2 November 2016

Margaret Telford
Secretary
Institute of Professional Editors
secretary@iped-editors.org

cc Michael Wyatt, NSW branch councillor
keyword@ozemail.com.au

Dear Margaret,

Guidelines for editing research theses

I am writing to provide comments on the 'Guidelines for editing research theses' (the Guidelines), as available on the IPEd website at October 2016.

These comments are based on my experience as an academic, researcher and an editor. I have completed a PhD in a large research program, worked as an academic and researcher, published research, supervised Honours, Masters and PhD research students and undertaken supervisor training. As a freelance editor, I focus on research-related editing including theses, journal articles and research reports.

These comments have also been prompted by the opportunity earlier in the year to comment on the development of the IPEd Code of Ethics.

The attached comments provide general comments on the Guidelines including lack of benefit to editors and comments on specific issues. While the specific issues include suggestions for change to the current Guidelines, I believe that the Guidelines should be withdrawn and rewritten to better benefit editors.

A revision of the Guidelines is an opportunity to promote the value and contribution of editors to the academic community, and provide realistic information on how editing works and what it costs, which would benefit all editors.

In IPEd's national survey of editors 2014, 32% of respondents selected 'academic' as their specialist or subject area, more than any other subject area, indicating the Guidelines are likely to be relevant to many members.

Please let me know IPEd's process for considering and responding to my comments.

Yours sincerely,

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Comments on 'Guidelines for editing research theses'

These comments are based on the 'Guidelines for editing research theses' (the Guidelines) on the IPEd website at October 2016.

General comments

While the Guidelines have been authored by IPEd and are published on the IPEd website, the primary benefit appears to be to universities to help them ensure that students submit their own work, rather than to editors. However, academic integrity is not an issue for a thesis produced over at least three years, with regular contact between students and supervisors, and supervisor review of student work at each stage such as conceptual framework, research design, data collection and analysis. This is very different from university coursework assignments where universities are concerned about students paying for complete assignments to be written for them, as highlighted by recent investigative research by Fairfax Media in Sydney.

The Guidelines place undue emphasis on editors being responsible for the role of universities in ensuring students' own work, with limited, if any, benefit to editors. The Guidelines do not appear to provide benefit to editors and limit the professional services editors can provide.

The professional body for editors agreed to the Guidelines, but without compensating benefits from universities. Editors do not benefit from fair rates or guidance on professional costs for editing theses from universities, or timely payment of editing invoices by universities. For instance, Macquarie University offers a maximum student grant which may be less than 50% of the cost of a very long thesis. Universities often take at least 30 days to pay an invoice. Universities that offer grants for editing should author and promote their own guidelines to students to specify the conditions. It is not clear that universities are publicising the Guidelines to supervisors or students, and it is left to editors to refer to and explain the Guidelines.

The Guidelines do not recognise that completing a research program is intended to be a learning process. Many people, both inside and outside universities, in addition to the principal and associate supervisors, contribute to a research student's learning and development and are acknowledged in the Acknowledgements. As professionals, editors should be part of the learning process and able to provide training and advice on research-related writing and communication including structure.

There are many areas of editing where integrity and public interest are important that do not have similar guidelines that limit the professional services editors can provide. For instance, there are no IPEd guidelines for editing student coursework assignments which also lead to academic qualifications and no IPEd guidelines for editors working on annual reports, which are a regulatory requirement with implications for company share prices.

The Guidelines do not recognise that editors can be highly skilled professionals with a range of communication expertise to benefit the academic community. The Guidelines reinforce that editors are only copyeditors, fixing spelling and grammar only.

Suggestions
• Withdraw the Guidelines.
• Consider whether Guidelines authored by IPEd are needed or not.
• If Guidelines are needed, rewrite the Guidelines to provide greater benefit to editors. The process could include initiating new discussions with universities on editing and the valuable role of editors, checking how widely available the Guidelines are in universities, asking supervisors and editors about knowledge of and usefulness of the Guidelines, or suggesting universities author their own guidelines.

Issue 1: Format of the Guidelines

The Guidelines are in four sections with repetition between sections for editors, students and supervisors. There is no one Guidelines document that is easily referenced with an author and date. The author is unclear, although it is assumed to be IPEd as the Guidelines are on the IPEd website. Or is the Australian Council of Graduate Research also an author?

Suggestion
- Format the Guidelines as one document, preferably as a pdf.
- Include an author and date for the Guidelines, so they can be easily referenced.
- Rename to indicate the primary audience for the Guidelines, which should be students rather than editors.
- Use lists of bullet points to clearly convey information specific to students, supervisors and editors and reduce repetition.

Issue 2: Who is a 'professional editor'?

The opening paragraph of the Guidelines states the Guidelines are for professional editors but it is not clear who that is: a member of IPEd (professional and/or associate?) or a member of any editing society? Or is a professional editor anyone who charges money for editing? Without publicly available information on who is a member of IPEd, anyone could be a professional editor.

Suggestion
- Include a definition of a professional editor.

Issue 3: Supervisor permission

The Background section of the Guidelines states that 'students should obtain permission from their principal supervisor and provide evidence of that permission to the editor'. The For editors section says 'It is recommended that students provide you with evidence of that permission'.

It is not clear how an editor is supposed to know who is a student's principal supervisor and who is appropriate to give permission. Not all students provide details of their supervisor or even their institution when contacting an editor, with some using gmail addresses. Editors can 'google' a student name and search university websites, but not all have information on supervisors, or up-to-date information. The Guidelines place undue burden on editors to be aware of supervisor permission.

Suggestion
- Change wording on supervisor permission.

Issue 4: Returning the edited file as a pdf file

The Editing and proofreading section, and later sections, states 'it is preferable that text marked up onscreen is returned to the student as a pdf file'.

