

# ANNUAL REPORT OF THE FINNISH NATIONAL BOARD ON RESEARCH INTEGRITY TENK 2023



FINNISH NATIONAL BOARD ON  
RESEARCH INTEGRITY TENK

# CONTENTS

<b>1. Objectives and tasks of TENK</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2. Promotion of research integrity</b>	<b>5</b>
2.1. Research Integrity (RI)	<b>5</b>
2.2. Research Integrity Advisers	<b>7</b>
2.3. Communication	<b>8</b>
2.4. Events	<b>9</b>
<b>3. Handling Alleged Violations of Research Integrity</b>	<b>12</b>
3.1. Alleged and verified violations of RI reported to TENK	<b>12</b>
3.2. RI statements requested from and issued by TENK	<b>13</b>
3.3. Summaries of RI statements issued by TENK	<b>14</b>
<b>4. Ethical review</b>	<b>19</b>
4.1. Coordination of ethical review in human sciences	<b>19</b>
4.2. Ethical review statements in human sciences requested from and issued by TENK	<b>21</b>
4.3. Developing the ethical principles and ethical review of research on nature and the environment	<b>22</b>
<b>5. International activities</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>6. Personnel and finances</b>	<b>25</b>

## 1.

# OBJECTIVES AND TASKS OF TENK

THE FINNISH NATIONAL BOARD ON RESEARCH INTEGRITY TENK is an expert body appointed by Finland's Ministry of Education and Culture, which handles ethical issues concerning research. Its task is to promote responsible conduct of research and to prevent research misconduct (Decree on the Advisory Board on Research Integrity 1347/1991). In addition, pursuant to the Decree, TENK is tasked with 1) making proposals and issuing statements to the authorities on legislative matters and other issues related to research integrity, 2) acting as an expert body when investigating problems related to research integrity, 3) taking initiatives to promote research integrity and promoting discussion on research integrity in Finland, 4) monitoring international development in the relevant field and actively participating in international cooperation, and 5) carrying out communications related to research integrity.

The Finnish National Board on Research Integrity TENK carries out the tasks assigned to it by ensuring the ethical nature and quality of research thus preventing research misconduct in all fields of research. TENK prepares national guidelines, organises seminars and promotes education, coordinates the ethical review in human sciences, builds networks and maintains a presence both nationally and internationally. In addition, TENK oversees research integrity by monitoring and compiling statistics on violations of research integrity, by issuing statements on the investigation of alleged violations of research integrity and providing advice when problems arise. The implementation of these tasks is discussed in more detail in chapters 2–6.

The Ministry of Education and Culture appoints the members of TENK for a three-year term based on a proposal from the scientific community. During TENK's term of office running from 1 February 2022 to 31 January 2025, Professor **Riitta Keiski**, from the University of Oulu, will serve as chair, and **Sirpa Thessler**, Vice President of Natural Resources Institute Finland, will serve as vice chair.

In addition, TENK has eight other members:

- Manager **Veikko Ikonen**, VTT
- University Lecturer **Simo Kyllönen**, University of Helsinki
- Professor **Jari Laurikka**, University of Tampere

- University Lecturer **Matti Muukkonen**,  
University of Eastern Finland
- Senior Advisor **Susanna Näreaho**, Metropolia  
University of Applied Sciences
- Professor **Riitta Salmelin**, Aalto University
- Assistant Professor **Alexi Tornio**, University of Turku
- Professor **Risto Turunen**, University of Eastern Finland

Chancellor Emerita **Krista Varantola** serves as permanent expert on the Board. TENK Secretary General, Docent **Sanna-Kaisa Spooft**, serves as secretary.

TENK met seven times during 2023. The meetings were mainly held remotely. In addition to the Board's duties, TENK members promote research ethics and research integrity in many ways, for example by teaching, giving presentations, and giving speeches, taking part in publishing activities, giving interviews and other media performances, and by actively working in national and local ethics committees and working groups.

## 2.

# PROMOTION OF RESEARCH INTEGRITY

## 2.1. RESEARCH INTEGRITY (RI)

From 1994, the guidelines prepared by the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity TENK in cooperation with the research community have provided researchers and higher education students with a model of research integrity (RI) in Finland and on how suspected RI violations are handled (the RI process). *The Finnish code of conduct for research integrity and procedures for handling alleged violations of research integrity in Finland (RI Guidelines)* is based on the self-regulation of the research community and is a general guideline that must be applied in all the research activities and academic disciplines of the organisations that are committed to it.

From 2012, when the previous RI Guidelines were published, the higher education and research community has become increasingly international. Open science, data protection regulations, social media and AI applications as well as researchers' assessment practices have altered the operating methods and environments of researchers. In 2018, TENK responded to the increase in disputes related to the authorship of publications with a separate recommendation on agreeing on authorship (PDF).

