal/publisher found to be predatory" (722). As far as I have come to understand, "exclusion" here means the journals or their publishers have been told DOAJ will not accept future applications for a period of time. In the cleaned dataset the original reason for rejection/exclusion is lacking, but I would assume there are good reasons for the exclusion/rejection. Digging back into the uncleaned dataset will be time-consuming and will probably not add very much to the discussion. But as with "Comment field empty", these applications will probably belong in one or more of the other problem categories, this again indicates that numbers for other categories should be higher.

4. Comparisons between DOAJ and the rejected applications

Can we see any patterns when comparing the journals in DOAJ with those who have had their last application rejected? There are some aspects where we have information for DOAJ journals, but not for applicant journals. Such information includes the number of articles published, scholarly field and type of publisher, this information is collected and published by Walt Crawford, both as a dataset and as a yearly report (Crawford 2025a;b). While it would be very interesting to compare rejected applications with accepted journals regarding these aspects, the work entailed in finding the data needed for 25,050 journals would make that impossible. So, the comparisons made are based solely on which information is present in the applications.

It is important to note that none of the points compared below are requirements for being listed, this is information that could shed light on the technical quality of the journals. Requirements for being listed are having a valid ISSN, satisfying criteria for being scholarly, fulfilling criteria for being Open Access, and publishing content satisfying DOAJ's criteria for volume and regularity. Many applications are rejected immediately due to severe problems like ISSN issues, inconsistent licensing and copyright information, full-text not being available immediately or without registration, or not enough content being published. The majority of applications are rejected at a later stage when other issues are not solved after some rounds of attempts to improve the applicants' information.

4.1. APCs or not

Important information is whether a journal has an Article Processing Charge (APC). In DOAJ 62.4% of journals do not use APCs (numbers from the DOAJ website, searching for journals charging/not charging APCs). Among the rejected applications, we see from the rejection data that 62.2% state they do not charge APCs. If we ignore the fact that the information given might not be correct, this percentage is very similar to DOAJ's share of non-APC journals. Previous research (Frantsvåg and Strømme 2019) indicates that using APCs creates a better financial situation for the journal, and thus increases the chance of being able to meet various DOAJ standards, so it is a bit surprising that the two sets of journals are so similar, as one would have expected those that have been rejected to have a lower share of APCs than those who have been accepted. This could also be a sign that DOAJ has been successful in weeding out "predatory" journals (as these journals must have APCs by their nature) and that the share of legitimate journals not using APCs being rejected is higher than 62.2%.

4.2. Geographical distribution

ROAD (the Registry of Open Access Scholarly Resources) is a large database of the International ISSN office, listing all scholarly Open Access resources that have been issued an ISSN number, more than 64,000 (International Standard Serial Number International Centre 2026). On August 21st, 2025, I received a file containing all records in ROAD, 64,323 in all (International Standard Serial Number International Centre

Country	No of journals in DOAJ	In rejects	In DOAJ	Relative frequency rejects/DOAJ	In ROAD	Relative frequency rejects/ROAD
Indonesia	2,628	27.2 %	11.6 %	2.34	17.7%	1.54
India	412	10.1 %	1.8 %	5.56	4.2%	2.41
Türkiye	663	7.6 %	2.9 %	2.60	6.8%	1.12
United States	1,310	7.2 %	5.8 %	1.24	5.5%	1.31
Brazil	1,452	5.1 %	6.4 %	0.80	5.1%	1.00
Iran, Islamic Republic of	1,058	4.2 %	4.7 %	0.90	4.7%	0.90
Pakistan	178	2.6 %	0.8 %	3.25	0.7%	3.66
Nigeria	53	1.8 %	0.2 %	7.70	0.1%	18.04
Ukraine	464	1.7 %	2.1 %	0.83	1.8%	0.95
Spain	1,003	1.7 %	4.4 %	0.38	2.8%	0.61
United Kingdom	2,263	1.7 %	10.0 %	0.17	4.0%	0.42
Russian Federation	644	1.5 %	2.8 %	0.52	1.8%	0.82
Poland	956	1.2 %	4.2 %	0.29	3.0%	0.41
Malaysia	109	1.2 %	0.5 %	2.46	0.2%	5.93
Romania	346	1.1 %	1.5 %	0.75	1.3%	0.88
China	497	1.0 %	2.2 %	0.47	0.5%	2.06
Colombia	452	0.9 %	2.0 %	0.45	1.4%	0.64
Ecuador	105	0.9 %	0.5 %	1.91	0.6%	1.48
Mexico	235	0.9 %	1.0 %	0.83	1.0%	0.87

