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Model Authorship Dispute Procedure

A reference for research contributors and organisations

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The Authorship Integrity Toolkit

This procedure is part of a toolkit designed to help research contributors uphold the highest standards of authorship practice, developed through a cross-sector project commissioned by UKRI and led by UKRIO.

In addition to this Model Authorship Dispute Procedure, the toolkit includes the following:

- **Guidance on Good Authorship Practice**
- **Template Authorship Strategy Agreement**

See **here** for more information about the toolkit.

Introduction

Authorship plays a critical role in the academic and professional recognition of contributions to research and scholarly work. Clear attribution ensures integrity, transparency and fairness, reflecting both the intellectual input and accountability of contributors. However, authorship disputes can arise at any stage of the research lifecycle. Disagreements are not limited to authorship of scholarly journal articles; they can affect a wide range of research outputs, including datasets, software, protocols, reports, presentations and creative works. Such disputes often stem from misunderstandings caused by poor communication, differing expectations or views about authorship due to a lack of agreed criteria or guidelines, inadequate record-keeping and power imbalances. This highlights the importance of establishing clear, shared expectations from the outset and maintaining open communication throughout the research process.

Disputes may involve disagreements over the level or nature of contribution, the order of authorship, the inclusion or exclusion of contributors or the appropriate recognition of intellectual input. Left unresolved, such issues can have lasting repercussions for professional relationships, career progression, and the overall integrity of the research. Given these risks, it is essential to have a clear, accessible procedure for addressing authorship disputes.

How to use this model procedure

This Model Authorship Dispute Procedure aims to provide a structured and impartial process for addressing disputes. It has been designed to assist the research community with resolving disputes promptly, fairly and in accordance with established principles of research integrity, thereby safeguarding both the integrity of the work and the relationships between collaborators. It draws on UKRIO's Authorship Guidance and accompanying [Template Authorship Strategy Agreement](#), both of which have been designed to support research teams in establishing clear expectations and responsibilities related to authorship throughout the research.

A proactive, preventative approach is always preferable to managing disputes, especially when conflicts may be avoided through early, open communication. Regular discussions about authorship throughout the research process can reduce misunderstandings, manage expectations and support a collaborative working environment.

When disputes do occur, it is recommended to remain focused on the broader purpose of research: the advancement of knowledge for societal and environmental benefit. Keeping this shared goal in mind can encourage more constructive dialogue and lead to more collaborative and principled resolution.

Management of the process

This authorship dispute procedure applies to all contributors to research and innovation. Such contributors can include researchers, industry partners and non-academic contributors (e.g., practitioners, patients, community stakeholders, programme managers, technicians, co-producers and co-designers of research). Steps 1 and 2 of this procedure should ideally be managed by research contributors themselves. Step 3 is a formal process and should be led by the research organisation via a designated responsible person with or without advice from advisers who are independent or impartial to those involved in the dispute.

Research contributors should be aware that the resources available to support and manage formal processes will vary by organisation. The steps recommended here should be implemented in a way that is appropriate to the local context. Although one viable approach is outlined in this document, research organisations will manage formal authorship procedures in a way that is suitable for their needs.

The model authorship dispute procedure presented here involves three steps:

Step 1: Informal discussions – Resolution is achieved by informally discussing the situation and coming to an agreement.

Step 2: Informal discussions with assistance – Resolution is achieved by informally discussing the situation with the help of an individual who can act as an impartial mediator to facilitate an agreement.

Step 3: Formal authorship dispute investigation and adjudication – Where Steps 1 and 2 do not result in a satisfactory outcome or are not deemed suitable, a formal process is followed, and an adjudicator makes the decision on behalf of the research contributor(s) to settle the disagreement.

Outcomes of a dispute

The goal is for all contributors to reach an agreement; however, any agreement must be grounded in the principles of research integrity, with a focus on honesty, transparency, care, respect and accountability in support of equitable and fair authorship practices.

