

# National Advisory Board on Research Ethics

## TENK

### Annual report 2002

#### 1. Mission of National Advisory Board on Research Ethics

The statutory tasks of the National Advisory Board on Research Ethics, which is appointed by the Ministry of Education, are:

1. To make proposals and issues statements to governmental authorities on legislative and other matters concerning research ethics;
2. To act as an expert body working towards the resolution of ethical issues relating to research;
3. To take initiative in advancing research ethics and to promote discussion concerning research ethics;
4. To monitor international developments in the field and to take actively part in international cooperation; and
5. To inform the public about research ethics.

#### 2. Composition of the Board (1.2.2001-31.1.2004)

In 2002 the National Advisory Board on Research Ethics was chaired by Rector Gustav Björkstrand (Åbo Akademi University) and its vice-chair was Professor Jaana Hallamaa (University of Helsinki). The Secretary General of the Board is Salla Lötjönen, LL.M., M.A. The Board's office is attached to the Federation of Finnish Learned Societies.

The Board has eight members and a permanent expert, Docent Marja Simonsuuri-Sorsa. The members, who do not have personal deputies, are:

- Secretary General Arja Kallio, Academy of Finland (up to 11.6.2002 Secretary General Sakari Karjalainen, Academy of Finland)
- Special Researcher Veikko Launis, University of Turku
- Professor Olli Mäenpää, University of Helsinki
- Senior Assistant Sinikka Parkkinen, University of Joensuu
- Professor Amos Pasternack, University of Tampere
- Research Professor Matti Sarvas, National Public Health Institute
- Director Mervi Sibakov, National Technology Agency TEKES
- Professor Irma Sorvali, University of Oulu

### **3. Activities 2002**

The Board convened seven times during 2002. Its aims are to (1) seek to prevent misconduct and fraud in science by disseminating information and arranging education about the principles of good scientific practice; (2) to develop and supervise the investigation of ethical misconduct and fraud in research; (3) to raise its profile in disseminating public information about research ethics; and (4) to contribute actively to Finnish and international debates on research ethics.

#### **3.1. Preventive action**

##### Revision of the guidelines

At its meeting on 27 February 2001 the Board set up a taskforce to revise the research ethics guidelines published in 1998. The taskforce was chaired by Jaana Hallamaa and composed of Sakari Karjalainen, Veikko Launis and Matti Sarvas. The secretaries were Jaana Aalto (1.2.-31.7.2001) and Salla Lötjönen (1.8.-31.12.2001).

After a consultation round, the taskforce completed the revision in autumn 2001 and the Board adopted *Good Scientific Practice and Procedures for Handling Misconduct and Fraud in Science* on 7 December 2001. The guidelines were translated into Swedish and English and distributed extensively to universities, research institutes and polytechnics. It was also published as an appendix to the *Korkeakoulutieto* 1/2002 (a higher education quarterly published by the Ministry of Education). The Board arranged the signing of the guidelines on 3 April 2002. During 2002 altogether 70 research organisations confirmed their commitment to the guidelines by signing it.

##### Guidelines for the humanities and social sciences

At its meeting on 2 December 2002 the Board set up a taskforce to consider the need for ethical guidelines for the humanities and social sciences and their eventual content.

The taskforce consists of Professor Jaana Hallamaa, University of Helsinki, who also chaired it; Professor Irma Sorvali, University of Oulu; and Special Researcher Veikko Launis, University of Turku. The secretary is Salla Lötjönen, Secretary General of the National Advisory Board on Research Ethics.

The taskforce is looking into the need for separate guidelines for humanities and social sciences. It examines numerous guidelines and recommendations issued for humanities and social sciences research. In the Nordic countries, for instance, the Swedish and Norwegian science councils have issued such guidelines. They address questions like the use of delicate

sources and registers of information, research methods, the treatment of interviewees and respondents, dissemination of information, and the social impact of research.

### Research ethics education

The publication of *Good Scientific Practice and Procedures for Handling Misconduct and Fraud in Science* stepped up the activity of the Board in education, which was provided by the Secretary General and the Board members. To this end, the Secretary General designed a set of transparencies describing the Board and its activities, which was put at the disposal of the members. Education was mainly requested by university faculties and departments. Since the Board does not have sufficient human resources to meet the overall need for education, it began to plan training to be given to educators at different research units. The plan will probably be carried out during 2003.

In 2002 the Board also held a number of seminars. On 19 April 2002 it arranged an education event on research ethics in cooperation with the Federation of Finnish Learned Societies for the Federation's member associations. On 31 May 2002 the Secretary General visited the ethics committee of the University of Jyväskylä and gave a lecture at an education event arranged by the University for university lawyers. Seminars jointly organised by the Finnish research ethics bodies are described in section 3.3 Information.

## **3.2. Development of mechanisms for handling misconduct in research**

### Questionnaire of the incidence of research ethics questions, mechanisms for addressing them and research ethics education

Since 1994 research organisations have reported most serious cases of misconduct in science to the National Advisory Board on Research Ethics. The guidelines for procedures to be used to handle misconduct and fraud in scientific research, which were revised in connection with *Good Scientific Practice and Procedures for Handling Misconduct and Fraud in Science*, stress the duty of research organisations to notify the Board of the research ethics cases they have handled.

