Research Integrity in Finland: Insights for Universities, Universities of Applied Sciences and Research Institutes from the Research Integrity Barometer 2023

FINNISH NATIONAL BOARD ON RESEARCH INTEGRITY TENK
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Research Integrity Barometer 2023

One of the findings of Finland's Research Integrity Barometer 2023, conducted by the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity TENK, is that the researcher's own organisation and research community are the primary sources of knowledge on research integrity and research ethics. Finland's research community also regards these topics as a central component of responsible conduct of research.

As responsible research environments foster high-quality research, TENK has drawn up this overview and a set of recommendations for the leadership of universities, universities of applied sciences and state research institutes. This publication is an English translation of the Finnish overview, which was published and sent to these organisations on 20 November 2025.

Universities, universities of applied sciences and state research institutes were selected for organisation-type analysis due to their clearly defined profiles. While the results must be considered as indicative due to response numbers, the findings show notable similarities across all three. The influence of respondents' career stages is also considered, using the full dataset (N=1,100). The barometer examined the time period of 2019–2022.

The barometer survey received responses also from other types of organisations that are committed to the RI Guidelines. These responses were not included in this analysis, as they were either few in number or did not come from organisation types that could be sensibly grouped together (Table 1). No data was collected of individual organisations.

The results highlight the responsibility of organisations to ensure easy access to information for their personnel, to provide appropriate training, and to protect those who report alleged research integrity violations.

Key observations

Research integrity has a strong foundation in Finland, and members of the research community in general consider their research integrity competence to be sufficient. However, organisational support structures may not meet the existing needs in all respects.

Key areas for development include offering more training opportunities, ensuring that information about research integrity, research ethics and training reaches the personnel effectively, and that support is given to early-career researchers.

Competence

The majority were satisfied with their competence in responsible conduct of research. Respondents with less than ten years of professional experience were the most cautious in their self-assessments.

Training

Approximately half of the respondents would welcome more training on research integrity and research ethics. In addition, information about the training offered by organisations does not reach personnel effectively. Training opportunities were regarded as insufficient especially in universities of applied sciences and research institutes.

Research integrity advisers

Awareness of the research integrity adviser system remains limited.

Handling alleged research integrity violations

Suspicions of research integrity violations rarely lead to formal notifications. Nearly 20% of the respondents did not know how they ought to proceed if they suspect a research integrity violation.

Most common suspicions of research misconduct or disregard for good research practices

Respondents reported having observed particularly the following: disregard for good research practices related to data or results (43 % of all respondents), including a researcher's name in a list of authors without justification or gift authorship (37 % of all respondents), and plagiarism (34 % of all respondents).

Relevance of career stage

• Respondents with less than 10 years of professional experience

- participate in training most actively, yet feel the most uncertain about their competence
- have the least knowledge of the RI process and the research integrity adviser system
- submitted the fewest notifications of alleged RI violations

• Respondents with 10–20+ years of professional experience

- the most satisfied with their competence
- have the strongest knowledge of the RI process
- submitted the most notifications of alleged RI violations

Self-Assessment of Competence

Overall, the respondents were relatively satisfied with their competence in responsible conduct of research (Figure 1). Most considered their competence to meet the requirements of their role, and one-third considered that they fully met the requirements. University respondents were more confident than those in other organisation types. Familiarity with TENK's guidelines was relatively similar across organisation types.