It is highly unrealistic and impractical to suggest that a thesis-length Word file of hundreds of pages that has been edited in track changes should be returned to a student as a pdf file. This requires the student to identify and replicate every single keystroke made by the editor, and is likely to create more errors and lead to poor overall quality. Editors often make formatting and consistency changes efficiently that are not easily visible in a pdf file such as replacing double spaces with single spaces, changing headings to title case or sentence case, or applying or modifying Styles.

Suggestion
- Delete text: 'For example, it is preferable that text marked up onscreen is returned to the student as a pdf file'.

Issue 5: Keeping on file all marked-up versions of the work

The Guidelines state 'the editors should 'keep on file all marked-up versions of the work' and the later For Editors: Retaining copies of your work section states that 'You should keep a copy of all versions of the marked-up thesis, whether hard copy of electronic'. It is not clear how long material should be kept for. Who has room to keep hard copies of multiple theses? How long should electronic files be kept for? Editors may choose to keep material as part of good business practice, but it should not be a requirement. Editors do not necessarily know when a thesis has been submitted or its progress through the examination and revision process.

Suggestion
- Delete text on keeping all marked up versions or add detail on how long it is good practice to keep material for, possibly a short time such as 3 months after final payment.
- Be clear whether keeping material is for the benefit of students, editors or universities.

Issue 6: Paying your editor

The Guidelines include a short list of only three reasons that may affect the cost of editing including 'quality of the work submitted'. The Guidelines would be more useful for editors if they provided more much more detail to students about what affects the time and cost of editing, and what is involved in the process of editing.

Suggestion
- Add more detail on how and why the cost of editing might vary including amount of non-text material such as tables, figures, diagrams and equations, use (or not) of features such as Styles in Word for formatting and generating a table of contents, use (or not) of reference management software, use (or not) of footnotes, and use of Word, LaTeX or other software.

Issue 7: Acknowledgement of the editor's contribution

The Guidelines state that 'the name of the editor and a brief description of the services rendered' should be included. Editors may not wish their name to be included if they are not aware of how their suggestions and changes have been received, or if the student has to replicate every keystroke accurately from a pdf file. This text is included in the For editors section, but as editors do not submit the thesis, and may not even see a draft Acknowledgements section of the thesis, editors may not be aware of how they have or have not been acknowledged.

Suggestion
- Include text to suggest students ask editors if they want to be named or not. The acknowledgements could still acknowledge a professional editor (however defined) provided services.
- Include author and date of the Guidelines in the suggested acknowledgement text, to be consistent with good referencing practice.

Issue 8: Use of 'legitimately'

The For editors section refers to 'information on the scope and limit of editing services you can legitimately provide'. The basis for the use of 'legitimately' is not clear and the word should be deleted. See Issue 10 for comments on services which editors can and should be able to provide.

Suggestion
- Delete the word 'legitimately'.

Issue 9: Engaging an editor in advance

The For students section of the Guidelines states 'You should engage an editor well in advance of the deadline for submission', and the For supervisors section says 'If your student decides to engage a professional editor, you should encourage them to do so as early as possible during the preparation of their thesis'. But it is very hard for editors to provide an accurate quote without an estimate of total word length, or seeing the quality of the writing and the components of the work. Students may not meet deadlines for providing material to be edited if the times are too far ahead.

It is not clear what engage means here. Students often make inquiries and editors often provide quotes, but this does not constitute 'engaging' an editor. Should the student pay a deposit in advance to 'engage' an editor, which is non-returnable if the student changes their mind or misses the deadline? It would be of more benefit to editors to provide more information to students on what engaging an editor means.

Suggestion
- Add text on what an editor needs from a student to provide a fair and accurate quote of cost and time.
- Add text that engaging an editor without knowing when the material will be provided or the student not meeting the timeframe means the editor may not be available due to other work commitments or the cost might increase.
- Add text on realistic timeframes for editing, explaining the process of editing and recognising professional editors have a range of work commitments.

Issue 10: Scope of editing services

The Editing and proofreading section says 'Professional editorial intervention should be restricted to copyediting and proofreading'. The For students section, and the later For supervisors section, states what services a professional editor may offer and what services that a professional editor will not provide.

The comments below support the earlier general comments on the Guidelines.

The Guidelines do not recognise that undertaking a research program to produce a thesis is a learning process and that editors, with their extensive professional experience and diverse backgrounds, can have a role in providing training or helping students learn how to communicate at the required academic standard including the structure of academic work.

Editors should be able to provide services in the *Australian standards for editing practice* other than copyediting and proofreading to students. Not all editors will want to do this, and not all students will ask for or require this, but it should not be prevented under the Guidelines. Can editors provide other communication-related services if the services are not called 'editing'?

Currently editors are usually engaged in the very final stages of a thesis, often days before the submission deadline. Many issues editors see could be identified and better addressed earlier if editors were involved earlier and their expertise in communication recognised.

Universities offer services to research students that are beyond copyediting and proofreading through variously named learning centres, so it is clear that supervisors are not the only people who can advise students on structure and substance. The Guidelines have advice on the role of supervisors, but not all supervisors are willing to or have the time or ability to provide comprehensive editorial advice to students.

Through the Guidelines, universities have restrained the business of editors without recognising the important and useful role editors can play in developing research-related writing and communication skills in students, benefiting both students and universities.

Suggestion
- Include text to recognise that editors can provide services other than copyediting and proofreading.

Issue 11: Other academic material

The Guidelines do not provide guidance on editing journal papers of research students where the published articles form chapters of a thesis in the increasingly popular format of 'thesis by publication', or editing coursework assignments for students.

Suggestion
- Consider whether the Guidelines would be better to focus on academic material where there are concerns about academic integrity, instead of on theses.