At its meeting on 27 January 2023, TENK approved the new RI Guidelines it had updated in cooperation with the research community. **Atte Jääskeläinen**, Director General of the Ministry of Education and Culture, announced the publication of *The Finnish code of conduct for research integrity and procedures for handling alleged violations of research integrity in Finland. The Finnish National Board on Research Integrity's RI Guidelines 2023 (PDF)* on 15 March 2023 at Ethics Days at the House of Science and Letters. The new RI Guidelines emphasise the promotion of good research practices and a responsible research culture.



*Director General Atte Jääskeläinen announces the publication of the updated Finnish Code of Conduct for Research Integrity and Procedures for Handling Alleged Violations of Research Integrity in Finland at Ethics Day 15 March 2023.*

The key reforms of the RI Guidelines 2023 include the following:

- a shorter duration of the RI process and the timeline for requesting a statement from TENK;
- the addition of the role of Research Integrity Advisers;
- the aligned classification of RI violations with international practices;
- the addition of an assessment of severity to the identification of RI violations;
- the European recommendation on the protection of the parties is now taken into consideration;
- the addition of the researchers' obligation to disclose relevant commitments;
- the addition of the responsibility for processing alleged violations in Master's theses belonging to higher education institutions; and
- the English translation for "hyvä tieteellinen käytäntö" is now research integrity.

In spring 2023, the new guidelines were presented to stakeholders in remote discussion events tailored to the needs of stakeholders. Supplementary materials were compiled for the RI Guidelines, such as a checklist for committed organisations and researchers and a revised form for the reporting of suspected



RI violations. The Guidelines were printed separately in Finnish, Swedish and English. By the end of 2023, nearly one hundred organisations of different sizes had committed to the RI Guidelines 2023. [See organisations committed to the RI Guidelines.](#)

## 2.2. RESEARCH INTEGRITY ADVISERS

TENK coordinates the national [Research Integrity Adviser activities](#), launched in 2017. The premise for Research Integrity Adviser activities includes the need to strengthen the expertise of the research community in good scientific practice in Finland. The most important task of Research Integrity Advisers is to provide confidential advice to the staff of their organisation in the event of suspected violations of research integrity. Organisations committed to the new RI Guidelines also undertake to appoint a Research Integrity Adviser for their organisation. By the end of 2023, the network of Research Integrity Advisers included 75 research organisations and 157 Research Integrity Advisers.

TENK organises annual training and networking events for Research Integrity Advisers. In 2023, events were held in February, May and December, and this year the focus was on the induction of Research Integrity Advisers to the new RI Guidelines.

The update of the instructions for Research Integrity Advisers (TENK recommendations for Research Integrity Advisers, 2018) was initiated. The purpose of the update is to ensure that the instructions are in line with the [RI Guidelines updated in 2023.](#)

In January 2024, 59 Research Integrity Advisers responded to the annual survey for Research Integrity Advisers (response rate 38%). As in the past, the tasks of Research Integrity Advisers in 2023 primarily involved providing advice and information on research integrity. There were relatively few suspected RI violations and processes. The respondents to the survey believed that the work of Research Integrity Advisers was beneficial and that they had succeeded in their duties for the most part. Challenges identified included more extensive research ethics and research integrity issues falling outside the scope of the RI-focused task, resources, and the organisation's approach. TENK was asked to provide more support for such things as networking.

The Research Integrity Adviser Development Group started its new three-year term at the beginning of 2024. The development group defined the updating of the instructions for Research Integrity Advisers, the provision of instructions for organisations and engagement in Research Integrity Adviser activities, the facilitation of Research Integrity Adviser activities in English and the development of networking as the priorities of future activities. The group's chair is Simo Kyllönen, board member of TENK from the University of Helsinki.

## 2.3. COMMUNICATION

The task of the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity TENK is to communicate about matters of research integrity. Communication is part of all activities and expert tasks carried out by TENK and its Secretariat. TENK provides information about its activities, its guidelines and recommendations and, more broadly, national and international questions related to research ethics and research integrity in Finnish, Swedish and English on its website, in its *TENK tiedottaa* newsletter, as well as on the Responsible Research website and the Vastuullinen tiede X account (@VastTiede).

In 2023, communications were significantly linked to the revised RI Guidelines. Information was communicated on the Guidelines and their update in particular on the website and in the newsletter as well as through various targeted stakeholder messages. The *TENK tiedottaa* newsletter covers TENK's most important news and current issues in research ethics and research integrity. The newsletter is published 2–4 times a year. The newsletter is sent to subscribers, the management of organisations committed to TENK's guidelines and other key stakeholders. In 2023, the newsletter was published in February (1/2023), April (2/2023), September (3/2023) and December (4/2023). By the end of 2023, the newsletter had a total of 585 subscribers.

