What to do in cases of suspected plagiarism in submitted articles

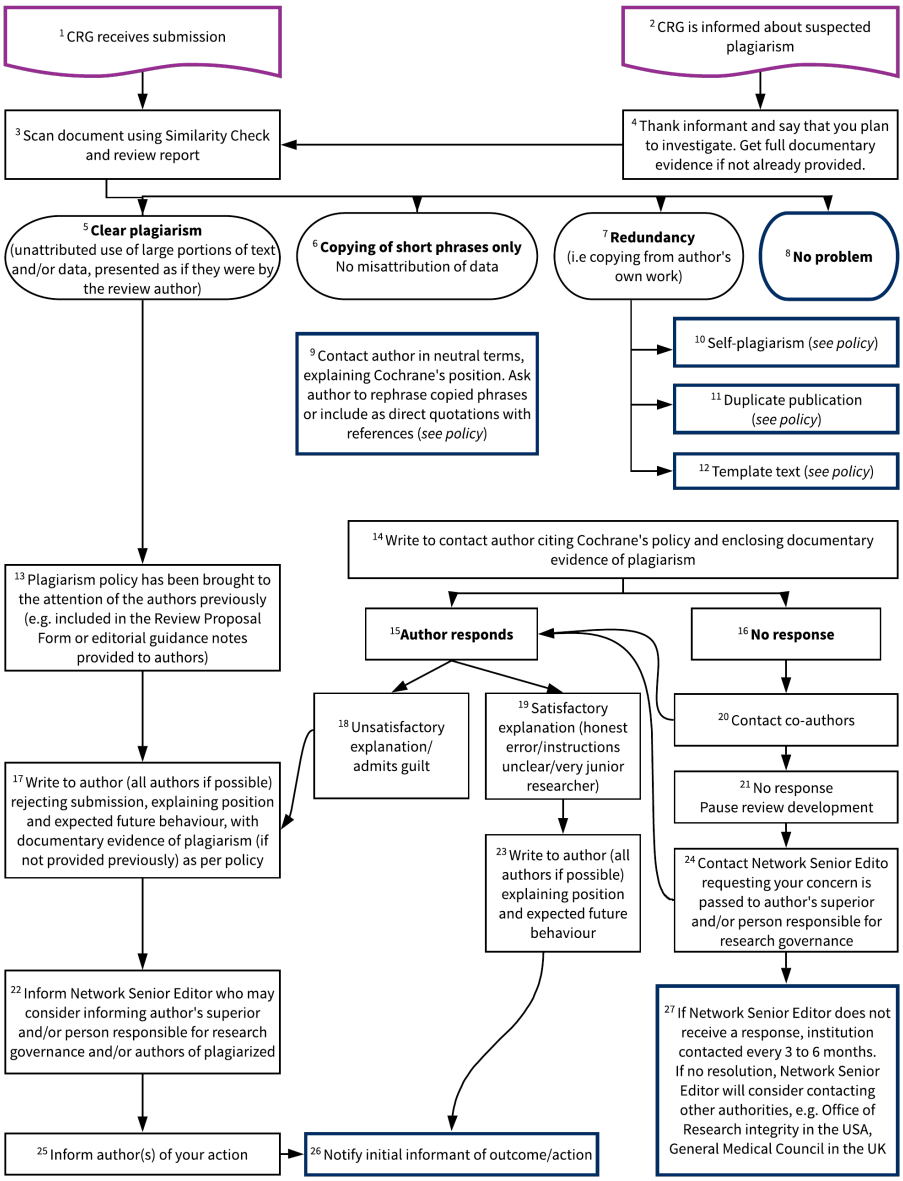
- Substantial and/or repeat instances of plagiarism
- Recording information about cases of suspected plagiarism in Archie

The Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) has published guidance, in the form of a flowchart, on how to deal with suspected plagiarism. This flowchart has been adapted, with permission, to Cochrane's editorial process. Editorial teams with a case of suspected plagiarism should follow the process outlined in the flowchart in the *Flowchart*. As shown in the flowchart, there is no arbitrary threshold that should be used to signify plagiarism, rather the nature of the duplicated material is as important as the incidence.

As described in the flowchart, once overlapping text has been identified, the severity of overlap will dictate the action to be taken. Common reaction from authors when confronted with accusations of plagiarism can range from indifference to anger and panic. Make your decisions thoughtfully. Sharing the similarity report can be useful for discussion with authors if it adds value to the discussion and understanding of the issue. Be educational rather than punitive.

It is good practice to ensure that the Co-ordinating Editor and Contact Editor (if used) for a review are informed in cases of overlapping text and correspondence with authors. When authors make changes in response to an Editor’s feedback, a member of the editorial team should check the revised manuscript when resubmitted to confirm the revisions are sufficient.

Flowchart. What to do if plagiarism is suspected



Adapted with permission from COPE from the flowchart (2013): "What to do if you suspect plagiarism: Suspected plagiarism in a submitted manuscript". *The Network Senior Editor will liaise with Editor in Chief about actions taken or potential escalations.*

Substantial and/or repeat instances of plagiarism

Cochrane Review Groups should follow certain steps if they identify one of the following: (1) high levels of clear plagiarism within one review that the Co-ordinating Editor would like to draw to the attention of the Network Senior Editor and Editor in Chief; (2) repeated instances of plagiarism at different stages of a review; or (3) from the same author(s) in different reviews.

As noted in the *Flowchart*, it may be appropriate to report author(s) to academic institutions. This action, and any other very serious consequences must be discussed and undertaken in consultation with the Network Senior Editor who will inform the Editor in Chief of such cases. The Network Senior Editor and Editor in Chief will, however, consider situations on a case-by-case basis and decide on an appropriate course of action.

Recording information about cases of suspected plagiarism in Archie

Storing Similarity Check reports: Editorial teams can record similarity scores with notes of what was checked in the History section of the review workflow. If relevant, copies of similarity reports may be saved in the workflow files.

Recording actions taken: Editorial teams should consider whether to record as a note any action against an author in their Archie person record, sharing the note within their entity or with a specific administrative role. Notes should be as factual as possible, noting what has occurred and the actions taken, as opposed to judgmental. For example, it would be appropriate to write, “A paragraph of text was copied verbatim from a separate article without acknowledgement of the original text. The author was asked to explain the reason for this and make appropriate changes before resubmitting.” It would be inappropriate to write, for example, “Author often plagiarises text”.

Instances of serious plagiarism: These will be escalated to the Network Senior Editor and Editor in Chief (see Substantial and/or repeat instances of plagiarism). The Network Senior Editor and Editor in Chief will monitor whether cases occur with the same authors or groups of authors, and will take appropriate action.