Role of publishers

It is not the role of publishers to determine who should or should not be listed as an author. However, as custodians of research records, they have a responsibility to ensure the accuracy and integrity of the published record (see UKRIO's *FAQ: Correcting the scholarly record, and dispelling myths around corrections*).

Any authorship dispute brought to their attention will result in the suspension of manuscript processing until the issue has been resolved. They may take appropriate actions depending on the stage of publication, their internal policies, COPE guidance and their correspondence with the submitting author and affiliating organisation(s).

For example:

- **During the submission process:** Editors may withdraw the submission, encourage contributors to resolve the dispute amongst themselves, or contact the affiliating organisation(s) to raise awareness or to enquire if an authorship dispute resolution process is underway.
- **During the peer review process:** Editors may pause the review and put further processing on hold and wait for resolution, reject the manuscript, encourage resolution among the contributors or contact the affiliating organisation(s) to determine whether an informal or formal authorship dispute resolution process is underway.
- **After publication:** Editors may encourage contributors to resolve the dispute or contact the affiliating organisation(s) to confirm whether a resolution process is ongoing. If the dispute remains unresolved or is not addressed in a timely manner, the journal will likely issue an *Expression of Concern* about an authorship dispute, pending the outcome of the investigation by the relevant organisation(s).

Definition of roles

Organiser: Typically, the Organiser will be the individual or individuals who have concerns about authorship and seek to come to an agreement that considers their perspective.

Research Contributor: Any individual or individuals who contributed to the research.

Impartial Party: A trusted individual or group (e.g., a colleague) with no competing interests in the outcome of the dispute, who can provide peer support to the Organiser or Research Contributor. Additionally, they can serve as a witness to help ensure discussions are conducted respectfully and transparently. While an impartial party should not advocate or argue on behalf of the Organiser, their supportive presence can reduce the isolating effects of power imbalances and promote a more balanced, open dialogue, ensuring all parties feel heard and respected. They should possess good interpersonal and communication skills, be familiar with the context and be able to maintain confidentiality. Furthermore, an impartial party may help alleviate the emotional burden associated with navigating complex or hierarchical relationships.

Mediator: A neutral person with no competing interests in the outcome of the dispute who can act as a mediator (with or without formal training) to give neutral support to all parties to facilitate an agreement. Their role is to focus on promoting fair and ethical dialogue.

Responsible Person: A person with no competing interests in the outcome of the dispute who is suitably experienced to investigate and review relevant materials, and who is authorised to act as an adjudicator (i.e. to make official decisions) to resolve the dispute and decide on authorship.

Steps for resolving an authorship dispute

Step 1: Informal discussion

If an authorship dispute arises, it is preferable to resolve the matter at the most local level, using a human-centred approach grounded in empathy, emotional intelligence and collegiality, while considering and protecting the well-being of all those involved and preserving working relationships.

This may involve initiating a conversation in a relaxed setting, such as suggesting a meeting over coffee to discuss the matter informally but effectively.

Research Contributors are encouraged to engage in good faith and aim to resolve issues informally through open dialogue and mutual understanding.

Advice:

- The Organiser should invite collaborators to a discussion in an informal setting and list the points of dispute that need to be discussed in advance. If they cannot meet in person, this could be done online. Meeting online could be helpful, especially where Contributors are geographically spread out or there are time/financial pressures.
- If an authorship strategy agreement has been used, refer to the most recent version.
- To aid discussion, relevant materials such as authorship criteria and guidance from appropriate stakeholders (funders, publishers or organisational guidance on authorship) may be brought to the meeting. Discussion should be focused on finding practical solutions to resolve the dispute by reviewing the agreed criteria. If no criteria were agreed in advance, all parties should work together to determine appropriate standards for authorship, contributorship and acknowledgement. They should aim to use these criteria to reach a mutually acceptable outcome, and Research Contributors should commit to the agreed decision to prevent future disputes. The outcome should be clearly documented and shared with all parties as a record of the agreement.
- Ideally, a decision should be made during the meeting, or a clear timeline for decision-making (e.g. within 10 working days or at a second meeting) should be agreed and communicated to all parties.
- The Organiser should draft a record of the agreed resolution and course of action to be reviewed and approved by the Research Contributors. The Research Contributors should be offered the opportunity to correct any inaccuracies in this record.
- If a dispute cannot be resolved by this informal route, the Organiser should seek further support to assist with resolving the dispute (Step 2).