Table 2: Share of rejected application, of DOAJ and of ROAD for major countries.

and Frantsvåg 2026). After removing entries in the ROAD data with an end year and publication types that are clearly not journals, we are left with 56,400 records that may be current journals. Comparing all the 19 countries with 200 or more rejected applications and their share of the rejections with their share of journals in DOAJ and in ROAD, we get the picture in table 2 (sorted by number of rejected applications). A relative frequency less than 1 indicates that the country has a smaller share among rejected applications than in DOAJ or ROAD.

Looking at the relative frequency of rejects versus journals indexed in DOAJ, on the one end of the scale are United Kingdom, Poland and Spain for whom rejections looks like a minor problem. One should bear in mind that the United Kingdom is the seat of many of the large commercial publishers, who usually have few problems in organising their journals and the information in such a way as to have their applications approved, and they also have much experience with the process.

On the other end of the scale, we find Nigeria, India, Pakistan, Türkiye, Malaysia and Indonesia. Nigeria previously had a reputation for harbouring "predatory" journals (which is partly anecdotal and from the time of Beall's list), it might be that what we see here is a result of a publishing culture nurturing journals of low quality. Shen and Björk (2015) note that 27% of "predatory" publishers were located in India. Türkiye and Indonesia are countries with large OA publishing activities. We know from the DOAJ Blog (Turgut 2025) that Turkish journals need to improve the consistency of the information on their websites, as this leads to a high level of rejection. In 2025 DOAJ spent resources educating Turkish editors, which should lead to a lower reject rate in coming years. China's relatively high frequency of rejects versus ROAD numbers combined with the DOAJ numbers could indicate that there are relatively few Chinese entries in ROAD that haven't applied to DOAJ.

First language	DOAJ	Rejects	Relative frequency among rejected applications
English	63.34 %	65.68 %	1.04
Spanish	9.78 %	5.08 %	0.52
Indonesian	4.78 %	11.86 %	2.48
Portuguese	4.39 %	3.12 %	0.71
Persian	2.56 %	2.17 %	0.85
French	2.33 %	1.23 %	0.53
Russian	2.30 %	1.00 %	0.44
Arabic	1.26 %	2.38 %	1.88
Italian	1.11 %	0.34 %	0.31
Chinese	1.08 %	1.24 %	1.15
Polish	0.94 %	0.26 %	0.28
German	0.90 %	0.52 %	0.58
Ukrainian	0.84 %	0.46 %	0.54
Turkish	0.73 %	1.80 %	2.47

Table 3: First language among DOAJ and rejected applications.

4.3. Publishing language

When applying to DOAJ the applicant is asked to enter the languages the journal accepts manuscripts in. There is no ranking of languages, but if we assume that languages generally are entered in order of importance or dominance in the journal, we can compare which language is first (and hence most important) among journals in DOAJ and among journals that had their applications rejected.

If we look at all languages that are mentioned first by 100 or more journals in DOAJ, we see the picture in table 3. A relative frequency less than 1 means the language is less represented among the rejected applications than among journals in DOAJ.

The languages that stand out with a high rejection frequency are Indonesian, Turkish and Arabic. This corresponds well to what we see in the geographical distribution of rejected journals, except for Arabic which is not so closely tied to a single country. The numbers in the table could possibly point to the language itself being a source of problems for the applications: for example, the applicant may have problems filling in the application form and trying to make sense of the accompanying instructions and information.

