



## **Procedure for Submitting and Handling Complaints, Appeals, and Reports of Misconduct**

### **1. Purpose and scope**

This Procedure establishes a structured and fair process for receiving, reviewing, and resolving complaints, appeals, and reports of misconduct related to SCIR activities. It covers SCIR journals and journal subdomains, editorial and peer review workflows, platform administration, research and analytical projects, educational services, and public communications. The Procedure applies to complaints about quality of service, transparency, conflicts of interest, fact-checking, corrections, privacy, and alleged breaches of SCIR policies. It also applies to appeals of editorial decisions where a defined ground exists, and to allegations of serious integrity breaches, including plagiarism, data fabrication, falsification, manipulated images, undisclosed competing interests, and unethical handling of human-derived data. The Procedure is designed to ensure due process, impartiality, confidentiality, and consistent documentation. SCIR treats this Procedure as an operational control that protects both individuals and the integrity of SCIR outputs. The Procedure is aligned with recognised publication ethics guidance for handling complaints and for responding to concerns raised about published work.

### **2. Definitions**

A complaint is any concern about SCIR conduct, processes, or service quality that requires review and response. An appeal is a request to reconsider a decision, typically an editorial decision, based on defined grounds such as procedural error or material misunderstanding. A report of misconduct is an allegation of serious breach of research integrity or ethical obligations, including actions that can distort the scholarly record or harm individuals. A whistleblowing report is a report made in good faith by a person who believes wrongdoing has occurred and who may require protection against retaliation. Anonymous reports are accepted when they contain sufficient detail to assess credibility and to pursue verifiable evidence. SCIR differentiates between general dissatisfaction and actionable complaints, and it prioritises cases involving privacy risks, safety concerns, and potential harm. These definitions support consistent triage and proportionate handling across different SCIR services.



### **3. Principles**

SCIR applies fairness and impartiality by ensuring that relevant parties can respond to allegations and that decisions are based on documented evidence. SCIR applies confidentiality by limiting access to case information to authorised persons and by protecting identities where lawful and appropriate. SCIR prohibits retaliation against individuals who submit complaints or reports in good faith, and SCIR treats intimidation or harassment connected to a case as a separate breach of conduct. SCIR manages conflicts of interest by requiring disclosure and recusal of any person whose impartiality could reasonably be questioned. SCIR applies proportionality, meaning that corrective actions correspond to severity, impact, and evidence quality. SCIR aims to ensure transparency of outcomes when correction of the record is necessary, while avoiding disclosure of sensitive or personal data. SCIR keeps a clear internal audit trail of steps taken, evidence reviewed, and decisions made, because traceability is essential for learning and accountability. These principles provide a stable foundation for handling both routine complaints and complex integrity investigations.

### **4. Submission routes and required information**

SCIR accepts complaints, appeals, and misconduct reports through the official contact routes published on SCIR websites and journal subdomains, typically including a dedicated email contact and a web form where available. Submissions should include a clear description of the issue, relevant dates, identifiers of affected materials such as article titles, manuscript IDs, or platform pages, and any supporting evidence that can be shared lawfully. SCIR does not require excessive personal data to submit a complaint, and SCIR requests identity verification only when necessary to prevent misuse or to protect confidentiality. SCIR accepts reports submitted by third parties, including readers and partners, and it considers the credibility of evidence regardless of the complainant's role. Anonymous submissions are assessed on the basis of specificity and verifiability rather than identity. Where the submission includes personal data about third parties, SCIR may request minimisation or redaction to reduce privacy risks. This approach supports accessibility, while preserving security and due process.



## **5. Acknowledgement, triage, and expected timelines**

SCIR aims to acknowledge receipt promptly and to apply a triage step to determine urgency and category. Urgent cases include suspected disclosure of personal data, threats to safety, legal risk, or high-risk integrity concerns affecting published work. Standard cases include service complaints, minor metadata issues, or requests for clarification that do not involve elevated risk. After triage, SCIR assigns the case to an accountable function, such as the Responsible Editor for editorial matters, the Platform Administrator for technical matters, the Data Steward for privacy matters, or the Project Lead for project-related matters. If the complaint concerns a senior decision maker, an Editor-in-Chief, or another person with controlling influence, SCIR assigns the case to an independent reviewer or a governance function to reduce conflict risk. SCIR provides updates when reasonable, but SCIR may limit details where confidentiality or legal constraints apply. These steps are intended to ensure timely progress without compromising integrity of the process.

