Guidance on raising concerns over authorship practices

Purpose:

As outlined in the University's Attribution of Authorship Guidelines, colleagues are encouraged to have an early conversation about publications and authorship to avoid disputes occurring at a later stage. Decisions regarding the roles of contributors and collaborators should be jointly agreed and communicated to all members of the research team. A written record of this agreement can be documented by email. Alternatively, the University has developed a template Publication and Authorship Agreement form that can be used to support this process.

However, the University recognises that disputes regarding authorship practices may occur from time to time. The purpose of this document is to provide guidance to colleagues on how to raise concerns and how to access support and advice. A flow chart illustrating this process is also provided on page 3.

Principles:

As part of our commitment to a positive and inclusive research culture, all researchers should feel able to question authorship decisions they regard as unfair without fear of repercussions. However, the University acknowledges that some researchers may feel uncomfortable raising concerns with more senior colleagues. In these situations, confidential advice on how to proceed may be sought from the relevant Head of Academic Unit, Director of Research or by contacting the Research Integrity and Governance Manager (email: research.integrity@ncl.ac.uk).

Pre-publication:

If the publication is not yet in print, it may be possible to reach a local resolution through informal discussions with the Corresponding Author. Researchers are encouraged to explore this option before escalating the issue for more formal investigation.

1) **Review what was agreed** – check whether the authorship of outputs was discussed and formally agreed as part of the dissemination strategy. If there is a written agreement in place, this document can be used to guide discussions with the Corresponding Author. In the absence of a written agreement, the final decision regarding who should be listed as an author lies with the Corresponding Author. However, other contributors have the right to raise concerns and / or request changes.

2) **Engage with the Corresponding Author** – when raising concerns, calmly state your position and provide evidence (where possible) to support your case. Colleagues may also find it helpful to refer to published guidance on best practice such as the Contributor Roles Taxonomy (CRediT) or the UKRIO Code of Practice for Research.

3) **Seek further support, if necessary** - if it is not possible to reach an agreement through direct communication with the Corresponding Author or there has been a breakdown in the working relationship, the Head of Academic Unit or Director of Research with knowledge of the subject area may be called on to act as a mediator. In the event of any conflicts of interest, a suitable alternative will be identified.

4) **Resolve or refer** – if an agreement is reached which is acceptable to both parties, an amendment will be made prior to publication. Local actions may also be taken by the Head of Academic Unit to address any research integrity or People Services issues identified. If an informal resolution is not possible or the allegation is of a serious nature, the matter may be referred for formal investigation in accordance with the University's Policy and Procedure for Investigating Allegations of Research Misconduct.

Post-publication:

If an authorship issue is identified following the publication of an article or book, colleagues are encouraged to contact the Research Integrity and Governance Manager in the first instance to discuss their concerns (email: research.integrity@ncl.ac.uk). Supporting evidence should also be provided to support any claims. The case will then be assessed in line with the University's Policy and Procedure for Investigating Allegations of Research Misconduct. As part of this process, an informal resolution will be sought prior to a formal research misconduct investigation. The publisher will be notified of the allegation. If the allegation is proven, a formal correction will be made to the published scholarly record and corrected in the institutional repository.

Feedback:

This document will be regularly updated to incorporate best practice within the sector. Any questions or comments regarding this procedure should be forwarded to research.integrity@ncl.ac.uk.