With the publication of the revised RI Guidelines, TENK's communications focused on updating the TENK website. The entire content of the website was updated to correspond to the contents and changes in the revised RI Guidelines. At the same time, attention was paid to the site's clarity, comprehensibility, and visual identity as well as the improvement of its user experience. During the year, the website was updated in Finnish. The updating of the Swedish and English webpages will continue in 2024.

In 2023, the TENK website was visited 168,000 times. The number of unique visits increased by 59.4% compared to the previous year 2022, when 105,383 visits were made to the website. There were 620,995 pageviews. The five most visited pages of the year were the Template for researcher's curriculum vitae (in English), the Homepage, Research Integrity, Advice and Materials and the Template for researcher's curriculum vitae (in Finnish). (Tutkijan ansioluettelomalli. Tutkimuseettisen neuvottelukunnan suositus 2020) The website and brand of the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity TENK are well known; most people can find the website directly through their browser's address field. The second most common method through which visitors found the website was search engines, and the third was through other websites, such as the websites of research organisations.

A new training video was produced to support communication and stakeholder work of the updated RI Guidelines, thus supplementing a series of previous videos. The new video presents good scientific practices through animation, audio and text. The video was made in Finnish and it



was subtitled in Swedish and English. Previous videos cover topics such as the investigation of research misconduct in Finland and ethical review in human sciences.

In addition, TENK members and its Secretariat provide communication on and bring awareness to TENK's activities and questions on research integrity by giving seminar presentations, publishing articles, and giving interviews.

## 2.4. EVENTS

TENK worked with other national research-ethical boards to organise Ethics Day 2023 on 15 March 2023. Ethics Day is a multidisciplinary seminar on research integrity, which has brought together representatives of different academic disciplines since 2011. This time, the theme of the seminar was ethical issues in the research of natural and environmental sciences.

The event began in the morning with workshops and the publication of the *Finnish Code of Conduct for Research Integrity and Procedures for Handling Alleged Violations of Research Integrity in Finland, The Finnish National Board on Research Integrity RI Guidelines 2023*. **Tiina Pullola** (Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry), **Petteri Lehikoinen** (Natural History Museum Luomus), **Meri Kunnasranta** and **Katja Holmala** (Natural Resources Institute Finland) and **Riina Huusko** (Natural Resources Institute Finland) discussed various methods for labelling wildlife at the first workshop of the morning. **Eero Kaila**, an Adviser at TENK, led the second workshop of the day, during which participants produced an ethical checklist for research in natural and environmental sciences together with stakeholders.



*From left, Päivi Tikka, Terhi Kilpi, Sanna-Kaisa Spoof, Riitta Keiski and Minna Aittasalo at the RI Guidelines 2023 publication event at the House of Science and Letters on 15 March 2023.*

Atte Jääskeläinen, Director General of the Ministry of Education and Culture, TENK Chair Riitta Keiski, Secretary General Sanna-Kaisa Spooft and Senior Adviser **Minna Aittasalo**, **Terhi Kilpi**, Assistant Director General at National Institute for Health and Welfare and **Päivi Tikka**, Director of the Division of Strategic Research at the Academy of Finland, addressed the audience in connection with the publication of the RI Guidelines. In addition, Senior Specialist **Toni Eerola** (Geological Survey of Finland), Research Coordinator **Anna Lintunen** (University of Helsinki), Professor **Ilari Sääksjärvi** (University of Turku), Research Professor **Juha Hiedanpää** (Natural Resources Institute Finland), Project Manager **Kaj Forsius** (Finnish Environment Institute) and TENK Vice Chair Sirpa Thessler and TENK member Simo Kyllönen all spoke at the Ethics Day seminar.

Ethics Day was organised at the House of Science and Letters (Tieteiden talo) in Helsinki (Kirkkokatu 6). The seminar could also be viewed remotely on YouTube. The event was organised in cooperation with the Board for Gene Technology (GTLK), the Council of Finnish Academies, the National Advisory Board on Social Welfare and Health Care Ethics (ETENE), the National Committee on Medical Research Ethics (TUKIJA) and the Council on the protection of animals used for scientific or educational purposes (TOKES).

In April, on 12 April 2023, an information event on commitment to the new RI Guidelines was organised for the management and administrative personnel of research organisations. The event was organised remotely on Zoom. The programme included Riitta Keiski, Chair of TENK, Erja Heikkinen, Director (Ministry of Education and Culture), Sanna-Kaisa Spooft, Secretary General of TENK, and Minna Aittasalo, Senior Adviser, as well as **Kirsi Klemelä**, Development Specialist (University of Turku).

In May, on 10 May 2023, an information event was held on the new RI Guidelines and on the handling of suspected violations of research integrity for persons in research organisations who investigate suspected cases of research misconduct and prepare or implement RI processes. At the event, the participants learned about the updated RI Guidelines and the key changes to these in terms of the RI process and the handling of suspected violations of research integrity. The event was organised remotely on Zoom. Sanna-Kaisa Spooft, Secretary General of TENK, Minna Aittasalo, Senior Adviser, and Professor **Sakari Melander**, the Chancellor's Secretary (University of Helsinki) appeared at the event.

