

Application for membership of Peer Review Panel: Procedure and criteria

The International Ombudsman Institute (IOI) is a global organisation which seeks to promote and promulgate good practice and effectiveness on the part of Ombudsman Institutions. The IOI considers that Peer Review is an effective method of assessment for Ombudsman institutions to identify corporate strengths and areas for improvement.

These independent reviews are commissioned by an IOI member institution and undertaken by a Lead Reviewer (who is either an Ombudsman office holder or a recent office holder). They usually involve a short visit to the institution under review and lead to the subsequent publication of findings. The reviews offer an opportunity for independent officeholders to identify (following agreement of Terms of Reference); processes and outcomes used in individual cases, strategic decision-making and governance that work well, and assisting IOI institutions to understand where further improvements in these arrangements can be made.

The purpose of the creation of a validated Peer Review panel is to ensure that only those with appropriate expertise, experience, and independence form part of a Peer Review panellist list. Applications will be reviewed by Dr Tom Frawley, former Northern Ireland Ombudsman and former Vice-President of IOI, who will make recommendations to the IOI European Board on their validation and inclusion on panel membership for Lead Peer Reviewers and Review Team member(s).

The role of the Lead Reviewer is to have overall responsibility for the delivery of the Peer Review supported by Review Team members with various competences and expertise. The Lead Reviewer, having been selected from the panel list by the Ombudsman organisation commissioning a Peer Review, will work with the commissioning organisation to agree a Review Team best suited in terms of their expertise and demonstrable independence to provide advice on the challenges and issues facing the organization being reviewed.

Applications from Interested Officeholders

The European Board of the IOI have agreed on a transparent procedure for the accreditation of Peer Reviewers:

Part A - Procedure

1. To become an IOI Lead Reviewer, an Ombudsman officeholder or former officeholder needs to make a formal application including a two-page CV and a one-page letter of application to Dr Tom Frawley at ioi@volksanwaltschaft.gv.at The application procedure is a three-stage process:

Step 1: Letter of Application - Once an applicant has decided that they would like to become an IOI Peer Reviewer, they need to write a formal letter of application with supporting CV and related documentation¹ addressed to Dr Frawley, setting out their experience and expertise and how it relates to the criteria set out at Part B below.

Step 2: External Assessment of Application - Once the application letter and the supporting documents have been received, they are considered by Dr Frawley and referred to the European Board for discussion either at the next meeting or by remote meeting and exchange. The Board also has the opportunity to invite Dr Frawley to join a Board meeting in person to discuss applications where appropriate. The application is reviewed by Dr Frawley, who decides, on the basis of available evidence whether or not to recommend that the applicant be accepted or rejected by the European Board, or whether to ask for further supporting evidence. While the Board will respect the advice of Dr Frawley, ultimately the decision is that of the European Board of the IOI.

If Dr Frawley requires additional information, he has the authority of the European Board to request that information and unless it is provided within two weeks from the request (and without good cause), the application will not proceed. For the avoidance of doubt, Dr Frawley's recommendation remains confidential.

Step 3: Decision within one month of the application: If none of the European Board members has an evidence-based opinion against inclusion of an applicant on the Peer Reviewer list, the recommendation of Dr Frawley is accepted and the European Board sends a letter to the applicant, confirming appointment as a new Panel member.

If a European Board member has an evidence-based opinion to reject an applicant's inclusion as a Peer Reviewer, then the European Board must review again the application in the light of the new information. Again, a final decision is made by the Board.

Unsuccessful applicants will be provided with written feedback and are free to apply again not less than a year later. For the avoidance of doubt, there is no right of appeal from a decision of the European Board of the IOI concerning membership of the Peer Reviewer panel.

Part B - Criteria for Lead Reviewer and Review Team member

2. The following criteria must be evidenced to Dr Frawley in order for him to assess the application. For Lead Reviewer:
 - Be an Officeholder or recent former Officeholder of an Ombudsman or Independent institution responsible for dealing with the external

¹ Related Documentation includes proof of IOI membership, any educational attainments and two IOI member referees for validation

- monitoring of state authorities' actions or decisions or the provision of public services for at least three years;
- An Independent institution is defined as not normally positioned under the hierarchy of a Minister and not an internal inspectorate body;
 - In their role, the applicant assesses and investigates cases related to violation of human rights and/or maladministration or application of a code of ethics.

For a Review Team member :

- Has professional Ombudsman experience at a senior level, by way of a legal, governance, accountability, regulatory or investigative nature for a period of at least three years.
- Is an academic specialising in Ombudsman practice with a proven publication record in the field.

3. This Guidance should be read in conjunction with:

Guide to Peer Reviews, IOI Best Practice Paper, Issue 4, April 2020

[BPP_Issue 4 Peer review guidance May 2020 \(1\).pdf](#)

From Manchester to Athens: next steps Annex D, Additional Notes on Peer Reviews (IOI, March 2021).

[UK_PHSO_Manchester Memorandum Athens Paper May 2022 \(1\).pdf](#)

Recent Ombudsman peer reviews include:

Peer Review of the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman

https://www.ombudsman.org.uk/sites/default/files/Value_for_Money_report_final.pdf

Peer Review of the Síndic de Greuges de Catalunya

https://www.sindic.cat/site/unitFiles/7457/Peer%20review_SGC_abril_2020.pdf

At the Manchester Memorandum seminar in the UK in November 2021, colleagues from the Office of Ombudsman in New Zealand presented a paper on their development of a self-assessment tool to support Ombudsman services in the Australasian and Pacific Region of the IOI, by measuring them against best international practice including the Venice Principles. This tool could be used as a preliminary process in advance of Peer Review or (for smaller schemes) a substitute to Peer Review.

Ombudsman New Zealand Self-Assessment Tool

<https://az659834.vo.msecnd.net/eventsairwesteuprod/production-dellardavies-public/5d350216e3294a5e9f5b6cc49a5d193b>

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