

Research Peer Review Procedure

Section 1 - Background and Purpose

(1) This Procedure describes the principles and professional responsibilities of researchers and research trainees undertaking peer review activities as outlined in the [Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research \(2018\)](#) and associated Peer Review guide. The principles of the Code are:

- a. Principle 3: Transparency in declaring interests;
- b. Principle 4: Fairness in the treatment of others.

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

- a. the assessment of research proposals and grant applications;
- b. the assessment and selection of material for publication and dissemination;
- c. the assessment of research of Higher Degree by Research (HDR) candidates;
- d. the assessment of research quality, engagement and impact by government bodies, and
- e. other reviews or assessments of research conducted by individual researchers, teams, academic units and institutions.

(3) Peer review provides expert scrutiny of proposed research or research outputs and helps to maintain high standards in research, including by ensuring that accepted disciplinary standards are met. At its best, peer review contributes to accurate, thorough and credible reporting of research.

(4) Peer review may also draw attention to departures from the principles of the Code, including by identifying plagiarism, duplicative publication, errors and misleading statements.

(5) Participating in peer review also provides benefits for researchers, including keeping abreast of the most recent research, improving critical analysis skills and understanding of peer review processes, and obtaining recognition for contributions to peer review.

Section 2 - Scope

(6) Applies to:

- a. all research activities;
- b. all University staff and research trainees including Higher Degree by Research (HDR) students and post-doctoral researchers involved in research;
- c. Undergraduate and postgraduate coursework students are excluded from the scope of this Policy.

Section 3 - Policy Statement

(7) Responsible peer review ensures that research meets accepted disciplinary standards and ensures the dissemination of only relevant findings, free from bias, unwarranted claims, and unacceptable interpretations.

(8) This Procedure covers the principles of peer review and the responsibilities of researchers and research trainees undertaking peer review activities.

(9) This procedure should be read in conjunction with:

- a. [Research Integrity Policy](#) and associated procedures;
- b. Policies and procedures of funding bodies and peer-reviewed journals.

(10) No part of this procedure is a substitute for personal responsibility.

Section 4 - Procedures

Part A - Principles of Peer Review

(11) When La Trobe research staff and research trainees participate in a peer review process, they must do so in a way that is:

- a. Fair;
- b. Rigorous;
- c. Timely; and
- d. Maintains the confidentiality of the content and peer review process.

Part B - Responsibility of Researchers

(12) The following responsibilities of peer review apply to researchers and research trainees to ensure the fairness and robustness of the process:

- a. Actively contribute to the peer review processes, including mentoring of research trainees. If they receive public funds, they have a responsibility to participate in the peer review process.
- b. Disclose any actual, potential and perceived conflicts of interest to the appropriate authority including but not limited to – funding bodies, publishers or editors, Deans, Heads of Schools. Should an actual, potential or perceived conflict of interest exist, advice on its management and whether to continue or cease review should be sought from the organisations (e.g. La Trobe, funding body or peer-review journal).
- c. Be fair and seen to be fair by all involved in the peer review process.
- d. Remain transparent and provide independent, objective, impartial, free from bias advice throughout all stages of the peer review process, as required.
- e. Only undertake peer review if they have appropriate experience, expertise and knowledge.
- f. Ensure that the content and/or outcomes of any process are treated as confidential unless expressly authorised and mentoring research trainees in responsible peer review. Refrain from discussing work under review with others.
- g. Provide comments in a prompt manner and submit on time. Contact the relevant organisations as soon as possible if unable to complete the review or provide a report, as required, on time.
- h. Ensure that comments provided are professional and detailed enough to allow appropriate assessment of the

work.

- i. Notify the relevant organisations (e.g., funding body, peer-review journal, La Trobe Research Integrity Advisor) immediately of any irregularities, any concerns about ethical aspect of work, or suspected research misconduct that may have occurred during the writing and submission of the research subject to peer review process. Maintain confidentiality and do not personally investigate the matter further, unless the relevant organisations ask for further information.

(13) Peer reviewers must not:

- a. Contact the author/s or other reviewers unless authorised to do so.
- b. Discuss the work under review with others.
- c. Consider matters that are not relevant to the review criteria or attempt to interfere with the process or seek to influence its outcomes when your own work is undergoing peer review.
- d. Delegate their responsibilities or ask others to assist with a review, unless authorised to do so.
- e. Allow 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).
- f. Obtain an unfair advantage by acquiring privileged information from research projects under review, without permission through peer review; the peer review process is not used to benefit an individual or a third party's self-interests or to take advantage of the peer review process or outcomes for their own work while it is being reviewed.
- g. Conduct a review for which one lacks appropriate expertise.
- h. Intentionally delay the review process.

Part C - Non-compliance with Procedure

(14) This procedure forms part of the La Trobe [Research Integrity Policy](#). The Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Industry Engagement) (DVCRIE) may determine that a breach of this procedure may be dealt with as a breach of the Research Code of Conduct.

(15) Examples of actions that can be deemed breaches include, but are not limited to:

- a. Conducting and undertaking peer review without sufficient experience, expertise or knowledge;
- b. Failing to declare and/or manage any conflicts of interest in line with relevant policy of the organisations you are conducting the peer review for and also of the University's [Conflict of Interest Policy](#);
- c. Intentionally delaying the peer review process;
- d. Using information from the peer review process without permission;
- e. Breaching confidentiality;
- f. Unable to separate and prevent personal prejudices, predispositions and beliefs from influencing their ability to participate in the peer review process in an impartial manner;
- g. Being a member of the research team or project;
- h. Being the supervisor of research to be undertaken by a student of the University as part of their course of study;
- i. Research Trainees (e.g., HDR students) involved in research are not to participate in peer review of work produced by their supervisor.
- j. Not disclosing a personal or familial relationship with the relevant researcher or research team;
- k. There is a business relationship, financial or any pecuniary interest in the research project;
- l. There are other influences which might reasonably be considered to affect their judgment of the research

project.

Part D - Peer Review Process Compromised - Actions Available to Researchers

(16) Where the peer review process has been conducted contrary to this Procedure or relevant procedure of the relevant organisations, researchers can exercise the following actions against each peer reviewer:

- a. contact the authority assigning the peer reviewers and inform it of the peer reviewer's actions;
- b. seek to have their research withdrawn and resubmitted for peer review.

Section 5 - Definitions

(17) For the purpose of this Procedure:

- a. Peer review: Impartial and independent assessment of research by others working in the same or a related field.
- b. Peer reviewer: A researcher who engages in peer review of another researchers' outputs that falls within the peer reviewer's area or related area of expertise.
- c. Research trainees: Research trainees include all undergraduate, graduate and postgraduate students conducting research as part of their degree or as a combination of research and coursework and all postdoctoral researchers.
- d. Researcher: Someone who conducts an organised and systematic study of a given subject, field or problem and undertakes to discover facts or principles. For the purpose of this Procedure, a researcher is any La Trobe staff or Higher Degree by Research student conducting research.
- e. Staff: All employees of the University or affiliated enterprises with which the University has a formal agreement and includes casual employees, clinical staff and unpaid members of the University such as Honorary and Adjunct appointments, all of which are registered on the HR system.

Status and Details

Status	Current
Effective Date	15th September 2020
Review Date	8th September 2023
Approval Authority	Academic Board
Approval Date	9th September 2020
Expiry Date	Not Applicable
Responsible Policy Officer	Alistair Duncan Executive Director, Research Office
Author	Heidi Gaulke
Enquiries Contact	Ethics, Integrity and Biosafety