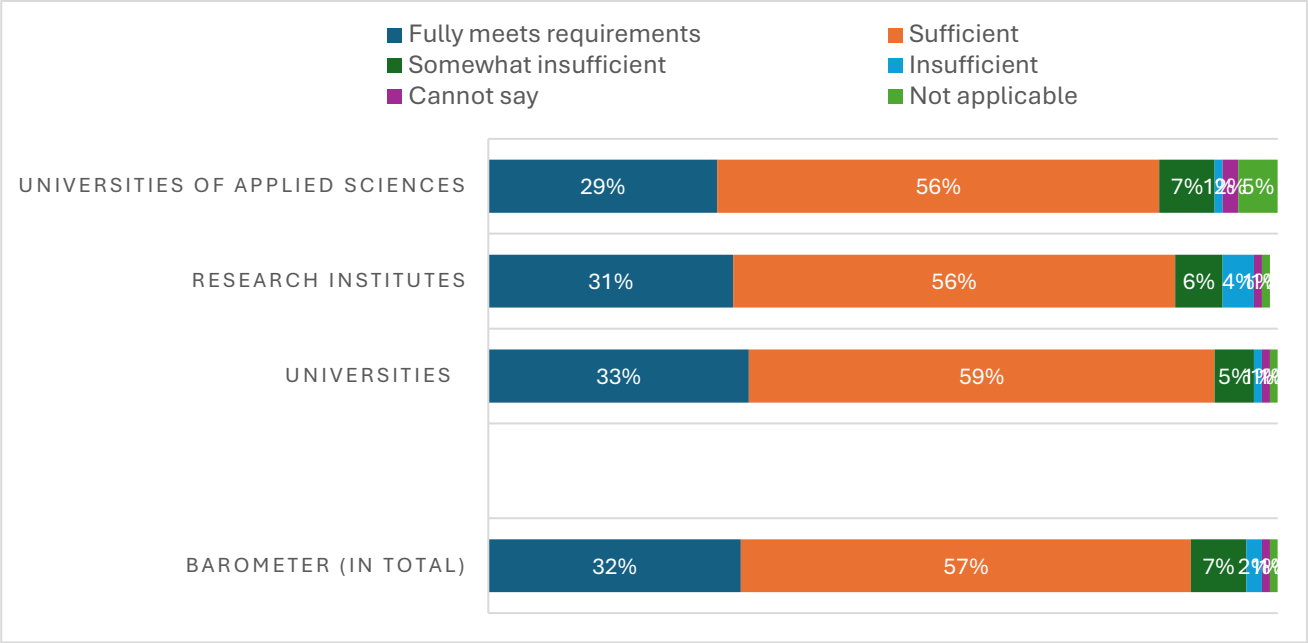

Figure 1. Self-assessment of competence in responsible conduct of research

Respondents with more than 21 years of professional experience were the most confident about their own competence, whereas those with less experience were more cautious (Figure 2). Among respondents with less than 10 years of experience, 19% (N=78) also reported that they were not familiar with the RI Guidelines at all.

