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HANDLING OF POST-PUBLICATION CRITIQUES

What is a post-publication critique?

In accordance with **COPE Core practices**, https://cope.onl/core-5, journals must allow for post-publication discussion on their site, through letters to the editor or on an external moderated site. Post-publication discussion typically starts with a reader's critique of an article that a journal has previously published. When formally submitted for journal publication, such critiques are commonly known as 'letters to the editor', 'commentaries', 'comments' or other types of 'correspondence'. This document offers guidance on handling post-publication critiques submitted for publication; online forums or other methods of commenting on published content are not considered. Unlike informal or online post-publication discussions, after a formal critique is received, journals often invite the original authors of the critiqued article to write a 'response' or 'reply'. Furthermore, both critique and response may be peer reviewed and revised, and, if accepted and published, are indexed by bibliographic databases. How to handle responses to post-publication critiques is also considered in this guidance document.

What is the purpose of a post-publication critique?

Post-publication critiques provide a mechanism for readers to raise concerns or seek clarification about published content. Critiques may provide an alternative interpretation of the original content and they allow journals to engage in issues relevant to their research community. They also represent an opportunity for journals to present a scholarly and constructive exchange about issues important to their readership. During the editorial handling process of critiques, the original authors of the work are given the opportunity to reply to help facilitate discourse. Through publication of such commentary and exchanges, readers can also be made aware of further developments and arguments that advance a field of research. Therefore, a default position for a journal should be to consider critiques for publication if they are found to be constructive and useful to the community.

What should be considered when handling post-publication critiques?

Submitted critiques can often be challenging to handle and may be time consuming and complex.

Questions journals face include:

- **Does the critique add value?**
- **Should it be peer reviewed?**
- **Do the original authors and handling editor(s)/peer reviewers have any potential conflicts of interest?**
- **Should the original authors be contacted? If so, at what point in the process?**
- **What happens if the original authors do not respond?**
- **Should the critique be published, or is another route, after due consideration or investigation, more appropriate, such as an amendment to the original article (eg, a correction, expression of concern, or retraction)?**
- **If an amendment to the original article is appropriate, how does a journal recognise the contribution of the researcher who raised the issue?**

There may be other considerations too; for example,

- **How many critiques can be published on the same article?**
- **Should a time limit be imposed, and what interval is reasonable between article publication and allowing post-publication discussions?**
- **Should there be limits on article length and number of references allowed?**
- **Should open access journals charge an article publication/processing charge (APC) for post-publication discussions?**
- **Consider if new data are allowed and if so, the number of tables/figures allowed, consistent with journal policy on data availability, ethical approval and consent, etc.**
- **Consider if authors are allowed to publish anonymous letters or letters under a pseudonym eg, see COPE Case 12-17, 'Anonymity versus author transparency', https://cope.onl/case-anonymity**

Following discussion among Wiley colleagues and COPE, and based on additional feedback from external editors and COPE Council Members, here we propose potential considerations and steps for handling a post-publication critique. We hope editors will find this guidance helpful in transparently determining their own policies and processes for handling critiques.

Cite this as: COPE Council. COPE Flowcharts and infographics — Handling of post-publication critiques — English. https://doi.org/10.24318/o1VgCAih

