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# Policy Statement on Publication of Research and Results

The quality of publications by University staff and students is a key ingredient not only in achieving high gradings in the Research Assessment Exercise on which substantial income from the Funding Council depends, but also in the general ability of the University to secure research funding from the Research Councils, the European Commission, government departments, charities and industry.

Publication is the dissemination of the outcomes of scholarship and research in conventional paper form and in other media, including electronic media. Along with such artefacts as books, chapters, articles, conference proceedings, reviews, catalogues, compositions and other products of the creative arts, software and databases also form part of this overall topic. The scope of the term ‘publications’ will be taken in the discussion below to have this broad interpretation, unless otherwise indicated.

Ethical considerations apply to the production of all such categories of publication, and the University’s reputation depends in part on the ethical standards being seen to be maintained in the publications of its staff and students.

***Originality and innovation***

Universities are among the very few public organisations funded to pursue fundamental research. New knowledge is by definition original, and curiosity, imagination and tenacity in the pursuit of the perceived logic of experimental and other data which are all attributes that the University values highly in its researchers. Originality has two elements: the avoidance of plagiarism and the achievement of innovation. All publications should be original with respect to the avoidance of plagiarism, but achieving innovations will depend on the scholarly or research motivation concerned.

***Protecting authenticity***

A major assumption about the scientific integrity of research leading to publication is that there should always be a robust and reliable audit trail which can be followed to establish the authenticity of any discovery or invention. The authenticity of records, their provenance and data, should therefore be defendable, to support claims both of originality and scientific priority, in the interests of protecting both scientific integrity and the due ownership of intellectual property rights.

The need for authenticity puts a stringent obligation on the researcher to maintain records in a state which can be investigated and understood by anyone with a legitimate right to enquire. In some areas, statutory obligations exist to protect the authenticity of data, for example the keeping of records of experiments subject to the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986.

The best international practice suggests that researchers in science-based disciplines should record all experimental data meticulously and permanently, in bound notebooks with numbered pages, that they date and sign entries, and store backups of records and software in fireproof and waterproof safes separately from the originals. The last part of this advice is not only in the University’s interests, to protect intellectual property and potential commercial exploitation; it is also directly in the interests of staff and students themselves, in that fires and floods can cause devastating damage to the careers of researchers who fail to give adequate protection to their records and data. Also, under US patent law, the validity of patents can depend on the authenticability of the work concerned through its recording in notebooks of appropriate form. Advice on suitable practice in this context can be obtained from the Research Support Unit.

***Publications and intellectual property rights***

In the United Kingdom, publication of any concept pre-empts the patentability of the idea. In order to protect the potential exploitability of inventions fairly, and to protect the institution’s and the inventor’s intellectual property rights (IPR) generally, researchers are encouraged, where relevant, to approach the Research Support Unit for advice on patent applications before they proceed to submission of material for publication.

Ethical issues surface frequently in matters dealing with co-authorship, which is a sensitive and complicated topic. It is in the interests both of staff and the University to disseminate good practice in this area. New researchers should learn the general conventions of authorship within their discipline. When submitting manuscripts for publication, a basic assumption is that researchers should know the conventions of authorship in use by the journal they have chosen. The most critical aspect of good practice in this area is the need for authorship and the order of authors to be agreed by the contributors, within the conventions of their discipline(s), before the manuscript is prepared.

Standard guidelines on co-authorship were published in the New England Journal of Medicine (1991:324; 424428) by the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors of over 400 journals (the ‘Vancouver Group’):

“All persons designated as authors should qualify for authorship. The order of authorship should be a joint decision of the co-authors. Each author should have participated sufficiently in the work to take public responsibility for the content.

Authorship credit should be based only on substantial contributions to (a) conception and design, or analysis and interpretation of data; and to (b) drafting the article or revising it critically for important intellectual content; and to (c) final approval of the version to be published. Conditions (a), (b) and (c) must all be met. Participation solely in the acquisition of funding or the collection of data does not justify authorship. General supervision of the research group is also not sufficient for authorship. Any part of an article critical to its main conclusions must be the responsibility of at least one author.”

