Q&A Responses

Practical Tools for Good Authorship

Wednesday 24 September 2025

On 24 September 2025, UKRIO hosted *Practical Tools for Good Authorship,* the first event in its 2025/2026 Expert Webinar series. This session marked the launch of the Authorship Integrity Toolkit, a set of resources designed to help research contributors adopt and promote good authorship practice. During the event, UKRIO introduced the resources in the toolkit and shared practical strategies for applying them to uphold research integrity.

The session concluded with a Q&A. Below is a collection of **written responses to questions submitted during the session**. Light edits have been made to some questions for clarity and consistency. While all questions were submitted by individual participants, identities have been omitted. Only questions addressing the toolkit have been included in this document; those concerning personal disputes and other topics were directed to UKRIO's Advisory Service.

For a full summary of the event, including a recording, see here.

Questions/ Submissions

1. Researchers from non-biomedical fields often criticize ICMJE Guidelines as limited in scope such that these don't adequately consider authorship context and realities of other non-biomedical or social sciences fields. Should we start looking at tailoring 'formalized' authorship guidelines in accordance with various fields of study for adoption?

Ideally yes. Currently, if you are submitting to a journal that has its own criteria, then these would have to be followed, which is why we suggest in both the Authorship Guidance and the Authorship Strategy Agreement that you should consider stakeholder (e.g. publishers and funders) criteria for authorship in the first instance.

2. Our research integrity office at a large teaching hospital tried to develop an agreement template to support our busy PIs. We experienced so much push-back that we abandoned the idea in the end.

An agreement is one tool that can be used to support fair and equitable practices. It could supplement a data management or project management plan. It doesn't have to be the PI who organises and takes responsibility for the ongoing review and update of the agreement; others in a collaboration could do that and should be

encouraged to have designated responsibility for this as part of their ongoing professional development.

3. Any chance that the template could be sent to us separately from the toolkit, please?

Each tool sits as an individual document on our website here.

4. Are the tools taking PhD students into consideration, as their situation is quite unique?

Yes, there is advice for PhD students included within each of the documents in the toolkit. Although PhD students are learning to be researchers, the general principles and approach to authorship should be the same.

5. For PhD theses by paper (e.g. those consisting of 3 papers), sometimes the student is expected to note their % contribution to each paper. Is estimating a % for each co-author's contribution used in other circumstances? Is it a good idea to promote this practice, or is it too prescriptive?

Estimating percentage contribution is one approach when considering who has made a substantive contribution, although it could be subjective and may be open to criticism. A description of the contribution of what each individual did may offer more clarity and transparency. Within the Guidance, on page 8, we give an example of mapping contributions. The text is as follows:

"Mapping contributor roles against the CRediT taxonomy (or an adapted form) can be a practical way to guide discussion and support transparent decision-making. The British Trust for Ornithology offers a useful example of how to do this."

6. The main argument against such an agreement was that it will generate conflict by raising expectations in inexperienced researchers that may not be met in the end - giving them a "signed document" to insist on their demands. Do you see any good arguments to counter this argument? Do you perhaps see this risk, too?

We do not see this as a risk, as the Authorship Strategy Agreement is structured into two sections: A and B. Section A outlines the general expectations at the outset, while Section B provides the detailed framework for each individual output. As long as the Agreement is kept up to date and reviewed regularly throughout a research project, it should ensure clarity for all parties throughout the research process. Confusion and disputes tend to arise when expectations are set only at the beginning and not revisited until a research output is nearly complete. The Agreement is intended to facilitate ongoing conversations, making it clear who should be credited as an author and who should be acknowledged. This approach

reduces the likelihood of misunderstandings and misaligned expectations. The risk of raising expectations is higher if an agreement is not used and regularly reviewed.

7. Do you cover specific guidance for those university staff co-authoring with external non-HEI partners (like community groups/ organisations)? As you know, this type of co-authoring 'counts' towards Knowledge Exchange/ KEF, so it's something we are encouraging.

There are sections within the Authorship Guidance and in the Authorship Strategy Agreement that cover different types of collaborations.

8. Thinking of the Technician Commitment: technical staff are not always recognised in research outputs, and some may not be fully aware that they should be. Is there anything available to help technical staff awareness that they can access these approaches and resources, please?

The Toolkit highlights the importance of appropriately crediting all research contributors, including technical staff. UKRIO is working to reach the research community through webinars, newsletters, training, and its subscriber network, and we will continue to engage with organisations that support those in technical roles.

