

Summary of the objectives and principles of the Memorandum of Understanding between the OECD and scientific journals on the AOP Development Programme

The OECD has been exploring ways to improve the collaboration between (i) OECD and (ii) scientific societies and their affiliated journals on the AOP Development Programme. Collaboration with journals involved has been formalised with the development of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the OECD and scientific journals. Journals interested in further cooperation on the AOP Development Programme can contact the Secretariat (nathalie.delrue@oecd.org or magdalini.sachana@oecd.org).

The MOU has been elaborated by the OECD, involving the OECD Legal Service and the OECD Communication unit, and the editors of two scientific journals Environmental Toxicology and Chemistry (ET&C) and Environmental and Molecular Mutagenesis (EMM).

The MOU is not for public disclosure but the present document provides a summary of MOU terms.

Objective of the MOU

The MOU sets out the conditions for co-operation regarding the AOP Development Programme where Journals will participate in managing the scientific review of some AOPs of relevance to their field of expertise.

The objective of the cooperation is to:

- Increase the rate of AOP scientific reviews by distributing the burden of organising and managing those reviews across a broader range of organisations;
- Incentivise more AOP contributions by providing authors with the career recognition associated with a peer-reviewed publication; and
- Benefit participating journals by providing “review-like” articles with high citation potential.

The objective of the MOU is to make sure that the review of an AOP will be carried out in accordance with the OECD Guidance Document (GD) for the scientific review of AOPs (OECD, 2021) in terms of guidance principles and review content.

The GD for the scientific review of AOPs provides guidance on the OECD quality standards required for the scientific review of an AOP on the AOP-Wiki. It defines the core principles associated with AOP scientific review in order to enable consistent scientific reviews to be conducted, regardless of who is doing the review, thus facilitating OECD endorsement.

Following these guidance principles thus guarantees that an AOP has been reviewed in line with OECD standards. AOPs that have been scientifically reviewed and accepted by a Journal who has signed the MOU can be considered for OECD endorsement and subsequent publication in the OECD working papers Series on AOP ([Link](#)).

AOP Review principles, as described in the Guidance Document (OECD, 2021)

- The scientific review should be independent and conflicts of interest avoided
- The scientific review should be transparent:
 - Transparent selection of reviewers through diverse recruitment channels – e.g. making use of OECD expert groups with expertise in relevant fields, journals' internal reviewer databases.
 - Public disclosure on AOP-Wiki or e.AOP portal of the names of the reviewers and of the review manager (i.e., handling editor), the collective outcome of their individual declaration of interest analysis, reviewers' comments and the responses of the AOP authors to the reviewers' comments
- The collective scientific expertise of the Review panel should cover the full scope of the AOP (e.g. technical, biological, toxicological aspects)
- The scientific review should address a standard set of pre-defined charge questions (see paragraph 33 of the GD)

Review content:

An AOP snapshot generated before the start of the review is the document of reference that should be used for the review (versioned, date-stamped PDF document automatically generated by the AOP-KB).

The Journal may ask the AOP authors to develop a separate manuscript (i.e. Journal Format Article) using a format determined by the Journal for Journal publication. In that case, the journal review panel will be required to review both the Wiki content (in the form of a Pdf dated version of the AOP) and the Journal Format Article.

Acceptance of a Journal article without review of corresponding content in the AOP-Wiki is not sufficient to make an AOP eligible for consideration for endorsement by OECD Working Parties.

Publication:

- The Journal will publish the AOP reviewed through the Journal Format Article (see [example of an accepted AOP Journal article published by ET&C](#)).
- The OECD will publish the AOP as described in the AOP-Wiki at the end of the OECD endorsement process in the form of an OECD working paper in [the AOP Series](#).

Other elements

- Only AOPs developed in the AOP-Wiki are covered by the MOU. A journal engaging in the review of an AOP that is not included in the OECD AOP work plan may encourage the authors of the AOP to ask for inclusion of the AOP in the OECD work plan by submitting a simplified project proposal to the OECD, in order to benefit from OECD endorsement and publication if they so wish.
- Before the start of the scientific review, the Journal will ensure that the AOP under consideration is compliant with the AOP-Wiki development principles. This compliance check is conducted by coaches for AOPs in OECD workplan or by the journal editors after which a Compliance Check form will be filled in and made available in the AOP discussion pages.

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- The list of journals who co-operate with the OECD in the context of a MOU will be publicly available. In case the Compliance Check of an AOP has been conducted by the OECD and the OECD is aware that AOP authors are seeking scientific review, the OECD will direct the authors to this list of journals, to help them contact the most relevant journal based on the topic of the AOP.

References

OECD (2021). Series on Testing and Assessment No. 344: Guidance Document for the scientific review of Adverse Outcome Pathways. Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, Paris. Available at: [<https://www.oecd.org/chemicalsafety/testing/series-testing-assessment-publications-number.htm>]