PGR-Supervisor Co-Authoring Guidelines

Introduction

Authorship is a vital aspect of academic publishing. It is increasingly central not only to the dissemination of research findings, but also to researchers' career development and progression. The Arts and Humanities have traditionally followed a sole authorship model, but collaborative projects are on the rise. While, in most cases, co-authorship relationships are effectively managed, there can be instances where miscommunication, a lack of guidelines or differing publication objectives can lead to problems. The stakes are particularly high when PGRs and supervisors are involved, given the inevitable power imbalance between these roles.

These guidelines were developed by Dr Carol O'Sullivan, Dr Xiaochun Zhang and Dr Paola Ruffo as part of a project funded by Research England in 2022 aimed at better understanding and exploring emerging joint supervisor/PGR publication practices. The guidelines were informed by a review of existing literature and resources on the topic, interviews with key stakeholders at the University of Bristol, and responses to a questionnaire aimed at supervisors and PGR students. The guidelines are intended primarily for use within the Faculty of Arts of the University of Bristol, but other Faculties and Schools are welcome to adopt or adapt them.

This document provides a set of best practice principles and resources on co-authoring between supervisors and PGR students. It is not designed to be prescriptive, or comprehensive. Rather it offers a starting point for discussions around the topic and provides some guidance and context to PGRs and supervisors who are considering co-authoring.

Principles of best practice

1. **Get the conversation started.** Have a conversation about publication as early as possible to set expectations and discuss possibilities around both sole- and co-authoring. Topics for discussion could include motivations to publish, timelines, publishing avenues, number and type of publications etc. As the research progresses, it is good to regularly come back to the conversation and check whether any priorities have changed.

2. **Define what constitutes a significant contribution.** Supervisors and their PGR students should negotiate the meaning of significant contribution for their particular project before starting to work on a publication. Author order should also be discussed at this stage. Existing guidelines can advise on what constitutes a significant contribution (see 'External Resources').

3. **Document contributions.** Once significant contributions have been defined, start documenting them. For example, you could have a shared spreadsheet file where each task is assigned to a person and where everyone can log their progress. This can help to avoid problems later on in the process.

4. **Take power imbalance and different roles into account.** The power imbalance that is inherent to the PGR/supervisor relationship should always be considered when discussing co-authoring strategies, priorities, roles, and contributions. Factors to take into account include differences in experience, seniority, and career objectives. There should be a discussion about boundaries between the role of PhD supervisor and the role of co-author.

5. **Consult the literature and other resources.** Co-authoring conversations are not always straightforward, and standards and expectations can vary from project to project. When in doubt, it is always a good idea to consult the available resources on the topic and talk to colleagues about their experiences. It is beyond the scope of these guidelines to propose an Arts-and-Humanities-specific set of parameters for what co-authorship would look like, but we provide links below to several definitions of what constitutes co-authorship, which you may wish to take into account.

6. **Co-publication should be a collaboration opportunity, not an obligation.** It seems unlikely that co-publication will become the norm in the Arts and Humanities, at least in the medium term. Copublication should only be by mutual agreement. Both students and supervisors should feel free to decline a suggestion to co-publish.

Other factors to consider

Co-authoring guidelines can be a useful point of reference, but many personal, professional, project- and discipline-specific factors can affect co-authoring arrangements. Some factors you might want to take into account are listed below:

- Is this an individual doctoral project or a collaborative one? In the case of a collaborative project, one might need to consider whether other people's contributions to data collection, study design etc. warrant co-authorship
- Where the publications are to form part of the final thesis, institution-specific regulations about this must be taken into account. At the University of Bristol the relevant regulations can be found at http://www.bristol.ac.uk/academic-quality/pg/pgrcode/annex5/
- Field-specific grant, hiring or publishing awards requirements (some disciplines might value sole authorship more than co-authorship or vice versa)
- Feasibility of copublication for the timeline of the thesis and the PhD student's overall workload
- Supervisor's workload and availability
- Discipline-specific conventions (e.g., in an interdisciplinary PhD)
- Publication norms/requirements in national/regional job market(s)
- Number of expected publications for competitive job candidates
- Journal requirements
- If the PhD is by publication, different parameters will apply
- Copublication is not necessarily only bilateral. For instance, at Bristol each student normally has more than one supervisor. Multilateral discussion may be appropriate.

Who to contact

In case of queries, you should contact your School's Postgraduate Research Officer (PGRO) in the first instance.

University of Bristol Resources

- [Regulations and Code of Practice for Research Degrees Programmes](#)
- [Research Supervisor Development](#) (self-enrol Blackboard site)
- [PGR-Supervisor Agreement of Principles](#) (requires UoB login)
- [Supervisory Expectations Questionnaire](#) (requires UoB login)
- [Bristol Doctoral College](#)
- [Bristol Institute for Learning and Teaching (BILT) – Research Supervisors Support](#)

External Resources

- [CRediT Taxonomy](#)
- [British Sociological Association Authorship Guidelines](#)
- [ICMJE Authorship Guidelines](#)
- [A Student Collaborators' Bill of Rights](#)
- [Committee On Publication Ethics (COPE)](#)
- [Erasmus University Rotterdam (EUR) Dilemma Game](#)
- ["Co-writing with your supervisor – do we need a code of good practice?" - Pat Thomson's blog](#)

(version as of Spring 2023)