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Expert View on Managing Reviewers Webinar Q&A

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Peer Review Process

Is the person who handles the review process a dedicated person, or do they handle other matters of the journal as well?

Peter Gilroy: Yes, their role is to manage the review process and maintain the database.

Dianne Dixon: The dedicated person on this journal is the Managing Editor. I assist in managing the review process in conjunction with the Editor in Chief, Associate Editors and Guest Editors. I follow the progress of each paper from submission, revisions, final decision all the way to the publication online and in the print issue. Also, the journal has established guidelines and policies that should be followed, and I am there to guide the process when any issue comes up.

What are the roles of Assistant and Associate Editors in the review process?

Peter Gilroy: We do not have Assistant Editors, but rather Deputy Editors. Each of the four deputy editors has a particular role within the review process. The role of the International Editorial Board (who were previously known as the Associate Editors) is to advise the Executive Board on teacher education developments and research activity in their country, to identify authors and reviewers, and to represent and publicize the journal. They also contribute to the annual Executive Board meeting.

Dianne Dixon: We do not have Assistant Editors. We use Associate Editors and they are responsible for choosing reviewers for the paper, reading all the reviews, and making a recommendation to the Editor in Chief for a decision. They will also handle all the revisions for the paper until acceptance.

Does your office review special issues that have already been reviewed by the guest editor?

Peter Gilroy: No, the Guest Editor has *carte blanche*, although they are briefed in some detail about the journal's expectations. Their original proposal for a special issue has to include details of the papers that will be published, so there is an initial review of the proposed contents of the special issue (amongst other things) by the full Board.

Dianne Dixon: For special issues, the Guest Editor manages the review process with the assistance of the Managing Editor, but only makes a recommendation to the Editor in Chief based on the reviews. The decision letters are written by the Editor in Chief, but she rarely goes against the recommendation of the Guest Editor. If there are issues with paper, a decision is made collectively.

Do you sometimes ask reviewers to review a paper a second time, after it has been revised?

Dianne Dixon: Yes, we do. Our reviewers have the option of declining to review a second time, but I've found most of our reviewers accommodating. We have had as many as four revisions on a manuscript.

Gareth Meager: Yes, and the submission systems can easily facilitate this. In both ScholarOne and Editorial Manager it can be set so that the system automatically selects the same reviewers for a second round revision to make it easier for editors to assign the same person and keep the consistency. Templated emails can also be configured to specifically be aimed at such instances and say something along the lines of "We'd like you to review this revision of a paper you already provided an excellent review of". The systems also allow for all previous correspondence, and author responses to reviewer comments, to be accessible for a reviewer of a revised manuscript.

I am about to succeed an editor who has insisted on having three reviewers for each paper. It sounds as if most of you find two sufficient?

Dianne Dixon: We've found two reviewers to be sufficient, but if the two reviews oppose each other we always find a third. It does delay the review time but we want it to be a fair process.

Gareth Meager: Generally, two is the default setting in systems, but this can be altered. There is also a mechanism on the submission system for changing the number of required reviews on a paper by paper basis. So you can change it to have three reviewers should you need them, or two, or even just one for perhaps a paper that has been revised multiple times. Even if the journal's default setting is to have two, it can be changed.

To what extent (if any) do you edit reviewers' comments to authors?

Peter Gilroy: I have edited reviewers' comments, but not for sense, more for emotion. Sometimes reviewers forget that they're writing about somebody's work and that the author might be quite new to the process of writing, and I wouldn't want cruel remarks to be passed on. So I do occasionally filter out some of the emotive side that you get in some reviewers' comments, but not the sense.

Dianne Dixon: I look at all the decision letters and yes, there are times when reviewers can be a little bit harsh about someone's paper, so those kinds of comments are edited out.

Hervé Stolowy: I think it's a very important question. In principle, I never edit the comments, which doesn't mean that I agree with everything that is written, but I make a decision based on two pieces of advice. Concerning the wording, the reviewers receive clear instructions to be constructive, positive, and not to be nasty, not to be harsh, with authors.