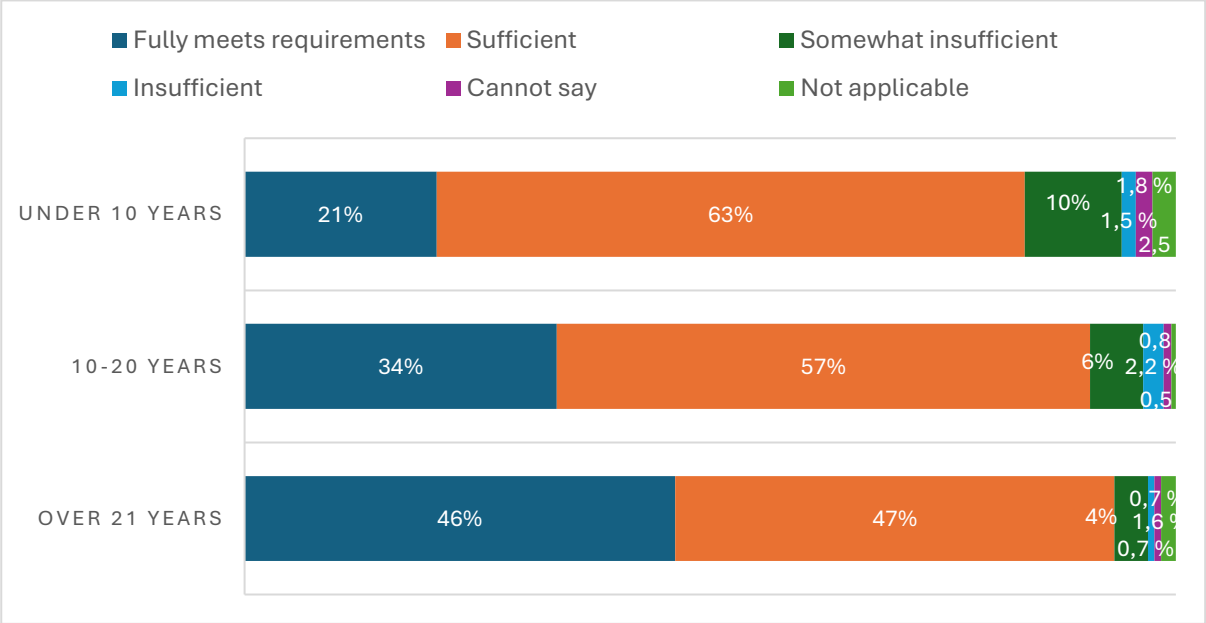

Figure 2. Self-assessment of competence in responsible conduct of research: Career stage

Views concerning the availability of training

Respondents were somewhat unsure whether their organisation offers training in research integrity and research ethics (Figure 3). Approximately one quarter of all respondents did not know whether this was the case. University respondents were the most satisfied with the training available, yet even in universities only slightly more than half considered the training opportunities to be sufficient. In universities of applied sciences, 28 % did not know whether training was available, and only eight percent considered that the amount of training offered was sufficient.

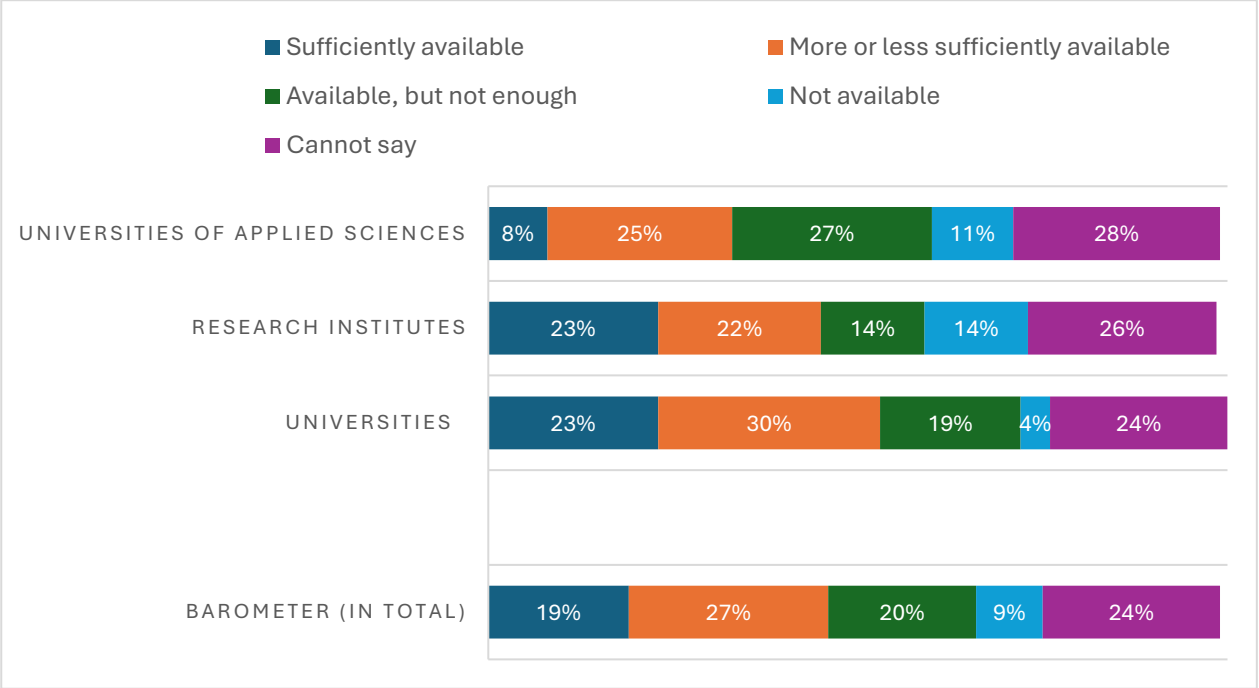

Figure 3. Views concerning the availability of training

Respondents with less than 10 years of experience had participated in training most frequently. However, **when more senior respondents took part in training, they tended to attend a greater number of training events than early-career researchers** (three or more training events: 12% vs. 7%). Among early-career respondents, participation was typically limited to one or two events, and this group also expressed the greatest uncertainty about their competence.

