



# The Royal Society of Queensland Ethics and Malpractice Policy for Editing *The Proceedings of the Royal Society of Queensland*

## Introduction

### Purpose and status of this statement

This Policy has been adopted to complement the publication of the *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Queensland*, a scholarly journal published approximately annually to bring scientific research relevant to Queensland, Australia to a national and international audience.

The Policy has been written to guide the Editor in evaluating research material for publication and to reassure readers and scholarly institutions that articles published in the *Proceedings* conform to the highest standards of scientific writing.

The *Proceedings* have been published since 1884. The core consists of peer-reviewed articles to which this Policy applies in its entirety. From time to time, the *Proceedings* will also include reports to members, presidential addresses, opinion pieces and short communications which have not been peer-reviewed and are not considered to be part of the scholarly canon. This Policy applies in spirit to these contributions, but with appropriate allowances for their non-scholarly nature.

This Policy is a paraphrase of the Position Statement *Responsible research publication: international standards for editors* by Sabine Kleinert & Elizabeth Wager<sup>1</sup> and promulgated by the Committee on Publication Ethics.

This Policy was adopted by the Council of The Royal Society of Queensland on 21 November 2014. The Policy will apply as far as practicable to *Proceedings 119*; and in its entirety to *Proceedings 120* and subsequent issues.

### Summary

1. The Editor on behalf of the Society takes responsibility for every peer-reviewed article published in the *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Queensland*, except where clearly stated otherwise.
2. The Editor will make fair and unbiased decisions independent from commercial considerations and will ensure a fair and appropriate peer review process.
3. The Editor will encourage maximum transparency and complete, honest reporting.
4. The Editor will guard the integrity of the published record by issuing corrections and retractions when needed and pursuing any suspicions or allegations of research and publication misconduct.
5. The Editor will pursue any suspicions or allegations of reviewer misconduct.
6. The Editor will critically assess the ethical conduct of studies in humans and animals.
7. Peer reviewers and authors will be advised of what is expected of them.
8. The Society has an appropriate policy in place for handling editorial conflicts of interest.

### Preamble

As a guardian and steward of the research record, the Editor encourages authors to strive for and themselves adhere to the highest standards of publication ethics. Also, the Editor is part of the

wider professional editorial community, and will keep abreast of developments relevant to publication ethics and will bring issues requiring policy attention to the Council.

## **Editorial Principles**

### **1. Accountability and responsibility for journal content**

The Editor takes responsibility for everything published in the *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Queensland* (the “*Proceedings*” or the “journal”). The Editor has a collective responsibility for the research record. The Editor is accountable to the Council of The Royal Society of Queensland (the “Society”) for upholding the scholarly integrity of the *Proceedings*. The Editor will be an experienced scientist. The Editor may be but is not required to be a member of the Council of the Society. The Editor or the Council may appoint an Assistant Editor or Administering Editor who will also be bound by this Policy.

### **2. Editorial independence and integrity**

An important part of the responsibility to make fair and unbiased decisions is the upholding of the principle of editorial independence and integrity.

#### **2.1 Separating decision-making from commercial considerations**

The Editor will make decisions on the basis of academic merit and English expression alone and take full responsibility for their decisions. Commercial activities within the journal such as acceptance of advertising will be separated from editorial processes and decisions and will be referred to and determined by the President advised by the Council. The Editor however will take an active interest in the Society’s pricing policies and will strive for wide and affordable accessibility of the journal.

Sponsored supplements or conference proceedings will undergo the same rigorous quality control and peer review as any other content for the journal. Decisions on such material must be made in the same way as any other journal content. The sponsorship and role of the sponsor must be clearly declared to readers.

Advertisements will be considered for publication but will be clearly distinguishable from other content. Advertisers and sponsors will not be involved in the editorial process.

#### **2.2 Editors’ relationship to the Society as publisher**

The principle of editorial independence is embedded in the appointment of the Editor and their acceptance of the position. The Council of the Society will determine the broad scope of subjects that can be published and this will be consistent with the objects of the Society (science, the application of science and science-related policy focused on Queensland or a Queensland-relevant context). The Council will not for commercial or political or relationship reasons have any role in decisions on content. The Council will not discipline the Editor because of any journal content unless there has been gross editorial misconduct or an independent investigation has concluded that the Editor’s decision to publish or not publish was antagonistic to the Society’s scholarly mission.

#### **2.3 Journal metrics and decision-making**

The Editor will not attempt to inappropriately influence the journal’s ranking by artificially increasing any journal metric. For example, it is inappropriate to demand that references to that journal’s articles are included except for genuine scholarly reasons. In general, the Editor will ensure that papers are reviewed on purely scholarly grounds and that authors are not pressured to cite specific publications for non- scholarly reasons.