The Research Integrity Morning event was organised on 24 May 2023 for international researchers. The event, held in English, included presentations on TENK's activities, guidelines and recommendations as well as on Research Integrity Adviser activities. TENK Secretary General Sanna-Kaisa Spooft, Coordinator **Kalle Videnoja**, Adviser Eero Kaila, and Coordinator **Anni Sairio** spoke at the event organised remotely via Zoom.

In October, on 10 October 2023, TENK organised a seminar on good academic practices in higher education institutions in cooperation with the Finnish National Agency for Education and the Ministry of Education and Culture. Seminar participants discussed the Council of Europe's Recommendation on countering education fraud, promoting good academic practices and preventing education fraud in higher education institutions. The free seminar was organised at Paasitorni in Helsinki. It was also possible to follow the event remotely on YouTube. The programme included addresses by Permanent Secretary **Anita Lehikoinen** (Ministry of Education), Senior Ministerial Advisor **Maija Innola** (Ministry of Education and Culture), Professor **Riitta Pyykkö** (University of Turku), Professor **Erika Löfström** (University of Helsinki) and Professor **Phil Newton** (Swansea University). Vice President **Petri Suomala** (Aalto University), Director of the Strategic Development of Education **Peppi Taalas** (University of Jyväskylä), Vice Chair **Diana Muraskina** (SAMOK), Senior Researcher **Anne Kärki** (Satakunta University of Applied Sciences) and Director of Educational Affairs **Petri Sjöblom** (University of Turku) spoke in parallel small groups. The event was chaired by Director **Jonna Korhonen** (Ministry of Education and Culture).

In October, on 25 October 2023, TENK took part in the Finnish University Partnership for International Development (UniPID)-organised publication event for the work *Ethical guidelines for responsible academic partnerships with the Global South*. TENK partnered with the event and guidelines by participating in the steering group's work. **Liisa Laakso** (Nirdoc Africa Institute), **Tiina Vihma-Purovaara** (Ministry of Education and Culture), **Elizabeth Eta** (University of Helsinki), **Bonn Juego** (University of Jyväskylä), **Jackie Kado** (Network of African Science Academies), Markus Laitinen (University of Helsinki) and **Tiina Konttinen** (UniPID, University of Jyväskylä) spoke at the From words to action: Laying foundations for responsible academic partnerships with the Global South event. TENK's address was given by Veikko Ikonen, member of TENK.

## 3.

# HANDLING ALLEGED VIOLATIONS OF RESEARCH INTEGRITY

## 3.1. ALLEGED AND VERIFIED VIOLATIONS OF RI REPORTED TO TENK

In 2023, a total of 38 new allegations of violations of research integrity (RI) were reported to TENK by Finnish universities, universities of applied sciences and other research organisations committed to the RI guidelines. Four of these concerned Master's theses at universities of applied sciences.

According to the notifications received by TENK, 37 RI processes were completed during the year, some of which had already been started during preceding years. Of these, 32 concerned cases investigated in universities or other organisations and five concerned Master's theses at universities of applied sciences. The allegations were investigated in the RI process in the organisation where the research or thesis under suspicion was carried out.

In 2023, 11 RI violations were observed, seven of which were cases of research misconduct and three disregard for RI.

<b>Allegations of RI violations reported to TENK and verified violations, no.</b> (number of cases concerning UAS Master's theses shown in parentheses)	<b>2023</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2019</b>
Reports from research organisations on new allegations of RI violations	38 (4)	31 (5)	53 (10)	43 (2)	34 (13)
Research organisations' finalised RI processes with a verified RI violation: <b>misconduct</b>	7 (2)	2 (1)	5 (2)	6 (3)	13 (9)
Research organisations' finalised RI processes with a verified RI violation: <b>disregard</b>	3 (0)	0	3 (1)	9 (2)	6 (4)

*Table 1: The numbers of allegations of RI violations and verified RI violations reported to the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity TENK (number of cases concerning theses prepared at universities of applied sciences are shown in parentheses).*

### **3.2. RI STATEMENTS REQUESTED FROM AND ISSUED BY TENK**

In 2023, TENK received a total of 13 new requests for statements related to the investigation processes of alleged violations of research integrity. The backlog caused by the exceptionally large number of requests for statements received in the year before last was resolved, and the number of requests for statements returned to the level of previous years in 2023. Overall, TENK issued a total of eight RI statements in 2023.

In addition, TENK received one request for a statement concerning ethical review statements issued by a human sciences ethics committee. The summaries of statements issued by TENK for ethical review in human sciences are presented in section 4.2.

The summaries of RI statements issued by TENK in 2023 are presented in section 3.3. The summaries are also published on the [TENK website](#).

