

#11 Disputes between researchers

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1) About this resource sheet

This Resource Sheet relates to disputes between researchers. It should be read in conjunction with Resource Sheets [#1](#), [#2](#) and [#6](#). In addition, any Resource Sheets pertinent to the dispute should also be consulted. This sheet does not replicate the content of those sheets.

2.0 What is a dispute between researchers?

For these purposes, a dispute between researchers refers to a situation where researchers who have previously collaborated have a disagreement about a research integrity matter.

3) Common disputes

Some common categories of disputes are listed below (this list is not intended to be exhaustive):

Authorship disputes

Authorship disputes typically relate to disagreements about the inclusion or exclusion of persons (who might not necessarily be parties to the dispute) or the order of authorship on an output. Also, disputes about the level or type of contribution of authors of an output. See [RIRS#4](#) items 15-21 for more about authorship.

Data disputes

Data disputes typically involve providing access to the data, deciding who can access the data, ownership of the data, how data can be used (including who can publish based upon the data), and the storage/responsible management of data. See [RIRS#5](#) for more about data disputes.

Conflicts of interest disputes

Conflicts of interest (Col) disputes most often relate to the failure to disclose a Col (if only to collaborators) or failure to otherwise manage the Col – especially when there are negative consequences from the failure. See [RIRS#9](#) for more about conflicts of interest.

Equipment disputes

Equipment disputes often are associated with who controls access to the equipment, access to and blocking from the equipment, and proficiency.

Grant disputes

Grant disputes can occur in relation to a collaborating researcher being removed from a grant, without their permission, despite them already making a substantive contribution to the project, or one member of the team changing institution and trying to take all of the grant with them.



Suggested reading
1 of 2

Co-author of now-retracted paper about video games apparently demoted to “lecturer” by uni - Retraction Watch (Alison McCook | October 2017)

Costly Collaborations: The Impact of Scientific Fraud on Co-Authors' Careers (Papers: Philippe Mongeona and Vincent Larivière | January 2015)

Ethics, collective health, qualitative health research and social justice (Papers: Iara Guerriero and Fernando Peñaranda 2015)

The Ethics Ecosystem: Personal Ethics, Network Governance and Regulating Actors Governing the Use of Social Media Research Data (Papers: Gabrielle Samuel, et al | February 2019)

The Ethics of Collaboration Whose Culture? Whose Intellectual Property? Who Benefits? (Claire Smith and Gary Jackson 2007)

Laboratory/workspace disputes

Laboratory/workspace disputes often are associated with who controls access to, and use of the space, access to and blocking from the space, and proficiency. It can also include failure to keep a space clean.

Personality disputes

Some disputes come down to simple personality clashes.

Publication ethics disputes

Publication ethics disputes typically relate to disagreements about where and when to publish research outputs. See [RIRS#4](#) items 1-14 for more about research outputs.

This sheet discusses some simple strategies to avoid these disputes. See [RIRS#6](#) for more about collaborative research.

4) Parties to disputes

Typically, the parties in a dispute will be two or more researchers who are current, recent or previous collaborators on a project or research output.

All parties might not be current Griffith University researchers. All parties might not be current Griffith University researchers, parties could be previously affiliated or recently separated from Griffith University. Similarly, external researchers might be Australian-based or based outside Australia.

The location and affiliation of the parties may introduce extra complications (e.g. which institution's policies, procedures or guidance standards apply and/or which national standards apply?) See [RIRS#6](#) for more about collaborative research.

5) What aren't considered disputes

The following are not considered to be disputes between researchers (primarily because they are addressed by other specialised arrangements):

- (i) Allegations from an organisational area, or general staff member, that a researcher has not adhered to Griffith University policy (e.g. not obtaining the required ethics approval prior to conducting a project, conducting a project in a manner not covered by the approval, or breaching the conditions of that approval).
- (ii) Allegations of [sexual harassment](#), [bullying](#) or [fraud](#), which are investigated and managed through specialised processes by Corporate Services.

Suggested
reading
2 of 2

For young scientists, a supervisor's fraud can derail a career - STAT (Ivan Oransky | November 2016)

From research integrity to researcher integrity: issues of conduct, competence and commitment (Papers: Sarah Jane Banks 2015)

Geoscience society rescinds award to top seismologist after ethics investigation - Nature (Sara Reardon | May 2018)

Researcher discovers paper published by co-author in another journal - Retraction Watch (Victoria Stern | September 2017)

Resolving authorship disputes by mediation and arbitration (Papers: Zen Faulkes | 2018)

What does it mean to "take responsibility for" a paper? - Scientist Sees Squirrel (Stephen Heard | July 2018)

Whitepaper: Practical challenges for researchers in data sharing (David Stuart, et al | September 2018)

- (iii) Allegations of a breach of the [Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research \(2018\)](#)/research misconduct. Such matters are processed as per the [Research Integrity Breach Investigation Procedure document](#).

Allegations of a breach of relevant laws and regulations. Such matters are processed as per the relevant law or regulation.