Notes:

If there is a Research Contributor or Organiser who feels intimidated, vulnerable, lacks confidence to convey their concerns or perceives a power imbalance, it may be advisable to invite an Impartial Party (e.g., a trusted colleague) to support and

accompany them to any meeting(s). Ideally, the Impartial Party should be respected and trusted by all parties, and their inclusion in the meeting mutually agreed.

If it is felt that this support is insufficient and the dispute is causing distress, then moving straight to Step 2 may be more appropriate.

Step 2: Informal resolution with assistance

If Step 1 has not been successful or there is a real or perceived power imbalance, it is advisable to seek further assistance to reach an agreement. In the first instance, it is important to acknowledge that a disagreement exists – ideally in writing by the individual who raised the authorship concern – and suggest that seeking assistance to support an informal resolution is an appropriate and constructive step forward.

To seek assistance with informal resolution, Research Contributors can invite a Mediator (a neutral person), such as an appropriate, impartial colleague, to facilitate discussions.

A Mediator typically does not make decisions but supports and aids discussions neutrally. Human Resources (HR) departments may be able to provide support or be able to recommend individuals with training in mediation skills

However, a neutral person without formal mediation training can be equally helpful.

Advice:

- The Organiser should:
    - o Write to Research Contributors explaining that, to resolve the dispute via informal means, it would be beneficial to have assistance in the form of an impartial Mediator. If suitable, they should explain why this is necessary and explain the role the Mediator would perform in the process.
    - o Propose a Mediator or speak to an appropriate person who could suggest a Mediator.
    - o Approach a suitable Mediator or ask the appropriate person to invite a suitable person to be a Mediator. They should pass on information such as the expected time commitment (e.g., time to be spent at meetings, taking of meeting minutes) and general expectations of the role (for information about the role of a Mediator (who does not serve as an adjudicator), refer to *ACAS – Mediation: an approach to resolving workplace issues*).
- The Mediator might prefer to meet the parties individually at first to understand each side's perspective. This approach is particularly suitable if there is a real or perceived power imbalance.
- The Organiser should invite relevant parties to a meeting(s) with the Mediator present.
- As in Step 1, relevant materials such as authorship criteria and guidance from appropriate stakeholders (funders, publishers or organisational guidance on authorship) may be brought to the meeting to aid discussion.

- If appropriate, collaborators could share any relevant records relating to discussions on authorship (emails, notes and meeting minutes) and review them during the meeting.
- The Mediator (or other pre-agreed individual) should keep detailed minutes of the meeting(s) and circulate them afterwards.
- The Research Contributors should mutually agree on the outcome of Step 2 and end the process. It is advised that Research Contributors agree to abide by their decision to prevent further disputes, and this should be appropriately documented and disseminated to all parties.
- If a dispute is not resolved within a reasonable time frame (e.g., 30 working days from the initial meeting), the matter should be escalated to Step 3.

Notes:

- Mediator biases (e.g., unconsciously favouring authorship norms of their research field) should not be a concern, as a Mediator's role is not to make decisions but rather to neutrally facilitate discussions without making recommendations.

- To ensure opinions can be confidently expressed (for instance, where there are power imbalances within Steps 1 and 2), a junior party may seek the support of a third party from within their institution but external to the research in question. The role of this person should not be to represent the junior party in a legal capacity, but to give peer support.

- There may be circumstances where working relationships have broken down and Step 1 is not feasible; there may also be a lack of willingness to follow Step 2. In this instance, it is recommended to move straight to Step 3.

- If Steps 1 and 2 are unsuccessful or take too long, the matter should be escalated to Step 3.

