University of Exeter

PROUD SUPPORTER OF THE
Technician Commitment

Attribution Policy

1. OVERVIEW AND PURPOSE

1.1. This document aims to define the University of Exeter's expectations around ensuring appropriate and fair attributions are given to all contributors to research, regardless of their relative status, position, or project role. It also aims to provide examples as to what contributions to the work constitute authorship or acknowledgement in the publication of research outputs.

1.2. This policy also defines the expectations around the inclusion of contributors to research as Investigators on research grant applications

1.3. The attribution of authorship and contribution to research applications is important in the context of good research practice. The university recognises the important of diverse roles contributing to research, from technical colleagues, students, software engineers, librarians, archivists, public engagement specialists and more.

1.4. When experts make intellectual or other contributions to research that result in an output (e.g., publication, grant, software, or dataset etc.), they should be recognised in the same way as any other contributor. Doing so benefits not only the individual, but the research lead, the institution, and the wider community, in allowing for more transparent and traceable research, as well as developing the careers of those contributors. It also fosters a healthy research culture which in turn promotes further collaboration.

1.5. Increasingly over more recent years, external funding bodies, such as UKRI and the Wellcome Trust, are recognising the need for research leaders to acknowledge all contributions appropriately and are beginning to consider a research lead's historic efforts to consider fair attribution in their criteria when assessing funding applications. This is detailed within UKRI's People and Teams Action Plan, for example.

1.6. Furthermore, as a signatory and member of the Coalition on Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA), the university has formally committed to 'recognise the diversity of contributions to and careers in, research in accordance with the needs and nature of the research' (= CoARA Commitment 1). The university is also a founding signatory of the Technician Commitment which aims to improve the visibility, recognition, career development, and sustainability of technical careers.

1.7. In addition to this, some funders, such as Wellcome and CRUK, are now beginning to require minimum level of sustainability accreditation of technical spaces, where applicable, as part of their funding criteria. These accreditations are achieved with the direct support and expertise of technical staff, and expectations around these standards are likely to rise in the coming years. If accreditation is a requirement of the funder/call being applied to, we heavily recommend the acknowledgement of the individuals who led these applications in each space. As a signatory of the Concordat for the Environmental Sustainability of Research & Innovation, we have agreed to show leadership in the area of environmental sustainability, and ensure consideration and recognition of this is embedded into institutional policies.

1.8. Equitable recognition for collaborators also fosters connection throughout the global research community and encourages future research collaborations.

2. SCOPE

2.1. This document is relevant to all staff and students enabling and contributing to research projects and outcomes at the University of Exeter; this definition includes students at all levels: undergraduate, and post-graduate including MREs, M by Res and PhD, Post-Doc researchers etc., as well as all staff: technical, administrative, and otherwise.

3. RESPONSIBILITIES

3.1. Lead researchers

3.1.1. In addition to any contractual responsibilities to the funder, Principal Investigators (and lead supervisors of PhDs) should take overall responsibility for the transparent and fair attribution of all contributions to research grant applications, research projects and research outputs. This would typically entail:

- Making inclusive, justified and fair decisions about who should be invited as co-investigators, and who should be named collaborators/contributors (but not as co-investigators).
- Make fair and transparent decisions about allocating 'credit split'; that is, where university systems require the funding for successful funding awards to be attributed (as % share) to those who led and developed the successful grant application.
- Clarifying and agreeing with the whole project team and collaborators the principles and processes for discussing and deciding authorship of and contributorship to planned outputs (e.g. as part of a broader publication and dissemination strategy, and reflecting funder and university guidance on authorship).
- Specifying a department process or experienced academic independent from the project for adjudicating on any disputes or disagreements about authorship or contributorship that cannot be amicably and fairly resolved within the research project team.
- In the context of cross-institutional outputs, the University of Exeter lead has the responsibility to ensure appropriate accreditation is provided, regardless of their overall responsibility of the output.

3.2. Co-investigators

3.2.1. Co-applicants on grant applications have agreed to take joint responsibility (with the lead applicant and all other co-applicants) for the delivery, quality and research integrity of the project application and its outputs. This includes a commitment to fair and responsible recognition of all contributions to research - whether by authorship of outputs, acknowledgements statements and other transparent records of contributorship.

