What to do if you suspect a reviewer has appropriated an author’s ideas or data

Author alleges reviewer misconduct

Thank author and say you will investigate

Retrieve files (submitted MS and reviews)

If files are no longer available at journal, request copy from author

Open review (reviewer’s identity is disclosed to author)

Anonymous review (reviewer’s identity is NOT disclosed to author)

Author accuses actual reviewer of misconduct

Author accuses somebody who was not asked to review the article for your journal

Get as much documentary evidence as possible from author and other sources, e.g. publication*, abstract, report of meeting, copy of slides, grant application: do not contact reviewer until you have assessed this

Check for links between accused person and named reviewer, e.g. same department, personal relationships

Review evidence (or get suitably qualified person to do this) and decide whether author’s allegations are well-founded

Consider contacting actual reviewer(s) to comment on allegation and check they performed the review themselves/did not discuss the paper with others

Not well-founded

Appear well-founded

Discuss with author

Write to reviewer explaining concerns and requesting an explanation

Review evidence exonerated

Contact reviewer’s institution requesting an investigation

Review evidence found guilty

Discuss with author

Keep author informed of progress

*Note: If author produces published paper this may be handled as plagiarism (see plagiarism flow chart)

Note: The instruction to reviewers should state that submitted material must be treated in confidence and may not be used in any way until it has been published

Note: options depend on type of review system used

NB Do not forget people who refused to review

Consider removing reviewer from review database during investigation and inform reviewer of you action

Remove reviewer permanently from database and consider reporting case in journal

If no response, keep contacting institution every 3–6 months

*Note: if author produces published paper this may be handled as plagiarism (see plagiarism flow chart)

If satisfactory explanation provided, explain situation to author

If no reply/unsatisfactory explanation provided, explain situation to author

Discuss with author

Contact reviewer’s institution

No reply/un satisfactory explanation

If files are no longer available at journal, request copy from author

Note: the instruction to reviewers should state that submitted material must be treated in confidence and may not be used in any way until it has been published

Satisfactory explanation

No reply/unsatisfactory explanation

If satisfactory explanation provided, explain situation to author

If no reply/unsatisfactory explanation provided, explain situation to author

Discuss with author

Review evidence (or get suitably qualified person to do this) and decide whether author’s allegations are well-founded

Appear well-founded

Discuss with author

Write to reviewer explaining concerns and requesting an explanation

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