Guidelines of the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity TENK for Research Integrity Adviser Activities[1]

The Finnish National Board on Research Integrity TENK launched the research integrity adviser network in 2017. The goal of this system is to promote research integrity and responsible conduct of research and to advance how suspected research integrity violations are addressed within the Finnish research community.

Organisations committed to TENK's RI 2023 Guidelines agree to appoint one or more research integrity advisers within their organisation and to ensure the resources necessary for these positions.

The research integrity adviser promotes research integrity within their organisation and offers confidential advice to the organisation's members on research integrity topics. **The organisation** ensures that the advisers have necessary resources and conditions to operate effectively. **TENK** trains the advisers and develops the research integrity adviser system.

Objectives in the organisation:

- To promote research integrity and responsible conduct of research
- To offer the opportunity for confidential discussions and advice on research integrity and the investigation of alleged research integrity violations (i.e., the RI process)
- To improve the identification and prevention of acts that breach research integrity
- To raise awareness of TENK's guidelines and activities and the RI process
- To lower the threshold for submitting a notification when serious research misconduct is suspected

Scope of research integrity adviser's responsibilities:

- Research integrity that applies to all research disciplines, in accordance with TENK's RI Guidelines
- Does not generally include discipline-specific research ethics
- Does not include data management or data protection issues
- Does not cover academic misconduct

Research integrity adviser's tasks:

- To provide low-threshold advice and support to the researchers and other staff in their organisation
- To give neutral advice on the RI process when RI violation is suspected
- To provide technical assistance in drafting notifications of alleged RI violations, if necessary
- To advise and support the parties involved in an RI process

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[1] This guideline was updated by the Advisory Board of the Research Integrity Adviser Network and approved in TENK's meeting of 25th April 2024, and it will be updated as necessary. This document is an English translation of the original guideline in Finnish (Tutkimuseettisen neuvottelukunnan ohje tutkimusetiikan tukihenkilötoimintaan).

Responsibilities of the organisation

1. Understanding the role of research integrity advisers

- Research integrity advisers promote research integrity and good research practices that apply in all research disciplines in accordance with TENK's guidelines. Discipline-specific research ethics, data management, and data protection are not within the advisers' remit, unless agreed upon within the organisation.
- The adviser does not participate in their organisation's RI process. They may, however, participate in the RI process of another organisation.
- A decision-maker or person assigned to carry out the RI process cannot act as a research integrity adviser.
- Confidential notes from discussions between the adviser and the advisee cannot be used in the RI process.

2. Communicating about adviser activities

- The organisation informs its staff about the research integrity adviser system and reminds about it in suitable personnel events.
- The organisation ensures that the contact information and role description of the advisers is available on the intranet or other communication channels that reach all members of the organisation.
- The organisation notifies TENK of the appointment of new advisers and ensures that TENK has the advisers' contact information.

3. Enabling the proficiency of the advisers

- Advisers are given the opportunity to participate in training and other events organised by TENK that support adviser activities, during their working hours.

4. Ensuring the resources

- The organisation ensures that the advisers can perform their duties alongside their main role.
- The time required for adviser activities is agreed upon in consultation with the adviser.
- If there are several advisers in the organisation, it is recommended that the organisation appoints a coordinator for the adviser activities.

5. Keeping the advisers informed

- The organisation sends the advisers all notifications and decisions related to the RI process which are sent to TENK. Advisers are included in the distribution list of decision documents. TENK sends its statements also to the relevant organisation's advisers.
- The research integrity advisers and those who carry out the RI process know each other's roles.

6. Ensuring the continuity of adviser activities

- The continuity of adviser activities is ensured when an adviser steps down from the role.
- When an adviser steps down, they inform their successor of ongoing advisory cases.
- Advisers are encouraged to network with advisers within their own and other organisations.

7. Ensuring the well-being of employees

- The RI process is demanding for all parties involved. Information about the organisation's occupational health services and safety measures should be readily available, and the organisation needs to ensure the well-being of the advisers.

Responsibilities of the research integrity adviser

1. Understanding my responsibilities

- I understand that bringing up a possible RI violation as well as being suspected or involved in such a case can be difficult and evoke strong emotions; they must be taken seriously and approached with empathy.
- I recognise that research integrity issues are not entirely separate from employment and occupational safety matters; if necessary, I will refer my advisee to human resources, occupational health services, or other relevant experts. It is important that those involved in a problematic situation do not feel alone.
- I remember that the decision to file a notification of an alleged RI violation is made by the person who has raised the suspicion; I cannot encourage people to do this. In serious cases, I can seek advice from TENK's secretary general.
- It is important that someone suspected of an RI violation is not prejudged. This should be emphasised to the person raising the suspicion to prevent the spread of inappropriate information about the suspect, whether accidentally or intentionally.