Knowledge of the RI Process

When a violation of research integrity is suspected, even partial knowledge of the RI process can be enough to get started. **Respondents from the universities of applied sciences knew best what to do in these situations**, and knowledge overall seems solid across organisation types (Figure 4). The particularly good results from universities of applied sciences likely reflect their respondent profile, which included a larger proportion of administrative staff who by the definition of their role know the relevant processes and institutional systems. However, it is noteworthy that **20% of university respondents did not know what to do in these situations**.

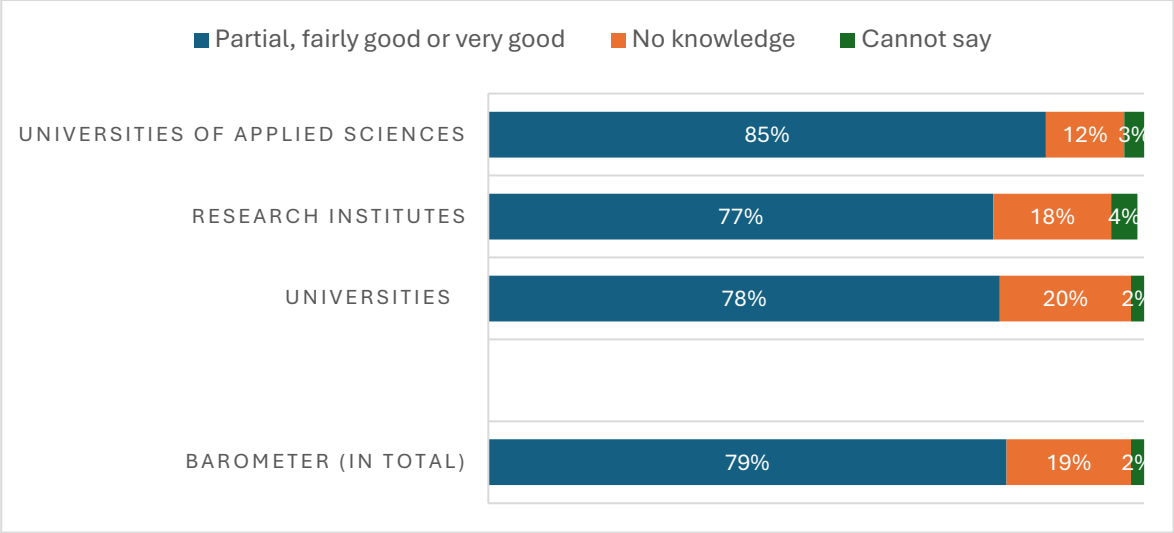

Figure 4. Levels of knowledge of the RI process

Suspected RI Violations

Suspicions of RI violations are seldom reported, so they rarely proceed to formal investigation in the RI process (*Research Integrity Barometer 2023*, p. 33). Only 7% of all respondents had made a notification after suspecting an RI violation. Fear of personal consequences was cited as the most common reason for not taking the matter forward.

During the period 2019–2022, 29% (171) of university respondents, 24% (22) of research institute respondents, and 18.5% (30) of respondents from universities of applied sciences had suspected an RI violation. It is important to note that these numbers and the differences between organisation types are small, making the results indicative at best. The majority of respondents had not suspected RI violations.

Respondents with the longest careers had both the highest level of knowledge of the RI process and the lowest threshold for reporting their concerns.[1] Those with over 21 years of experience had submitted the most notifications of alleged RI violations (13%, N= 37). Among respondents with less than 10 years of experience, 25% (N= 93) did not know what measures to take regarding an alleged RI violation.[2] This group had also rarely submitted notifications.

