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Peer Review

A guide supporting the *Australian Code for
the Responsible Conduct of Research*

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Peer review: A guide supporting the
*Australian Code for the Responsible
Conduct of Research*

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1. Introduction

This guide complements the ***Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research*** (the Code), which articulates the broad principles and responsibilities that underpin the responsible conduct of Australian research.

This guide is intended to assist institutions and researchers to adhere to the following principles of the Code:

- Principle 1: ‘Honesty in the development, undertaking and reporting of research’, which requires information to be presented truthfully and accurately in proposing research
- Principle 2: ‘Rigour in the development, undertaking and reporting of research’, which requires research to be underpinned by attention to detail and robust methodology, avoiding or acknowledging biases
- Principle 3: ‘Transparency in declaring interests’, which requires conflicts of interest to be disclosed and managed
- Principle 4: ‘Fairness in the treatment of others’, which requires researchers and others involved in research to be treated fairly and with respect
- Principle 7: ‘Accountability for the development, undertaking and reporting of research’, which requires good stewardship of public resources used to conduct research.

This guide aims to assist individual researchers in understanding and applying best practice in conducting and participating in peer review.

The Code and this guide apply to all research conducted under the auspices of Australian institutions. These institutions vary in size, maturity, experience and organisational structure. They range from large and complex universities to small privately funded institutes. Accordingly, it is acknowledged that different institutional policies and processes are capable of fulfilling the aim of this guide and attempts have been made to ensure that there are appropriate options for flexibility in its application.

2. Peer review

For the purposes of this guide, and as defined in the Code:

Peer review is the impartial and independent assessment of research by others working in the same or a related field.

Peer review has a number of important roles in research and research management, including:

- the assessment of grant applications
- selecting material for publication
- the review of performance of researchers and teams

Peer review provides expert scrutiny of a research project and helps to maintain high standards in research, including by ensuring that accepted disciplinary standards are met. It encourages accurate, thorough and credible research reporting.

Peer review may also draw attention to deviations from the principles in the Code, including by identifying duplicative publication, errors and misleading statements. Peer review has been important in the detection of fabrication and fraud in research.

3. Responsibilities of researchers

This section provides guidance on the responsibilities that researchers have in relation to peer review.

3.1 *Participate in peer review*

All researchers should recognise the importance of participating in peer review processes and embrace the opportunity to participate. Researchers in receipt of public funding have a responsibility to participate in peer review when appropriate opportunities arise.

To ensure the quality and integrity of peer review processes, researchers should ensure that they have the appropriate expertise to participate in the peer review activity.

3.2 *Conduct peer review responsibly*

Researchers participating in peer review ('peer reviewers') must do so in a way that is fair, rigorous and timely and maintains the confidentiality of peer review processes, as stated in Responsibility 28 of the Code.

Peer reviewers must also be aware that each funding agency from whom they receive funding or for whom they conduct review is likely to have its own peer review policy to which they must adhere.

3.2.1 *Conduct peer review fairly, rigorously and in a timely fashion*

It is important that peer reviewers are fair, rigorous and timely in their review.

Peer reviewers must:

- ensure that they are informed about and comply with the criteria to be applied in the peer review process
- review research objectively with respect to the review criteria
- apply standards equally to all research under review
- give proper consideration to research that challenges or changes accepted ways of thinking, which may include innovative, interdisciplinary or collaborative research.

Peer reviewers must not:

- introduce considerations that are not relevant to the review criteria
- permit personal prejudice to influence the process (peer reviewers should be aware of how their own biases (conscious or unconscious) could affect the peer review process, including in relation to gender, ethnicity, nationality, institutional employer and research discipline)
- take undue or calculated advantage of knowledge obtained during the peer review process, or use information from research projects under review without permission.
- intentionally delay the review process.

3.2.2 *Respect confidentiality*

Peer reviewers must ensure that they adhere to the confidentiality requirements of publishers and funding agencies in relation to the conduct of peer review. In most processes, peer reviewers are required to maintain the confidentiality of peer review processes and must not disclose the content of any projects under review or the outcome of any review process in which they are involved.

3.2.3 *Disclose interests and manage conflicts of interest*

Peer reviewers must declare all material (relevant) interests and abide by any requirements established to manage conflicts of interest, in accordance with Responsibility 24 of the Code.

For further detail, see *Conflicts of Interest: A guide supporting the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research*.

3.3 *Avoid interference in the peer review process*

Researchers whose work is undergoing peer review must not seek to influence the process or outcomes.

3.4 *Mentor trainees in peer review*

Supervising researchers have a responsibility to assist trainee researchers in developing the necessary skills for peer review and understanding their obligation to participate in peer review and conduct peer review responsibly.

4. Responsibilities of institutions

This section provides guidance on the responsibilities that institutions have in relation to peer review.

4.1 *Support the peer review process*

Institutions should recognise the importance of the peer review process and encourage and support the participation of its researchers.

4.2 *Manage breaches of the Code*

Institutions should manage and investigate concerns or complaints about potential breaches of the Code in accordance with the *Guide to Managing and Investigating Potential Breaches of the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research*.

The following are examples of breaches of the Code that are related to peer review:

- failure to conduct peer review responsibly and fairly
- taking undue advantage of knowledge obtained through peer review processes
- disclosing the content or outcome of peer review processes
- failure to declare relevant conflicts of interest.