

Research Peer Review Procedure

Section 1 - Key Information

Policy Type and Approval Body	Academic – Academic Board
Accountable Executive - Policy	Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation)
Responsible Manager - Policy	Executive Director, Research Office
Review Date	27 September 2026

Section 2 - 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 \(2018\)](#) (Research Code) and associated Peer Review guide. The relevant principles of the Research Code are:

- a. Principle 2: Rigour in the development, undertaking and reporting of research;
- b. Principle 3: Transparency in declaring interests and reporting research methodology, data and findings;
- c. 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 Research 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 current research, improving critical analysis skills and understanding of peer review processes, and obtaining recognition for contributions to peer review.

Section 3 - Scope

(6) This Procedure applies to:

- a. all La Trobe research activities;
- b. all La Trobe 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 4 - Key Decisions

Key Decisions	Role
Determine that a breach of this procedure be dealt with as a breach of the Research Code.	Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research & Industry Engagement) or Pro Vice-Chancellor (Graduate and Global Research)

Section 5 - 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. The [Research Integrity Policy](#) and associated procedures;
- b. Policies and procedures of relevant funding bodies and peer-reviewed journals.

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

Section 6 - 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 for which peer review is being conducted (e.g., funding body, peer-review journal) of any irregularities, any concerns about conflicts of interest or ethical aspect of the work, or suspected misconduct related to the research subject to peer review. Maintain confidentiality and do not personally investigate the matter further, unless the relevant organisations ask for further information. If required, contact a Research Integrity Advisor or the Research Integrity Hub for advice prior to notifying the relevant organisations.

(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. Release the material under review to generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools or plagiarism detection software.
- d. Consider matters that are not relevant to the review criteria.
- e. Seek to unduly influence the review process.
- f. Delegate their responsibilities or ask others to assist with a review, unless authorised to do so.
- g. 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).
- h. Take advantage of knowledge obtained during the peer review process or use information from research projects under review, without permission.
- i. Conduct a review for which one lacks appropriate expertise.
- j. 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 Innovation) (DVC(R&I)) or the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research) may determine that a breach of this procedure should be dealt with as a breach of the Research Code.

(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. Failing 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 responsible for the research that is under review;
- h. Not disclosing a personal or familial relationship with the relevant researcher or research team;
- i. Having a business relationship, financial or any pecuniary interest in the research project;
- j. Other influences which might reasonably be considered to affect their judgment of the research project.

Part D - Actions Available to Researchers when the Peer Review Process is Compromised

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

- 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 7 - Definitions

(17) For the purpose of this procedure:

- a. Generative AI: artificial intelligence system capable of generating text, images, audio, synthetic data or other content.
- b. Peer review: Impartial and independent assessment of research by others working in the same or a related field. This includes, but is not limited to, the assessment of research proposals, grant applications and manuscripts prepared for publication.
- c. Peer reviewer: A researcher who engages in peer review independent assessment of another researchers' outputs that falls within the peer reviewer's area or related area of expertise.
- d. 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.
- e. 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.

Section 8 - Authority and Associated Information

(18) This Procedure is made under the [La Trobe University Act 2009](#).

(19) Associated information includes:

- a. [The Ethics, Biosafety and Integrity website](#)

Status and Details

Status	Current
Effective Date	27th September 2023
Review Date	27th September 2026
Approval Authority	Academic Board
Approval Date	27th September 2023
Expiry Date	Not Applicable
Responsible Manager - Policy	Alistair Duncan Executive Director, Research Office
Enquiries Contact	Ethics, Integrity and Biosafety