Responsible conduct or research (RCR)  
Whose responsibility? The Finnish experience

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TENK and The Finnish Guidelines on Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR)

Background:

- Statute about TENK in 1991 (Nov 15, 1991)
- First Advisory Board started work on Feb 1, 1992 as a national-level body with a three-year mandate, ten members. Chairs usually former university chancellors or rectors.

- Appointed by the Ministry of Education on the basis of proposals from the Finnish research community (universities, research institutes, funding agencies, science academies...)
TENK and its main responsibilities

- To promote the responsible conduct of research and to prevent misconduct
- To promote discussion and dissemination on research integrity
- To monitor and take part in international developments in research integrity and responsible conduct of research
- Make proposals and issue statements to governmental authorities on issues related to the RCR
The scope of TENK

- Issues related to research integrity in all research institutions and research irrespective of field
  - Including doctoral dissertations and sometimes even MA theses

Not in the scope of TENK’s activities:

- Field-specific ethical norms are governed by other national-level boards, such as The National Advisory Board on Social Welfare and Health Care Ethics, ETENE, The National Committee on Medical Research Ethics, etc.

- Alleged violations of the law, such as copyright law or patent law or slander
The leading principles behind TENK

- Self-regulation of science and research
- A non-legalistic approach
- A decentralized model
- Commitment of research-performing organizations to adhere to the guidelines for handling alleged violations of RCR
- Training in RCR
- TENK is an appeals court without being a court
- TENK’s primary mission can be compared to that of dentists – prevent cavities from appearing
Commitments

- All public research institutions in Finland have committed themselves to following the guidelines by their signature (a university-level commitment)
- The universities conduct the investigations themselves following the procedure described in the guidelines
- They are obliged to report to TENK about all the investigations undertaken by them
The investigation procedure

- The investigation procedure for alleged violations of the responsible conduct of research involves three steps:
  - A written notification
  - A preliminary inquiry and if necessary
  - The investigation proper
    - Committee with at least two external experts
Violation against responsible conduct of research - categories

- Research misconduct
- Disregard for the responsible conduct of research
- Other irresponsible practices
Definitions of misconduct

- Misconduct
  - Fabrication
  - Falsification
  - Plagiarism
  - Misappropriation

- In international guidelines, misconduct is usually divided into three categories: fabrication, falsification and plagiarism, which is also referred to as the FFP categorisation.
Disregard for the responsible conduct of research manifests itself as gross negligence and carelessness during the research process. This type of behaviour can be identified when researchers engage in:

- denigrating the role of other researchers in publications, such as neglecting to mention them, and referring to earlier research results inadequately or inappropriately;
- reporting research results and methods in a careless manner, resulting in misleading claims;
- publishing the same research results multiple times ostensibly as new and novel results (redundant publication, also referred to as self-plagiarism);
- misleading the research community in other ways.
Other irresponsible practices may also occur in research. For example, researchers may engage in:

- manipulating authorship, for example, by including in the list of authors persons who have not participated in the research, or by taking credit for work produced by what is referred to as ghost authors
- exaggerating one’s own scientific and scholarly achievements, for example, in a CV or its translation, in a list of publications, or on one’s homepage
- expanding the bibliography of a study to artificially increase the number of citations
Other irresponsible practices 2

- delaying the work of another researcher, for example, through refereed peer reviewing
- maliciously accusing a researcher of RCR violations
- hampering inappropriately the work of another researcher
- misleading the general public by publicly presenting deceptive or distorted information concerning one’s own research results or the scientific importance or applicability of those results
- In their most serious forms, these practices may meet the criteria of an RCR violation mentioned above.
The most common types of allegations of violations against the RCR handled by TENK

- Misconduct
  - Plagiarism
    - Usually at PhD level

- Disregard for the RCR
  - Authorship issues
    - The most common type and on the increase
Principles related to the procedure

- The fairness and the impartiality of the process
- The hearing of all involved parties
- The competence and expediency of the process
- Careful documentation and the parties' right to information.
- The person responsible for making the decision is the rector of the university or the director of the research organization. The decision making cannot be delegated to another person.
Additional documents

- Recommendations:
  - Ethical review in human sciences
  - Template for researchers curriculum vitae
What is the current TENK working on?

- **Training in RCR** – a work group together with UNIFI (Universities Finland)
  - Aim: An on-line information source for teachers, about curriculum content, available national and international material, etc.

- **Description of the duties, rights, responsibilities of the different actors involved in the doctoral dissertation process**
Is TENK independent?

- Yes
  - Although nominated by the Ministry of Education and Culture, nominations based on proposals from the research community
  - Never any interference from the Ministry side
  - Physical premises together with the Federation of Finnish Learned Societies
  - Trust-based independence
Does self-regulation work?