3.2.2. Therefore, co-investigators have a key responsibility to speak up and raise any concerns if they believe authorship or contributorship decisions have not been made in a fair and transparent way. In particular, they should speak up, and empower others to speak up, if they believe contributors who qualify for authorship of an output have been omitted from authorship of draft or final outputs, or if a statement of contributions is incomplete or inaccurate.

3.3. **Contributors**

3.3.1. Anyone listed as an author on an output should accept personal responsibility for their contribution to the output and, where appropriate, be able to specifically identify their contribution to it.

4. POLICY

4.1. The issue of authorship is important in the context of good research practice and fostering a healthy research culture. The university recognises the diversity of the roles contributing to research, from both senior and early career researchers, technical colleagues, students, software engineers, librarians, archivists, administrative staff and more. Appropriately attributing work to others who contributed to a project or application does not detract from the lead researcher's ability to gain recognition for the work.

4.2. When experts make intellectual, technical, practical, or other contributions to research that result in an output (e.g., publication, grant, software, or dataset etc.), they should be recognised in the same way as any 'traditional' contributor[i].

4.3. Authorship of academic outputs, including the presumed meanings attached to sole authorship and different authorship positions (first author, last author), has become a dominant proxy for judging researchers and others' actual and diverse contributions to research. This dominance of output authorship, sometimes to the exclusion of other ways of more fully and fairly describing contributions to research, can make authorship decisions more contentious and divisive, as well as leading to misjudgements about the research achievements and capabilities of individuals when based mainly on their listed publications.

4.4. Whilst we believe we should move away from order-based attribution in the long-term, we also think positions like first and last author should be chosen carefully whilst this is the system we are dealing with in the long term. First/lead author positions should therefore usually be assigned to those who played a key role in carrying out and leading the research day-to-day, and writing it up. Last/senior author positions should be assigned to those who played a key role in initiating and supervising the research - not just in terms of winning the funding, but also in terms of supervising the first author and shaping the final submitted manuscript for example. Sometimes, it may be desirable to have more than one author in such positions, which we encourage more frequent use of where appropriate. This should be indicated clearly in the submitted manuscript (e.g. through typographical marks in the author list and an associated key) so that such authors can easily evidence this in the future.

4.5. The use of the CRediT Contributor Roles Taxonomy and the inclusion of contributorship statements alongside traditional attributions are heavily encouraged. For more information see section 5.

4.6. It is recognised that different journals, funding bodies, or grant applications have different criteria for what may constitute authorship, or recognition of specific status. It is recommended that those are always referred to in the first instance, with careful consideration of acknowledgements and contributorship statements to provide full recognition of all contributions, whilst acknowledging the potential impacts of this, in particular on eligibility for future funding opportunities.

4.7. At the outset of any research project, a team meeting should be held, led by the Lead Researcher, to discuss and consider expectations around authorship with those contributing to the project. This allows conversations to take place early on, should

there be any misalignment in understanding across the group, and helps individuals to understand their role in delivering the output from the start.

4.8. The examples provided below are intended to guide decision making as to how to describe and recognise everyone's contributions to a research project or output, and how to decide which contributors qualify for authorship on a given output, and which contributors should be acknowledged in other ways.

4.9. **Authorship / Investigator**

4.9.1. If someone makes a substantial intellectual contribution to the work and demonstrates accountability for the accuracy and integrity of the resulting data or analysis, then they should be included as a co-author on any resulting outputs as would any other contributing researcher, or as an investigator on a research grant. This is regardless of their position or received seniority.

4.9.2. Examples of the type of work that would constitute authorship/ investigator include, but are not limited to:

- Individuals who make substantial intellectual contributions to the conceptualisation, design, or writing of a research grant application, including the development of methods, analyses, research questions, or narrative structure, should be included as co-investigators.
- Designing or redeveloping experiments, bespoke equipment, software, scripts
- Developing new data generation or analysis methodology
- Interpreting data
- Data curation i.e., management activities such as producing metadata, scrubbing data, and maintaining research data, including software code where necessary for data interpretation.

