Research Outputs: Guidance on Authorship and the Recognition of Contributions

Policy Category:	Research
Subject:	Recognition of contributions to research outputs
Approving Authority:	Academic Board
Responsible Officer:	Vice President (Research & Innovation)
Responsible Office:	Research Management & Innovation/Research Culture
Related Procedures:	Authorship and Contributions procedure; Research Misconduct Procedure
Related College Policies:	Fair Publication Policy ; Research Publications Policy
Effective Date:	25/02/2026
Supersedes:	N/A
Next Review:	25/02/2029

I. Purpose & Scope

1.1. The central tenet of this guidance is that King's College London expects its staff to value, recognise and be transparent about **all** contributions to research in line with its Research Culture and Research Integrity principles.

1.2. The traditional notion of 'authorship' does not always reflect the diverse processes and outputs increasingly associated with modern research. Conventional author lists are often limited in capturing individuals' relative and/or specific contributions and fail to recognise those who have contributed outside of author roles. In addition, the University has a governance responsibility to ensure accurate attribution and accountability for contributions to research outputs published in its name. It therefore strives to maintain transparency around the roles individuals play in the research process and to foster accountability for their respective contributions.

1.3. This guidance is designed to support the increased visibility of individual contributions to research outputs, the fair and ethical allocation of contributor and author roles, and to promote a culture of constructive collaboration, transparency, and accountability. It applies to all King's College London staff (academic, professional services, and research) and students involved in the research process and generation of research outputs.

1.4. The guidance promotes the appropriate documentation of contributions for all university-affiliated research outputs in a standardised format. Adherence to this guidance facilitates the prevention and resolution of contributor/authorship disputes.

1.5. Whilst much of this guidance focuses on multi-authored or collaborative research outputs, it is also relevant to single-authored outputs. In such cases, if individuals are present who have contributed but do not meet authorship criteria, they should still be appropriately acknowledged.

II. Definitions

2.1. **Contributorship:** An umbrella term recognising individuals who have made a specific, identifiable, and essential contribution to a research output. A contributor's role must be such that the output could not have been produced in the same form without their input. Contributors **may or may not** also meet the criteria for authorship. Contributors who are **not** listed as authors are often those whose contributions were operational, technical, or administrative rather than intellectual, and who were not involved in drafting or critically revising the work. This can include research enabling and/or support staff.

2.2. **Authorship:** A distinct subtype of contributorship. There are no universal standards to determine what constitutes authorship, and exact criteria differ across disciplines and journals. However, general consensus is that to be considered an author, an individual must have made a *significant intellectual contribution to the work* (see 3.2. and 3.12. in the principles below) and must approve the final version of the output, taking responsibility for its entire content rather than just their specific contribution. Authorship is not linked to a specific job title or status: Anyone who meets the criteria for authorship – whether an academic, student, professional services staff member, community partner, lived experience expert, etc. – can and should be included as an author.

2.3. **Non-contributor acknowledgements:** These are used to recognise individuals or organisations who indirectly assisted or supported research or the development of the resulting output but who do not meet the criteria for either authorship or contributorship. These roles are typically not clearly identifiable within the essential and **active** intellectual or technical

production of the output. Examples include general encouragement, proofreading, or helping to secure access to data or settings – without directly providing or analysing resources. Such indirect assistance or support may have helped create favourable conditions for the work but did not play an active part in it.

2.4. **ICMJE authorship criteria:** Four criteria for authorship of research outputs, as proposed by the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE), adopted across various disciplines – beyond just medical fields –, and reflecting the above.

2.5. **CRediT:** A Contributor Role Taxonomy specifying 14 distinct roles regarding the generation of research outputs.

2.6. **Tenzing:** Open-Source software to document contributorship in accordance with CRediT.

III. Guidance principles

3.1.	It is recommended that those collaborating on research projects and outputs start discussions around contributorship and authorship at the outset of a project, or as soon as realistically possible.
3.2.	The discussions mentioned under principle **3.1** will naturally evolve and change over the course of a research project. Therefore, it is recommended that they are documented in writing, with clear date stamping. This documentation may be maintained as a shared written log with version control or as an email trail, which inherently includes date stamps. The log should capture agreements on contributorship and authorship, including what, within the specific project context, constitutes a *significant intellectual contribution to the work*.
3.3.	It is recommended that collaborators use CRediT as a framework for discussions and agreements from an early stage onwards. Tenzing can be used to document agreed contributor roles in line with CRediT (and help streamline the generation of a standardised contributor list/CRediT statement at the output stage).

