

GUIDANCE ON INTERNAL PEER REVIEW OF RESEARCH OUTPUTS

September 2019

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PRINCIPLES OF PEER REVIEW

Whereas, the need for researchers to protect their own research interests is widely recognised, both the University and the main funding bodies that support our research actively encourage researchers to be as open as possible. This openness includes common practices such as the scholarly exchange of ideas and data and the submission of work to peer review journals or to a forum where it can be challenged and questioned constructively. Moreover, the use of internal peer review to enhance the success of publication in high quality journals and related public outputs is deemed to be part of healthy academic discourse.

It is recommended that Research Directors actively encourage peer review activities within research centres and research groups, for example, through specific topical meetings or via the dissemination of written work for internal review and constructive feedback. In doing so, staff should be made aware of and comply with any Faculty policies on such mutually supportive peer review procedures.

PEER REVIEW OF RESEARCH OUTPUTS

Peer review involves subjecting an author's scholarly work or research outputs to the scrutiny of other experts in the same field so as to check its validity and evaluate its suitability for publication.

SELECTION OF REVIEWERS

In general, manuscripts that are to be submitted to main stream journals will benefit directly from internal peer-review by appropriately experienced academic colleagues. These internal peer reviewer(s) can be selected either by a request being made from the author(s) or they can be appointed by the Research Director (with the agreement of the author(s)). All academic staff and senior postdoctoral researchers (Grade 8 and above) are eligible to participate in such peer-review processes.

All those involved in the peer review of others' work are expected to act with professional integrity and objectivity, as well as treating the material they review confidentially. As necessary, competing interests should be managed via best practice, for example by including a suitable declaration regarding the lack or otherwise of a conflict of interest.

FORMAT OF REVIEW

Internal peer reviewers will be provided with a full copy of the final draft of a manuscript that is in the format required for submission to a specific publisher. In general, they will be asked to examine and assess the work in the same manner as they would if the paper were to be provided to them for external peer review but to emphasise constructive feedback that will improve the draft as a final submission. If the reviewer recommends that the paper requires major amendments prior to submission s/he can also suggest that it is reviewed for a second time by them or another internal reviewer.

Reviewers will be asked to comment on:

- the originality, significance and rigour of the output
- the validity of the research
- the academic/and or scientific merit and validity of the article and its methodology

The reviewer(s) will provide written feedback to the author(s).

One-to-one feedback is also encouraged, especially in the case of early career researchers. As necessary, this can be arranged by the Research Director.

A reviewer's checklist has been included in the Appendix 1.

TIMING OF REVIEW

It is anticipated that the written report of the internal peer review will be returned to author(s) via the Research Director within 21 days of receipt by the draft paper by the reviewer.

APPENDIX 1

REVIEWERS' CHECKLIST

Title

- Does the title accurately reflect the purpose, design, results, and conclusions of the study?

Abstract

- Does the abstract correctly and succinctly summarize the salient points of the study?

Introduction

- Does the introductory section provide adequate background and rationale for the study?
- Is it clear why the study is important to the relevant community?
- Are the aims and objectives clear and precise?
- Is a study hypothesis(es) or null hypothesis clearly stated?
- Are the strengths and limitations of the study adequately established?
- Is the literature discussed in a manner that provides a state-of-the-art perspective on the purpose and importance of the work presented?
- Is it clear how the experimental and/or theoretical approach to be used is likely to yield definitive (or unique) insight into the topic(s) of interest?
- Are the outcomes to be measured clearly defined?
- Does the introduction section adequately prime the rest of the manuscript in a logically compelling way?

Study design and methodology

- Is the experimental design capable of answering the question implied by the study hypothesis(es) or null hypothesis?
- Do the methods address the aim and deliver the objectives?
- Is the methodology described in sufficient detail for others to repeat study?
 - Is the sample size/study population adequate?
 - Is there a rationale for the research design?
 - Is the measurement instrument or method clearly described?
 - Are the details as to how the data was derived (calculated) adequately explained so that they can be confirmed by the reviewer and reproduced by future investigators?
 - Are the data reproducible?
 - If quantitative, is it clear how the data will be interpreted to either support or refute the hypothesis(es) or null hypothesis?
 - Is the use of any peer reviewed reference material appropriate?

Interpretation of results

- Are the outcomes of analysis (ethnography, narrative, phenomenological, grounded theory or statistical) presented appropriately and interpreted accurately?
- Are the data reported in a clear, concise, and well-organised manner?
- Are the main findings of the study clearly described?
- Are the data reported in a manner that the reader can check the basis of the analyses that leads to all of the major findings?
- Are any tables and figures presented clearly and concisely with all necessary legends, keys, etc.?

Discussion

- Are any major findings from the study clearly described and new knowledge properly emphasised?
- Is the significance of the results described in the context of the objectives for the study?
- Is it clear how the findings extend previous knowledge in a meaningful way?
- Are the implications of the weaknesses/limitations of the study considered?
- Are the outcomes from the study in perspective with existing literature?
 - Are similarities and differences with other published works addressed
 - Are important observations from previous reports described in the context of the present results?
- Is there excessive speculation?
 - Do the author(s) distinguish opinion from the evidenced based deliverables?
 - Do the authors support their statements with appropriate references?
 - Do the authors discuss their data in a manner that provides insight beyond that presented in previous sections?
- Is there any other way to interpret and/or explain the data other than that suggested by the authors?

Conclusion

- If quantitative, were the hypothesis(es) or null hypothesis proved/disproven?
- Are the key conclusions adequately supported?
- Do the author(s) point out the significance of the conclusions?
- Do the authors make suggestions as to how the results of their study need to be extended in the future to learn more about the issue in question?
- Are the conclusions justified by the evidence created from the experimental results of the study?

Organisation and Style

- Is the writing in the manuscript clear and concise?
- Is the material presented without the use of excessive jargon?

- Are all of the various graphs or charts needed?
- Is the paper well written, properly organized, and easy to follow?
- Is there use of proper grammar, spelling, and punctuation throughout?
- Should the manuscript be shortened?
- Should the manuscript be more comprehensive?

Overall significance and suitability

- Is the manuscript sophisticated enough for the intended professional readership of the target journal?
- Is the research question significant enough to persuade an editor to send it for review?
- If quantitative, is a clear and appropriately testable hypothesis presented?
- Is the overall method valid?
- Are the results presented in a manner that best reflects their value?
- Are the conclusions reasonable on the basis of the results obtained?
- Does the manuscript contain new findings or ideas?
- Does the manuscript provide a unique contribution to knowledge?
- Should the paper be sent to a higher quality journal than that currently being considered?
- If a higher quality journal is to be considered, are there specific changes that need to be considered, including the provision of additional experimental data?

General

- Does the article have any self-citing or citing of other Ulster University staff?
- Are there any international co-authors/collaborations or interdisciplinarity?
- Does the article meet with the REF criteria of originality, significance and rigour?