4.4. Licenses

It is difficult to get a comprehensive overview of the licenses used by the rejected journals and the journals indexed in DOAJ – there are too many combinations available. Creative Commons (CC) licenses are dominant for both rejects and listed journals, but a striking difference is that while listed journals use the publisher's own license in 174 cases (0.77% of listed journals), this is used by 3,184 rejected journals (12.71% of rejected journals). Publisher's own licenses are generally not translated to other languages and are not machine-readable (in contrast to CC licenses). This can reduce the reuse and distribution of the content, hence reducing readership and usefulness. It is telling that this is so popular with the rejected applications, and it can point to publishing competence being a major reason for the journals having their applications rejected.

4.5. Machine-readable license embedded

In the guidelines for applying (DOAJ 2026a) it is stated that "It is recommended that licensing information is displayed or embedded in full-text articles, but this is not required for inclusion in DOAJ". In the information on transparency and best practices (DOAJ 2026b) it says "Licencing terms should be indicated on the full text of all published articles (HTML and PDF)" and that "If Creative Commons licences are used, then the terms of that licence should also link to the correct licence on the Creative Commons website".

The term "Machine-readable license embedded" means that the licensing information should be displayed as text with an embedded link to the relevant license. An important point is that the linked license information needs to be in the article, not only in the masthead or in an "about the journal" information text.

Among rejected applications, 49% claim to have machine-readable licenses embedded, while in DOAJ 60% claim the same.

4.6. Use of preservation services

This is an area that is a bit difficult to analyse properly, as for most of the period we have data for (2014–2025) there has been no guidance as to which services actually perform the functions that a long-term preservation service should. From 2020 DOAJ instated a policy that acceptable services should be listed in the Keepers Registry, or undergo separate scrutiny, to be accepted. Currently, applicants can choose from a list of 7 actual services, or "A national library" or "Other" – or tick off that no such service is used. Both "A national library" and "Other" then ask for a free-text input. It is quite obvious from looking at the data in DOAJ that not all editors really understand what they have responded: unidentifiable three-letter acronyms are not really informative, and neither "Handle", "Indexing Services" nor "Self-Archiving Policy", just to give a few examples, are adequate responses to this question. This is the same that was found in the Open Access Diamond Journals Study (Bosman et al. 2021:58–60). An impression from looking at the data is that in DOAJ, the vast majority of journals that have a value in this field are actually preserved, but 61% of journals in DOAJ have not provided the name of such a service. Among rejected applications, the list of dubious entries is longer and represents a larger part of the non-empty responses, but only 41% of rejected applications have no value here.

4.7. Deposit policy information

As with preservation services, this is a bit difficult to analyse: the entries for deposit policy information are a mix of predefined services and free text. The journal's or publisher's own website is a popular source to point to both for rejected applications and for accepted journals in DOAJ.

Journals in DOAJ lack information about this for 63.7% of journals, among rejected applications this is lacking for 71.2%. 23.7% of journals in DOAJ use Open Policy Finder, only 8.5% among the rejected applications. Diadorim comes third with 2.9% for journals in DOAJ against 1.8% for rejected applications, and Dulcinea is used by 1.5% of journals in DOAJ, 0.3% of rejected applications.

4.8. Persistent article identifiers

Persistent identifiers (PIDs) for articles are URLs that do not experience link rot, typically DOIs, URNs and Handles. Such services are used by 83% of journals in DOAJ, while 16% have no such identifiers. The remaining journals list various combinations of services, mostly the aforementioned services.

Among rejected applications 26% have no such article PID listed, while 68% use DOIs. The remaining 6% of applicants list a number of different things, many are actual such PIDs but e.g. URL, UDC, UDK, PDF, Google Scholar are not such identifiers. So some more than 26% lack persistent article identifiers.

Theme	Rejected applications	Journals listed in DOAJ
APCs or not – % not using APC	62.2%	62.4%
Geographical distribution	Third world over-represented	
Publishing language	Turkish, Indonesian over-represented	
Licenses – Publisher's own	12.71%	0.77%
Machine-readable license embedded	49%	60%
Use of preservation services	59%	39%
Deposit policy	36%	29%
Persistent article identifiers	74%	83%
Author holds copyright	69%	62%
Waiver policy in place	37%	61%

Table 4: Summary of comparisons.

