



Australian Research Integrity Committee

Annual Report to the Sector, 2024-25

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 each agency in the financial year 2024-25.

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 based on ARIC's advice, and any other relevant considerations, and provides recommendations for action where appropriate. While reviews require a substantial investment of time and resources, they play a crucial role in delivering 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 Investigating Potential Breaches of the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research, 2018* (the Investigation Guide), ARIC's recommendations may include re-investigating a matter, providing additional information to relevant parties, or making adjustments to institutional policies and processes for managing complaints and potential breaches under the Code in order to ensure procedural fairness in the future. 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. Adding to this, the advent of advanced artificial intelligence systems, and particularly large language models, pose both opportunities for researchers and potential threats to research integrity. 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.

Emeritus Professor Michael Brooks FTSE FACS

Chair, Australian Research Integrity Committee

ARIC Members

Member	Appointed	Expiry of appointment
Emeritus Professor Michael Brooks (Chair)	August 2023	31 July 2026
Professor Margaret Otlowski (Deputy Chair)	May 2017	31 July 2026
Emeritus Professor Alan Lawson (Deputy Chair)	May 2017	31 July 2026
Mr Michael Chilcott	May 2017	31 July 2026
Emeritus Professor John Finlay-Jones	April 2020	31 July 2026
Professor Gerald Holtmann	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 (member until October 2024)	May 2017	October 2024

The process for appointments and re-appointments commences in early 2026.

Activities

The table below presents data on ARIC matters for financial year 2024-25 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 of 30 June*
ARC	12	7	5	2 [†]	10
NHMRC	7	4	4	2	4

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

[†] So far, in the first half of financial year 2025-26, ARIC-ARC has completed 8 reviews.

[±] This figure includes requests for review resolved prior to ARIC accepting the review, such as withdrawn requests or matters addressed by the institution.

Key procedural concerns identified by ARIC

Almost all concerns encountered by ARIC arose from a failure to follow closely the Investigation Guide and/or the institution's own policies and procedures. The most common procedural issues observed in 2024-25 were:

- Undertaking a Preliminary Assessment that has the character of an investigation in mistakenly appearing to make definitive findings. The purpose of the Preliminary Assessment is to assess expeditiously whether the complaint, *if proven*, would constitute a breach of the Code. It is a subsequent investigation that determines whether, having regard to evidence and on the balance of probabilities, a respondent has breached the Code.
- Confusing the demarcated roles of Designated Officer, Assessment Officer and Responsible Executive Officer in the management of investigations.
- 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 have made a significant intellectual or scholarly contribution to the research. The Code (and its predecessors) clearly states that institutions must have "a mechanism ... for the resolution of disputes about authorship". Authorship agreements, at the point of conceiving and starting work on a research paper, are highly desirable.
- Lack of timeliness in managing the process: significant delays in carrying out institutional processes can compromise procedural fairness.
- Failure to provide adequate explanations 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 a party is directly affected by the outcome. Providing a Preliminary Assessment or Investigation Report (redacted where necessary) may give assurance that the matter has been carefully and thoroughly investigated and makes 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 eligible to receive funding from the ARC and/or NHMRC are required to develop, apply, and make publicly accessible policies and procedures that align with the Code and Investigation Guide. They are also required to cooperate with requests for information about the process undertaken to manage and/or investigate a potential breach of the Code, as may be reasonably required.
- Failure to give parties that are directly affected by a matter an adequate opportunity to respond to allegations during an investigation. Ideally, all parties would be informed in writing of relevant allegations and other matters as the investigation proceeds and be 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.
- Failure to manage conflicts of interest: there should be consideration of perceived conflicts in addition to actual conflicts of interest. Investigation reports should document declared conflicts and how they are managed.

Outreach activities

As the lead agencies overseeing ARIC, the ARC and NHMRC are committed to engaging with research integrity stakeholders to strengthen relationships and build a greater understanding of ARIC and the Code. We welcome opportunities for ARIC to participate in research integrity initiatives across the sector or present on ARIC's work.

During 2024-25 the ARIC Chair presented a series of workshops and presentations on the Code, the role of ARIC, and the future of research integrity governance.