

Supporting responsible authorship

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Acknowledgement of Country

RMIT University acknowledges the people of the Woi wurrung and Boon wurrung language groups of the eastern Kulin Nation on whose unceded lands we conduct the business of the University.

RMIT University respectfully acknowledges their Ancestors and Elders, past and present.

RMIT also acknowledges the Traditional Custodians and their Ancestors of the lands and waters across Australia where we conduct our business.

Rupertswood and the Ashes



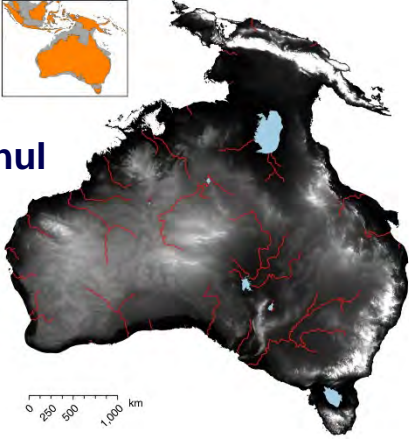
1882

Now

From: Landscapes, rules predict optimal superhighways for the first peopling of Sahul



Sahul



70k

60k

50k

40k

30k

20k

10k

1k



Wurundjeri Earth Rings



Outline

1. What do we mean when we say 'research integrity'?
2. There's no 'research misconduct' at RMIT!
3. What is 'responsible authorship'?
4. How do we support responsible authorship and hybrid ways of working?
5. Can we resolve authorship disputes to ensure research integrity?



**What do we mean when we say
'research integrity'**



What is research integrity?

The value and positive impact of research is dependent on trust

‘Research integrity is the coherent and consistent adherence to principles that underpin the trustworthiness of research.’

Adapted from *Honesty, Accountability and Trust: Fostering Research Integrity in Canada* published in 2010 by the Council of Canadian Academies

The principles apply to all research and are robust to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and new Generative Artificial Intelligence technologies



The Australian Code



Honesty



Rigour



Transparency



Fairness



Respect



Recognition



Accountability



Promotion

The eight principles underpin compulsory responsibilities for **institutions** and **researchers**



Striving for integrity

- Research is a human activity
- Translation of the principles of research integrity into research practice is complex
- Being a responsible researcher *all of the time* appears to be very difficult
- A research integrity spectrum



There's no 'research misconduct' at RMIT

- A breach is a failure to meet the principles and responsibilities of research integrity
- Various factors affect the seriousness of a breach
- Research integrity investigations into potential breaches
- A focus on the trustworthiness of research, not on the trustworthiness of a researcher (misconduct)
- Breaches occur on a research integrity spectrum

Research Integrity

Honesty
Rigour
Transparency
Fairness
Respect
Recognition
Accountability
Promotion

Breach of
research integrity

Serious breach of
research integrity

Not following ethics approval

Flawed designs and reporting

Mismanagement of data

Inadequate supervision

Irresponsible authorship

Various... 'Questionable research practices'

Plagiarism

Falsification

Fabrication

← Variation in translation of the principles of research integrity into research practice →

What is 'responsible authorship'?



What is 'responsible authorship'?

Responsible authorship is important because it a mechanism by which individuals and institutions get credit and assign accountability for research findings

The coherent and consistent adherence to principles that underpin trustworthy authorship

- Honest, rigorous, and fair attribution
- Accountability for contributions
- Fair, respectful, and transparent communication, planning and agreement



Honesty



Rigour



Transparency



Fairness



Respect



Recognition



Accountability



Promotion



Criteria of authorship

An author is an individual who:

- has made a significant intellectual or scholarly contribution to research and its output,
- is accountable for at least their contribution to the research described in the research output, and
- agrees to be listed as an author.



Intellectual or scholarly contributions

At least one of:

- conception and design of the project or output; or
- acquisition of research data where the acquisition has required significant intellectual judgement, planning, design, or input; or
- contribution of knowledge, where justified, including Indigenous knowledge; or
- analysis or interpretation of research data; or
- drafting significant parts of the research output or critically revising it so as to contribute to its interpretation.



Responsible acknowledgement

Researchers will uphold the principles of responsible research conduct in all aspects of their research. To this end, researchers will:

- Acknowledge those who have contributed to the research.
- Cite and acknowledge other relevant work appropriately and accurately.
- *Conventions and traditions*
- *Expectations are not well defined*
- *Increased structure would help research integrity*



**How do we support responsible
authorship and hybrid work?**



For RMIT campuses in Melbourne, one of the World's most 'locked-down' cities, remote and hybrid ways of responsible research are persisting



Services for responsible authorship

- Policy, procedure and increasing guidance
- Education and training
 - *Significantly adapted to remote and hybrid work*
 - *Reflective and Practical*
- Research Integrity Advisor Network
 - *Expert advice for researchers and the institution*
- Resources and systems
 - *Researcher Portal*
 - *Planning and Agreement Tool*



Evidence-based research management

Research integrity climate survey | 2018 | 280 responses

	Always	Very often	Often	Not very often	Never	I don't know
How often do you give authorship credit where it is not earned?	6%	5%	7%	27%	46%	9%



RMIT Research Integrity Review

Across 2020–21, we facilitated an expert review of research integrity at RMIT University by an external and international panel fully online, which allowed for review activities to be staged across months as compared to days.