Step 3: Formal authorship dispute investigation and adjudication

Step 3 should not be used frivolously to address relationship tensions, personality clashes, or conflicts or differences of academic opinion that have arisen during the research. It should only be used as a way of genuinely resolving authorship disputes where Contributors have engaged in Steps 1 and 2, where deemed appropriate or feasible.

This stage of the process is formal and involves resolving the dispute through adjudication. A designated individual (the Responsible Person) will assess the case and make a decision regarding authorship for all parties involved.

The Responsible Person may be the institutional research integrity lead, an individual with experience in managing formal investigations and no conflicts of interest related to the dispute in question (e.g., someone responsible for leading investigations into breaches in research integrity), a deciding official or another responsible or appropriately senior person within the organisation. The early involvement of senior organisational figures can provide valuable support to the Responsible Person and help legitimise the process. It is important to protect all

professional relationships, particularly if any upset caused by the dispute is directed towards the Responsible Person.

Role and responsibilities of the Responsible Person

The Responsible Person holds the authority and responsibility to adjudicate the dispute. Their decision is final and should be accepted by all parties involved.

Where necessary, the Responsible Person may seek advice from knowledgeable individuals within the research community, including those external to the organisation, whilst making every effort necessary to maintain confidentiality. For example, they may seek advice to confirm accepted disciplinary norms around authorship. Any such requests for advice should be anonymised to maintain confidentiality and avoid disclosing personal information.

The Responsible Person is responsible for collating and reviewing the evidence submitted by the involved parties and must treat all materials as confidential. As part of their duties, the Responsible Person will assess the dispute and determine whether Step 3 of this process is appropriate. Factors such as the stage of publication may influence this decision; however, each case must be considered individually. The Responsible Person should allocate up to 10 working days for this initial review.

If the dispute is particularly complex (see Cross-organisational scenarios) or if the evidence suggests that Step 3 may not be suitable, the Responsible Person has the authority to seek advice from HR and research integrity leads for consideration. In such cases, the dispute may be addressed instead through HR procedures, and/or research integrity breach procedures.

Depending on the process followed, external parties (e.g., journals, publishers or funders) may be notified of any formal investigation, where appropriate. Responsibility for this communication will depend on the organisation's structure and may or may not fall within the Responsible Person's remit.

Advice:

The formal authorship dispute investigation and adjudication process begins when the Organiser contacts the Responsible Person to request that the authorship dispute be resolved via Stage 3. The request should be made via email, and the following materials should be provided by the Organiser and other Research Contributors when requested:

- Details of adopted authorship, contributorship and acknowledgement criteria
- A summary of the complaint(s), history of the dispute and records of efforts made to reach informal resolution (if available, with or without mediation)
- A copy of an authorship strategy agreement (if available) or any documents in which contributions to the output have been tracked and agreed
- A list of the Research Contributors, including their contact details, roles and how they have met the agreed authorship criteria
- Materials that are to be published or that are already published

- The desired outcome and the rationale for it
- Any other relevant materials

Where necessary, the Responsible Person can ask for further information from those involved, such as drafts of manuscripts, presentations, research proposals, emails etc. Where appropriate, relevant Research Contributors may be interviewed by the Responsible Person and pertinent questions asked to gain clarity.

Initial assessment

The Responsible Person should conduct an initial review of the materials, after which the complexity of the dispute should become clear. They should then consider which process should be applied to address the issue, as outlined in Table 1 below. If the Responsible Person believes there is evidence of misconduct – for example, bullying, harassment or discrimination or breaches of research integrity – Step 3 of this process will be deemed unsuitable, and it may be more appropriate to refer the matter for investigation under the relevant procedures. The Responsible Person will contact the relevant individual within the organisation to bring the dispute to their attention so that the most appropriate process can be followed.