4.9. Author holds copyright

69% of rejected applications claim to have a policy that the authors retain copyright to their own work, against 62% among journals listed in DOAJ. One should note, though, that one of the major reasons for rejection is inconsistent and self-conflicting information re copyright (see table 1). So, I would hesitate to accept that the rejected journals actually are better in this regard, than journals accepted by and listed in DOAJ.

4.10. Waiver policy in place

If a journal charges an APC, it is important to know whether they have a waiver policy in place, so that the APC will be less of an obstacle for authors from less prosperous countries or institutions. 37% of rejected applications say they have such a policy, while 61% of journals in DOAJ claim to have one. One could note that less prosperous countries are overrepresented among rejections. APCs in journals from these countries are often relatively low, so the need for a waiver could be less than for publishers from prosperous countries. And the journal's finances could well be less suited for offering waivers.

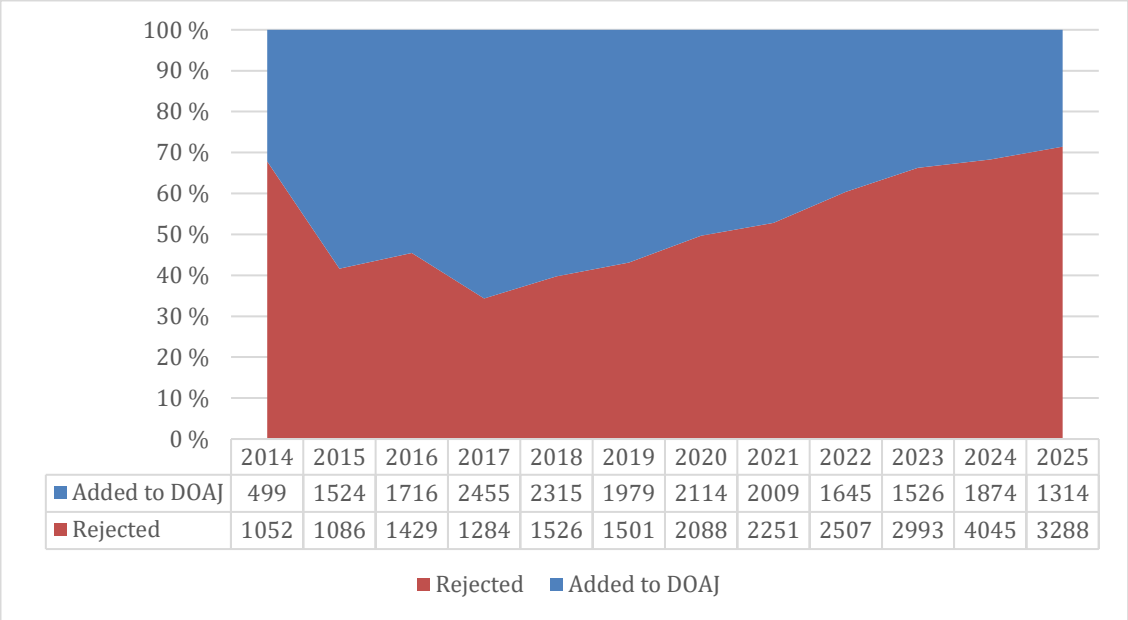
4.11. Conclusion to comparisons

Table 4 provides a summary of the comparisons from this section. For more detailed information on geographical distribution or publishing language, see the relevant subsection. There was too much information to put in the table.

It is important to understand that the data compared here are not requirements for being accepted to DOAJ, but information on to which extent the journals meet publishing standards. However, lack of response, incomprehensible or inconsistent information on these points may lead to a rejection.

It is difficult to draw strong conclusions when we compare the different aspects. When looking at the numbers we need to remember that what we have for the rejected journals are their claims, while the information in DOAJ has been through some quality control. And a "good" response in an application might be found inaccurate and a reason to reject the journal. So, the numbers given above for the rejected applications will probably present a better picture of the applicants' technical quality than what is the reality.