- Terms of reference based on the *Australian Code* and our own aspirations
- A self-assessment (included the UKRIO tool)
- Interviews with researchers, integrity staff and advisors, leadership
- Document and system review
- Panel's report findings and recommendations, and our response
- *Research Integrity Review Management Action Plan* until 2025



Recommendations for authorship

To update or produce education modules that explain authorship practices, including the different authorship conventions across research disciplines, with clear articulation of what is acceptable under the *Australian Code*.

- Working group
- Terms of reference include policy, education, and promotion
- *Scenario and problem-based learning resources*
- *Guidance about disciplinarity and using Generative AI tools*
- *Discussion paper on the authorship of proposals for research funding*



Can we resolve authorship disputes to ensure research integrity?



The challenge of responsible authorship

In theory, authorship is straightforward. In practice, authorship can be complicated

- Lack of education and guidance, unspoken discipline conventions, conflicts of interest, academic hierarchies and competition, misunderstandings, personality traits, gender, ethnicity, race, and other human things



Most researchers say they fairly assign authorship



About half will say they've had a disagreement about authorship



Negative impacts to integrity, wellbeing and productivity



Authorship is a common issue managed by research integrity offices

Authorship dispute resolution

- Aims to ensure or restore research integrity – principles and responsibilities
- Informed by academic considerations and decisions made using fair and reasonable processes
- There should be an awareness of other concerns and factors external to research integrity and should refer these to appropriate processes
- Supports the wellbeing of parties in dispute



Dispute resolution procedure

1. Direct dialogue with advice
 2. Mediation by RIO with an RIA from the discipline
 3. Management as a potential breach
- A link to Corresponding Authors
 - Dissemination only after the process is complete
 - Authorship disputes of disseminated research outputs are managed as potential breaches




Dispute resolution pathways

 Support direct dialogue between authors with advice

 Facilitate mediation processes within the institution

 Investigate potential breaches and support corrective actions

 Provide 'Management Action Plans' to support researchers and their line managers

 Co-facilitate mediation-arbitration processes with other institutions, publishers



Characteristics

Parties in dispute – Researchers who are considered to be peers, Supervisors, HDR Candidates and students, Collaborators, ... Wide variation in knowledge, experience and expectations, wellbeing, ...

Research outputs – manuscripts, book chapters, journal articles – potential, in development or preparation, submitted, post-peer review, post-publication, ...

Potential breaches – honest and fair attribution or acknowledgement, obtaining agreement, opportunity to contribute, ...



Parties: HDR Candidate (PhD) and Primary Supervisor

Research Integrity: Honest and fair attribution, Obtaining agreement

Observations: A Supervisor prepared a manuscript and shared multiple drafts with their HDR Candidate, each time incorporating 'minimal' feedback. After providing a final version for review and approval, but not hearing back from the HDR Candidate after 10 days, the Supervisor submitted the manuscript for peer review without listing the HDR Candidate as a co-author.

Upon learning that the manuscript was submitted, the HDR Candidate and Supervisor engaged in direct dialogue (**Step 1**). After this failed, the RIO was notified by the HDR Candidate via the School and an RIA from a related discipline was asked to mediate discussions (**Step 2**).

Outcomes: Through discussions with the RIA, it was found that the HDR Candidate qualified for authorship – their contributions in revising the manuscript were significant. The manuscript was withdrawn by the Supervisor and re-submitted to the journal with a revised authorship listing that included the agreeable HDR Candidate.



Parties: Primary HDR Candidate (PhD)*, Primary Supervisor*, other Supervisors, other HDR Candidates, Undergraduate students

Research Integrity: Honest and fair attribution, Obtaining agreement

Observations: A Primary Supervisor revised and resubmitted a journal article for peer review, but changed the author order, listing themselves as first author, displacing the Primary HDR Candidate without discussion or agreement. The journal article was published online as 'In Press'. The Primary HDR Candidate raised a complaint to the University that was referred to the RIO.

The authorship dispute was referred to the breach management procedure (Step 3). The Investigation Panel found on the balance of probabilities that there was a minor breach of research integrity by not meeting the principles and responsibilities for authorship attribution (author order) and agreement. The Panel recommended the researchers discuss and agree on a new authorship listing and that the journal article be published with the Primary HDR Candidate listed as first author.

Outcomes: Mediated discussions between parties in dispute and a 'Management Action Plan' were used to facilitate authorship agreement in line with journal requirements. These were largely unsuccessful. Consequently, the Primary Supervisor and several co-authors agreed to not be listed as authors. The corrected journal article shows revisions to the authorship listing and the contributions of former co-authors in the acknowledgements.



Reflections



Reflections

- Principles of research integrity are robust and demonstrable
- Being a responsible researcher *all of the time* appears to be very difficult
- Responsible authorship can be supported
- Authorship disputes can be resolved, but have wide-ranging negative effects
- *Can we make authorship discussions and planning easier for researchers?*
- *Can we better prepare researchers for moments of integrity?*
- *Can we incentivise responsible research?*
- *Can we normalise the reporting of breaches of research integrity?*



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Thank you!

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Parts of this presentation have been presented elsewhere



Please visit <https://wcri2024.org/>

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