Table 1: Questions for Responsible Person during initial review of materials

Question	Possible answers	Considerations
Is there an authorship strategy agreement in place?	Yes/No	If yes, refer to the most recent version. If not, is there a record of authorship discussions (e.g. emails, meeting minutes)?
What stage in the publication process is the research in?	• Draft – being prepared for submission • Submitted to publisher, pre-print published, etc. • Undergoing peer review • Published, exhibited, performed	The stage will determine whether external party involvement is necessary (e.g., if there is a need to contact the journal, publisher or other stakeholder about an authorship dispute).
What is the main cause of the dispute?	The dispute is mainly based on differences of approach, such as: • Misaligned expectations • Differences in academic opinion • Concerns over intellectual and/or level of contribution • Author position • Author inclusion or exclusion • Post-publication amendment of authors, contributions or acknowledgements • Other authorship disputes not listed The dispute is linked to misconduct, such as: • Harassment, discrimination, undisclosed conflicts of interest etc. • Possible breaches in research integrity	The cause of the dispute will determine the most suitable process to follow.
Which process(es) will be followed?	• Step 3 of this process • Human Resources process (e.g., complaint/grievance/harassment procedure) • Procedure for investigating allegations of research misconduct or breach of research integrity	These are the common process options. However, depending on the organisation, other processes may be relevant.

If, after an initial assessment, it is determined that Step 3 can proceed, the Responsible Person must adjudicate the dispute within 20 working days of receiving all materials related to the dispute. All parties should be informed of the outcome in writing, and the adjudication should include a brief summary of the evidence considered, the rationale for the Responsible Person's decision and any further action required. The communication must also clearly state that the decision is final and that no appeals process is available. This decision should be accepted by all parties. The Research Contributors are then responsible for taking any further action required, as set out in the Responsible Person's adjudication.

Notes:

Cross-organisational scenarios

If the lead author (also known as corresponding, executive or responsible author) is located at a collaborating organisation, it may be more appropriate for that organisation to have lead responsibility for formally investigating and adjudicating the dispute. They should keep all collaborating institutions informed of the progress of the investigation. This arrangement should be mutually agreed on in advance, and it must be clearly established in writing that the organisation has the authority and oversight to resolve the dispute. All parties involved should commit to accepting the outcome of the investigation.

The Responsible Person should be informed of these arrangements and notified of the outcome of the collaborating organisation's investigation via email. They may also serve as a liaison for authors within their home organisation. In complex disputes involving multiple organisations, consideration must be given to the constraints smaller institutions may face in running a formal process. For example, a hybrid approach of sharing resources – such as a larger organisation providing expert members to contribute confidential advice to the Responsible Person – can be beneficial, as it is in the best interest of all organisations to have a successful and fair resolution.

If all those involved in the dispute are located at the same organisation, the Organiser should contact the Responsible Person as described above.

Implementation of this procedure

It is acknowledged that many organisations will handle authorship disputes via their research misconduct processes, and implementing this authorship dispute procedure may require adjustments to existing procedures for handling breaches of research integrity or allegations of research misconduct.

Acknowledgements

About the development of this procedure

This procedure was created in two stages. The first draft was written and then reviewed by the project's Authorship Advisory Group (AAG). It was then shared at two collaborative workshops hosted by UKRIO in March 2025, attended by 83 stakeholders (see here for details, including attendees). The document was subsequently developed and refined using contributions from workshop attendees, with further advice and review from the AAG. UKRIO extends its sincere thanks to everyone who contributed to this guidance, with particular appreciation to members of the AAG.

Professor Marcus Munafò, University of Bath, UK Reproducibility Network

Dr Jo O'Leary, UK Research and Innovation

Professor Christopher Smith, Arts and Humanities Research Council

Peris Thuo, British Academy Early Career Researcher Network

Competing Interests

Resources

Professor Marcus Munafò, University of Bath, UK Reproducibility Network

Dr Jo O'Leary, UK Research and Innovation

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Registered Charity No: 1147061 Registered Company No: 7444269

UK Research and Innovation

This project was commissioned by
UK Research and Innovation (UKRI).