<b>TENK's statements, no.</b> (number of statements requested and issued concerning UAS Master's theses shown in parentheses)	<b>2023</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2019</b>
New requests for a statement received by TENK that concerned the RI process	13 (0)	8 (0)	37 (7)	14 (2)	23 (10)
Statements issued by TENK that concerned the RI process; also including different requests for a statement other than those in the previous section	7 (0)	19 (0)	22 (0)	13 (0)	22 (12)
Expert statements not concerning the RI processes	2	1	1	7	1

*Table 2: Number of statements issued by the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity TENK (number of statements requested and issued concerning UAS Master's theses shown in parentheses).*

### 3.3. SUMMARIES OF RI STATEMENTS ISSUED BY TENK

#### **Statement 1 (TENK 2023:1): The absence of a reference in a seminar presentation was not considered an RI violation**

TENK received a request for a statement from Postdoctoral Researcher A from University X, which was related to a notification of suspected RI violation submitted by A. The respondent, Docent B, was a university researcher from the same university. The notification concerned alleged misappropriation and disregard for good research practices. The request for a statement expressed dissatisfaction with the RI preliminary investigation decision made by the Rector of X in the matter.

According to A, during a presentation at an international seminar B has presented the research they (A and B) had carried out in their joint project as B's own and was thus guilty of misappropriation. In addition, A believed B was guilty of misleading the research community, as B had failed to mention A and other researchers involved in the joint project during B's presentation. In addition, A expressed a suspicion related to B's appointment as a docent.

TENK finds that the purpose of the contested presentation was for B to present their personal research career in a "My journey as a researcher" type



format. The aim of the seminar was not to give extensive presentations on research projects implemented for example at X. The shortening of references was considered to be normal practice in the sector. TENK found that B had not committed an RI violation in their presentation and that University X had completed the RI process in question in accordance with TENK's instructions.

**Statement 2 (TENK 2023:2): Professor did not steal his subordinates' research idea, but he should have informed them about his own project plan**

University Lecturer A in Pharmaceuticals and Health Sciences suspected that their supervisor, Professor B had stolen research ideas of the research group the professor headed, belittled the achievements of other researchers and made their work more difficult. At the centre of the case was a diagram of the theoretical model presented in the manuscript for joint article by A's research team, which, according to A, had been created as the result of long-term development work. A was surprised when this figure was included in the slideshow presenting B's project plan in their team meeting. Member C of A's research team had, without A's knowledge, authorised B to use this manuscript in the preparation of their project. A had planned to apply for funding for a new project based on the diagram, but changed their plan to prevent a competitive situation. B received funding for their project, while A did not.

Based on the preliminary investigation, the President of the University decided that no RI violation had taken place. As the slideshow referred to the aforementioned manuscript, B did not present the controversial idea in their own name. A was dissatisfied with both the conclusion and the RI process carried out. According to A, the preliminary investigator did not have an in-depth knowledge of the research discipline in which the suspected misconduct took place.

In its statement, TENK found that in their position as supervisor, B should have taken the initiative well in advance to come to an agreement with A on the division of labour in planning projects on similar research topics. B should also have requested permission to use the contested manuscript either from all its authors or from the principal investigator of the research project in question, meaning A. However, the fact that B did not do so cannot be regarded as misappropriation or disregard for RI. As B mentioned in their presentation the source they had used, it was therefore not gross negligence. In TENK's view, the preliminary investigation and the expertise of the preliminary investigator had been sufficient, and no actual investigation was needed in the matter.

**Statement 3 (TENK 2023:3): The use of test materials was part of the research group's activities and there was no RI violation related to its use**

Researcher A from University X submitted a notification of a suspected RI violation, in which they suspected that Postdoctoral researcher B and project researcher C from University Y had committed a violation related to authorship. According to A, A had carried out experiments in a project led by B, the results of which ended up in an article published by B, C and three other authors in 2012. According to A, this had been an RI violation because A had not been asked to join the article's author group. A was dissatisfied with the RI preliminary investigation decision made by the President of University Y in the matter, according to which no RI violation had taken place.

In its statement, TENK concluded that the experiments carried out by A and B were experiments carried out within the framework of the same research group. B had been a principal investigator in their research group and was responsible for the division of tasks within the research group. TENK found that neither B nor C had committed an RI violation and that the RI process in question had been carried out in accordance with TENK's Guidelines.

**Statement 4 (TENK 2023:4): Not citing the thesis of an author of a joint article was not plagiarism**

Researcher A suspected that Postdoctoral Researcher B, Assistant Professor C and Professor D were guilty of plagiarising researcher E's thesis in a joint article in the field of technology written by B, C, D and E. The article made use of the text, results and observations of the thesis, but the thesis was not cited as a source. A believed that the research community was also misled about the novelty of the findings in the article. In their request for a statement to TENK, A stated that the peer reviewers could not have known about the similarities between the article and the thesis.