During 2002 the Board compiled a questionnaire to find out (1) the number of suspected and confirmed cases of misconduct and fraud in science during the period 1998 - 2002; (2) the procedures for handling misconduct and fraud; and (3) the systems of research ethics education and relevant needs. The questionnaire was completed during 2002 and sent to research organisations on 2 January 2003. With the help of the computer staff of the Federation of Learned Societies, the questionnaire was also made available in electronic form.

Cases reported to and processed by the Board

During 2001 the National Advisory Board on Research Ethics received notification of 11 cases of misconduct or fraud; six of them had been handled locally.\* The Board was requested to give its opinion on six cases, three of which were not appraised because their handling was either still in progress or not initiated by the research organisation. One case was returned to the research organisation for further investigation, one was seen to concern a copyright issue, in which the Board has no competence, and in one case the research organisation was seen to have acted correctly in stating that no violation of good scientific practice had taken place.

The cases investigated between 1998 and 2002 are presented in a statistical form below (Figure 1). The cases reported to the Board included notifications of cases adjudicated by research organisations and cases on which the Board was requested to give its opinion. The cases handled by the Board recorded in the statistic below only include suspected cases in which it has given its opinion of alleged violation or in which it has recommended reappraisal by the research organisation. The statistic does not contain requests for the opinion in cases which the Board has forwarded, for instance, to be handled locally. The figures are indicative only since the data on all locally treated cases are not available and the principles for compiling the statistic have not been the same in all years.

CASES HANDLED BY AND NOTIFIED TO THE NATIONAL ADVISORY BOARD ON RESEARCH ETHICS 1998-2002 (Figure 1)

	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Plagiarism		5(4)[1]	1(0)[1]	2 (1) [0]	6 (0) [5]
Misappropriation of an original research idea, plan or finding	3(3)[0]	4 (3) 0]	1 (1)	2 (1) [0]	1 (1) [0]
Fabrication or misrepresentation of research findings	1(1)[0]	1(1) [0]	2(1) [0]	1 (1) [0]	0(0)[0]

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\* The Board does not process cases at first instance, but if a suspect or a complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of the process at the research organisation, the Board can be requested to give its opinion on the matter based on the written material.

Misrepresentation of facts in application or of research merits		2 (2)[0]		0 (0) [0]	1(0)[0]
Misconduct in science	2 (1) [1]	1 (0) [0]	7 (1) [0]	2 (1) [1]	1 (1) [0]
Other violation of good scientific practice		6 (2) [0]			3 (1) [0]
TOTAL	6 (5) [1]	19 (12)[1]	10 (2) [1]	7 (4) [1]	12 (3) [5]

Reported to the Board X

Processed by the Board (X)

Noted fraud/misconduct [X] (Some cases ongoing.)

The requests for the Board's opinion in 2002 concerned:

- The division of responsibilities between a researcher and a supervisor and the right to use a research idea and materials in one's own name. This case was returned to the research organisation for additional information.
- Juridical copyright vs. moral authorship. In this case the Board saw that the question is mainly legal, and therefore outside its competence. The moral authorship was not in dispute.
- A disagreement between the director of a research institute and a member of a research team concerning the member's contribution to the research project and the report based on it, and also the procedure used in the handling of the case. The Board noted that the research organisation had acted appropriately in stating that no misconduct had occurred.

### 3.3 Information

Publication: *Tutkijan eettiset valinnat* (Researcher's ethical choices)

A taskforce set up by the National Advisory Board on Research Ethics initiated a project in autumn 2000 for a book on research ethics. It invited Archiatre Risto Pelkonen, Professor Juhani Pietarinen, Secretary General Sakari Karjalainen and Secretary General Veikko Launis to edit the book, which was published by Gaudeamus in 2002. The newly revised ethical guidelines *Good scientific practise and procedures for handling misconduct and fraud in*

*science* were appended to the book. The book was publicised at the signing of the revised ethical guidelines on 3 April 2002.

#### Information on the net

In spring 2002 the National Advisory Board on Research Ethics opened its new website on the server of the Federation of Finnish Learned Societies at: [www.pro.tsv.fi/tenk/](http://www.pro.tsv.fi/tenk/). In autumn 2002 the Ministry of Education linked the sites dealing with the Board on its own website to this site. The site is in three languages: Finnish, Swedish and English.

In spring 2002 the Ministry of Education opened its research and science policy website at [www.research.fi](http://www.research.fi). The Ministry requested the Board to prepare a section dealing with research ethics for the site. Collaborating with other ethics bodies, the Secretary General wrote an article on research ethics, which was linked to the Board's own site and to those of other ethics bodies. After the publication of *Ethical Evaluation of Research in Finland*, the site was updated accordingly.