We see a marked difference in geographical distribution, and in the use of licenses. Use of preservation services seems to be better among rejected applications than among DOAJ journals, 59% versus 39%. The 59% include many more "various" services of unknown quality than the 39%, so the difference is not as huge as it may seem. When we look at deposit policies, journals in DOAJ have information about this to a larger extent than rejected applications.



	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Added to DOAJ	499	1524	1716	2455	2315	1979	2114	2009	1645	1526	1874	1314
Rejected	1052	1086	1429	1284	1526	1501	2088	2251	2507	2993	4045	3288

Figure 1: Rejects and additions to DOAJ 2014–2025.

Persistent article identifiers are used by at least 83% of DOAJ journals, and by 72–74% of the rejected journals. Machine-readable licenses are embedded in 60% of DOAJ journals, 49% of rejected journals. Author holds copyright in 62% of DOAJ journals, 69% among rejected journals. DOAJ journals with an APC has waiver policies in place to a much larger extent than among rejected journals.

A tentative conclusion is that the rejected journals to some extent display a lower technical quality than journals in DOAJ. This is not a reason for their being rejected, but it shows us they probably have fewer resources available to them. It is impossible to compare scholarly quality from the data available to us, but we know all journals in DOAJ have been through a quality check – even if their quality may have changed since then. In addition, low scholarly quality is one of the factors resulting in a rejection (see table 1).

5. Is there a development over time?

Looking at the number of rejected applications and the number of journals added to DOAJ over time gives us the picture in figure 1.

An important caveat is that the dates used are the date the application is registered for rejected applications, and the date added to DOAJ for additions. As there is a time lag between application and rejection or acceptance, an accepted application may well have been registered in the preceding year.

The picture still shows that while the majority of applications were turned down in the first years in the period, this developed positively for some years, increasing the accepted share to over 60%. But from around 2017 the reject rate started steadily increasing again and is now around 70%. This indicates that the quality of either the applying journals or the applications – or both – have deteriorated over the last years, or that requirements have become more difficult to satisfy over the years, for example new requirements introduced during the period studied. One should bear in mind, though, that journals with the last rejection in recent years may have one or more earlier rejections – this effect will automatically make the reject percentage higher in recent years than in previous years, where some rejections will be "suppressed" by the later rejection. But when using the full number of applications, i.e. all applications, not only the last one, we see the same pattern.

6. What can this tell us?

That the number of rejected journals seems to be higher than the number of accepted journals can be seen as evidence of many things. One obvious conclusion – too obvious, in my opinion – is that this shows that most journals not in DOAJ, do not belong in DOAJ in their present form.

I have no doubt that some of the numbers around the reasons for rejection – like "fake claims", "excluded", "endogeny", "editorial board", "peer review", "predatory" and "publishing practices" – represent serious problems that indicate that this applicant does not belong in a registry of scholarly open access journals like DOAJ.

On the other hand, some of the reasons for rejection – like "copyright", "URLs not giving info", "URL does not work" – rather point to problems with for example publishing competencies, structuring information, thinking through policies, than to low-quality journals. Of course, to be a good journal you need to have control over this, so a reject from DOAJ does look well merited. But these are things that could be fixed, given time and supervision by people with more competence in these fields. National initiatives such as pushing DOAJ competence to editors of journals not being listed, and DOAJ using local ambassadors, should help journals to get indexed in DOAJ in the future.

ROAD numbers indicate there are some 56,400 scholarly OA journals. DOAJ has 22,600 journals – and 25,050 rejections. 13,444 of the rejections are listed in the ROAD data. Another 2,078 journals in the ROAD data are found in the lists DOAJ publishes of retracted journal listings. (A few of these turn out to be journals that were delisted at some point and then listed again later.) This means that of the 56,400 series in ROAD about 15,400 have demonstrated they do not (yet) belong in DOAJ. This leaves about 41,000 series in ROAD that could possibly merit a listing in DOAJ; meaning it could look like DOAJ is missing about 18,000 journals. But we know that some of the ROAD listings are not journals, but other serials and hence do not belong in DOAJ. We also know these serials haven't applied for inclusion in DOAJ. It could be they know they do not belong – but it could also mean they lack the necessary competence and resources to know they should apply, and to make an application. And then we have quite some thousands of rejected applications that do not represent real scholarly OA journals. One conclusion we should be able to make is that DOAJ lists the majority of all journals that belong there.