What is your opinion about patient peer-review, where a non-scientist / non-specialist gives feedback to the researchers' work?

Peter Gilroy: I've not tried it so I'm not sure how it would work, because what you want is expert advice on the particular paper, academic advice. Although within the UK system of the research exercise, the REF, I can see why you might want to have some element of impact. I don't know whether Dianne does this, but I know in some medical journals, there is a section for the abstract where you identify the impact of your paper and I have thought of adding that to the journal that I edit.

Dianne Dixon: We actually don't have that currently in our journal.

Hervé Stolowy: We only use experts in the field, academics.

Do you have any reviewer top tips or guidelines that we can share with new reviewers on our journal?

Gareth Meager: Firstly, there's the idea of making reviewing collaborative and a conversation between a reviewer and the author of the paper, although in the case of double-blinding they don't know each other. As we've touched upon, it's about writing things that you would happily say to someone face-to-face, and being constructive. Making it a dialogue and an open expression of how the manuscript could be improved and what areas were good and not so good. Certainly, we try to express that a good review is a full and frank one rather than a short, snappy one.

Dianne Dixon: For my journal, I would encourage new reviewers to not be afraid to reach out to the Editor-in-Chief or the Associate Editors. These are the people that are going to be selecting you, so get to know them and have them get to know you, so they will start using you more.

Peter Gilroy: I encourage reviewers, particularly new, younger reviewers, to see the process as a discussion and to think of the paper as being written by themselves – what kind of review would they like if they had written the paper?

Hervé Stolowy: Ask for advice from senior colleagues in a department when it's your first review, because in your department, many colleagues will have very good experience of reviewing. Also, many PhD programs train the students to discuss a paper in public. This can be very helpful for learning how to review a paper; it's not so different to discuss a paper in public and to write a review. So I think it's important to train our PhD students to discuss papers in public.

Which model of peer review do you prefer: open peer review, single blind, double blind, or triple blind?

Peter Gilroy: I prefer double-blind review, which takes place after the editorial board have seen the papers themselves, so at that point it isn't blind.

Hervé Stolowy: The system we have is two reviewers, double-blind.

Dianne Dixon: On the managing perspective, my current journal is single-blind. I have worked on a double-blind journal and I find it's quite a challenge to make sure it's completely blinded. I think from the author's perspective, it's probably good because it will be less biased by the reviewers, but to manage that process, my preference is a single-blind.

What is your process for reviewing (adding and omitting) members of the Editorial Board?

Dianne Dixon: The Editorial Board serves a term of three years. We have Associate Editors and an Advisory Board that make up the Editorial Board. As the Managing Editor, I can see the types of papers submitted and I track the amount of manuscripts assigned to each Associate Editor. If a particular Associate Editor is receiving more than a manageable amount of papers every month, I have a discussion with the Editor in Chief to see if we need another person to cover a particular area. For the Advisory Board, I also review how many times they were invited, agreed, and submitted a review on a yearly basis.

As editors, do you peer review for other journals at all?

Peter Gilroy: Yes, I certainly peer review for other journals, and I've learnt from that experience what not do to as an editor.

Hervé Stolowy: Before the beginning of my term, I used to review a lot for many other journals. I still review a bit now, but because of the editorship it's very difficult to review too much for other journals due to the workload. From time to time, I still review, and I try to review on-time for the other journals.

How can editors benefit from projects such as Publons?

Gareth Meager: Publons is an initiative that's giving reviewers credit for the work they've done. Reviewing is a voluntary pursuit and 99.9% of the time reviewers are not paid. So Publons is an initiative where the reviewers can claim work and say "I reviewed for 'x' journal" and then they can build up a Publons profile. This gives them more of an online presence of the work that they've done, and in some ways it records the fact that "yes, I was a reviewer on this journal".

At Taylor & Francis, we're trialing it on a number of journals, so when reviewers are reviewing a paper, there's a question that says would they like to have this connected to their Publons account and they can say yes or no. Then they're taken to the Publons page, a specific Taylor & Francis area with Publons where they can then claim their review.