It deserves emphasis that the Vancouver Group Guidelines allow for reasonable variation of contribution to the publication by different co-authors. One co-author, for instance, might contribute the conception and design, and also write the initial draft of the text, while another might contribute the analysis and interpretation, together with revising the draft text. The Guidelines strictly insist, nevertheless, on each co-author’s participation in the process of final approval of the version to be published.

The University recognises some difficulties with this position, for example in inter-disciplinary work. Similarly, in some areas of experimental science, in team-based consortia with many members with different roles, it may be that the co-authors who provided the experimental data are distant in technical culture from the theoreticians who use that data as the foundation for their conclusions. Nevertheless, agreeing to the status of co-author implies a full commitment to have one’s name and reputation (and, by implication, that of the University) fully associated with the content of the publication.

Given that internal promotion as well as external reputation depends in part on a researcher’s publication record, integrity demands that conventions of co-authorship amongst its staff are not allowed to be so divergent that comparability of achievements across disciplines becomes infeasible. The University regards the Vancouver Group Guidelines as identifying good practice in co-authorship, and commends them to its staff.

***Staff/student collaborative research relationships and co-authorship***

Delicate issues associated with co-authorship may arise when staff and students collaborate in research, especially when the member of staff is the supervisor of the student. The delicacy springs from the unavoidable fact that the latter is to a tangible extent within the power of the former. In such a situation, it is part of the academic integrity expected of the University’s staff that they will wish to give carefully judged recognition to the contributions to collaborative work made by research students under their supervision.

Early discussion of, and adherence to, the conventions of co-authorship described above will be particularly helpful in protecting the interests of all concerned in the collaboration. In preparing collaborative publications, both the member of staff and the student should take care to protect the identifiability of the student’s original contribution to the work, for degree purposes.

***Honorary co-authorship***

The idea of ‘honorary’ co-authors has sometimes been tolerated by certain groups, where inclusion in the list of authors is on the basis not of contributions under the three conditions proposed by the Vancouver Group Guidelines and quoted above, but rather through other association with the work (or sometimes merely with the co-authors themselves as colleagues. Most researchers would say that allowing ‘honorary authorship’ is fraught with the potential for abuse, and best avoided. The University supports this view.

***Acknowledgement***

Part of the general ethical obligation of recognition of the work of others is that the contributory efforts of people who have helped in the work being reported in a publication should be identified. The Vancouver Group conventions on co-authorship include a useful section on acknowledgement - “At an appropriate place in the article (title-page footnote or appendix to the text; see journal’s requirement) one or more statements should specify:

1. contributions that need acknowledging but do not justify authorship;
acknowledgements of technical help;
2. acknowledgements of financial or material support, specifying the nature of the support;
3. financial [or other] relationships that may pose a conflict of interest.”

***Citation***

The University supports the view that there is a fundamental ethical obligation on authors to acknowledge and attribute external sources of information, with conventional ways of citing these sources depending on the house style of the journal in question. Citation not only gives due credit to the work of others, but readers can only identify innovative elements in the text and thereby fully recognise the contribution tacitly claimed by the author, if the context of previous work is known.

***Plagiarism and misuse as misappropriation of other people’s intellectual property***

Plagiarism is the unattributed publication of the work of another as if it were one’s own. It is seen by this University as offensive to norms of academic conduct, and is therefore construed as constituting misconduct, and subject to sanction under the institution’s disciplinary procedures. Plagiarism of verbatim material, which directly infringes copyright, shades as an offence into other forms of unethical misuse of someone else’s intellectual property. The plagiaristic basis of such misuse is made clear by the American Historical Association’s statement on standards of professional conduct (1993:13-14), quoted by Ryan (1995:35):

“The misuse of the writings of another author, even when one does not borrow the exact wording, can be as unfair, as unethical, and as unprofessional as plagiarism. The clearest abuse is the use of another’s language without quotation marks and citation. More subtle abuses include the appropriation of concepts, data or notes all disguised in newly crafted sentences, or reference to a borrowed work in an early note and then extensive further use without attribution. All such tactics reflect an unworthy disregard for the contributions of others.”

Plagiarism and misuse of this sort are complex and elusive topics. Plagiarism is a culturally relative concept. In some cultures, the adoption and reproduction of the work of admired authorities is seen as a mark of respect for their status. Supervisors of research students from such cultures may need to recognise the importance of reminding them of the stringent requirement of this University, as in all other British universities, to avoid plagiarism and misuse.