Peer Review Policy

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Art. 1 Scope and principles

This policy describes how VIGIL assesses manuscripts: who reviews them, against which criteria, within what timeframes, how submissions by editors are handled, and how to become a reviewer.

It is based on the Code of Conduct and the Ethical Guidelines for Peer Reviewers of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), the Principles of Transparency and Best Practice in Scholarly Publishing (COPE, DOAJ, OASPA, WAME), the Recommendations of the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE) and the reporting guidelines of the EQUATOR Network.

Editorial decisions are based on scholarly merit alone. They do not depend on the authors' nationality, origin, gender, beliefs or institutional affiliation, nor on ANIQRC membership. Publication is free of charge and no payment can affect the outcome.

PART A

Review procedure

Art. 2 Content subject to peer review

All research and review articles, together with their supplementary material, undergo external peer review.

Editorials, commentaries and letters are assessed by the editors rather than by external reviewers; the published article is labelled "Editorial review". Any exception to the standard procedure is stated in the article.

Art. 3 Roles

- **Editorial Office Manager:** receives manuscripts, performs the technical check and handles communication with authors and reviewers.
- **Editor-in-Chief:** assigns each manuscript to a handling editor, takes the final decision and ensures this policy is applied.
- **Handling editor:** usually the Associate Editor for the subject area; selects reviewers, weighs their reports and recommends a decision.
- **Methodological Editor:** examines study design and data analysis when the handling editor requests it.
- **Language Editor:** carries out language editing after acceptance without altering the scientific content.
- **Reviewers:** independent experts who are not part of the editorial team.

Art. 4 Stages of assessment

1. Technical check: completeness of files, anonymisation of the text, declarations (conflicts of interest, funding, ethics approval, use of artificial intelligence), reporting checklist and text-overlap screening.
2. Editorial screening: fit with the journal's scope, originality and basic soundness. The manuscript may be rejected without external review, with written reasons.
3. Double-blind external review by at least two reviewers.
4. Decision, sent to the authors with the reviewers' reports.
5. Revision by the authors with a point-by-point response; the revised version may return to the same reviewers.
6. Acceptance, language editing, proofs approved by the authors, and publication.

Passing editorial screening does not guarantee publication.

Art. 5 Selection of reviewers

The handling editor selects reviewers for their expertise in the topic and method, checking for conflicts of interest (same institution, recent collaboration, personal relationships). No automated or artificial-intelligence systems are used to identify or invite reviewers.

Authors may suggest up to three reviewers and request, with reasons, the exclusion of no more than two people. The editor is not bound by these suggestions and never relies solely on reviewers proposed by the authors.

Art. 6 Anonymity and confidentiality

Review is double-blind: authors submit a text free of names, affiliations and identifying references; reviewers are not told who the authors are, and authors are not told who the reviewers are.

Reports remain anonymous and are not published with the article.

The manuscript is confidential. Reviewers do not share it, do not contact the authors, do not use its data or ideas, and delete all copies once the review is complete. They may involve a colleague, for example an early-career reviewer in training, only with the editor's prior consent; the editor is told the colleague's name, and the colleague is bound by the same obligations.

Art. 7 Decisions

- Accept.
- Minor revision.
- Major revision.
- Reject.

When reports disagree, the editor may seek a third opinion. Every decision is reasoned and accompanied by the reviewers' reports, with any offensive or irrelevant remarks removed.

Art. 8 Timeframes

- **Technical check:** within 15 days of submission.
- **Editorial screening:** within 30 days of submission.
- **Reviewer report:** within 21 days of accepting the invitation.
- **First decision:** within 10 weeks of submission.
- **Revised version:** within 30 days of the decision.

Timeframes are indicative, not guaranteed. If there is a delay, the Editorial Office informs the authors, who may withdraw the manuscript. Every published article shows its received, accepted and published dates.

Art. 9 Artificial intelligence in review

Reviewers do not upload the manuscript, or any part of it, to artificial intelligence tools, nor use them to generate or rewrite their report. Only a spell checker on their own text, containing no manuscript content, is allowed. The same applies to editors.

Art. 10 Appeals

Authors may appeal a decision within 30 days by writing to the Editorial Office with their reasons and a point-by-point response to the comments. The appeal is assessed by an editor who was not involved in the decision and who may seek a further opinion. The outcome is final.

Art. 11 Editor training and contact

Everyone who takes editorial decisions is familiar with this policy and with COPE guidance on reviewer selection, conflicts of interest and handling reports. Authors and reviewers may contact the Editorial Office with questions at any stage: giuseppe.fumai@aniqrc.it.