#### **2.4 Where the Editor is an author**

If the Editor wishes to submit a paper as primary author or co-author, the Editor will recuse himself/herself from all involvement in the peer-review process and will remit the paper to the

President. The President (or experienced nominee) will handle all aspects of peer-review, including removal of material identifying the authors, selection of reviewers without involvement of the authors, transmission of review comments and confirmation that comments have been incorporated. In administering the review process, the President will be bound by this Policy. If the paper is to be accepted for publication, the President will accept it and a notice to that effect will accompany the article.

### **3. Editorial confidentiality**

#### **3.1 Authors' material**

Where peer reviewers are chosen by the Editor (normal practice), the Editor will protect the confidentiality of authors' material and remind reviewers to do so as well. The Editor will not share submitted papers with editors of other journals, unless with the authors' agreement or in cases of alleged misconduct (see below). The Editor will not give any indication of a paper's status with the journal to anyone other than the authors. Web-based submission systems will be run in a way that prevents unauthorised access.

In the case of a misconduct investigation, it may be legitimate to disclose material to third parties such as an investigation committee or other editors.

#### **3.2 Reviewers**

The Editor will protect reviewers' identities unless operating an open peer review system. However, if reviewers wish to disclose their names, this should be permitted. Disclosure will normally not happen until after their comments have been remitted to the authors. If there is alleged or suspected reviewer misconduct it may be legitimate to disclose a reviewer's name to a third party.

## **General editorial policies**

### **4. Encouraging transparency and honest reporting**

To advance knowledge in scholarly fields, it is important to understand why particular work was done, how it was planned and conducted and by whom, and what it adds to current knowledge. To achieve this understanding, maximum transparency and complete and honest reporting are crucial.

#### **4.1 Authorship and responsibility**

The Society has adopted an accompanying Policy for Authors. For multidisciplinary and collaborative research, it should be apparent to readers who has done what aspect and who takes responsibility for the conduct and validity of which aspect of the research. Each part of the work is to have at least one author who takes responsibility for its validity. All authors are expected to have contributed significantly to the paper and to be familiar with its entire content and this should be declared in an authorship statement submitted to the journal.

When there are undisputed changes in authorship for appropriate reasons, the Editor will require that all authors (including any whose names are being removed from an author list) agree to these in writing. Authorship disputes (that is, disagreements on who should or should not be an author before or after publication) cannot be adjudicated by the Editor and should be resolved at institutional level or through other appropriate independent bodies - for both published and unpublished papers.

#### **4.2 Conflicts of interest and role of the funding source**

All authors must declare any relevant financial and non-financial conflicts of interest and publish advice of these, at least those that might influence a reader's perception of a paper, alongside the paper. The funding source of the research should be declared and the role of the funding source in the conception, conduct, analysis and reporting of the research should be stated and published.

The Editor will make it clear to authors if in certain sections of the journal (such as commissioned commentaries or review articles) certain conflicts of interest preclude authorship.

### **4.3 Full and honest reporting and adherence to reporting guidelines**

The most important responsibility of the Editor is to maintain a high standard in the scholarly literature. Every published paper should make a substantial new contribution to their field. The Society discourages so-called ‘salami publications’ (that is, publication of the minimum publishable unit of research). It discourages duplicate or redundant publication unless it is fully declared and acceptable to all (such as publication in a different language with cross-referencing). It encourages authors to place their work in the context of previous work (that is, to state why this work was necessary/done; what this work adds or why a replication of previous work was required; and what readers should take away from it).

The Editor will encourage full and honest reporting, for example, by requiring authors (in fields where this is standard) to submit protocols or study plans; and, where they exist, to provide evidence of adherence to relevant reporting guidelines.

Digital image files, figures and tables are to adhere to the appropriate standards in the field. Images are not to be inappropriately altered from the original or to present findings in a misleading way. The Editor may screen for plagiarism, duplicate or redundant publication. If plagiarism or fraudulent image manipulation is detected, this will be pursued with the authors and relevant institutions (see 5.2 below).

## **5. Responding to criticisms and concerns**

Reaction and response to published research by other researchers is an important part of scholarly debate in most fields and is encouraged. Criticisms may be part of a general scholarly debate but can also highlight transgressions of research or publication integrity. The journal will facilitate debate by publishing readers’ responses if they are of sufficient scholarly merit and adequate standard of expression. The Editor’s assessment of “scholarly merit” shall be conclusive unless the Editor wishes to refer the matter to the President or Council for advice.