[1] Partial, fairly good, or very good knowledge: 84% of respondents with more than 21 years of experience, 81% of those with 10–20 years, and 72% of those with less than 10 years of experience. Among early-career respondents, only 6% considered having good knowledge of the process, and only 3% (n = 12) had submitted a notification of an alleged RI violation.

[2] Among respondents from universities of applied sciences, 11% (18) had reported an alleged RI violation, 18.5% (30) had chosen not to report their suspicions, and 70% (114) had not suspected an RI violation during 2019–2022. Among university respondents, 7.5% (45) had reported an alleged RI violation, 29% (171) had not done so, and 64% (379) had not suspected an RI violation. In research institutes, 3% (3) had reported an alleged RI violation, 24% (22) had not reported them, and 73% (67) had not suspected an RI violation. Despite the precise wording in the survey, respondents' understanding of what constitutes reporting may have included actions other than submitting a formal notification.

78 % had not reported their observations, which could indicate that the number of RI violations that go uninvestigated is worryingly high. However, TENK's statistics show that alleged RI violations can also turn out to be workplace problems, and in many investigations, the RI process concludes with the finding that that no research integrity violation has taken place. (Research Integrity Barometer 2023: 35)

Most Commonly Suspected Research Integrity Violations

All types of research misconduct and all the examples of disregard for good research practice surveyed in the barometer were suspected to have occurred within the Finnish research community. The most commonly suspected research integrity violations in the *Research Integrity Barometer 2023* (pp. 25, 28) are the following three:

1. **Disregard concerning the use, documentation or storage of research data or results,** suspected at least once by 43 % of all respondents
    - Few differences between organisation types
    - Career stage had little influence
2. **Including a researcher's name in a list of authors without justification** (gift authorship), 37 % of all respondents
    - Most common in universities and research institutes
    - Career stage had little influence
3. **Plagiarism**, 34 % of all respondents
    - Significantly more common in universities of applied sciences
    - Most frequently suspected by respondents with the longest careers (31% had suspected plagiarism 1–2 times)

The majority of respondents had not suspected research integrity violations in their work environment.

Figures 5–7 present these three most common types of suspicions by organisation type.

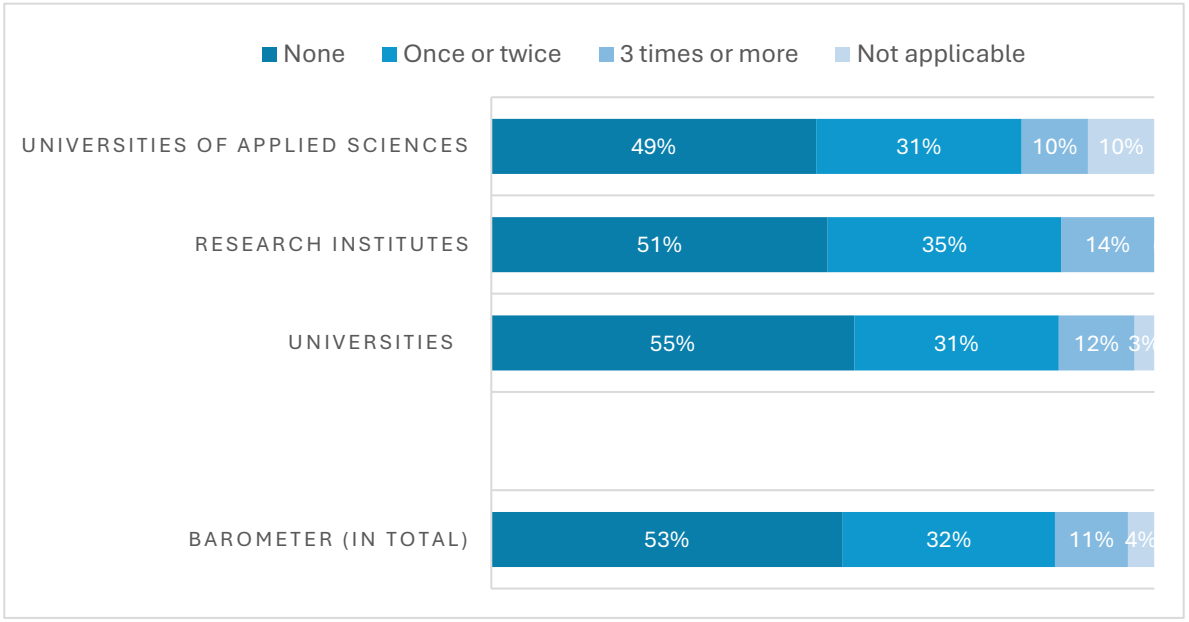

Figure 5. Suspicions of disregard concerning data and results, 2019–2022.