PART B

Assessment criteria

Art. 12 Criteria

- **Relevance:** the work falls within the journal's scope (patient safety, quality, clinical risk, clinical governance and the organisation of nursing care).
- **Originality:** it adds to what has already been published and shows this through an adequate literature search.
- **Methodological rigour:** a clear research question, a design suited to it, a described sample and instruments, and correct, reproducible analyses.
- **Validity of conclusions:** conclusions follow from the results and the study's limitations are discussed.
- **Ethics and transparency:** ethics approval and consent where required, trial registration, and statements on data, funding, conflicts of interest and use of artificial intelligence.
- **Relevance to practice:** the work shows what changes for the organisation of care, processes or roles.
- **Clarity:** text, tables and figures are understandable and consistent.

Art. 13 Reporting guidelines

Authors follow the EQUATOR Network guideline that fits their study design and attach the completed checklist. The main ones: CONSORT (randomised trials), STROBE (observational studies), PRISMA 2020 and PRISMA-ScR (systematic and scoping reviews), COREQ and SRQR (qualitative research), SQUIRE 2.0 (quality improvement), STARD (diagnostic accuracy), CHEERS 2022 (economic evaluations). Reviewers and editors check adherence.

Art. 14 The reviewer's report

- A brief summary of the work.
- Major comments, which determine acceptance.
- Minor comments.
- Confidential comments to the editor, not passed to the authors.
- **Recommendation:** accept, minor revision, major revision or reject.

The report is objective, reasoned and respectful. The recommendation informs the editor's decision but does not bind it.

Art. 15 What does not affect the decision

The decision is not affected by the direction of the results (negative or non-significant results are publishable), the authors' nationality, gender or institution, their ANIQRC membership, or the reputation of the research group.

Reviewers and editors do not ask authors to cite VIGIL articles or their own work unless the citation is scientifically justified.

PART C

Submissions by editors

Art. 16 Scope

This part applies to manuscripts authored by a member of the editorial board (from the Executive Editor to the Editorial Office) or of the ANIQRC Board of Directors. The same rules apply to manuscripts by colleagues from the editor's institution or close collaborators, in which case the editor withdraws.

Art. 17 Handling

- The editor-author takes no part in any stage: assignment, reviewer selection, discussion or decision. They have no access to confidential reports or to the reviewers' identities.
- The manuscript is assigned to an editor with no conflict of interest. If the author is an Editor-in-Chief, the decision rests with the other Editor-in-Chief or the Deputy Editor; if no editor is free of conflict, with a guest editor from outside the journal.
- The same criteria and procedure apply as for any other manuscript, with at least two reviewers from outside the editorial team.
- The journal monitors the share of articles authored by members of the editorial team.

Art. 18 Transparency

The published article carries a note: "One or more authors are members of the VIGIL editorial team. The manuscript was handled by an independent editor; the authors took no part in its review or in the decision."

PART D

Becoming a reviewer

Art. 19 Requirements

- A degree in health care or a related discipline (for example statistics, health management, law, clinical engineering).
- Documented professional or research experience in at least one of the journal's areas; a master's degree or doctorate and peer-reviewed publications are preferred.
- An up-to-date ORCID iD.
- Acceptance of this policy and of the COPE Ethical Guidelines for Peer Reviewers.

Art. 20 Application

Send an e-mail to journal@aniqrc.it with the subject "VIGIL reviewer application", attaching: a short CV, ORCID iD, up to five keywords describing your expertise, working languages and any interests to declare.

The Editorial Office assesses the application and communicates the outcome. Data are processed solely for editorial purposes, in line with ANIQRC's privacy notice.

Art. 21 Training and mentoring

Every new reviewer receives this policy and the report template. Those starting out may carry out their first reviews alongside an experienced reviewer, with the consent of the editor, who knows both names.

Art. 22 Reviewer commitments

- Respond to invitations within 5 days and accept only with the necessary expertise and time.
- Declare any conflict of interest and, if there is one, decline.
- Keep the manuscript confidential and do not contact the authors.
- Tell the editor if you recognise the authors.
- Do not use artificial intelligence tools on the manuscript or to write the report.
- Write an objective, constructive report without personal remarks.
- Report suspected plagiarism, unreliable data or ethical problems confidentially to the editor.
- Submit the report within the agreed time or give early notice.

Art. 23 Recognition

On request, the Editorial Office issues a certificate of reviewing. Reviewers may record the activity on their professional profiles (for example ORCID or Web of Science) without stating the manuscript's title or authors. Reviewers' names are not published.

Art. 24 Removal from the list

Repeated delays without notice or breaches of this policy lead to removal from the list of reviewers.

Final provisions

Art. 25 Final provisions

The editorial team reviews this policy at least once a year and whenever the reference guidelines change. Each version carries a number and a date. The version published on the journal's website is authoritative; earlier versions are available on request.

VIGIL Editorial Office · giuseppe.fumai@aniqrc.it · aniqrc.it/vigiljournal.html