

Policy and Good Practice Guidelines for Authorship

PSSRU, September 2013

Introduction and scope

Research inquiries are frequently collaborative efforts among colleagues of different levels of seniority and from different disciplines. Listing the authors on publications and outputs tells readers 'who did the work and should ensure that the right people get the credit, and take responsibility, for the research' (ICMJE). The *PSSRU Policy and Good Practice Guidelines on Authorship* aims to encourage a culture of ethical authorship, provide a framework for sound research practice, help staff comply with their ethical and professional obligations to colleagues (as set out by the University of Kent, by journal editors and learned / professional societies within in our fields), protect individual research staff, and help researchers prevent and resolve any problems or misunderstandings. The policy sets out obligations that PSSRU researchers are expected to uphold and summarises principles of good practice.

Researchers' Obligations

Research teams should follow eight points when discussing authorship on publications:

1. Be as inclusive as possible but all authors should have had sufficient input into the research and the publication to be able to defend some of the content. Researchers who cannot defend an aspect of the publication should not be included as an author but should be included in the acknowledgements.
2. Researchers should discuss each output in light of point 1 above, bearing in mind journal requirements where necessary.
3. Research teams should ensure that an agreement about their general approach to publications and authorship is discussed at the beginning of the research project.
4. The research team should agree on the lead author of each publication when required and the appropriate co-authors.
5. The authorship order should be decided at the first draft stage of a publication. The BSA and ICMJE guidelines offer a useful approach (see page 3). Authorship should always be revisited when staff membership or responsibilities change within a research team. All subsequent authorship decisions should be effectively communicated to all members of the research team.
6. Authors should assess whether additional acknowledgements on a paper are appropriate for individuals inside or outside the research team.
7. Contributions made by members of the research team who are not included as authors should be outlined in the acknowledgements sections of publications, for example, 'critically reviewed the study proposal' or 'collected data'.

The next section provides detailed authorship guidance.

Detailed Guidance

This guidance provide a summary of good practice principles concerning authorship agreement, an overview of approaches towards authorship order, examples of contributions that should be included in acknowledgements, the significance of the corresponding author, and procedures for handling disputes. When planning journal outputs, it is important to take into account that individual journals often specify their own authorship criteria, possibly in relation to manuscript integrity (in terms of plagiarism and originality), a maximum number of authors, or a particular protocol, such as the Vancouver Protocol.

The following principles apply across publications; they are not limited to authorship in journals.

Good practice principles for authorship

1. Specify at study launch the roles of researchers in the project team.
2. Recognise that all researchers have a vested interest in authorship for career development at all stages of their careers; take into account the reputation and careers of all contributors.
3. Junior researchers should be given opportunities to be authors of work resulting from projects on which they have spent substantial amounts of time.
4. Try to anticipate any issues that might arise as a result of working collaboratively.
5. Try to anticipate any issues that might arise as a result of publishing in journals with specific authorship criteria.
6. When there is more than one co-author of a research output, nominate one co-author (by agreement amongst the authors) as executive author for the whole research output (see below for SRA and UK Research Integrity Office web links).
7. Discuss who will be the corresponding author on journal outputs at an early stage of planning.
8. Include authors on outputs when they are circulated for drafting, revision, review and comment.
9. Ensure all authors are given the opportunity to see and comment on an output before it is submitted to a journal or published on a website.
10. Where a number of authors report on behalf of a larger group the Vancouver Group recommendations are useful:

“When submitting a manuscript authored by a group, the corresponding author should clearly indicate the preferred citation and identify all individual authors as well as the group name. Journals generally list other members of the group in the Acknowledgments. The NLM indexes the group name and the names of individuals the group has identified as being directly responsible for the manuscript; it also lists the names of collaborators if they are listed in Acknowledgments”

Authorship order

Approaches towards, and the significance of, authorship order, vary across disciplines. Some list authors in order of their degree of involvement in the work, with the most active contributors listed first; others list them alphabetically. The BSA guidelines offer a useful approach (and see web link on page 4).