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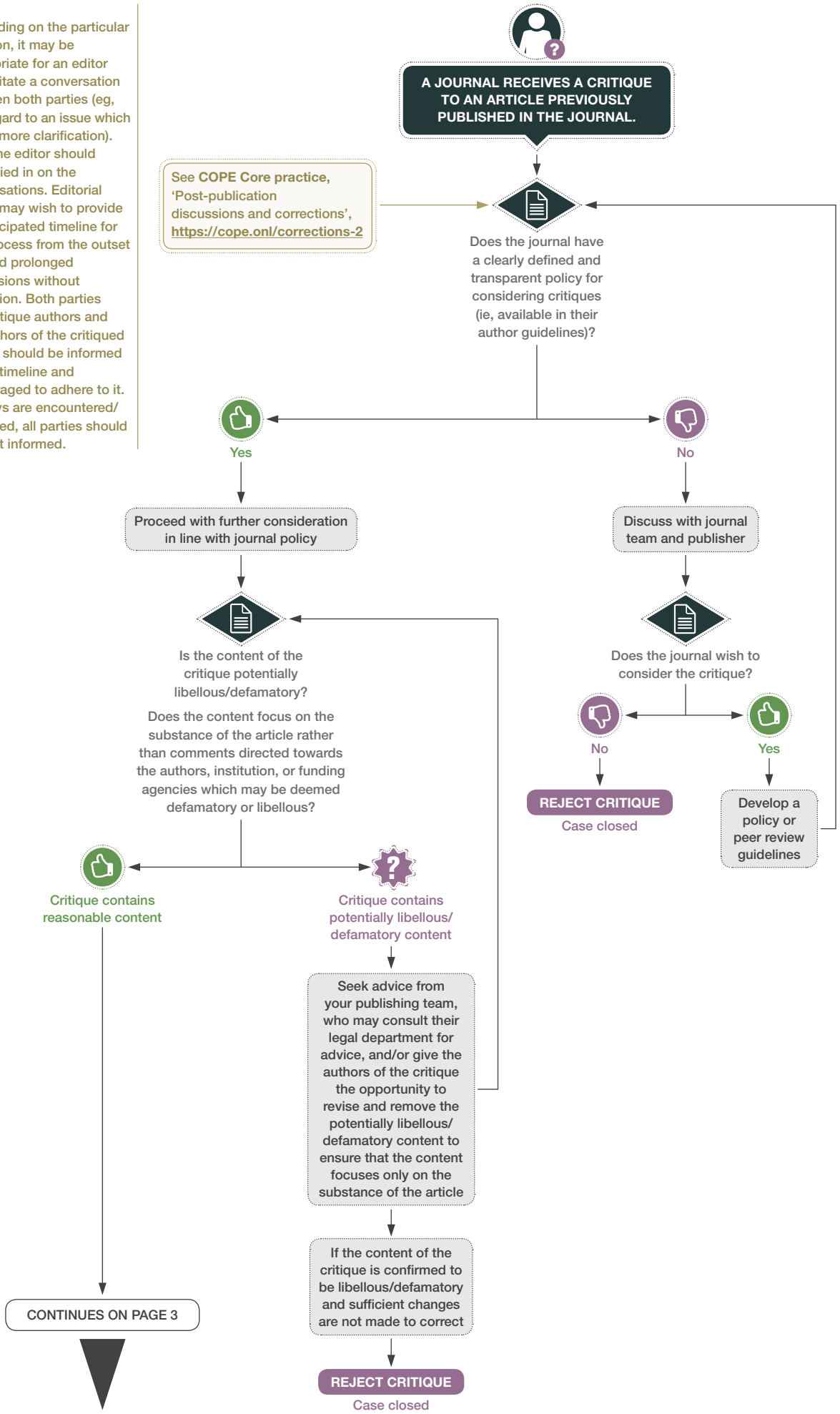
Notes

Depending on the particular situation, it may be appropriate for an editor to facilitate a conversation between both parties (eg, if in regard to an issue which needs more clarification). If so, the editor should be copied in on the conversations. Editorial teams may wish to provide an anticipated timeline for this process from the outset to avoid prolonged discussions without resolution. Both parties (the critique authors and the authors of the critiqued article) should be informed of this timeline and encouraged to adhere to it. If delays are encountered/ expected, all parties should be kept informed.