4.9.3. For further information, case studies demonstrating good attribution practice for authors, from across the University, can be found on the Research Culture SharePoint site.

4.10. **Acknowledgement**

4.11. All other contributions to the work, should be recognised with a formal acknowledgement of the individual and, if relevant, Research Facility in the acknowledgements section of the resulting publication, research output or grant application.

4.12. Examples of the type of work that would constitute an acknowledgement include, but are not limited to:

- Performing instruction-led acquisitions of data or routine sample preparations
- Monitoring and maintaining experiments or equipment
- Laboratory supervision of a research student who has undertaken analysis or data collection
- A standard service provided by research facility staff

4.13. Funders of the work should always be acknowledged, and in most cases require this as part of their terms and conditions of funding. Please check these conditions to ensure that their preferred wording is used where appropriate.

4.14. Please see the Research Culture SharePoint for some Case Studies of Good Practice when it comes to acknowledging contributions.

5. COMPLIANCE AND GOOD PRACTICE

5.1. At the start of a research project, or during grant development, project teams should discuss expected contributions and how attribution will be handled. This should include authorship expectations, potential Investigator roles, and principles around data access. These discussions should be revisited as the project evolves.

5.2. Research funders may have some specific requirements on authorship and acknowledgements. Please ensure these are adhered to.

5.3. The Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) have ample guidelines and examples available to support your decision making.

5.4. The CASRAI CRediT (Contributor Roles Taxonomy) resource for suggested contributor roles and clear criteria for attribution of authorship is recommended as a resource. It may help decide whether it is appropriate to list as an author or to acknowledge.

5.5. The use of a CRediT Contributorship Statement which can be used alongside traditional authorship/acknowledgements is encouraged. The link provided gives an excellent example. For more information on the use of the CRediT Taxonomy see this article by Allen, O'Connell and Kierner (2019), https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1002/leap.1210

5.6. Where an individual has made a substantial intellectual contribution to a research grant that results in the generation of intellectual property and/or a dataset, for example through conceptualisation, methodological design, or analysis planning, it is good practice to ensure they are kept informed about the development and use of that dataset, and assured fair opportunities to contribute to resulting research outputs, in line with authorship and contributor criteria.

5.7. The use of AI within the development of grant applications and outputs should be considered extremely carefully, with key consideration being given to the reliability and accuracy of its outputs. AI cannot take responsibility for an output it creates, and therefore can never be acknowledged as author or contributor, however, it is important to ensure that any AI assistance used within the development of an application or output should be transparently declared. Funder and journal rules regarding the use of AI should also be considered first and foremost. More information on the responsible use of AI in research can be found on the website.

6. REPORTING CONCERNS

6.1. The University of Exeter wants to empower everyone to raise any concerns about attribution through the proper and correct routes.

6.2. Concerns about suspected breaches of best practice in attribution[ii] should be raised in the first instance with an individual's Head of Department or Associate Pro-Vice Chancellor for Research and Impact or Faculty Pro Vice-Chancellor, in confidence, who will advise on the appropriate action to take. The next steps relating to this, depending on the nature of the issue, may include investigation as an allegation of misconduct.

Review / Contacts / References	
Policy title:	Attribution Policy
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Next review date:	August 2027
Related internal policies, procedures, guidance:	Compliance and Risk – Research Integrity
Policy owner:	Research and Impact Executive Committee
Lead contact / author:	Emma McArdle (e.mcardle@exeter.ac.uk)

[i] Anyone who contributes knowledge to a research output. This might be a Co-I, members of the research group, post-docs or post-graduate researchers, but also includes other contributors such as technicians, experimental officers, archivists, software engineers, project managers, and other roles

[ii] Historically, this may have been termed 'Research Misconduct', however, an article by the UK Research Integrity Office (UKRIO) suggested updating this wording to encourage reporting and to support investigations: "…There are psychological implications of either reporting a concern or being accused of research misconduct, no matter the outcome. Being transparent about the spectrum of breaches while not detracting from the seriousness of research misconduct could indicate areas to focus on for improvement and remove barriers to reporting. As an example, being accused of denying authorship is serious, but if this accusation was unfounded this could damage a reputation. However, calling this a breach of best practice in authorship changes the tone…"