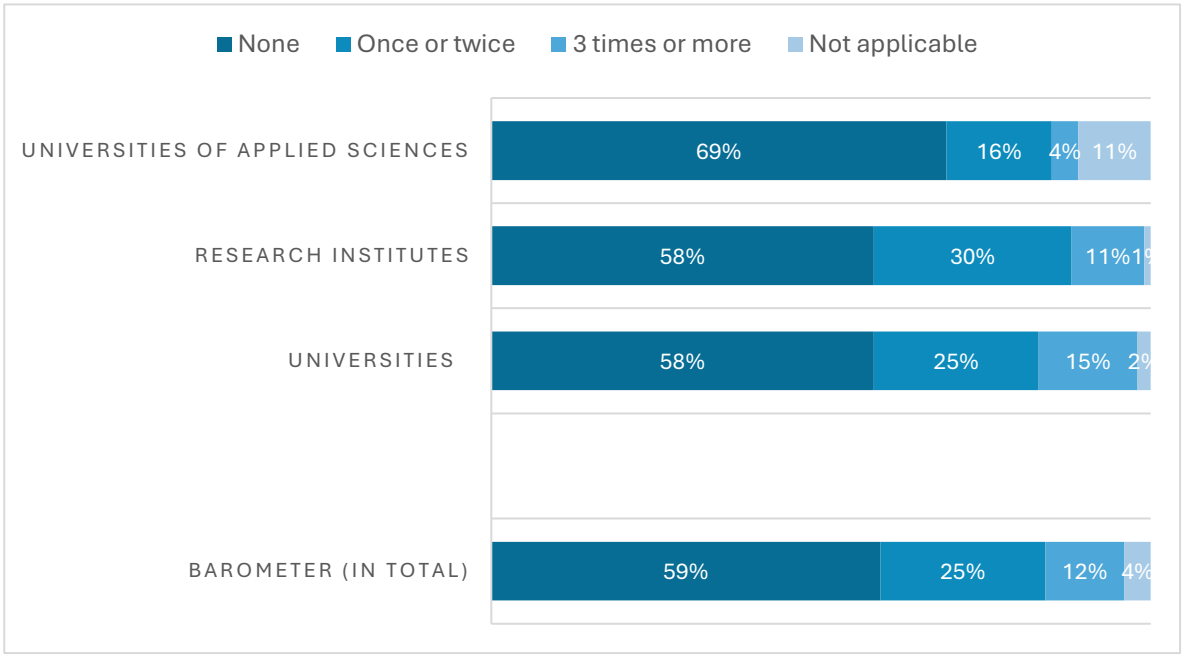

Figure 6. Suspicions of gift authorship, 2019–2022.