### **5.1 Ensuring integrity of the published record - corrections**

When readers, authors or editors point out genuine errors in published work, a correction or erratum will be published as soon as possible, on the website and in the next issue of the journal, if the error(s) do not render the work invalid. If the error(s) render the work or substantial parts of it invalid, the paper will be retracted with an explanation on the website and in the next issue of the journal as to the reason for retraction. A notice of retraction will be sent to all known subscribers.

### **5.2 Ensuring the integrity of the published record – suspected research or publication misconduct**

If serious concerns are raised by readers, reviewers or others about the conduct, validity, or reporting of academic work, the Editor will initially contact the authors (ideally all authors) and allow them to respond to the concerns. If that response is unsatisfactory, the Editor will take this to the institutional level (see below). The Editor will also respond to findings from research integrity organisations that indicate misconduct relating to a paper published in their journal. The Editor is entitled to retract a paper if convinced that serious misconduct has happened even if an investigation by an institution does not recommend it.

The Editor will respond to all non-vexatious allegations or suspicions of research or publication misconduct raised by readers, reviewers or other editors. The Editor will act, even in the case of a paper that has not been accepted or has already been rejected. Cases of possible plagiarism or duplicate/redundant publication can be assessed by the Editor personally. However, the Editor may also request an investigation by the institution or other appropriate bodies (after seeking an explanation from the authors first and if that explanation is unsatisfactory).

Retracted papers (or the title and abstract) should be retained online, and they should be prominently marked as a retraction in all online versions, including the PDF, for the benefit of future readers.

### **5.3 Encourage scholarly debate**

The Society wishes to facilitate forums by which readers can discuss papers, voice criticisms and add to the scholarly debate. This can be online or in the subsequent issue of the *Proceedings*. Authors may contribute to the debate and will be given an opportunity to do so, if their work is subject to negative feedback. Such scholarly debate about published work should happen in a timely manner. The Editor will clearly distinguish between criticisms of the limitations of a study and criticisms that raise the possibility of research misconduct. Any criticisms that raise the possibility of misconduct should not just be published but should be further investigated even if they are received a long time after publication.

## **Editorial policies relating to research in humans or animals**

### **6. Critical assessment standard of ethical conduct of research**

Especially in biomedical research but also in social sciences and humanities, ethical conduct of research is paramount in the protection of humans and animals. Ethical oversight, appropriate consent procedures, and adherence to relevant laws are required from authors. The Editor will be vigilant to concerns in this area.

#### **6.1 Ethics approval and ethical conduct**

For medical research in humans the Editor will generally require approval of a study by an ethics committee (or institutional review board) and the assurance that it was conducted according to the Declaration of Helsinki; but, in addition, will be alert to all aspects of concern in the ethical conduct of research. This may mean that a paper is sent to peer reviewers with particular expertise in this area, or to the President on behalf of the Council of the Society, or that the Editor will require further reassurances or evidence from authors or their institutions.

Papers may be rejected on ethical grounds even if the research had approval from the authors' institution's own ethics committee.

#### **6.2 Consent to take part in research**

If research is done in humans, the Editor will ensure that a statement on the consent procedure is included in the paper. In most cases, written informed consent is the required norm. If there is any concern about the consent procedure, if the research is done in vulnerable groups, or if there are doubts about the ethical conduct, the Editor will ask to see the consent form and enquire further from authors, exactly how consent was obtained.

#### **6.3 Consent for publication**

For all case reports, small case series, and images of identifiable people, the Editor will require the authors to have obtained explicit consent for publication (which is different from consent to take part in research). This consent should inform participants of the journal in which the work will be published, make it clear that, although all efforts will be made to remove unnecessary identifiers, complete anonymity is not possible; and ideally state that the person described has seen relevant aspects of the submitted paper and agrees that they have not been misrepresented.

For medical research, the signed consent form should be kept with the patient file rather than sent to the journal (to maximise data protection and confidentiality; see paragraph 6.4). There may be exceptions where it is not possible to obtain consent, for example when the person has died. In such cases, a careful consideration about possible harm is needed and out of courtesy attempts should be made to obtain assent from relatives. In very rare cases, an important public health message may justify publication without consent if it is not possible despite all efforts to obtain consent and the benefit of publication outweighs the possible harm.

#### **6.4 Data protection and confidentiality**

The Editor will critically assess any potential breaches of data protection and patient confidentiality. This includes requiring properly informed consent for the actual research presented and consent for publication where applicable (see paragraph 6.3).