- The person who has made the major contribution to the paper and / or taken the lead in writing is entitled to be the first author
- Those who have made a major contribution to analysis or writing (i.e. more than commenting in detail on successive drafts) are entitled to follow the first author immediately; where there is a clear difference in the size of these contributions, this should be reflected in the order of these authors.
- All others who fulfil the criteria for authorship should complete the list in alphabetical order of their surnames.
- If all the authors feel that they have contributed equally to the paper, this can be indicated in a footnote.

Corresponding author

Researchers usually equate corresponding author with seniority, or the person who has overall responsibility for a research project and output. The corresponding author is the person who receives the reviewers' comments, the proofs, etc. and whose contact details are printed on the article so that readers can request reprints or contact the research group with questions or queries about the work.

Acknowledgement of contributions from others

Examples, drawn from the BSA and ICMJE guidelines, of contributors/contributions to be included in acknowledgements are people who have provided only the following inputs.

- assistance in obtaining funding
- financial and material support
- purely technical help, such as writing assistance, manuscript preparation, data processors, computing staff, clerical staff and statistical advisors
- a department chairperson who provided only general support
- assistance with one aspect of the work such as study design, or data collection (interviewers), data analysis, or manuscript preparation
- colleagues who are not part of the research team and have reviewed the paper
- research participants and people or organisations who facilitated recruitment or data collection, ensuring anonymity is maintained when assured.

The ICMJE also asserts that 'because readers may infer their (people in acknowledgements) endorsement of the data and conclusions, these persons must give written permission to be acknowledged.' This is good practice. It should be considered early enough to give people sufficient time to respond.

Handling disagreements

Disagreements about authorship can be classified into two types: those that contravene ICMJE guidelines (misconduct) and those that do not (disputes).

1. **Disputes.** If the suggestions to include or omit names came from the project lead, make clear why you do not agree with the decision. Support this with evidence. If the dispute cannot be resolved within the team, consider talking to your line manager or someone in the senior management team and let the project lead know that you are going to do this.
2. **Misconduct.** If you believe that someone is proposing to do something with the authorship list that is unethical, first explain your concerns to the project lead. Make it clear that the suggested author list contravenes the PSSRU policy or other guidelines/recommendations relevant for that document, and that it could be considered scientific misconduct. You will need to be clear about who meets the criteria for authorship and who does not, and why. If the project lead is unable to take a misconduct disagreement forward, or you are unhappy with the outcome, talk to your line manager, or someone in the senior management team.

References and links to further information

British Medical Journal (BMJ) *Uniform Requirements for Authorship and Contributorship*
<http://www.bmj.com/about-bmj/resources-authors/article-submission/authorship-contributorship>

British Sociological Association (BSA; 2001) *Authorship Guidelines for Academic Papers*
http://www.britisoc.co.uk/media/31310/authorship_01.pdf

COPE is primarily a resource for Editors and Publishers of Scholarly Journals, but it includes guidance on how to handle authorship disputes.

- *What to do if you suspect ghost, guest or gift authorship*
http://publicationethics.org/files/u2/04E_Author_Ghost_Guest_Gift.pdf.
- *How to handle authorship disputes: a guide for new researchers*
<http://publicationethics.org/files/2003pdf12.pdf>

ESRC (2010) *Research Ethics Framework*, updated September 2012
http://www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk/_images/Framework-for-Research-Ethics_tcm8-4586.pdf

International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE) *Uniform Requirements for Manuscripts Submitted to Biomedical Journals: Ethical Considerations in the Conduct and Reporting of Research*
http://www.icmje.org/ethical_1author.html

Social Research Association (SRA; 2003) *Ethical Guidelines*
<http://the-sra.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/ethics03.pdf>

UK Research Integrity Office (2009) *Promoting Good Practice and Preventing Misconduct*, includes a section on publication <http://www.ukrio.org/what-we-do/code-of-practice-for-research/>

University of Kent Good Practice in Research Guidelines
<http://www.kent.ac.uk/researchservices/res-govern-frmewrk/code-of-practice.html>