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In search of credit

Explicit recognition of researchers' contributions to science is becoming more comprehensive. Not before time — especially as a means of crediting referees.

Last year, this journal received an unusual request: could three authors have it indicated in a footnote that they were joint second authors on a paper? We refused — for better or worse, our policy is to allow no more than three authors in first and last positions on a paper. But authorship order is a much greater obsession in some disciplines than others (the example in question was from biology). And there could hardly be a more clumsy way of indicating credit — not to mention the disputes that it provokes among co-authors.

For several years, *Nature* and the *Nature* research journals have insisted that each author's contribution should be indicated in a statement at the end of any paper. However, these statements are not systematic, and are not accompanied by metadata to make them more searchable. So although this approach works reasonably well in indicating who did what on a particular paper, there is potential for such statements to cumulatively provide a database of the skills and experience of individual researchers. Through such statements, it could become transparently clear that, say, John Smith was responsible for the development of a particular technique and had applied it in multiple contexts. At *Nature*, we are working on ways to increase the utility of author contribution statements and so achieve such transparency.

Of course, it would help to know which John Smith we are talking about. And here is where last year's launch of the Open Researcher and Contributor ID (ORCID) facility is to be welcomed. The core function of ORCID — a community collaboration (see go.nature.com/sy3qnp) — is to assign every researcher a number and a web page, thereby providing a unique identifier and so disambiguation. The web page enables the researcher to record their contributions: papers they have published and — a facility to come — their research grants and

patents. *Nature* journals authors can link their ORCID to their account in our manuscript submission and tracking system, and we will soon be publishing authors' ORCIDs in papers. (Readers can register for ORCID here: <https://orcid.org/register>; see also *Nature* 485, 564; 2012.)

In contrast to such public activities, refereeing tends to be a private affair, whether for funding agencies or for journals. But it is of immense value and deserves its own credit. Referees can examine a submission only for its surface validity rather than for its deeper truth, but that in itself involves a substantial commitment. Some may devote days to the task if they are sufficiently stimulated or worried. The more that can be done to reward such dedication the better.

That is why *Nature* and the *Nature* journals have introduced two ways in which referees can be given credit. Any referee who, in a given year, has refereed three or more papers for any of the journals will receive a letter acknowledging their contribution and a free subscription to their choice of one of the journals. More importantly, we have recently introduced a system by which our referees can download a statement of the number of papers they have refereed for us. This report is available by logging into the 'My Account' page on any *Nature* journal's manuscript submission and tracking system and reflects the refereeing activity across all *Nature* journals. If nothing else, such statements provide a formal reference that someone can pass on to employers, government agencies and others enlightened enough to appreciate the value of such contributions.

All of these developments are ways in which researchers can gain explicit credit for contributions that have previously relied more on word of mouth. This is a trend that we will continue to support and encourage. ■

Safety catch

International laboratory survey offers comfort — and caution.

In Lake Wobegon, the fictional town invented by the US humorist Garrison Keillor, "all the women are strong, all the men are good-looking, and all the children are above average". In keeping with Keillor's gentle dig at the inflations of self-bias, if Lake Wobegon had research laboratories you can be sure that all the experiments would work, all the results would be significant and all the scientists would work safely.

This week, *Nature* reports the initial analysis of results from the first international survey of scientists' attitudes and behaviour towards lab safety, conducted by the University of California, Los Angeles, together

with Nature Publishing Group (see page 9). The analysis hints at a Lake Wobegon bias in perceptions about safety: one-third of scientists say that safety is more important to them than it is to their colleagues, with only 2% voting the other way. Although most respondents say that their labs are safe places to work, they simultaneously report behaviour, such as frequent lone working, that seems to belie that confidence.

The survey was done to improve understanding of lab safety culture. Health-and-safety officers have long complained of a lack of international data. It would be premature to draw immediate conclusions from the quantitative results — for example, almost half the respondents reported being injured in the lab — because few other comparable data have been collected. But the results do caution against complacency.

So, as you return to your laboratories in the New Year, look around the benches, observe your own working practices and those of your colleagues, and evaluate your relationships with supervisors and safety officers. Not everyone can be above average — but awareness of how perception clashes with reality can help lift standards for all. ■