3.4.	All KCL-affiliated research outputs – whether journal articles, books, or other – are strongly encouraged to include a contribution statement that clearly outlines the roles of all author and non-author contributors to the work. CRediT (Contributor Roles Taxonomy) provides a standardised, widely recognised and machine-readable framework for doing this, and its use is therefore recommended as the default method. However, acknowledging disciplinary differences, alternative recognised formats may be used where CRediT is deemed unsuitable – provided that these convey an equivalent level of clarity and transparency regarding each contributor's role. Where free text is permitted, researchers may include additional narrative detail to reflect disciplinary norms or to elaborate on the scope of contributions. **Note on proportionality:** A contribution statement can be omitted for single-authored outputs with no other contributors. For outputs with only one or two additional contributors, a simplified contribution statement may be used, where appropriate, as long as it clearly describes each individual's role in relation to the output.
3.5.	When using CRediT (or equivalent recognised frameworks), where multiple contributors have fulfilled the same role, it is recommended that the degree of contribution as 'Lead', 'Equal', or 'Supporting' is specified.
3.6.	All individuals who fulfil the criteria for contributorship based on CRediT (or equivalent) should be listed as contributors.
3.7.	In cases where a specific, identifiable contribution has been made as per **2.1**, but this contribution cannot be ascribed to an *individual* (e.g. large consortia, large research support teams collaborating on funding acquisition or software), it may suffice to credit the team collectively (within the CRediT (or equivalent) statement itself, an acknowledgements section, or other, depending on publisher/journal guidance). Assessments around this should be made on a case-by-case basis, following the process outlined under **principle 3.2**.

3.8.	All individuals who have fulfilled the criteria for authorship (based on individual journal/publisher guidelines where these apply or based on the ICMJE criteria in the absence of such guidelines) should be listed as authors.
3.9.	Where possible, it is recommended that the criteria used to determine authorship are explicitly listed in the 'Contributions' section, beneath the CRediT (or equivalent) statement.
3.10.	All authors should agree on the final version of a research output prior to publication and take responsibility for the output in its entirety. Where authors hold differing views on specific elements, this should be explicitly stated within the output.
3.11.	An exception to **principle 3.10** can be made where individual journal/publisher guidelines permit, for deceased contributors who fulfil all other authorship criteria. A deceased contributor can be listed as an author, provided that the research team submits a declaration confirming that the contributor is deceased and specifying their last date of contribution, naturally exempting them from any future responsibilities related to the output. This declaration should be included in the "Contributions" section, beneath the CRediT (or equivalent) statement. Deceased non-author contributors should be appropriately acknowledged in the CRediT (or equivalent) statement.
3.12.	Authorship criteria should not be misused to intentionally exclude individuals from authorship. Therefore, all individuals who, based on the project-specific agreements referenced in **principle 3.2**, have *significantly contributed* to the conception, design, data acquisition, analysis, or interpretation of the work (in line with the first ICMJE authorship criterion) should be given the opportunity to fulfil additional authorship criteria (i.e. involvement in writing, reviewing, and approving research outputs) and qualify for authorship.
3.13.	Individuals who have not fulfilled specific contributor roles or authorship criteria should not be listed as contributors or authors in research outputs, regardless of their position, status, or level of seniority.

3.14. All previous principles continue to apply when a member of a research team leaves the University. Based on their contribution, a person who has left the University will retain their right to be appropriately credited in subsequent research outputs. When an individual leaves the University, it is recommended that agreements for recognition in future publications are recorded in writing. If new publication ideas arise *after* an individual involved in the work has left the University, reasonable effort should be made to contact them.

3.15. Although King's College London acknowledges that it cannot set guidance for other institutions, the University expects all those engaged with research to promote, and advocate for, adherence to all previous principles when it comes to cross-institutional collaborations and outputs. This is particularly important in situations where there is a potential for inequality within partnerships, e.g. when working with partners from low-to-middle-income countries.

3.16. Where disagreements regarding contributions or authorship arise, teams should attempt to resolve these through informal discussion in the first instance, informed by the principles outlined in this guidance.

3.17. If the approach specified in **principle 3.16** is unsuccessful, or if factors like power imbalances (e.g. students or junior staff versus senior staff; role-dependent differences in status) might hinder open communication, support for resolution can be requested from Faculty-level colleagues or local Research Integrity Advisors (RIAds), who can provide impartial advice or support. Where attempts at local resolution via the RIAds or at faculty level have failed, advice may be sought from the Research Integrity Office (RIO), by emailing research-integrity@kcl.ac.uk; who will support Faculty to resolve this through an informal authorship dispute resolution process, informed by the principles in this guidance. Where there is risk of misrepresentation to the research record of the work undertaken, the RIO will consider whether the matter should be escalated under a formal procedure.