

Reviewer's report

Title: Core Competencies for Scientific Editors of Biomedical Journals: Consensus Statement

Version: 0 **Date:** 26 Apr 2017

Reviewer: Hilda Bastian

Reviewer's report:

Important work, but the manuscript has several reporting problems that need to be resolved, and I have some content concerns as well.

1. Project flow chart and final count of key core competencies

Up to the first box of the Delphi process, the flow chart corresponds to the text and the data provided. The additional steps after the consensus meeting are not included (further consultation and revision). The flowchart and text throughout refer to 14 final key core competencies. I count 15 in Table 2.

2. Lack of data on the competency statements

Throughout, readers are referred to Table 2 for the list of competency statements at each stage. For example, lines 301-303 report 1,566 potentially relevant statements producing 202 unique statements. However, Table 2 consists of the 15 final key core competencies and 63 accompanying elements. It does not correspond to the statements for which it stands as support on almost all occasions. At line 354 there is a reference to a Table 3, but there was no Table 3 in the PDF in the editorial management system. The data from 202 statements in each iteration are important for transparency and for anyone interested in considering issues for editors-in-chief and so on.

3. Stakeholders and editors

Line 277 refers to the group of experts in Table 1 as representing "the diversity of stakeholder groups related to scientific editing". However, the organizations are all publishers or groups representing editors. The closest to potentially representing non-editor/publisher stakeholders would be Cochrane and WHO, but it's not clear that those organizations provided non-editor/publisher input in addition to editor perspectives. No un-conflicted groups representing authors, research funders, or readers are listed. The statement should be changed to "represent scientific editing and publisher stakeholder groups".

There are concerns about the existence of a variety of implicit, and perhaps explicit, biases at journals, as there are throughout society. These include gender, race, editors' personal connections (including alma mater), institutional prestige, and language biases, including who is offered commissioned pieces. (I link to some of that literature here:

<http://blogs.plos.org/absolutely-maybe/2015/05/13/weighing-up-anonymity-and-openness-in->

publication-peer-review/.) Although there is a statement fairness to authors, peer reviewers, and readers in A(4), concerns about issues such as this don't flow through to the suggestions for monitoring and auditing the journal's performance in C(6.9), and neither does complaint management. Conflict of interest is not explicitly defined as including intellectual and other non-financial interest.

I believe the absence of an explicit engagement with a non-editor author/reader/peer reviewer rights perspective is visible in the final list of competencies. Consequently, as well as changing the stakeholder statement, I think this should be listed as a limitation of this process.

4. Brief definitions of editors

I think it would benefit by a short description of what is meant by editor. For example, the term managing editor is used, without definition for a non-editor audience.

5. Evaluation of the competencies and educational interventions, and accountability

In terms of further steps, adoption and education for these competencies is discussed. The final sentence appropriately includes the word "might" in relation to improvement, but a statement about evaluation from here is needed. In addition, the competencies mention accountability to other stakeholders, but it is not explicitly addressed. Extensions of the competencies for particular journals and particular roles is mentioned, but not for how issues related to accountability and other non-editor/publisher issues could be identified, addressed and potentially incorporated in future.

A minor point: CONSORT could be added to the list of abbreviations.

To note that I subsequently noticed there were 2 Table 2s: I had assumed that the flow chart was Figure 1, not a second Table 2. In addition, there are 14 core competencies: it's just the numbering in Table 2 that is wrong.

Many thanks for the important work!

Hilda Bastian

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Acceptable

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