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)

- 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

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

- Not well-founded
  - Discuss with author/ request further evidence
  - Satisfactory explanation
  - Discuss with author

- Appear well-founded
  - Write to reviewer explaining concerns and requesting an explanation
  - No reply/ unsatisfactory explanation
  - Contact reviewer’s institution requesting an investigation
  - Reviewer exonerated
  - If no response, keep contacting institution every 3-6 months
  - Reviewer found guilty
  - Keep author informed of progress

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

- Check for links between accused person and named reviewer, e.g. same department, personal relationships
- Consider contacting actual reviewer(s) to comment on allegation and check they performed the review themselves/did not discuss the paper with others
- Explain situation to author (decide whether you wish to reveal actual reviewer(s) name(s); this is up to you, however if your journal uses anonymous review you must get the reviewer’s permission before disclosing their identity to the author)
- 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 files are no longer available at journal, request copy from author

- NB Do not forget people who refused to review

*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

- NB: Do not forget people who refused to review

*Note: options depend on type of review system used

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

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