6) Avoiding disputes with collegiate planning

Most of the common disputes (see 2 above p1) and consequences (see 12 below p4) can be avoided with collegiate planning by collaborators. Such planning includes reaching agreement on a data plan (see RIRS#5 item 5 p2) and a publication plan (see [RIRS#6](#) item 7 p4).

Experience suggests such plans are important even if the researchers have collaborated before and even if they are experienced researchers. Having plans that are the product of collegiate discussions are especially important if this is the researchers' first collaboration and/or if any of them are early career researchers.

7) Avoiding disputes with good communication

Like most areas of collaborative research endeavours where the goal is to be successful and avoid costly missteps, good communication is paramount. Good communication is open, collegiate, respectful and professional. This communication should continue throughout the collaboration.

Following a collegiate discussion of all matters related to the research but especially those about the development, contribution and outcomes of the research should be confirmed by email and a copy of the exchange retained for later reference.

8) National standards

The [Australian Code \(2018\)](#) provides the national standards for the responsible conduct of Australian research. It is complemented by good practice guides. At the time of writing there is no specific national guidance with regard to disputes between researchers. There is guidance on collaborative research and alleged breaches of the Australian Code (2018). See [RIRS#6](#) and the [Procedure for the handling of alleged breaches of the Australian Code \(2018\) resource paper](#) for more on those matters.

9) International standards

Many countries have their own research integrity standards that govern the responsible conduct of research. When collaborating with researchers

**Tips and
overview of
process**

**Treat collaborators
with respect, integrity
and honestly**

**Maintain good and
collegiate
communication**

**Have an early
conversation about the
matters discussed in
these resource sheets
(e.g. location,
ownership, access and
use of project data)**

**In the event of a
dispute make a good
faith effort to resolve it**

**Only after such an
effort seek Group-level
mediation**

**Approach any
mediation
constructively, with
integrity and respect**

who are based in another jurisdiction it is important to understand what responsible conduct standards apply to them.

In the absence of any local standards, or when dealing with conflicting standards it may be useful to look at the guidance materials produced by the [International Committee of Medical Journal Editors](#) (ICMJ) and the [Committee on Publication of Ethics](#) (COPE).

The Office for Research (see the contact details on the p4 left side bar) will be able to assist with determining what standards should guide resolving the dispute.

10) Griffith University policy

The [Responsible Conduct of Research policy](#) provides a broad overview of Griffith University's implementation of the [Australian Code \(2018\)](#). Further policy detail (e.g. on conflicts of interest) can be found in other relevant University policy (with crosslinks to the Responsible Conduct of Research policy).

Practical guidance on these matters is provided by the Research Integrity Resource Sheets series.

11) Good faith efforts to resolve

By following in good faith the steps suggested in 6) and 7) above, most of the common reasons for disputes can be avoided, or identified early. Resolution may also be easier when there is a paper trail of what was initially discussed and agreed.

Griffith University researchers who find themselves in a dispute with another researcher must make every effort, in good faith to reach a mutually acceptable resolution.

Escalating a matter past this stage, without making a good faith attempt (even if you feel yourself to be the aggrieved party) could harm your interests.

12 Group-level mediation

Only once the parties have made a good faith attempt to resolve the dispute can it be escalated for Group-level mediation.

Different [Research Integrity Advisers](#) (RIA) can advise each of the parties through this process.

A party who feels the Group's Dean has a conflict of interest should discuss this with their RIA and contact the Office for Research.

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A matter must not be escalated to the University level unless there is a reason why the matter cannot be resolved at the Group-level, involves an alleged breach of the Australian Code (2018) or mediation has failed.

13) Consequences

Disputes can be a stressful experience that can sap energy, time and other resources. For this reason, Griffith University researchers must make every effort to avoid them.

If a matter is escalated beyond the Group-level the process will be much more formal and could have serious consequences. A finding that a researcher has committed research misconduct can have disciplinary consequences.

There is [commentary that suggests a forced retraction can do serious harm](#)¹ to the scholarly impact and reputation of researchers, which appears to last over ten years. In addition to the disciplinary consequences, the [harm caused by a research misconduct finding might be significant](#) (e.g. over an 85% reduction in scholarly impact).

Griffith University researchers are urged to follow the steps discussed in this Resource Sheet, before escalating a dispute to a formal investigation by the University or raising the matter externally (such as with a journal editor).

Even if a matter doesn't impact on the reputation or scholarly impact of individuals, it might harm how a project, line of enquiry or area of work is regarded and/or its prospects of success and impact.

14) Scope of these matters

These guidelines apply to all Griffith University research, regardless of whether the work requires ethical or biosafety clearance, the expertise of the parties, the methodology/design used, and/or the funding for the work (if any).

15) Sources of advice

Researchers are urged to consult the [other resource sheets](#) in this series. Researchers with further questions should consult a [RIA](#) (whether in their Group or elsewhere in the University) or the Office for Research.

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¹ We have included one article on the topic discussed. It is not the only item or necessarily the definitive discussion, but instead is one example