9. Does the Guidance and template agreement document align with the Contributor Role Taxonomy (CRediT)?

Yes, it does. There are references to CRediT throughout the Guidance.

10. How will you be evaluating this work and understanding its use/ impact?

The Toolkit will be evaluated using various methods, quantitatively by DOI downloads, webpage visits and Google alerts for mentions; and qualitatively via an evaluation questionnaire available from our website.

11. Authorship disputes (and changes) may arise during publication, and it is often quite time consuming and challenging for publishers. Is there specific guidance for publishers in the toolkits or do you mainly suggest we refer these to the authors' institutions?

There isn't specific guidance for publishers; however, we have defined the role of publishers during disputes within the Model Authorship Dispute Procedure, specifically pages 2-3. We suggest publishers, where necessary, consult with the author's organisation, via their research integrity lead.

12. Does the authorship dispute procedure consider the maturity of the publication development process (e.g. pre-writing dispute vs paper submitted dispute)?

Yes, it does, both in the sense of the role of the publisher, and where the matter may need to be looked at more seriously (specifically in Step 3 of the Model Authorship Dispute Procedure).

13. Would you have suggestions on encouraging uptake with group leaders? They frequently feedback that they have a high administrative burden and keeping documents up to date (e.g. probation and development plans for team members, grant reporting) Have any PIs involved in the development of the tool suggested how this could work/be embedded to other/existing processes?

One option is to suggest that others within the collaboration take some administrative responsibility for the organisation and ongoing review and update of the Authorship Strategy Agreement. This can be discussed and determined in Section A of the Agreement. It doesn't have to sit with the PI; others may benefit from the experience.

14. Have you thought about creating a suite of authorship case studies dealing with a whole range of authorship issues? Case studies can be really helpful and provide opportunities for in-depth discussions. They are also very useful in creating awareness of differences in cross-disciplinary settings.

There are two publication ethics case studies available publicly on the UKRIO website here. There are five publication ethics case studies available to subscribers via our subscriber portal. We are keen to continue to develop more case studies over the next year. If you have ideas for case studies, we would value you contribution to our work. Please email us at info@ukrio.org.

15. How should authorship order be determined when all authors contribute equally to a research project?

This is covered within the Guidance (page 9).

"First author

In the relative contribution system, the first or lead authorship position is seen as the most important and desirable, as it indicates the individual who contributed the most. Circumstances where two or more authors have equally contributed the most can be indicated through "joint first authorship" (i.e., "co-first author") or "equal contributions" 8, using a symbol such as an asterisk. Disputes relating to the ordering of co-first authors should not arise, as co–first authorship reflects equal contribution and should be treated accordingly."

16. Are there any plans to have translated versions of this documentation so they can be used more widely?

Unfortunately, not at present. UKRIO would be keen to do this but as its primary responsibility is to support the UK research community, this would be subject to the availability of further funding to support such work.

17. Does the CRediT taxonomy offer a solution to power imbalances and disputes at the research design stage?

The CRediT system does not define what constitutes authorship but helps acknowledge all contributions to a research output and can support decisions about who meets the agreed authorship criteria. It adds transparency as to who did what but does not necessarily address power imbalances.

18. This is good practice for internal disagreements on authorship - what would you suggest the best approach for collaborative authorship disputes with authors at other institutions?

We make several suggestions within both the Template Authorship Strategy Agreement and Model Authorship Dispute Procedure that try to support these situations. Firstly, the Agreement asks collaborators to discuss how they will go about resolving authorship dispute if they occur.

The Template Authorship Strategy Agreement states:

"**Resolving authorship disputes**

Even with a strong authorship strategy agreement in place, disputes can arise. Research is a human endeavour, and conduct –including authorship practices – exists on a spectrum. Even well-intentioned agreements can be undermined by differing agendas, pressures or assumptions. For example, a contributor may agree to an authorship plan in which they are not given authorship but expect their role to evolve into authorship over time, creating confusion and tension.

Advice: To help prevent misunderstandings, consider these questions early in the research process:

- How will an authorship dispute be handled initially? If unclear, assign someone to find out.
- If no formal procedure exists, what alternative process does your institution recommend? Does your institution provide advice on who could mediate a dispute among co-authors?
- In collaborations, which institution's dispute process will apply? Which take precedence?
- Has the process been clearly communicated to all collaborators?
- If a dispute involves a breach of research integrity, who will lead the investigation?

Refer to UKRIO's Model Authorship Dispute Procedure for further guidance."