In their decision, the President of the University concluded that even though it would have been desirable for the thesis to be cited, no RI violation had taken place. According to the President, "on the one hand, it is advisable to make extensive references to previous theses, but on the other hand, one should refrain from overly referring to one's own publications to artificially increase citation indices".

TENK has decreed that the authors of joint research articles should jointly approve both the content of the article and the names that are included in the list of authors. If an RI violation in a joint article has taken place, all those named as authors share responsibility for it, unless the contribution of each author is stated separately in the publication in question.

In its statement, TENK stated that because E was one of the authors of the article in question, parts of E's thesis were not plagiarised in the article. In approving the manuscript of the article, E had also accepted that the article did not reference E's thesis. At the same time, however, TENK agreed with the university's view that the thesis supervisors in particular should remember good citation practices when a thesis and a scientific publication are close in content.

**Statement 5 (TENK 2023:5): The grounds for the President's decision were not sufficient to establish research misconduct. The transitional provisions between the RI Guidelines had been interpreted incorrectly**

Principal Lecturer A and two other researchers from UAS 1 suspected that UAS 2 lecturer B was guilty of misappropriation in two articles B had published in the field of technology. According to A, B had acted as an expert in a multidisciplinary joint project, but not as a member of the research team, and B did thus not have the right to use the outputs of the project in their own name in those articles. According to B, however, the contractual situation applying to the parties and outputs of the project had been unclear. In addition, in B's own field of science, only those who participate in the writing of articles are listed as authors of articles.

On the basis of the preliminary investigation, the President of the University of Applied Sciences 2 decided that B was guilty of a mild RI violation, i.e. misappropriation based on the RI 2012 guidelines and plagiarism based on the RI 2023 guidelines. As the President considered the misconduct to be mild, there was no need to begin an actual investigation.

According to TENK, the contribution of other researchers must be presented in scientific publications in an adequate manner assessed on a case-by-case basis. In order for misappropriation, which is always very serious both as an act and in terms of its consequences, to be found to have taken place in the RI process, the act must not only fulfil the characteristics of misappropriation: it must also be intentional and deliberately mislead the scientific community. In this case, the President's decision was not sufficiently detailed to establish that misappropriation had taken place.

As the occurrence and identification of the RI violation were unclear, TENK stated that an investigation proper had to be initiated in the case. Both the assessment of the possible violation and the RI process had to be carried out in accordance with the RI 2012 Guidelines.

**Statement 6 (TENK 2023:6): Shortcomings related to the quality of a Master's thesis did not prove to be RI violations**

Person A submitted a notification of a suspected RI violation to the university's President, according to which Master's degree student B in social sciences

and economics was guilty of research misconduct in terms of plagiarism, misappropriation, fabrication and misrepresentation of observations, as well as misleading the scientific community, which could be interpreted as disregard for good research practices.

The conclusion of the preliminary investigation carried out by the university was that B was not considered guilty of research misconduct or disregard for good research practices and that there was no reason to start an investigation proper. A was dissatisfied with the decision and the RI process carried out by the university.

In its statement, TENK stated that the RI process had been carried out appropriately and that B, who graduated with a Master's degree, had not committed an RI violation in their thesis. The evaluation criteria of the faculty that conducted the investigation allows for quality deficiencies in Master's theses. TENK does not comment on the evaluations of theses in its statements.

**Statement 8 (TENK 2023:8): An RI process that focuses on individual researchers cannot assess the organisation's activities as an authority**

Professor A suspected that there was a conflict of interest in a research institute when the same persons carry out research activities and make official decisions on the subject they research. A named three persons that they suspected of RI violations. The research institute did not initiate the preliminary investigation of the RI process.

TENK considers that an RI process that concerns individual researchers cannot assess the organisation's activities as an authority. However, the suspected RI violation notified by A included serious allegations concerning the activities of individual researchers. Therefore, the suspicion was within the scope of the RI Guidelines and the research institute should have carried out a preliminary inquiry in accordance with the RI process, in which the parties concerned would have been consulted.

However, the preliminary review into the matter carried out by the research institute corresponded in scope to a preliminary inquiry of the RI process, and a preliminary inquiry would not have brought forward anything new that would not have been revealed in the documents submitted in connection with TENK's statement processing and in the consultation of the parties involved. Therefore, it was not necessary to launch a preliminary inquiry in line with the RI Guidelines. The respondents were not guilty of RI violations.

## 4

# ETHICAL REVIEW

## 4.1. COORDINATION OF ETHICAL REVIEW IN HUMAN SCIENCES

TENK coordinates ethical review in human sciences and promotes cooperation between regional and organisation-specific human science ethics committees.

When requested by researchers, human science ethics committees issue ethical review statements concerning the ethical aspects of research plans and other risks in research. The statements are based on TENK's guidelines *The ethical principles of research with human participants and ethical review in the human sciences in Finland. Finnish National Board on Research Integrity TENK guidelines 2019* to which the organisations are committed. The guidelines have been prepared together with the scientific community.

