



Recommendation 2/2023, October 17th, on the Institutional affiliation in scientific publications

Purpose and rationale

The proper attribution to institutions of the results of their scientific activity is an important aspect of research integrity. The correct, honest declaration of affiliation is a prerequisite for the fair recognition and positioning of the institutions to which the authors belong, and a fair return to these institutions for the resources used.

It is not always easy to determine an author's affiliation, given the increasing mobility of researchers and the existence of multiple affiliations. This document outlines some concepts and situations related to affiliation and sets out some recommendations for good practice in the declaration of affiliation, in order to promote correct, fair attribution of affiliation between institutions and to prevent possible conflicts.

Definition and determination of affiliation

In a scientific publication, the affiliation identifies the institution or company with which the author(s) carrying out the research have a formal (contractual or administrative) relationship.¹

Affiliation is thus a statement by the authors of scientific papers about the entity or entities to which they were affiliated at the time they carried out their research. It is this institutional affiliation that must be reflected in scientific publications, contributions to conferences and bibliometric databases.

Researchers often report a variety of affiliations, reflecting a variety of possible situations, which are described in the following section.

Multiple affiliations and changes of affiliation

The possibility of declaring more than one affiliation is explicitly included in cases where authors work in centres which are attached to more than one institution, when they carry out their research in a centre other than the one to which they are linked by their main occupation (doctors or teachers, for example), or when they are on sabbatical leave in a centre other than the one to which they are linked by their main affiliation, among other situations.

Spanish legislation explicitly recognises the possibility of dual affiliation in cases of partial affiliation: affiliation to the original institution to which the researcher is attached and affiliation to the institution to which they are partially attached. This dual affiliation must be made explicit in any output based on the activity carried out during the period of partial affiliation.²

¹ The specific case of student affiliation is not addressed in this document.

² Article 17 of Law 14/2011, of 1 June 2011, on science, technology and innovation, amended by Law 17/2022, of 5 September 2022.

In all these cases, the multiple affiliations are usually established within the framework of agreements between the institutions or by means of specific authorisations. In other words, these situations are authorised and regulated by the main institutions.

If the affiliations declared do not correspond to a formal, documented relationship with an institution, they should be considered misleading and even fraudulent.

This issue has become particularly relevant following the establishment of university and research centre rankings based on citations of articles published in international journals according to the authors' self-declared affiliations. The importance that some institutions have given to these rankings has led to the detection of fraudulent practices in the declaration of affiliations in order to improve their positioning in the lists.

Good practice

Since declarations of affiliation and authorship are the mechanism for attributing scientific output to research institutions, it is essential to observe good practice in these declarations to avoid discrediting this process and possibly prejudicing third parties.

It should be noted that it is the responsibility of the author to declare affiliation honestly and truthfully in accordance with the rules governing the institution to which they belong. In the case of multiple affiliations, the order in which they are listed must be equitable.

Scientific institutions should ensure that authors follow these criteria.

Recommendations

- Multiple affiliations should only be considered if each of the institutions has given substantial support to the study. As a general criterion, it is recommended that no more than two institutional affiliations per author be listed.
- In all cases, the primary affiliation of each author should be the institution at which most of the work has been carried out. If an author has moved to another institution since the work was carried out, the current address may be included additionally.
- Research centres in Catalonia are recommended to review their researchers' practices and contractual clauses, especially in cases of multiple affiliation or changes in affiliation in accordance with the criteria and procedures for the authorisation of new institutional affiliations, and to make every effort to disseminate them internally and ensure personnel are familiar with them.
- We recommend that the regulation of affiliation be explicitly included in universities' and research centres' codes of research integrity, as is the case with authorship.
- While respecting the wording that each research centre or university deems appropriate for inclusion in its codes of good scientific practice, we propose that the following statement be included in the section on affiliations:

"[Name of the institution] must be the first/main scientific affiliation for articles signed by its members. The author(s) should only cite other affiliations if there is a formal agreement with another institution."

Finally, we would like to emphasise the need to transform the competitive environment and challenge the over-reliance on ranking systems. We recommend prudent use of systems based exclusively on quantitative and bibliometric criteria, in line with the recommendations of the San Francisco

Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA)³ and the commitments of the Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA).⁴

³ The Catalan version is available at https://sfdora.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/DORA_Catalan.pdf.

⁴ This document is available at <https://coara.eu/agreement/the-commitments/>.