Why have so many journals not applied, and why are so many unable to demonstrate they belong there? There are, of course, a number of possible reasons for not applying or not being able to provide the necessary information, but I fail to see more than these four main reasons:

1. Lack of awareness of DOAJ and the role it plays in disseminating information and making the journal and its contents visible;
2. Incentive and assessment structures motivating indexing in indexes like Web of Science or Scopus but overlooking the need to be in DOAJ;
3. Lack of the necessary competence to create and maintain information on the journal website and create a successful application to DOAJ;
4. Lack of resources necessary to create and maintain information on the journal website and an application to DOAJ.

It boils down to two factors: knowledge and resources (time/money) to do the work. The OA community needs to see the necessity to help those who need more knowledge, and national institutions need to see the necessity to supply journals with the required resources. Today, libraries play an important role in supporting journals, but I fear this is not enough. And not all journals have a good library at hand to help them.

There are processes pointing in the right direction, e.g. DOAJ has been reaching out to resources (people and organizations) in various countries to engage them in helping journals/publishers. The help consists of education of editors, assistance in the preparation of better applications and ensuring that information is in place on the journals' websites. We see an increase in funding of diamond OA, e.g. the University of Lorraine's Open Science Fund and UiT The Arctic University of Norway's Diamond Programme, and the Norwegian *NÅHST* mechanism for non-APC OA journals being extended to more

subject areas. The establishing of the European Diamond Capacity Hub should improve the situation of European diamond OA journals and help improve competencies.

But the vast majority of OA journals are from outside Europe. Beyond the ALMASI project, which aims to develop a nonprofit, high-quality, and sustainable scholarly communication ecosystem across Africa, Europe, and Latin America, and the Collaboration for sustainable open access publishing in Africa, I am not certain which processes are ongoing to help these. A mixture of international and national initiatives and infrastructures is probably what is needed.

The analysis of the DOAJ rejection data presented in this paper should make it clear that there are many journals out there needing help, and also that DOAJ puts a lot of resources into ensuring that a listing in DOAJ means you have been scrutinized regarding both scholarly quality and compliance with fundamental OA requirements.

Appendix

To be useful, the raw data needed some cleaning. This Appendix aims at documenting the cleaning process and the reasoning behind what was done.

I created a new field, concatenating the two ISSN fields to create a single field to compare. I then sorted by this concatenated field first, then on date so that the most recent application came last. I then created another field, counting the number of times a concatenated ISSN appeared from there to the end of the column. The final occurrence of such a concatenated ISSN thus was assigned the value 1. This approach is not fool proof, if ISSN info in the application change between applications the duplication of applications will not be discovered.

Some journals were rejected due to missing or erroneous ISSN numbers in the application. To quote a typical comment from DOAJ "The ISSN is incorrect, provisional or not registered with issn.org. No ISSN registered at issn.org is provided in the application form." These records have been removed from the data. A number of journals providing "0000-0000" as an ISSN are also removed.

A number of such concatenated ISSNs received a high number of rejects, the record in this file is 43. 49 records show 20 or more rejects. Typical comments from DOAJ are "automatically rejected, nonsensical ISSNs"; "fake issn, autorejected"; "duplicate, autorejected"; "The provided ISSNs are from different journals. The same URL has been provided for all the questions which require a URL for an answer and this URL does not link to a journal's website". All these have also been removed, as they do not represent real journals and real applications.

After removing 17,385 rejects with an occurrence value greater than 1, I was left with 32,888 final rejections with a unique concatenated ISSN field.