TENK's office monitors the state of ethical review by collecting data on cases processed by human science ethics committees annually and maintaining a list of the committees' contact information. At the end of 2023, a total of 80 organisations were committed to TENK's ethical principles for human sciences.

There is a constant rise in the need for ethical reviews. Extensive and often multidisciplinary projects require careful ethical reflection. Entirely negative statements are issued very rarely, but the follow-up discussion following a request for a statement and various more detailed questions are a key part of the statement processes. If the request for a statement has been made only due to a requirement by the publisher, the committees may process the requests for statements on an accelerated schedule. The committees may also provide a description of the Finnish ethical review system. Researchers have expressed that they still need support in matters related to the processing of personal data. The use of artificial intelligence in research has also been an issue that researchers need information on. Multidisciplinary international projects, special issues related to artistic research, and projects that combine scientific research and development activities emerged as challenging cases.

<b>Cases handled by human science ethics committees, no.</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2018</b>
Requests for statement related to ethical reviews	802	690	589	432	432	468
Statements given by ethics committees	819	611	582	395	389	457
Negative statement <sup>1</sup>	4	4	3	7	0	13
No statement (ethical review not considered necessary or request for statement directed to another committee)	20	57	36	21	36	26
Organisations replying to TENK's follow-up survey, no.	27	25	34	25	27	24

*Table 3: Number of cases handled by human science ethics committees each year*

If necessary, a statement can be requested from TENK on the decisions issued by human science ethics committees. In 2023, the **subcommittee for ethical review in human sciences** handled requests for statements of ethical reviews and prepared statements. The other task of the subcommittee is to develop ethical review in human sciences and the work of the committees in the field in Finland and to monitor the international development of field-specific, non-medical research ethics.

TENK member Risto Turunen serves as the chair of the subcommittee and Riitta Salmelin serves as the vice chair. Other members include TENK members Veikko Ikonen, Susanna Näreaho and Secretary General Sanna-Kaisa Spoof. Senior Adviser Minna Aittasalo served as secretary until 31 July 2023, and Senior Adviser **Iina Kohonen** took over the position as of 1 August 2023. The department held five meetings in 2023.

1 In 2019 and thereafter, a negative statement means that no positive statement could be given, or the required revisions to the research plan have not been made, or the requested additional material for the statement has not been delivered. Before 2019, the numbers also include cases where the request for statement was returned with a demand for amendment.



## 4.2. ETHICAL REVIEW STATEMENTS IN HUMAN SCIENCES REQUESTED FROM AND ISSUED BY TENK

TENK's guidelines *The ethical principles of research with human participants and ethical review in the human sciences in Finland* state that if a person who has requested an ethical review statement does not accept the proposed changes in the statement or the decision of the human sciences ethics committee, they may request a statement on the matter from TENK.

In 2023, TENK received one request for statement related to ethical review in human sciences. A summary of the issued statement is below.

### **Statement for ethical review in human sciences 1 (TENK 2023:7): The Human Sciences Ethics Committee acted in accordance with TENK's instructions when requesting the opinion of the Regional Medical Ethics Committee on the request for a statement**

A researcher requested a statement from TENK regarding the decision of the Human Sciences Ethics Committee of a University of Applied Sciences to not to issue an ethical review statement for the researcher's research. In the view of the committee, the research setting and plan contained features that could make the research subject to the Medical Research Act.

With the permission of the researcher, the secretary of the Human Sciences Ethics Committee contacted the regional Medical Ethics Committee to ask about the matter. The committee concluded that the study was within the scope of the Medical Research Act. The researcher submitted an application to the Medical Ethics Committee for processing, and received an ethical review statement in favour of the study.

However, the researcher questions the committee's decision not to issue a statement. The researcher considered that their study was not subject to the Medical Research Act, for example because the focus of the study was not on issues related to illness or health. In addition, the participants that were requested to take part in the study were of good general health and did not belong to any risk group. The researcher asked for TENK's view on the line between the ethical review of human sciences and medicine so that this would be regionally uniform. They also hope that TENK take a stand on the way in which the committee justified its decision to not issue a statement.

In TENK's view, the research setting described in the request for a statement was a borderline case, which could possibly also have been assessed by the Human Sciences Ethics Committee. The Human Sciences Ethics Committee acted in accordance with the IEEA 2019 Guidelines when requesting a statement from the Regional Medical Ethics Committee on whether the study had to be reviewed under the Medical Research Act. As the Regional Medical Ethics Committee found that the study was subject to the Medical Research Act, this was the right party to review the study.

In TENK's view, the ethics committee also justified its decision sufficiently to the researcher. At a general level, TENK encourages committees to describe the grounds for their decisions as clearly as possible.

