

SIXTH ANNUAL MEETING OF THE NATIONAL SCHOLARLY EDITORS' FORUM

**Review of the ASSAf Code for
best practice in editorial
discretion and peer review**

Process....

- **ASSAf Report on Research Publishing in SA (2006)**
- **NSEF formed...2007**
- **Plenary discussion of draft Code of best practice**
- **Inputs by NSEF members**
- **Finalisation of published Code of best practice**

Editorial discretion

While there may be large or small editorial teams in charge of the production of particular journals, and variable designations of the participants, the essential requirement is for responsible and fair editorial oversight, exercised to ensure that:

- an editorial policy exists and is accessible to authors;
- submitted manuscripts are carefully examined with a view to the selection of appropriate peer reviewers (including scholars who have not previously co-published extensively with the author(s), who are free of known bias in relation to the subject matter, the author(s) and/or their institutions, and who cannot cover, from a position of authority and peer expertise, the topic(s) dealt with in the paper concerned).

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- **reviewer reports are carefully assessed to decide whether, individually and summatively, they constitute the basis for the publication of the article in question, or whether publication should follow if certain improvements are effected and/or further work done and reported on; or whether the paper should be refused;**
- **special statistical and/or mathematical review is sought, if needed;**
- **the focus of the journal is protected;**
- **misconduct is detected if at all possible (e.g. presentation of data, graphs or figures already published elsewhere; inconsistent data sets; plagiarism);**

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- **errata and retractions are properly managed and made part of the record;**
- **all reports and substantive correspondence relating to all published papers are properly and accessibly stored, preferably as part of a well-designed record- and document-handling system; and**
- **the journal as a whole contextualises reported findings in its editorial and supplementary sections (see above).**

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Editors who submit papers to their own journals must delegate the full editorial discretion in respect of those papers to a deputy or associate editor. Editors should compile an annual report on their journals, with recommendations for journal improvement, for consideration by editorial boards and publishers.

Peer reviewers

Peer reviewers (always more than one, and preferably three) must have expertise and special knowledge of the topic addressed in a submitted paper, in order to fulfil a range of functions in the system of global knowledge accumulation. They must always report in writing, with clear recommendations for acceptance of the paper in question, with or without revision, or rejection, as the case may be. They must especially:

- scrutinise the methods and results in terms of consistency, interpretability and likely reproducibility;
- identify gaps that could or should be filled to enhance the interpretability and strength of the findings and/or insights;
- suggest how the paper can be improved in terms of style, length and focus;

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- **assess the proper citation and referencing of previously published studies (as outlined above the “principles” section), including the critical issue of the originality of the work;**
- **contest conclusions not justified by the results or arguments presented; and**
- **“place” the work in the existing matrix of knowledge in the relevant area or field.**

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Any potential or real conflict of interest must be declared to the editor by a peer reviewer before the review is submitted. All peer reports and substantive correspondence must be retained, for possible later scrutiny, within a well-designed record system out. A list of peer reviewers used by a journal should be published at least once a once a year, and reviewers who default on their obligations should not be retained for further service.

Context-bound prior academic examination, as part of a thesis or dissertation submitted for degree purposes, of scholarly work submitted for publication in a journal does not replace peer review in the specific and different context of the latter.

Value-adding features...

Local journals should provide the enrichment features that give them their special local value described extensively in Chapter 1, namely wide participation of the foremost South African scholars in publishing, editing and peer reviewing; effective networking of local scholars and research trainees; presenting local research to others in a high-impact way; accessibly reflecting local focus, depth and strength in particular fields; professional enrichment and expert contextualisation of content fostering of disciplinary coherence; and maintaining and sustaining demonstrably high quality.