Louise Jones
Research Integrity and Governance Manager
Research Strategy & Development
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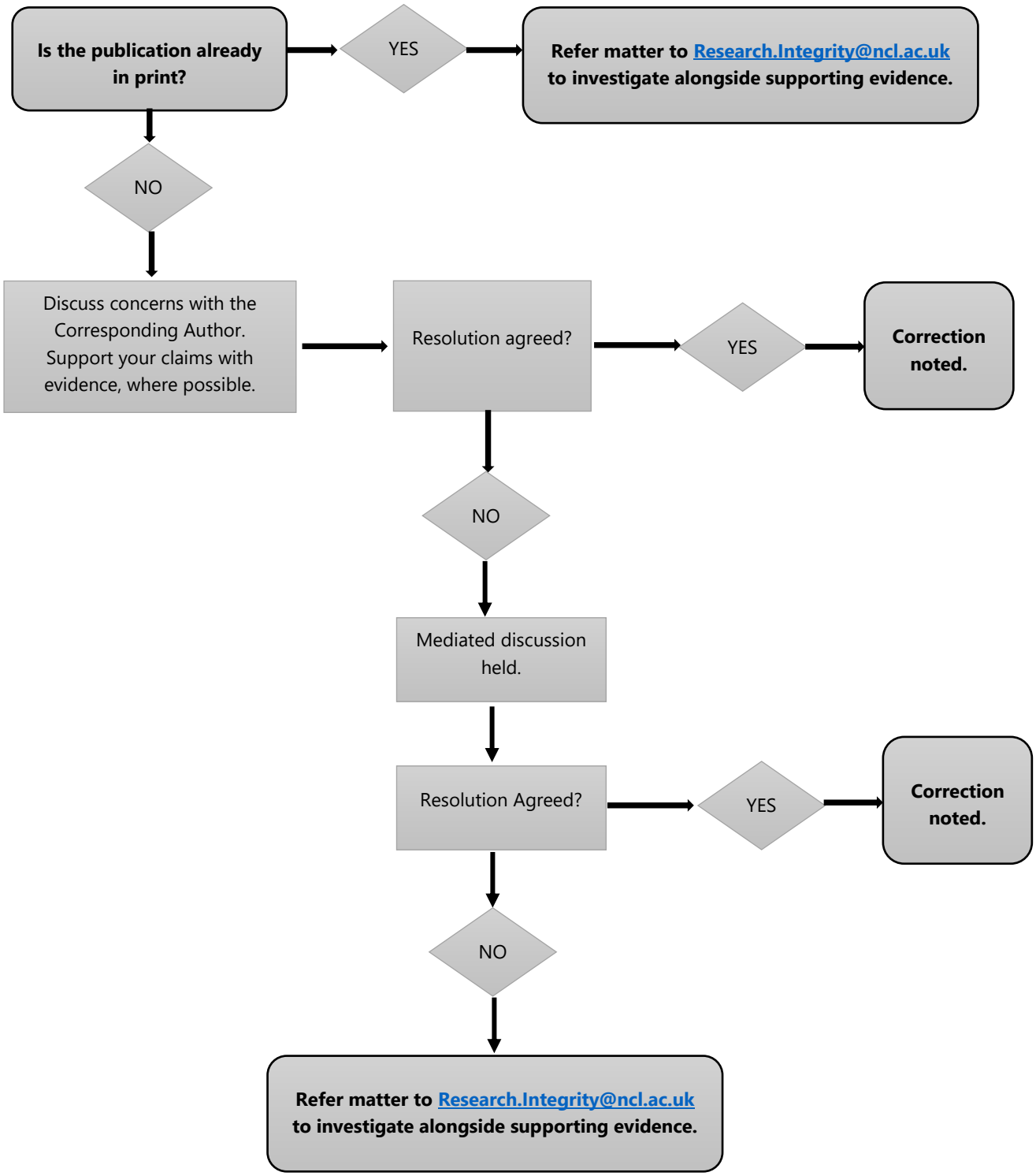
Flowchart


Is the publication already in print?
YES
Refer matter to Research.Integrity@ncl.ac.uk to investigate alongside supporting evidence.
NO
Discuss concerns with the Corresponding Author. Support your claims with evidence, where possible.
Resolution agreed?
YES
Correction noted.
NO
Mediated discussion held.
Resolution Agreed?
YES
Correction noted.
NO
Refer matter to Research.Integrity@ncl.ac.uk to investigate alongside supporting evidence.