In the Model Authorship Dispute Procedure, we advise the following:

"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. "

19. How would you suggest a governance team should introduce this tool kit in an organisation where this has always sat with the research team without intervention from the institution?

The toolkit could be incorporated within the organisation's guidelines for promoting research integrity and good practice in research. The Model Authorship Dispute Procedure could be introduced as part of the organisation's processes for handling alleged breaches of research integrity, either incorporated within the organisation's existing procedure for handling such allegations or signposted as a standalone process specifically for handling authorship disputes.

20. I'm interested in the differences across disciplines. I'm overseeing research across different subject areas especially regarding PhD supervisors not being included as co-authors in some fields. According to many criteria they meet the criteria for co-authorships, but there seems to be some resistance to this.

If they meet the criteria for authorship, then they should be listed as authors. This resistance may stem from some backlash to a culture when a senior researcher was always listed as an author, even if their contribution did not fulfil the required criteria. We appreciate there are many nuances around authorship across disciplines, but it is about fair and equitable authorship regardless of seniority, role or discipline. To support any conversations, this paragraph in the Guidance could be helpful, (page 4):

"Appropriate attribution of authorship of research outputs matters because:

- Authorship comes with responsibility for the rigour, trustworthiness, integrity ethics and reliability of the reported output.
- It brings transparency, enabling readers to know who has conducted the research.
- It provides credit to those who have substantially contributed to the reported research."

21. It seems that the term 'corresponding author' has multiple meanings, and that this contributes to confusion. There is reference to it being the 'submitting' author but also the author that follow-up can be made post-publication. It is often the case that the lead author is central to the submission process, but they would not be in a position to be the contact post-publication (due to limited time contracts etc)? Has any consideration been given to separating out these roles by having a 'submitting author' status at the level of journals?

Yes, this is covered in pages 9-10 of the Authorship Guidance. We suggest that the most suitable person to fulfil the role should be chosen to be the corresponding author, who may not necessarily be the submitting author.

22. I feel like people who attend these sessions are the ones who are not creating the problems, but most probably suffering from consequences or ECRs. I think institutions have a tendency to protect "powerful" academics, even if they have unethical procedures. The confrontation and conflicts will most probably damage ECRs' careers. Do you have any suggestions on this issue?

The rationale for this project was receiving and responding to many requests for assistance on authorship disputes through UKRIO's enquiry service. There appears to be, in some instances, a lack of knowledge around authorship and misaligned expectations. We hope that this Toolkit – in particular the Authorship Strategy Agreement – will give individuals a suitable framework to support discussions about authorship and align expectations across the board. We will continue our efforts to share this Toolkit to bring awareness to a wide range of stakeholders.

23. Are there any authorship agreement documents for arts and social sciences specifically?

No, this is a universal guide relevant to all disciplines, taking a principled approach. The opening advice is as follows (see page 4 of the Guidance):

"Across all disciplines, four essential steps support responsible authorship practices:

> 1. Reach a mutual agreement at an early stage of the research on clear and equitable authorship criteria, considering any relevant publisher or disciplinary guidelines.
>
> 2. Mutually agree on authorship eligibility based on the agreed criteria and keep a regularly updated record of any changes to authorship that occur during the research process.
>
> 3. Be transparent about the specific contributions each author has made to the research output.
>
> 4. Formally acknowledge contributions from individuals who do not meet authorship criteria, thereby ensuring appropriate recognition for all. You can use these four steps to facilitate informed discussions about contributions to your research."

There are many nuances around authorship across disciplines. We have tried to be inclusive through listening to contributions from stakeholders from many disciplines (see the summary from our workshops). However, we welcome suggestions to continue to develop the toolkit. Please contact us at info@ukrio.org or complete our feedback form.

24. Is there a way we can use these resources when academic colleagues are approached to be a contributing author mid-way through a project/output?

Yes, it isn't too late to start an agreement, even mid-way through a research project. The important thing is to have these conversations about authorship as soon as possible to manage expectations, minimise confusion and protect professional relationships.

25. Do you anticipate any hesitancy in its use by authors due to workload? We currently find it difficult to get academics to complete much more simple administrative tasks

We do have concerns about the adoption of such tools and will do what we can to promote their use. However, if they are incorporated into project management or data management plans, they could become widely accepted and embedded as good practice. Adapting them to context and taking from them what is relevant will also be important.

26. AI is one of the most pressing issues in publishing at the moment for authors, peer reviewers and editors. Do you plan to organise any events, updating your guidance specific to this?