2. Defining the scope of my responsibilities

- My duty is to assist the researchers and staff of my own organisation; if necessary, I advise people to contact the research integrity adviser of another organisation or to consult TENK's secretary general in unclear cases.
- I provide only technical assistance in drafting the notification; this assistance does not mean I agree with the person seeking advice, and I ensure they understand that I can advise also the other party involved in the matter.
- I maintain the confidentiality of my adviser activities and keep them separate from RI processes; I do not participate in the RI process, and my possible notes are not used in it.
- I remember that the decision on the necessity of an RI process is made by the organisation's leader; I do not investigate suspicions or act as a preliminary investigator or contact person between the parties involved, nor do I collect evidence or propose a solution to the problem.
- According to TENK's definition, discipline-specific research ethics, ethical review, data management, and data protection are not within the scope of my responsibilities. If I am unable to provide advice on these issues, I find out to whom these issues should be referred within my organisation.
- I ensure my contact information is available through the organisation's communication channels, so that they reach all members of the organisation.
- I bring up the research integrity adviser system in suitable personnel events.

3. Maintaining my skills

- I participate in training and meetings organised by TENK to keep my knowledge of research integrity and good research practices up to date.

- I network with advisers in my own organisation and in other organisations whenever possible.

4. Ensuring my impartiality

- I remember that I have the responsibility to advise both parties involved in a problematic situation, when necessary.
- I consider potential conflicts of interest, if the case involves (for example) my close relative, close friend or colleague, other ties, a polemical relationship, competitive situation, or co-publications. In such situations, I refer the individual seeking advice to another research integrity adviser or contact TENK's secretary general if needed.

5. Documenting my activities

- I document the contacts, meetings, alleged RI violations, and cases that proceed to the RI process. For this I can use the research integrity adviser's work diary, available from TENK's secretariat.
- I follow good data protection practices when recording my notes. I do not release my notes to be used in the RI process.
- I respond to TENK's annual research integrity adviser surveys, which include questions about the number of advisory meetings and suspected RI violations.

If I arrange a private advisory meeting to discuss a suspected RI violation…

Before the meeting:

- I request contact via email so I can schedule time for a possible meeting or phone conversation.
- I ensure that I have enough time for the meeting and that the location is suitable for a confidential discussion.
- I check the RI Guidelines and their scope and the types of RI violations.
- I make preliminary notes on the issues to be discussed, if necessary.

At the beginning of the meeting:

- I inform the advisee that the discussions are confidential.
- I remind them that I am an impartial adviser and discussion partner and that I may also advise the other party involved, if requested.
- I emphasise that I cannot comment on whether an RI violation has occurred; I can only help the advisee identify what type of possible RI violation or other ethical, social, or scientific disputes might be involved.

During the meeting:

- I understand my role in the discussion; my task is to create a safe atmosphere for the meeting, listen to the advisee, aim to keep the discussion within the scope of the RI Guidelines, present options that are in line with the RI Guidelines, and help the advisee find the most suitable solution for them, regardless of my own views or wishes.

At the end of the meeting:

- I ensure that I have correctly understood the matters that were discussed and summarise the conversation.
- I check that the summary and any follow-up actions that were agreed upon are consistent with the advisee's understanding of the discussion.

- I remind them of the possibility of further meetings and contacts.

After the meeting:

- The discussion remains between the adviser and the advisee. If I have made notes during the discussion, they cannot be used in a possible RI process.
- I contact TENK's secretary general if there is a need to protect the anonymity of the person raising a suspicion of an RI violation.

If I receive an anonymous notification of a suspected RI violation...

I check that the topic of the notification is within the scope of the RI Guidelines and that it concerns my organisation. If the suspicion involves a breach of research integrity, I inform the leader of my organisation. In unclear cases, I contact TENK's secretary general. An anonymous complainant cannot be heard in the RI process, and TENK's secretary general decides whether the complainant's name can be known only to TENK.

The research integrity adviser's title and its translations:

- Tutkimusetiikan tukihenkilö, [ORGANISAATION NIMI]
- Stödperson för forskningsetik vid [ORGANISATIONEN]
- Research Integrity Adviser at [ORGANISATION]

Key Materials for Research Integrity Advisers:

- The Finnish Code of Conduct for Research Integrity and Procedures for Handling Alleged Violations of Research Integrity in Finland 2023 (the RI 2023 Guidelines) https://tenk.fi/sites/default/files/2023-11/RI_Guidelines_2023.pdf
- Research integrity adviser's work diary: available from TENK's secretariat
- TENK's Notification form for submitting an alleged RI violation 2023

Other Guidelines and Materials:

- 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 https://tenk.fi/sites/default/files/2021-01/Ethical_review_in_human_sciences_2020.pdf
- Researcher's CV template. Compiled in 2012 in collaboration with UNIFI, Arene, and the Academy of Finland. Inflating CVs is mentioned in the RI Guidelines as disregard for good research practices: https://tenk.fi/sites/default/files/2021-06/TENK_CV_template_2020.pdf
- Supervision of doctoral dissertations and their review process in Finland with a special emphasis on research integrity. Compiled in 2016 in collaboration with UNIFI (English edition 2017): https://tenk.fi/sites/tenk.fi/files/TENK_UNIFI_recommendations_supervision_of_doctoral_dissertations.pdf
- Agreeing on authorship. Recommendation for research publications (PDF) (2nd edition), in Finnish, Swedish and English: http://www.tenk.fi/sites/tenk.fi/files/TENK_suositus_tekijyys.pdf
- The European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity. Revised Edition (ALL European Academies ALLEA 2023): https://allea.org/code-of-conduct/