Responsible Use of Peer Review Guideline

Section 1 - Purpose and Scope

(1) The Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research 2018 (the Code) defines peer review as 'the impartial and independent assessment of research by others working in the same or a related field'.

(2) The University of Queensland (UQ) recognises the importance of peer review processes to the academic and scientific endeavour. UQ encourages the use of, and participation in, peer review to support the publication of high-quality research outputs and the submission of high-quality funding applications.

(3) Researchers with the appropriate expertise to participate in peer review should do so as an important contribution to the research endeavour.

(4) This Guideline provides advice to authors and lead investigators on:

a. Funding applications: preparation and submission;
b. Research outputs: preparation, peer review and unethical publishers; and
c. Conducting peer review.

(5) This Guideline supports the implementation of:

a. The Code
b. Responsible Research Management Framework Policy
c. Conflict of Interest Policy
d. Administration of Research Funding - Applications, Grants and Contract Research Policy.

Section 2 - Funding Applications

Preparation

(6) Prior to submitting a funding application, it is strongly recommended that lead investigators:

a. Use readership schemes organised by local areas where available to improve their ideas and craft their applications.
b. Request qualified peers to critically review their draft funding application.
c. Ensure their own work and the work of others is appropriately and clearly acknowledged in the funding application.
d. Seek advice from the Research Office on eligibility and compliance with funding rules.

Submission

(7) When submitting a funding application, lead investigators must:

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a. Submit applications in accordance with the Administration of Research Funding - Applications, Grants and Contract Research Policy;
b. Disclose any conflict of interest in relation to the funding application; and
c. Ensure they are not involved in or have any influence over the peer review process of their own funding application.

Section 3 - Research Outputs

Preparation

(8) Prior to submitting a research output, it is strongly recommended that authors:

a. Request qualified peers, either at UQ or outside of UQ, to critically review the work prior to submission. It should not be unusual for multiple rounds of informal peer review of this nature to occur for high-quality work before submission;
b. Appropriately acknowledge colleagues who have peer reviewed the research output; and
c. Disclose any conflicts of interest (particularly with regard to funding sources and the nature of the work) in accordance with the Administration of Research Funding - Applications, Grants and Contract Research Policy.

Use of Pre-print Servers

(9) The dissemination of work on pre-print servers is one avenue available to gain peer comments prior to peer-reviewed publication. Manuscripts disseminated in this way should be advanced enough to be suitable for publication and adhere to the Responsible Research Management Framework Policy.

Peer Review of Research Outputs

(10) Where peer review is relevant to the research output type, authors should ensure the publishing outlet chosen has a robust peer review process. The details of the peer review process will vary among disciplines, but the following attributes are often present:

a. An Editorial board (or equivalent) of well-known senior colleagues in the field who have agreed to serve on the board, and who make recommendations to an Editor.
b. Independent peer review of the work by at least two specialists in the field who supply written comments upon which a recommendation is based.
c. Multiple rounds of peer review and revisions of the draft submission.
d. A high standard is applied to papers or submissions, with some submissions being rejected due to the peer review process.

Unethical Publishers

(11) In accordance with the Code, authors should avoid unethical or unprofessional publishers, sometimes called predatory publishers. Predatory publishers may have some or all of the following attributes:

a. Offer publication on the basis of a fee without a strong, or any, peer-review process.
b. Claim editorial board members without the approval of the individuals involved.
c. Conduct peer review that is a sham or is compromised in some way.

(12) Authors are strongly discouraged from publishing with unethical or unprofessional publishers.

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(13) Authors may wish to evaluate their potential publisher with a service such as Think.Check.Submit.

(14) The Library provides further information on unethical publishing.

Section 4 - Conducting Peer Review

(15) The purpose of peer review is to validate academic work or research and to improve the quality of published research.

(16) Peer review should occur prior to the submission of a research proposal, a grant application, or research for publication.

(17) The below requirements have been adapted from NHMRC Peer Review Guide.

(18) To ensure the quality and integrity of peer review processes, researchers participating in peer review must:

a. Conduct the peer review in a way that is fair, rigorous and timely and maintains the confidentiality of the content;
b. Inform themselves about the criteria to be applied in the peer review process;
c. Have the appropriate expertise to participate in the peer review activity;
d. Review research objectively, impartially, and in accordance with the review criteria;
e. Apply standards equally to all research under review;
f. Give proper consideration to research that challenges or changes accepted ways of thinking, which may include innovative, interdisciplinary or collaborative research;
g. Maintain professionalism in the tone of their comments, ensuring that peer reviews are as constructive as possible; and
h. Disclose interests and manage conflicts of interest.

(19) Peer reviewers must not:

a. Contact the author/s or other reviewers unless authorised to do so;
b. Seek to influence the review process unduly;
c. Delegate their responsibilities or ask others to assist with a review, unless authorised to do so;
d. Take into account factors that are not relevant to the review criteria;
e. 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 concerning gender, ethnicity nationality, institutional employer and research discipline);
f. Take advantage of knowledge obtained during the peer review process, or use information from research projects under review, without permission;
g. Conduct a review for which one lacks appropriate expertise; or
h. Intentionally delay the review process.

(20) Researchers in receipt of public funding may have a responsibility to participate in peer review.

(21) Training in peer reviewing is available through the Publons/Web of Science Academy.

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