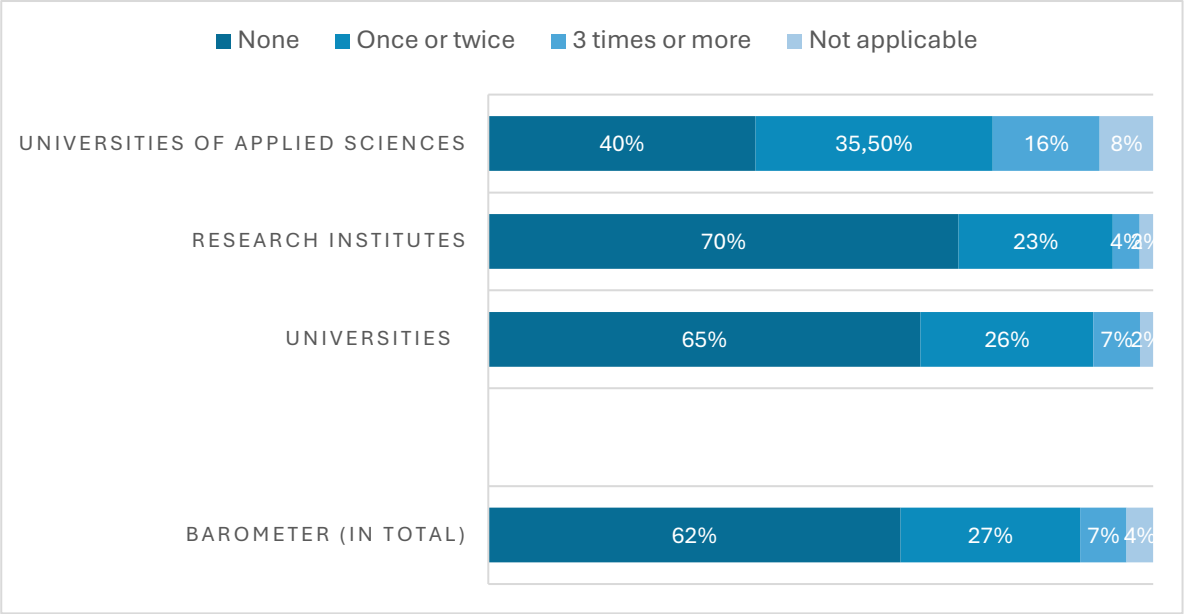

Figure 7. Suspicions of plagiarism, 2019–2022.

In suspicions of gift authorship, the respondents' career stage did not seem to be a relevant background factor. However, respondents with the longest careers had suspected the unjustified omission of an author's name more frequently than more early-career respondents (23% vs. 14% regarding 1–2 observations).

Over a quarter (27 %) of respondents saw time pressures, competition, and a lack of resources as the biggest risk factors. One in ten (11 %) brought up inadequacies in research integrity training and working practices. Many expressed frustrations with inadequate resources, management practices, and opportunities to act correctly. (Research Integrity Barometer 2023: 29)

Research Integrity Advisers: An Under-Recognised Resource

Research integrity advisers provide confidential guidance on research integrity to members of their organisation. This national system was launched by TENK in 2017, and all organisations committed to the 2023 RI Guidelines are required to appoint a research integrity adviser. There are advisers in more than 80 organisations, but they are still not very well known.

The results indicate that the full potential of research integrity advisers is not yet utilised in Finland's research community. Organisational support for advisers may also require strengthening.

Familiarity with research integrity advisers across organisation types is shown in Figure 8.