### **4.3. DEVELOPING THE ETHICAL PRINCIPLES AND ETHICAL REVIEW OF RESEARCH ON NATURE AND THE ENVIRONMENT**

In October, TENK launched a project to draw up national ethical principles and an ethical review model for research in the fields of natural and environmental sciences in Finland. The project concerns all research on nature and the environment.

The Ethical Principles of Research in the Natural and Environmental Sciences (LYTE) project funded by the Ministry of Education and Culture aims to harmonise and develop research ethics practices in natural sciences, life sciences, environmental and technical research and, at the same time, to increase ethical discussion on the impacts of research on nature and the environment. The project is based on TENK's model for the ethical review of research on humans.

A decision was made to apply for funding for the project on the basis of the results of the needs assessment (TENK 1/2023) published in January.

A steering group was set up to support this work, chaired by Riitta Keiski, TENK Chair. Sirpa Thessler, Vice Chair of TENK, was elected Chair of the working group. TENK Adviser **Veera Launis** serves as secretary of the steering group and working group.

## 5.

# INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITIES

TENK PARTICIPATES IN European Union's Horizon Europe project PREPARED, which was launched in September 2022. The three-year project aims to create research-ethical guidelines for research done in times of crisis where results must be made available on an accelerated schedule. The starting point of the project is to respond to research-ethical challenges encountered during the COVID-19 pandemic. The consortium has a strong emphasis on biosciences and medicines. The guidelines created in the project should also be applicable to non-biomedical and non-medical research, and TENK plays a key role in this task.

One of TENK's key tasks in the three-year project is to survey the ways in which European research integrity is regulated and to engage in stakeholder cooperation with ENRIO and other research integrity actors. In addition, TENK's task is to ensure that the guidelines produced in the project are in accordance with European research integrity practices and guidelines.

In 2023, TENK produced an analysis of the European research integrity systems for the project and was involved in organising a focus group interview that aimed to validate the project's research ethics and research integrity problems accelerated during the first year by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The project is coordinated by the University of Central Lancashire (Cyprus).

In addition, TENK acts as a partner in the 3-year EU project on research on scientific ethics and integrity BEYOND (2023–2025). The BEYOND project uses methods of behavioural science to determine what institutional factors and factors related to a researcher's career path are behind research misconduct and what kind of research integrity education is as effective as possible. The purpose of the project is to create models for dismantling and preventing factors exposing to misconduct. In addition, the project will develop new and further develop existing education materials.

TENK is responsible for communications in this international project. In 2023, a Dissemination, Exploitation and Communication Plan was created for the project, graphic design was commissioned and created for the project, the project website was designed and launched, and the project's social media communications were launched in LinkedIn.

As part of the project, TENK also conducts consultations on the usefulness of existing education and training models intended to reduce research misconduct and the impact of research misconduct investigations and statements processes on the researchers involved in them.

The project is coordinated by the University of Oslo, and the project's other Finnish partner is the University of Helsinki.

TENK continued to work with the European Network of Research Integrity Offices (ENRIO) by editing and publishing the online publication Research Integrity Practice in Europe at the ENRIO 2023 Congress on Research Integrity Practice in Paris.

## 6.

**PERSONNEL AND FINANCES**

IN 2023, members of the Secretariat of the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity TENK included Sanna-Kaisa Spoof, Secretary General, PhD, Docent, and Iina Kohonen, Senior Adviser, DA. During Kohonen's leave of absence (1 February 2022–21 August 2023), TENK employed Adviser Eero Kaila, DSocSci, and Senior Adviser Minna Aittasalo, Docent, DHSc (until 31 July 2023). The Secretariat also included Anni Sairio, Coordinator, PhD, Docent, and Kalle Videnoja, International Affairs Coordinator, MSc. Veera Launis, MA started as a fixed-term Adviser at TENK (1 October 2023). Planning Officer **Terhi Tarkiainen**, MA, and Office Secretary **Kaisu Reiss**, Bsc (Econ) worked part-time for the Secretariat. During Tarkiainen's leave of absence (starting on 1 April 2023), **Meri Vainiomäki** MSc worked as her substitute.

The TENK Secretariat worked at the location of the Federation of Finnish Learned Societies (TSV) at Kirkkokatu 6, Helsinki. In addition to office space, TSV provides TENK with financial and HR administration and IT services.

TENK had at its disposal a general grant of EUR 314,000 from the Ministry of Education and Culture and additional project funding from the Ministry of Education and Culture and the European Union.

\*\*\*

This annual report has been approved at the meeting of the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity TENK held on 19 March 2024.

*Riitta Keiski*  
Chair

*Sanna-Kaisa Spoof*  
Secretary General



TUTKIMUSEETTINEN  
NEUVOTTELUKUNTA

FORSKNINGSETISKA  
DELEGATIONEN

FINNISH NATIONAL BOARD ON  
RESEARCH INTEGRITY TENK

[www.tenk.fi](http://www.tenk.fi)