Now, if a journal is rejected but later accepted, this does not show in the file. So, I have tried to match the concatenated ISSN with a similar concatenated ISSN in a DOAJ file from February 13, 2026. This is not fool proof as journals change their listed ISSNs – adds, removes, changes – from time to time. Trying to match on title has the same problems of changes. Using a concatenated ISSN will remove a major part of the journals that have been accepted after a rejection (or more). Of 32,888 journals, 27,752 didn't find a match in DOAJ's current file, meaning 5,136 journals have been accepted after one or more rejects, 15.6%. Those with a match was removed before further work was undertaken. Matching on concatenated ISSN will underestimate the number of journals that should be removed. A quick glance at the list of Norwegian rejects shows two undiscovered matches – one journal that has later been accepted, but without one of the ISSNs in the rejected occurrence, one that is rejected twice with a change in ISSNs between rejections. If journals from other countries are similar, this indicates about 10% of remaining rejects should have been removed.

To try to find duplicate entries that do not match on concatenated ISSNs, I tried using the same technique as I used for them, on the journal titles. This revealed 1657 lines where the title matched the title of another line. A manual check revealed that this was mostly a case of changes in ISSNs between the various applications. A few instances of different journals with the same name were also found, but removing all duplicate names, while removing some that should have been retained introduces less error than keeping them all. Checking them all manually to decide which to keep costs too much labour to be

Number of rejections	Count
1	23,283
2	5,709
3	2,198
4	927
5	415
6	185
7	86
8	39
9	21
10	9
11	5
12	3
13	3
15	2
19	3
Total	32,888
Accepted	22,640

Table 5: Number of rejections per applicant.

worth the effort. So, the 1655 lines were removed, leaving 26,097 for further work. Matching titles to titles in DOAJ, to find rejected journals that have been accepted later, revealed 1047 matches that also were discarded. Some of these are different journals with identical titles, but a manual checking of some of the matches revealed that varying use of ISSNs for the same journal was the major source of these journals not having been found during earlier rounds of matching.

This leaves us with 25,050 in our final selection of journals. These are journals that have been rejected from DOAJ and not been admitted later. And the information we have is from the final rejection. This means that of the 32,888 journals only 7,838 have been able to be accepted to DOAJ after being rejected.

Some statistics on the number of rejections

One of my reviewers indicated a strong wish for more information about the number of rejections per journal. I had actually thought about this at an earlier stage, but not seen how I could produce such numbers. The reviewer's wish made me think again, and find a solution. The findings are not central to the article, but could be interesting "bonus material" for some of us.

Looking at the number of rejects an applicant receives, I found I could count the other way, so that the line with the latest occurrence – the one with the number 1 – could count also the number of occurrences of the same ISSN above, so that we get the number of applications for that ISSN, including the latest. I did this with the 50,273 records not being obviously problematic due to missing or bogus ISSN (see table 5).

We see that the typical application is rejected once, and a good number come back for a second and third rejection. The number of accepted journals, listed in DOAJ, is nearly as high as the number of single rejections, but accepted journals represent a longer time span. Being accepted still comes in as the second most likely outcome of an application.

The applications with a high number of rejections seems to be the result of same ISSN being used for a number of totally unrelated applications. One should note that all entries with 20 or more rejects have been sorted out at an earlier stage, as it was easy to see they were a result of the same ISSN being used for unrelated applications.

Where the line between struggling applications and bogus applications could be drawn in this table, is difficult to say for certain. After some manual checking we find that the ones with 19 rejects are not real (they are not repetitions of the same journal applying), the 2 with 15 rejects are real, 1 of the ones with 13 is actually 1 journal with 15 rejects (with slightly differing ISSNs) plus 1 fake application using this journal's ISSN, while the other 2 with 13 rejects are real. Among those with 12 rejects is one journal whose application has been rejected 12 times because the journal is already listed in DOAJ, the 2 others are also real applications. All 5 with 11 rejections look like real applications from the same journal. Of the 9 with 10 rejections, 7 seems to be repeated applications from the same journal. 1 is a journal that actually has 11 rejections, one with another ISSN combination. And the last one with 10 rejections is a combination of 10 different applications using the same non-existent ISSN.

Time does unfortunately not allow me to dig deeper into this.

Disclaimer

The author was on the advisory board of DOAJ from 2012 until the end of 2021.

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