## **6. Conflicts of interest and recusal**

Any person involved in assessing a complaint, appeal, or misconduct report must declare relevant conflicts of interest. Conflicts may be financial, professional, institutional, or personal, and they include situations where prior collaboration or competitive relations could bias judgement. Where a conflict exists, the person must recuse themselves and SCIR appoints a replacement decision maker. The recusal and replacement are recorded in the case file to preserve accountability. If conflicts cannot be mitigated internally, SCIR may seek independent external advice, particularly for high-impact or technically complex cases. This section ensures that the process protects both complainants and respondents against biased handling and protects SCIR against reputational and procedural risks.

## **7. Investigation process**

SCIR follows a staged approach adapted to the case type and severity. First, SCIR assesses whether the complaint is actionable by evaluating specificity, relevance, and the availability of evidence. Second, SCIR requests a response from relevant parties and provides a reasonable timeframe for reply, taking into account language, time zones, and complexity. Third, SCIR verifies evidence using primary sources, editorial records, peer review logs, data provenance documentation, and platform

audit trails, depending on the matter. Fourth, SCIR issues a reasoned decision and identifies corrective actions where appropriate. Where published work may be affected, SCIR evaluates whether a correction, expression of concern, or retraction is needed and documents the rationale. SCIR may pause dissemination of content temporarily when there is credible risk of harm, privacy breach, or serious factual error. SCIR records all steps in an internal audit trail that supports later review and prevents repeat failures. These controls are designed to protect the scholarly record and ensure procedural fairness.

## **8. Appeals of editorial decisions**

SCIR considers appeals only on defined grounds and does not treat disagreement with a decision as sufficient reason for reconsideration. Grounds may include a material factual misunderstanding, evidence of bias or undisclosed conflict, a demonstrable procedural error, or significant new evidence that was not available at the time of the decision. Appeals are reviewed by a person or panel independent of the original decision, and the review outcome is documented. SCIR may request additional expert input where methodological complexity is high or where reputational impact is significant. SCIR aims to communicate appeal outcomes clearly and respectfully, while limiting disclosure of confidential reviewer information. This section protects editorial independence while ensuring accountability and a meaningful route for redress.

## **9. Outcomes and corrective actions**

Possible outcomes include no action with an explanation, clarification of policy or process, technical fixes, metadata corrections, or public corrections where accuracy or integrity requires it. For serious integrity breaches, SCIR may issue formal notices that correct the record, including expressions of concern, corrections, or retractions, with visibility and traceability. SCIR may also apply remedial measures such as training, process changes, reassignment of roles, or suspension of editorial or reviewer privileges where justified. Where a case reveals legal or privacy risks, SCIR may restrict access to content, remove sensitive elements, or implement disclosure controls, balancing transparency with harm minimisation. SCIR may refer matters to relevant institutions when appropriate and lawful, particularly where misconduct involves institutional responsibilities. SCIR documents actions taken and ensures



that corrective actions are consistent across SCIR platforms. This section emphasises proportionality, consistency, and the integrity of corrective communication.

## **10. Communication, record keeping, and data protection**

SCIR communicates with complainants and affected parties in a respectful manner and provides updates where reasonable. SCIR may limit details to protect confidentiality, personal data, legal privilege, or the integrity of ongoing investigations. SCIR maintains a case file for each matter, including the submission, evidence, communications, decisions, and actions, and access is restricted to authorised persons. Case files are retained for a defined period consistent with purpose limitation and storage limitation principles under applicable data protection law. SCIR may analyse aggregated and anonymised trends to improve processes, reduce recurring issues, and strengthen integrity controls. SCIR updates relevant policies when patterns indicate systemic risk, and SCIR aims to communicate changes publicly in a clear and consistent way. This approach ensures that the Procedure remains both protective and practically enforceable.

### **References:**

1. European Union. (2016). Regulation (EU) 2016/679 (General Data Protection Regulation). <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2016/679/oj/eng>
2. European Data Protection Board. (2020). Guidelines 05/2020 on consent under Regulation 2016/679. [https://www.edpb.europa.eu/our-work-tools/our-documents/guidelines/guidelines-052020-consent-under-regulation-2016679\\_en](https://www.edpb.europa.eu/our-work-tools/our-documents/guidelines/guidelines-052020-consent-under-regulation-2016679_en)