

The End of QUALIS and the New Directions of Scientific Evaluation

O Fim do QUALIS e os Novos Rumos da Avaliação Científica

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In recent years, Brazilian science has undergone significant transformations, one of the most impactful of which for the academic community was the discontinuation of the QUALIS journal classification system, maintained by the Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior (CAPES). For decades, QUALIS served as one of the main criteria for evaluating the scientific output of graduate programs in the country, with classifications ranging from A1 (highest) to C (unqualified), directly influencing where and how researchers published their work.

This classification played an important role in organizing and ranking scientific dissemination outlets. However, in today's globalized and digitized scientific landscape, QUALIS began to show clear signs of obsolescence and anachronism, becoming the target of increasing criticism from the academic community.

One of the system's main limitations was its reliance on predominantly quantitative criteria, such as impact factor, indexing in specific databases, and publisher classification. While these indicators are relevant to some extent, they were insufficient to reflect the complexity and diversity of contemporary scientific production, which is increasingly characterized by the growth of open-access journals, preprint repositories, and alternative impact metrics, such as altmetrics. Moreover, the slow and often outdated update process of QUALIS perpetuated the inclusion of low-relevance journals in high-ranking tiers, while important journals in more specific fields—such as Clinical Analysis—were undervalued or overlooked.

Another criticized aspect concerned the compartmentalized structure of the system, which separated Brazilian journals from foreign ones and applied different criteria across academic fields. This fragmented logic contributed to the disconnection between science produced in Brazil and the broader international scientific dialogue. Rather than fostering the internationalization of Brazilian research, the system often encouraged publication in local journals with high QUALIS rankings but low international impact, promoting publication strategies focused solely on ranking rather than scientific relevance. Such practices compromised not only the international visibility of Brazilian researchers but also the integrity of the graduate program evaluation process.

The segmentation by fields of knowledge also introduced additional distortions. Each field established its own evaluation criteria, resulting in asymmetries that hindered

comparability across disciplines and could create undue advantages for certain subfields. Consequently, graduate programs from different areas were assessed using incommensurable metrics, which undermined the equity of the system. Furthermore, this configuration led to questionable practices, such as selecting journals based solely on their QUALIS classification, to the detriment of thematic relevance and the research's intended audience. There were also reports of the use of dubious or even predatory journals that were mistakenly ranked highly within the system, revealing serious weaknesses in the evaluation criteria.

In response to mounting criticism, CAPES proposed in 2019 the creation of *QUALIS Referência*, aiming to unify and streamline evaluation criteria by adopting internationally recognized bibliometric indicators, such as those from Scopus and Web of Science. Although it represented a conceptual advance, its implementation was marked by delays and resistance from sectors within academia, who feared the loss of specificities within their respective fields. Even so, there was growing consensus that this model was insufficient to address the challenges posed by an open, interconnected scientific landscape grounded in peer review within globalized environments.

Against this backdrop, it became clear that QUALIS—although it had played a historic role in consolidating Brazil's graduate programs—had become an outdated instrument that compromised the visibility, integrity, and international integration of national science. Its continuation in this format led to the perpetuation of practices misaligned with contemporary principles of open, collaborative science oriented toward social relevance. A profound reform of the system was, therefore, both urgent and necessary for Brazil to align with international best practices in scientific evaluation.

The discontinuation of QUALIS—officially replaced by new and modern evaluation parameters—represents a profound shift in how journals and their publications will be considered in both institutional and individual assessment processes. CAPES's decision aligns with a broader movement to reform Brazilian criteria for scientific excellence, placing greater emphasis on content quality, the real impact of publications, and more robust, globally recognized metrics such as the Journal Impact Factor (JIF), CiteScore, H-index, among others.

For the field of laboratory diagnostics, this shift brings both challenges and opportunities. The end of QUALIS eliminates a system criticized for regional distortions, lack of transparency, and misalignment with international standards. Conversely, it generates uncertainty for researchers and editors of national journals—especially those still striving for greater visibility and indexing in international databases.

This new paradigm also calls for a deeper reflection on the role of Brazilian scientific journals. Rather than prioritizing bureaucratic classifications, it will be necessary to invest in transparent editorial practices, qualified peer review, open data, and effective science communication. Editorial quality, genuine scientific contribution, and the ability to foster relevant scholarly debates will become the primary differentiators.

In the short term, there may be a trend toward the concentration of publications in well-established foreign journals, as a strategy for researchers to maintain the relevance of their academic portfolios. This may inadvertently weaken Brazilian journals, making it more difficult to consolidate a strong and internationally recognized national scientific output. However, this also opens a window of opportunity for journals in the field to

invest in editorial quality, internationalization, rigorous peer review, and the adoption of best editorial practices that enhance their standing in recognized bibliometric indicators.

It is up to scientific journals, such as ours, to rethink their mission and editorial strategies in order to continue serving as a reliable, accessible, and relevant platform for scientific dissemination. It is essential that researchers also understand that scientific publishing must go beyond classification purposes, serving as a tool for knowledge construction and the improvement of professional practice—particularly in fields such as laboratory diagnostics, whose direct applicability impacts public health and the quality of patient care.

Brazilian Journal of Clinical Analyses (RBAC - Revista Brasileira de Análises Clínicas) has taken an important step this year by beginning to publish its articles in both Portuguese and English. This strategy will enhance the visibility and positioning of the articles published in RBAC. We will remain attentive and engaged in this ongoing process of transformation. A commitment to high-quality science, ethical publishing practices, and the strengthening of national scientific production must guide our actions. The future of scientific evaluation in Brazil is under construction, and all stakeholders—editors, authors, reviewers, and institutions—have an active role to play in this process.