## **6.5 Adherence to relevant laws and best practice guidelines**

The Editor will require authors to adhere to relevant national and international laws and best practice guidelines where applicable, for example when undertaking animal research. The Editor will encourage registration of clinical trials.

## **Editorial Processes**

### **7. Ensuring a fair and appropriate peer review process**

The Editor will explain peer review processes in the information for authors and will also indicate in the journal which contributions are peer reviewed.

#### **7.1 Decision whether to review**

The Editor may reject a paper without peer review when it is deemed unsuitable for the journal's readers or is of poor quality. This decision will be made in a fair and unbiased way. The criteria used to make this decision should be made explicit. The decision not to send a paper for peer review should be based on the academic content of the paper or an inadequate standard of English expression, and should not be influenced by the nature of the authors or the host institution.

#### **7.2 Interaction with peer reviewers**

The Editor will use appropriate peer reviewers for papers that are considered for publication by selecting people with sufficient expertise and by avoiding those with conflicts of interest. The Editor will ensure that reviews are received in a timely manner.

Peer reviewers will be told what is expected of them and should be informed about any changes in editorial policies. In particular, peer reviewers should be asked to assess research and publication ethics issues (that is, whether they think the research was done and reported ethically, or if they have any suspicions of plagiarism, fabrication, falsification, or redundant publication). The Editor will request a formal conflict of interest declaration from reviewers and should ask reviewers to inform them about any such conflict of interest at the earliest opportunity so that they can make a decision on whether an unbiased review is possible. Certain conflicts of interest may disqualify a reviewer. The Editor will stress confidentiality of the material to reviewers and should require reviewers to inform them when they ask a colleague for help with a review or if they mentor a more junior colleague in conducting peer review. The Editor will monitor the quality and timeliness of peer review and to provide feedback to reviewers.

#### **7.3 Reviewer misconduct**

The Editor will take reviewer misconduct seriously and pursue any allegation of breach of confidentiality, non-declaration of conflicts of interest (financial or non-financial), inappropriate use of confidential material, or delay of peer review for competitive advantage. Allegations of serious reviewer misconduct, such as plagiarism, will be taken to the institutional level.

#### **7.4 Interaction with authors**

The Editor will make it clear to authors the role of the peer reviewers. For a particular paper the Editor may regard a reviewer as decision-maker or may regard a reviewer as advisor and may not necessarily follow a reviewer's recommendations on acceptance or rejection. Correspondence from the Editor is usually with the corresponding author, who should undertake to involve co-authors at all stages. The Editor may communicate with all authors at first submission and at final acceptance stage to ensure that all authors are aware of the submission and have approved the publication, but in all cases will ensure that the corresponding author knows whether that is their responsibility. Normally, the Editor will pass on all peer reviewers' comments in their entirety. However, in exceptional cases, it may be necessary to exclude parts of a review, if it, for example, contains libellous or offensive remarks. It is important, however, that such editorial discretion is not inappropriately used to suppress inconvenient comments.

There should always be good reasons, which are clearly communicated to authors, if additional reviewers are sought at a late stage in the process.

The final editorial decision and reasons for this will be clearly communicated to authors and reviewers. If a paper is rejected, there is no appeal by authors on scholarly grounds. An appeal on grounds of want of due process or scope may be entertained by the President but only after the grievance has been discussed with the Editor.

## **8. Editorial decision-making**

Editors are in a powerful position by making decisions on publications, which makes it very important that this process is as fair and unbiased as possible, and is in accordance with the academic vision of the journal.

### **8.1 Editorial and journal processes**

All editorial processes should be made clear in the information for authors. In particular, it should be stated what is expected of authors, which types of papers are published, and how papers are handled by the journal. The Editor will be fully familiar with the journal policies, vision, and scope. The final responsibility for all decisions about matters of scholarly merit rests with the Editor.

### **8.2 Editorial conflicts of interest**

The Editor will not be involved in decisions about papers in which they have a conflict of interest, for example if they have collaborated with the authors, if they own shares in an involved company, or if they have a personal relationship with the authors. Editorial conflicts of interests should be declared by the Editor to authors and the President as soon as a paper is received for consideration. The paper will then be submitted to the President to administer peer review (see para 2.4).

Council of The Royal Society of Queensland  
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<sup>i</sup> Kleinert S & Wager E (2011). Responsible research publication: international standards for editors. A position statement developed at the 2nd World Conference on Research Integrity, Singapore, July 22-24, 2010. Chapter 51 in: Mayer T & Steneck N (eds) *Promoting Research Integrity in a Global Environment*. Imperial College Press / World Scientific Publishing, Singapore (pp 317-28). (ISBN 978-981-4340-97-7).