



# AUSTRALIAN RESEARCH INTEGRITY COMMITTEE

## Annual Report 2023-24

**Emeritus Professor Michael Brooks FTSE FACS**

**ARIC Chair**

The Australian Research Integrity Committee (ARIC) was established jointly by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) and the Australian Research Council (ARC) in 2011. The information in this report details matters considered by ARIC for both agencies in the financial year 2023-24.

ARIC reviews the processes by which an institution has managed a potential breach of the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research, 2018 (the Code). ARIC is supported by Secretariats from each agency, who work with ARIC to conduct reviews efficiently and deliver robust outcomes. At the conclusion of an ARIC review, ARIC provides recommendations to the CEO of the relevant agency. The respective CEO responds to the concerned parties on the basis of ARIC's advice and any other relevant considerations, and provides recommendations for action where appropriate. Reviews can be resource intensive and time-consuming, and this important work provides valuable outcomes for the sector.

In instances where an institution's processes in managing and investigating a potential breach of the Code are determined not to have met the requirements of the Code or the associated Guide to Managing and Investigation Potential Breaches of the Code, 2018 (the Investigation Guide), ARIC's recommendations may include re-investigating a matter, providing additional information to relevant parties, or making adjustments to institutional processes for managing complaints and potential breaches under the Code in order to ensure procedural fairness in future matters. In this way, ARIC supports Australia's institutions to continuously learn and improve, contributing to public confidence in the integrity of Australia's research effort.

Australia enjoys a vibrant and high-quality research culture, and Australian researchers generally hold themselves to high standards of integrity. However, our research culture is not immune to challenges. Globally, the last decade has seen a significant and concerning increase in research paper retractions, publication of fake papers, and activity of predatory and hijacked journals. These trends remind us that there is no place for complacency in our national research system or amongst our research organisations and participants.

It is essential that we continue our efforts to build a resilient and outstanding culture of research integrity. This must include education and training, with greater awareness amongst researchers of their responsibilities under the Code and mentoring of colleagues; expeditious, fair and judicious handling of allegations of research misconduct; and a national governance system that holds researchers and institutions to the high standards required for the public's continued confidence in research. Through our international collaborations, Australia has the opportunity to be a world leader in research integrity, and we should continue to work to achieve such recognition.

### ARIC activity

The below table presents data on ARIC matters for financial year 2023-24 across both the ARC and NHMRC

| Agency | No. of new requests received | No. of requests accepted* | No. of requests rejected* | No. of reviews completed* | No. of matters active as at 30 June* |
|--------|------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| ARC    | 10                           | 4                         | 6                         | 5                         | 6                                    |
| NHMRC  | 3                            | 1                         | 2                         | 2                         | 3                                    |

\*These columns may incorporate numbers from previous financial years if the matters were not finalised in the previous financial year.

Requests for ARIC review may be rejected where they fall outside of ARIC's remit, which may include seeking review of the merits of a case rather than procedural matters; focusing on employment rather than research integrity issues; or relating to research not conducted at an administering institution of the ARC or NHMRC.

### Outreach

As part of ARIC's outreach activities, during 2023-24 the ARIC Chair undertook a workshop on the Code, and the role of ARIC, University of Adelaide, April 2024.

### ARIC evaluation

An independent evaluation of ARIC was completed in October 2023. The evaluation was conducted by KPMG, and focused on the effectiveness and performance of ARIC in meeting its purpose as outlined in the ARIC Framework.

As part of this evaluation, KPMG also undertook a desk-top review of the research integrity arrangements in other countries and provided a report of its review.

The evaluation found that ARIC is operating well in accordance with its Framework, with some suggested improvements to process. ARIC, along with the ARC and NHMRC, are in the process to deliver these improvements.

The ARIC evaluation reports, and a joint-agency response by NHMRC and the ARC can be found on both agencies' websites

- [Australian Research Integrity Committee | NHMRC](#)
- [Australian Research Integrity Committee | Australian Research Council](#)

## ARIC Membership

| Member  | Appointed    | Expiry of appointment |
|---|--------------|-----------------------|
| Emeritus Professor Michael Brooks (Chair from April 2024; member from August 2023)  | August 2023  | 31 July 2026          |
| Ms Patricia Kelly (former Chair)  | April 2020   | 31 March 2024         |
| Emeritus Professor Alan Lawson (Deputy Chair)                                       | May 2017     | 31 July 2026          |
| Professor Margaret Otlowski (Deputy Chair from April 2024)                          | May 2017     | 31 July 2026          |
| Mr Michael Chilcott   | May 2017     | 31 July 2026          |
| Emeritus Professor John Finlay-Jones  | April 2020   | 31 July 2026          |
| Ms Julie Hamblin (Deputy Chair until February 2023; member until 30 September 2023) | January 2011 | 30 September 2023     |
| Professor Gerald Holtman  | August 2023  | 31 July 2026          |
| Dr Jane Jacobs  | August 2023  | 31 July 2026          |
| Emeritus Professor Robyn Owens  | August 2023  | 31 July 2026          |
| Emeritus Professor Alan Pettigrew   | August 2023  | 31 July 2026          |
| Emeritus Professor Janice Reid  | May 2017     | 17 October 2024       |

## Key procedural concerns identified by ARIC

For the matters that were finalised in 2023-24, the most common procedural issues observed were:

- Failure to provide clear guidance on appropriate standards for authorship and authorship dispute resolution processes. The Code requires authorship of research outputs to be attributed to all those, and only those, who made a significant intellectual or scholarly contribution to the research. Authorship agreements, at the point of conceiving and starting on a research paper, are highly desirable.
- The time taken to manage matters. A lack of timeliness for institutional investigations can compromise procedural fairness.
- Failure to provide adequate explanation of the findings of an investigation and the reasons for those findings. ARIC has observed that institutions are sometimes reluctant to give parties a copy (or an extended summary) of the full investigation report even in cases where the party is directly affected by the outcome. However, doing this may give reassurance that the matter has been carefully and thoroughly investigated, and make it more likely that parties will accept the outcome.

- Not complying with the provisions of the Code, the Investigation Guide, and/or other relevant policies including institutional research integrity policies. Institutions in receipt of funding from the ARC and NHMRC are required to develop, apply, and make publicly accessible policies and procedures that align with the Code and Investigation Guide. Institutions are also required to provide ongoing training and education on responsible research practices.
- Not maintaining confidentiality in the management and investigation of potential breaches of the Code. Ensuring that all information related to an investigation is treated as confidential is an essential part of procedural fairness. Likewise, institutional processes may be jeopardised where complainants or respondents fail to maintain appropriate confidentiality.
- Failure to give parties that are directly affected by a matter an adequate opportunity to respond to allegations during the course of an investigation. Ideally, all parties would be informed in writing of relevant allegations and other matters as the investigation proceeds and given an opportunity to make submissions in relation to them. In many cases, it is appropriate to provide the draft investigation report to the parties for comment before the report is finalised.
- Management of conflicts of interest: these should focus not just on actual conflicts of interest but also on perceived conflicts. Investigation reports should document declared conflicts and how they are managed.