So how editors can benefit from projects such as Publons would be that it's just another incentive for reviewers, it's another opportunity to say to reviewers "if you give up your time to review for us, there's also an area now where you can begin to claim some recognition for the fact that you're doing this work for us".

Peer Review Timelines

How do journals, like *Nature*, that publish weekly issues manage to publish on time if finding reviewers takes more than a month?

Gareth Meager: It may be that titles, such as *Nature*, are providing additional incentives for reviewers. Big, fast moving titles could well offer financial incentives, but generally not. In the case of *Nature*, they provide extensive instructions to reviewers and are extremely clear and transparent on what they expect from those that agree to review. Timely turnarounds are presented and agreed upon from the outset, so a reviewer knows what is expected of them. I also suspect they draw upon a core group of reviewers that are very *au fait* with the review policy of the journal and know exactly to what they are agreeing. As Peter said in the Webinar, the personal touch is also crucial and I would fully expect titles such as *Nature* to address this.

How long do you typically give reviewers to review a paper?

Dianne Dixon: For my journal, we typically give 14 business days to review a paper.

Peter Gilroy: With us, it's slightly different because we have a preliminary review process that the editorial board take part in to check that a paper is appropriate. That is a 10-day process, maximum, usually much shorter than that, and then they go out to review and reviewers are given 14 working days.

Hervé Stolowy: For *European Accounting Review*, we have an initial screening process which I do, and this can lead in a few days to what we call 'desk rejections'. We have about a third of papers which are desk-rejected, and when all the other papers are sent out for review we give 45 days to review it.

How much of the review process should ideally happen before sending a manuscript to external reviewers?

Peter Gilroy: Working to the principle that reviewers should not be asked to waste their time identifying papers that are inappropriate (or so badly written that they cannot be rescued) then what Hervé termed the 'desk reject' consists of carrying out that check for the referees. So the pre-blind review process takes place for every paper. This is usually minimal, but can require major revision before being sent to external blind review.

Dianne Dixon: Manuscripts are reviewed by the Managing Editor for proper submission guidelines and plagiarism before it's sent to the Associate Editor. Associate Editors review the paper for suitability based on the scope of the journal. If it's not suitable, they reject at this stage or ask for reject and resubmit with comments to the author if they think the paper can be rewritten. If it’s suitable, it is sent out to reviewers.

Recruiting Reviewers

Do the ScholarOne and Editorial Manager systems work in similar ways for recruiting reviewers?

Gareth Meager: There's not a lot of difference between the two systems, as they are both fundamentally peer review management systems, and so can facilitate the typical journal workflow from paper submission to inviting reviewers to a decision being reached.

The sourcing, inviting, finding reviewers part of the process is, again, very similar in both systems. They both have an external reviewer search tool on ScholarOne it's called "Reviewer Locator", and on Editor Manager it's called "Reviewer Discovery". They work in very similar ways; they are externally-facing, they're going out to the internet to search for names and potential reviewers, and they're using metadata that's in the submitted manuscripts. It's an algorithm that's looking at terms, words in the abstract, keywords, words in the title, and then bringing back people who could potentially be good reviewers for that particular manuscript. The idea of these tools is to move away from the reviewer fatigue, where if you are continually using the same pool of reviewers and asking individuals to review more than five, six papers in a given period, you run the risk of burning them out. These tools are aimed at spreading that net a bit wider and finding people that maybe you wouldn't have considered before, and who are not in your journal's database already

For paper submissions that prove difficult to locate an appropriate reviewer from your database(s) or via ScholarOne or Editorial Manager, what is your process for locating reviewers?

Dianne Dixon: For my journal, I've set up a process where if the Associate Editor is having trouble finding two reviewers, we've asked the Associate Editor to act as a reviewer themselves. The advisory board members that we have are actually called upon to be reviewers on papers, so we have a built-in pool of people in case we can't find external reviewers.

Hervé Stolowy: When it gets very difficult to find two reviewers, so an editor has found one but not two, for many reasons I might accept the idea of having only one reviewer. I notice that when we really have problems finding reviewers, it is often related to the nature of the paper – maybe the paper is out of the scope of the journal, or maybe it is too specific. So there is a very high relationship between the scope of the paper and the difficulty to find the reviewers.