AI is one of the four dedicated workstreams in our 2025–2026 Work Programme. Our plans for supporting research stakeholders in navigating AI tools are outlined in the programme.

We recently published *Embracing AI with Integrity*, guidance to help research contributors uphold research integrity when using AI tools.

This year, we are hosting three UKRIO subscriber events focused on AI:

- 24 February: Good Practice Forum on using AI in research
- 10 June: Training Webinar on UKRIO's upcoming 'train-the-trainer' toolkit for responsible AI use
- 23 June: Roundtable on the roles of research organisations, publishers, and funders in promoting responsible AI use

Registration details for these events can be found in the work programme.

27. Who assigns the assistance/adjudication during resolution efforts?

This will depend on which Stage of the Authorship Dispute Procedure has been reached. In Stages 1 and 2, this should ideally be assigned and agreed by the research contributors themselves. If the Procedure reaches Stage 3, it would be more appropriate for this role to be assigned by the organisation's Research Integrity lead with support from the Research Integrity and Governance team.

28. Did members of the Technical Staff Community contribute to the consultation?

Yes, members of the Technical Staff Community contributed to the development of the Toolkit. Please refer to the summary of our authorship workshops.

29. Is there consideration for researchers who may leave the organisation in the middle of a project and on their authorship rights? Whether they should be an author on future papers or be acknowledged?

Yes, this has been considered carefully as it appears often to cause upset. The Authorship Strategy Agreement should be used to document all contributions to research outputs, such as who worked on what and when. The table in Section B of the Agreement lists safeguards like: including two email addresses so you can easily be reached, the status of your contribution (e.g., ongoing, no longer contributing, contribution complete or restarting contribution), dates, and a detailed description of the contribution. Of course, whether a contributor will be an author or simply have their contribution acknowledged depends on whether they meet the chosen criteria

for authorship. However, by expressing expectations in the table in Section A of the Agreement, other collaborators will be aware of all parties' wishes.

30. How was the often-occurring power dynamic between authors considered when putting together this toolkit? And the way this can affect careers?

We considered power dynamics throughout the process of creating the Toolkit. It was a thoroughly discussed topic at the stakeholders' workshops. We are aware that disputes rarely occur in isolation. They often reflect deeper cultural and structural challenges within the research environment. For this reason, it's important to consider disputes in the wider context of research culture and integrity. Addressing these issues requires attention to core principles such as openness and transparency. Power dynamics complicate disputes and, in some cases, cause real harm to the well-being of those involved and ruin professional relationships.

Within the Authorship Dispute Procedure, there are suggestions for those who feel vulnerable or don't feel confident in voicing their concerns. We advise those involved in a dispute to take an approach that is grounded in empathy, emotional intelligence and collegiality. When disputes do occur, we recommend that those involved remain focused on the broader purpose of research.

31. One issue we often have is that some parties involved in a dispute aren't willing to accept the authorship recommendations we make. How do we confer 'authority' on this process?

Stage 3 of the Model Authorship Dispute Procedure defines what the role of a `Responsible Person' would be in resolving such disputes. The intention is that this person would have the appropriate experience and seniority to investigate and review relevant materials and be authorised to act as an adjudicator. The Responsible Person could be the organisation's Research Integrity lead or appropriately senior person within the organisation (supported as appropriate by integrity or governance teams), to lend authority to the process.

32. What are the guidelines for listing institutional affiliations when an author changes workplace after the project and before submitting the manuscript?

Please refer to the Guidance, page 12, which states:

"An organisation should only be listed as a research contributor's affiliation if the work was conducted at, or formally connected to, that organisation. The primary affiliation should reflect where the research was actually carried out. Cambridge University Press offers further guidance on affiliations in publishing. If a researcher has since moved to a different organisation but is publishing work arising from research completed at their previous one, they should list the previous organisation as their affiliation. The research was conducted under its auspices and should be

attributed accordingly. Some publishers allow for both primary and secondary affiliations (e.g., "formerly at Organisation X, now at Organisation Y") to reflect the author's current position while maintaining accurate attribution of the research. When the author is acting as the corresponding author, they must provide a current and functioning email address so to ensure they can be contacted. "

33. Which is the main difference between the UKRIO toolkit to attribute authorship and the CRedIT taxonomy?

Contributorship is a broader concept than authorship, offering a way to acknowledge everyone who played a meaningful role in creating or presenting a research output, not just those listed as authors. The CRediT system does not define what constitutes authorship but helps acknowledge all contributions to a research output and can support decisions about who meets the agreed authorship criteria.

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