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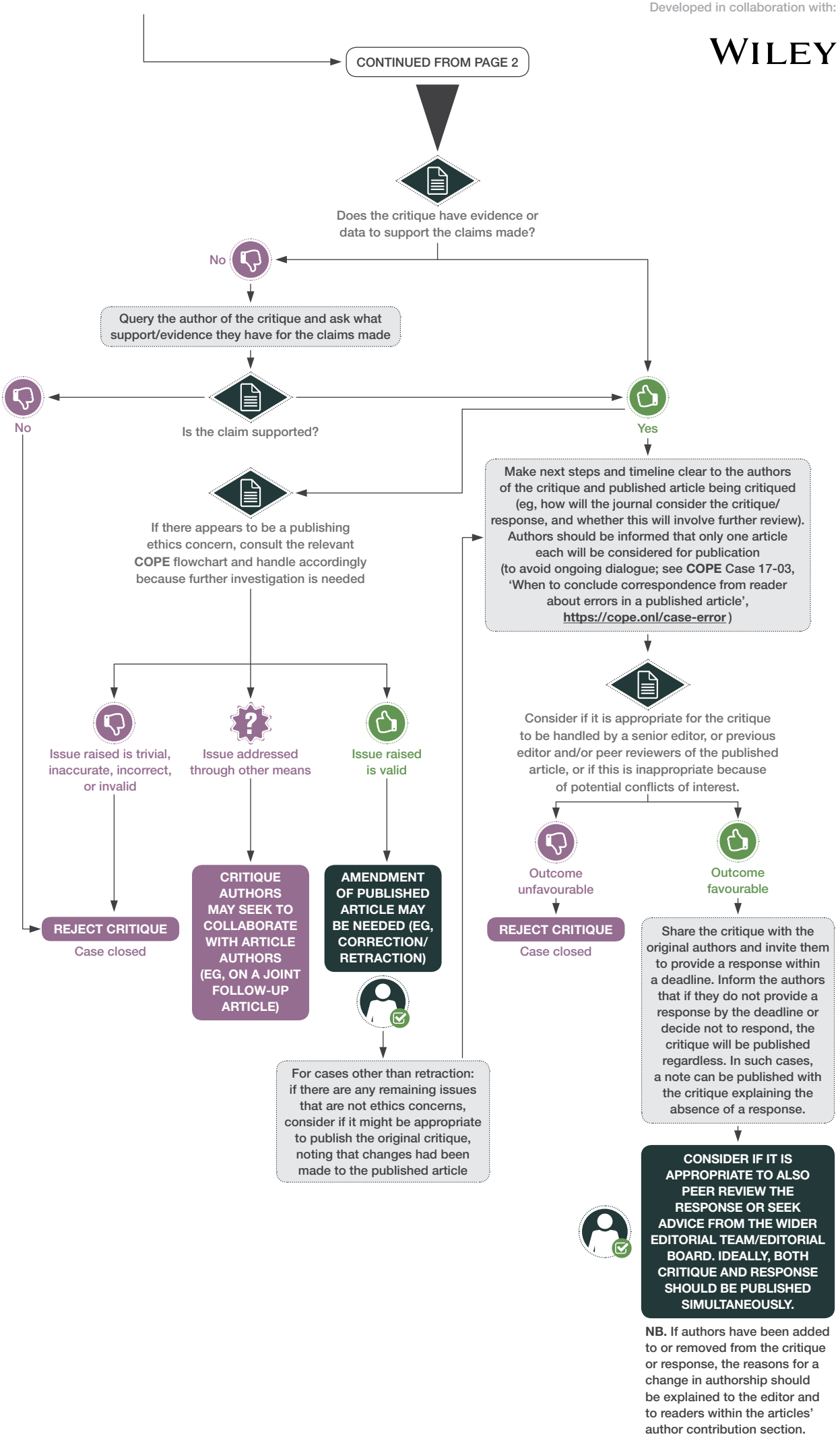

NB. If authors have been added to or removed from the critique or response, the reasons for a change in authorship should be explained to the editor and to readers within the articles' author contribution section.

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