What other incentives apart from Publons and T&F vouchers have editors tried?

Dianne Dixon: We have only used the e-voucher that Taylor & Francis provides.

Peter Gilroy: I've never actually offered this, but I have noticed that one or two reviewers have asked me for references and I think that might be because they are a member, formally, of the International Review Panel, so they're actually putting that on their CV and then suggesting that I could be a referee for a promotion or post elsewhere.

Hervé Stolowy: So I feel very guilty because, for reviewers, we give nothing. However, I fully agree with Peter, the number of recommendations I am asked to write for my Associate Editors or reviewers has significantly increased since I began my term. And I find this reasonable and I like to do that, because it's the minimum I can do for the colleagues who work very hard for the journal.

How often do you write to the reviewers that the contributors have suggested themselves?

Peter Gilroy: Never.

Hervé Stolowy: Never.

Dianne Dixon: We do allow suggestions for reviewers, but the board decided to remove that.

What are your general criteria in selecting/recruiting reviewers?

Hervé Stolowy: They must have published on the topic and they must have worked on the topic, but they can be senior or early in their career; we have a lot of young reviewers. Because we have two reviewers, we try to have a mix of one experienced researcher and one younger researcher, but we want to have reviewers who already have some publications in the field and on the topic. When we get to know the reviewers, so after a few papers, we know how they work. We know some reviewers write well, and write very constructive long reviews, but some reviewers we use are less interesting, so usually we tend to forget the second category in favor of the first one.

Peter Gilroy: We would prefer reviewers to have written with us; it's not always possible, but it's ideal if we can get it.

Dianne Dixon: What usually happens is, someone who is a senior scientist in their lab might have students and they'll email us and say "can we have one of our students review this paper? I will work with them" and we're okay with that. That's a way for them to be introduced to reviewing and then they'll become one of our regular reviewers if they do well.

Managing Reviewers

Can you expand on the idea of an International Review Panel? How does it function, and how is it different from a list of reviewers an editor keeps?

Peter Gilroy: A list of reviewers is just that, a list that you tap into. The panel know who each other are and it's more like a community, but crucially, it gives them some sort of status other than simply being a reviewer. After all, a reviewer is central to the work that we do as editors and we can't give them very much; there's the Taylor & Francis 30% off flyer, but other than that, there isn't much we can do. To give them some sort of status by making them a member of a panel and communicating with each other is quite useful, and I'd certainly welcome it as a reviewer myself.

How was the International Review Panel created and how do members communicate?

Peter Gilroy: 40+ years ago they were identified through the network of the founding editor. Now they are identified in the ways I described in the Webinar. They communicate by email with myself or one of the Executive Board.

Do you require a certain number of reviews a year from the International Review Panel members?

Peter Gilroy: No.

Are the International Review Panel members publically identified on the journal?

Peter Gilroy: Those who have submitted a review are identified and thanked in the first issue of each new volume of the journal.

Do you use both the International Review Panel and ad hoc reviewers?

Peter Gilroy: We prefer not to use ad hoc reviewers, but sometimes have to if a subject or an approach is not one covered by the International Review Panel (or if the appropriate person has already carried out their maximum of two reviews per year or is otherwise unavailable). We would first invite such a person and then offer them a paper with an explanation of why they have been asked to review that paper.

When you email reviewers asking them to update their keywords, what proportion of those people emailed actually do update their keywords?

Hervé Stolowy: The survey I ran was only for editorial board members and Associate Editors, so a group of about 100 people. I didn't run the survey for all reviewers because we have maybe 200 or 300 additional people who are reviewers. For the group of 100 people, I ran the survey once, a year and a half ago at the beginning of my term.

For those surveys with keywords, do you give a fixed set of key words that people check/tick or do they provide their own keywords?

Hervé Stolowy: I gave a long list of keywords (more than a hundred) plus the possibility for the editorial board to add their specific keywords in one box.