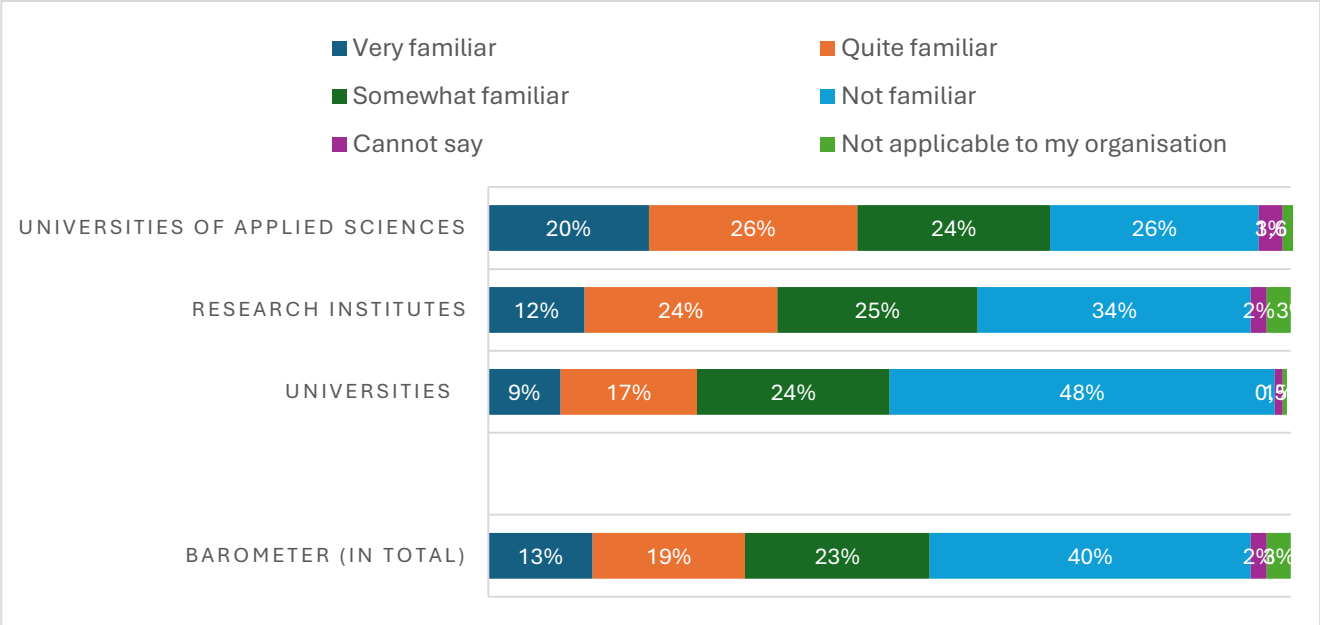

Figure 8. Familiarity with the research integrity adviser system

The responses highlight the strong knowledge in the universities of applied sciences regarding research integrity resources in Finland. In the whole barometer, early-career respondents were the least familiar with the adviser system.

Recommendations for Leadership

Responsible research culture can be effectively developed and maintained when efforts are focused on preventing problems. Both the organisation and the researcher's immediate work community play a key role here. Preventive measures enhance competence and the quality of research, strengthen organisational culture, and save the resources that RI processes require.

Strengthening the training pathway

Organisations should provide training for all career stages to ensure that personnel maintain the necessary levels of skills and competence.

Clear guidelines and accessible information

Organisations should ensure that guidelines and other relevant information are readily accessible. Because most suspected research integrity violations are never investigated, it is important that personnel know what to do if these situations arise.

Raising the visibility of research integrity advisers

Information about research integrity advisers should be actively communicated in organisations, and individuals considering initiating an RI process can be informed of this support service. Advisers need active and ongoing support from the leadership.

Strengthening responsible conduct of research in daily practice

Organisations should maintain open dialogue on research integrity and research ethics and ensure that good research practices (see Chapter 3 of the RI Guidelines) are fully embedded in their operational culture.

Supporting early-career researchers

Early-career researchers benefit from targeted support to ensure that problematic situations are not left unaddressed and that competence in responsible conduct of research is strengthened from the outset of their careers.

About the Barometer

The *Research Integrity Barometer 2023* was published in 2024 in the publication series of the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity TENK. The full report was published in Finnish and in English, and a summary was published in Swedish. The methodology of the survey is described in the report and on TENK's website. This survey examines the period 2019–2022.

Table 1 presents the number of respondents from universities of applied sciences, research institutes, and universities, as well as the pmary roles of respondents within these organisation types. Due to the variation and in some cases the small size of respondent groups, the results and cross-tabulations should be interpreted as indicative. No organisation-specific data were collected. A total of 1,100 responses were received to the barometer.

Table 1. Number of respondents by organisation type and primary role

	Research	Teaching	Administration	Other
Universities (N=645)	69 % (448)	16 % (104)	6 % (41)	8 % (52)
Universities of Applied Sciences (N=180)	21 % (38)	42 % (76)	22 % (40)	14 % (26)
Research Institutes (N=101)	82 % (83)	0	12 % (12)	6 % (6)
Barometer in total (N=1100)	*60 % (664)*	*17 % (186)*	*12 % (130)*	*11 % (120)*

Responses were received also from the following organisation types: *Other* (N=59), *Other research organisation* (N=105), and *Science policy or research funding organisation* (N=10).