#### Cooperation with other bodies

Seeing cooperation with other ethics bodies as one of its priorities, the Board, collaborating with the National Advisory Board on Health Care Ethics and its Sub-Committee on Medical Research Ethics, the National Advisory Board for Biotechnology, the Board for Gene Technology and the Cooperation Group for Laboratory Animal Sciences, organised a meeting on 5 April 2002 for the secretaries general and secretaries of these bodies. The secretaries met six times during 2002.

One of the most important results of this cooperation was a brochure *Ethical Evaluation of Research in Finland*, which presents all the cooperation partners and their work. There are two editions: one in both the national languages and another in English. It is also available on the net and has been widely distributed at different events.

The ethics bodies organised or prepared four different events in collaboration during 2002. The person responsible for them was the Secretary General of the National Advisory Board on Research Ethics, with the exception of a seminar on conflicts of interest in research funding, which was the joint responsibility of the National Advisory Board on Health Care Ethics and the Board. All the ethics bodies shared a stand with the Committee for Public Information at the Turku Book and Science Fair on 4-6 October 2002, where they presented their work and answered the public's questions at an event called *Sana on vapaa* (The floor is yours). A seminar on conflicts of interest in research funding jointly arranged on 9 October 2002 at Haartman Institutes had an attendance of over 200.

Most of the preparations for two seminars were made during 2002: *Tutkimusetiikka – kaltevan pinnan kysymys?* (Research ethics - a question of a slippery slope?) for the Finnish Medical Convention on 9 January 2003 and *Tiedon omena – hyvän vai pahan tiedon puusta?* (The apple of knowledge - from the tree of good or evil?) for the Science Forum on 10 January 2003.

#### Articles on research ethics by Board members

Many members of the Board published materials on research ethics during 2002, including Jaana Hallamaa's articles "Kuka valvoo tiedettä?" (Who supervises science?) and "Tieteen etiikka: ei mitään sensaatioiden siveysoppia" (Research ethics - definitely no morality of sensations) in *Tieteessä tapahtuu* 1/2002 and 4/2002; Marja Simonsuuri-Sorsa's article "Etiikka ja elämän patentointi – kuka omistaa ihmisen geenit?" (Ethics and patenting life - who owns human genes?) in *Tieteessä tapahtuu* 5/2002; and Salla Lötjönen's editorial "Tutkimusetiikan kyntötyöt" (Ethical plough furrows) in *A propos* 2/2002. Several members wrote articles for the book *Tutkijan eettiset valinnat* (Researcher's ethical choices) published in 2002.

#### Contacts with the media

The National Advisory Board on Research Ethics and the media cooperated actively during 2002. The publication and signing of *Good Scientific Practice and Procedures for Handling Misconduct and Fraud in Science* was broadcast in full by the Finnish Broadcasting Company (YLE) on *Tiedefoorumi* (Science forum). At the same event YLE also made a programme called *Puhutaan tieteestä* (Let's talk of science), which was broadcast in spring and rerun in autumn 2002. YLE also made a programme on linkages in research financing at the October seminar. The press has contacted the Board's office actively and published a number of news articles on its activities.

### **3.4 Statements and reviews**

On 26 November 2002 the National Advisory Board on Research Ethics gave its opinion on the amendment of the Gene Technology Act at the request of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health.

In 2002 the Board prepared a survey of the incidence of research ethics questions, the procedures for handling them and research ethics education, which will be conducted during 2003.

### **3.5 International activities**

There has also been growing international interest in the activities of the National Advisory Board on Research Ethics. The multilingual website and written materials have generated a great deal of interest, and the office has received a number of written requests for various purposes. Towards the end of 2002 the Board started to plan a Nordic research ethics seminar. The idea was received favourably in the other Nordic countries. The Board has good relations with other Nordic countries, which are further enhanced by the fact that the Board Chair Gustav Björkstrand was appointed to undertake a review by the Nordic innovation taskforce and the Secretary General is one of the Finnish members on the Nordic Committee on Bioethics. Gustav Björkstrand has also chaired the High Level Expert Group on Biology and Society of the European Science Foundation, which revised its guidelines on stem cell research and updated its survey of relevant legislation in August 2002.

The European Commission published its plan Science and Society in 2002, with the aim of promoting researchers' responsibility and research ethics education. The Secretary General is a member of the national Science and Society consultation group. In December 2002 the European Commission convened representatives of different European countries to set up a European research ethics discussion forum; the National Advisory Board on Research Ethics and the National Advisory Board for Biotechnology had representatives at the meeting. The Forum will start to operate during 2003, when the Finnish participants will be nominated.

The Board's Secretary General and members have also made visits abroad, e.g. to research ethics conferences in Warsaw and Maastricht.

#### **4. Economy**

The National Advisory Board for Biotechnology had an appropriation of € 8,409 for operational costs and € 47,092.61 for the Secretary General's salary and clerical expenditure. The salary funds were administered by the Federation of Finnish Learned Societies and the operational expenditure by the Ministry of Education. The Ministry allocated a separate appropriation of € 11,555 for the printing of *Good Scientific Practice and Procedures for Handling Misconduct and Fraud in Science* and other publishing.

The annual report was adopted at the Board's meeting on 11 February 2003.

Gustav Björkstrand  
Chair

Salla Lötjönen  
Secretary General