- **No**
  - severe doubts expressed in different contexts for good reasons. Plenty of examples from international contexts to support the argument
  - self-regulation at institutional level
  - self-regulation and collegiality
  
  - Conclusion: does not work if there is no extra-institutional control

- **Yes**
  - self-regulation works if there is a national-level system
Does self-regulation really work in the Finnish context?

- YES
- YES BUT
- NO
YES

- at institutional level
  - if brought to the attention of the rector/head of institution
  - no need for cover-ups
  - research integrity part of quality assurance
- the main funding agencies signatories and represented on the Board
- Foundations supporting research expect researchers to abide by the guidelines
- the link between “production” and funding formula still indirect
  - however, the system is getting increasingly competitive
- the academic community fairly homogeneous in a small country with a long tradition of handling alleged misconduct cases
YES BUT

- mistakes happen
  - people who should know the procedure don’t (both senior and junior)
    - dean wanted to deal with allegations internally, rector did not know about the case. process amended afterwards. Outcome the same
- supervisors spread bad practices
  - inherited bad practices
  - competition induced new practices (grey area)
- writing in a foreign language (English)
- impact factor and citation index orientation in biosciences
NO

- intentional oversight of grey area practices
  - local conventions
  - in project proposals
  - in the attribution of authorship
- hearsay evidence exists
  - of “plagiaristic” practices in the literature reviews of dissertations
  - of additional authors to articles in funding applications (to improve the standing of project members)
  - ghost writing
- whistle-blower protection
  - not all cases are reported, rumours abound
- collegial practices and cover ups (cf. more stringent regulations in the new guidelines)
- In principle, no anonymous allegations approved
Some practices need to be changed

- the role of whistle blowers
  - project members with temporary contracts totally dependent on project leader
  - authoritarian and overambitious leaders shut up mouths
  - Junior researchers need to be empowered to fight misconduct

- trust
  - offenders can get away with it if suspicions not voiced in the community
  - credentials trusted without checking (false medical diplomas)
  - trust is important but so is healthy mistrust (cf. article production frequency)
What about sanctions?

- Philosophy based on self-regulation
- Sanctions depend on the **status** of the offender
  - Sanctions issued by the university or research organization not by TENK
  - Often misunderstood by the instigator of the allegation
  - Universities autonomous
  - Public pressure?
Self-regulation vs legal approach

A major dividing line in Singapore at the Second World Conference on Research Integrity

- Self regulation = the European approach
  - Sanctions depend on institutional decision
  - Freedom of science from political pressure
- A legalistic approach - e.g. ORI/the USA
  - Legal consequences
Who is responsible for the RCR?

- Individual responsibility
- Institutional responsibility
- Political responsibility
Individual researchers and research groups

- The ultimate responsibility lies with the individual researchers and research groups
  - They bear the responsibility for their research practices and the results they publish.
  - The research community must, however, be able to trust that the research has in the first place been conducted honestly and according to commonly accepted practices.
  - Dishonest research neither promotes nor advances science and scholarship.
Institutional responsibility

- Universities and research institutes are responsible for the quality control of the research conducted under their umbrella.
- They need to make sure that the incentives used to promote research, as well as the monitoring processes applied are transparent and fair in actual research and in research administration.
- The responsibilities of senior researchers
Political responsibility

- Political decision makers, in particular bodies making science-political decisions about the criteria used for research funding or for funding formulas.
- At the national level, it is often the ministries of education and research or the national funding organizations that assume this role.
- In Europe, it is the EU that directs European research policies and thus also individual research efforts.
Questions to be directed at science-political decision-makers

- How can predominantly quantitative criteria be used to measure quality?
- Do the metrics used currently really encourage researchers to adopt novel, experimental and interdisciplinary approaches?
- Do the quantitative criteria encourage researchers to curiosity-driven research and risk-taking?
- Do the funding criteria allow researchers to define their own research questions?
- Do the funding criteria take into account the research takes time?
What is best for science and scholarship?

- Stop the measuring frenzy!
  - Quality rather than quantity
  - Need for new types of performance indicators
  - Put social sciences and humanities on an equal footing with natural sciences

- Use common sense when using metrics and assess the fraud risks when measuring performance
Future issues that are here already

- Open access publications
  - New tricks

- Open access to data
  - Who owns the data?
  - Who can use the data?
  - Who gets the credit?
  - Who guarantees the authenticity of the data?

- Recommended reading:
  - Responsible Research Data Management and the prevention of scientific misconduct (Advisory report) KNAW 2013
  - Pdf available on www.knaw.nl
Freedom of science and scholarship?

- The European model of promoting research integrity is firmly rooted in self-regulation—and this aspect of the freedom of science is worth defending and fighting for.
- This means that we need to make sure that self-regulation is both practiced and monitored throughout Europe.
- We also need to be vigilant and aware of both the need for independence in research and the effects of interdependence between science, ethics and politics. This is the only way to maintain trust in science.