

ANNUAL REPORT

2009



TUTKIMUSEETTINEN NEUVOTTELUKUNTA
FORSKNINGSETISKA DELEGATIONEN
NATIONAL ADVISORY BOARD ON RESEARCH ETHICS



National Advisory Board on Research Ethics

TENK

Annual report 2009 (1.1.2009–31.1.2010)

COMPOSITION OF THE BOARD AND MEETINGS

The Ministry of Education appointed the National Advisory Board on Research Ethics for a three-year period 1 February 2007 - 31 January 2010. The Chair of the Board during the period under review was Chancellor, Professor **Eero Vuorio**, University of Turku (from 1.1.2010, director of Biocenter Finland) and the Vice Chair was Vice-Rector (until 31.12.2009) **Riitta Keiski**, University of Oulu. The Advisory Board has eight members:

Professor **Katie Eriksson** (Åbo Akademi University),
Counsellor of Legislation **Markku Helin** (Ministry of Justice),
Development Manager **Arja Kuula** (Social Sciences Archive, University of Tampere),
Director **Paavo Löppönen** (Academy of Finland),
Director **Sinimaaria Ranki** (Helsinki Metropolia University of Applied Sciences),
Technology Expert **Hanna Rantala** (National Technology Agency TEKES),
Professor **Ari Salminen** (University of Vaasa),
Research Professor **Jussi Simpura** (National Institute for Health and Welfare THL)

Docent **Liisa Nieminen** acted as Secretary General of the Board. **Terhi Tarkiainen** acted as assistant to the Board apart from the period 1.8.2009 – 31.12.2009 when **Heidi Laine** acted as assistant.

The office of the National Advisory Board on Research Ethics was attached to the Federation of Finnish Learned Societies at the House of Nobility (Hallituskatu 2 B, Helsinki).

The Advisory Board convened seven times during 2009 and once in 2010, in January. With the exception of the December meeting, the meetings were held at the House of Sciences and Letters (Kirkkokatu 6, Helsinki). Meetings of the various working groups were held in the Secretary General's office.

1. Preventive action and education

The National Advisory Board on Research Ethics continued to work actively in 2009 to make its guidelines *Good scientific practice and procedures for handling misconduct and fraud in science* (published 3.4.2002) known. The target groups in 2009 were particularly the new graduate schools funded by the Academy of Finland that began their activities in 2010. The guidelines have also been distributed at the House of Sciences and Letters, at the Tiedekirja bookshop, at seminars organized by the Advisory Board and at various other events.

By the end of 2009 altogether 96 universities, universities of applied sciences, research institutes, and other research organisations had signed the above mentioned guidelines. A list of the organisations that have signed the guidelines can be found on the Advisory Board's website at:

<http://www.tenk.fi/HTK/allekirjoittajat.pdf>. No new commitments were gained in 2009. The decrease in the number of universities under the new Universities Act somewhat reduced the number of committed organisations at the beginning of 2010. With commitments to the guidelines from Aalto University and the University of Eastern Finland the total number of committed organisations is 92.

As in previous years, the Advisory Board received requests for education on topics relating to research ethics from many universities, graduate schools, universities of applied sciences and various research organisations. The Chair, some members and the Secretary General held educational sessions on research ethics in various locations in Finland (Appendix 1).

On 21.4.2009 the Board, together with other actors, arranged a seminar at the House of Sciences and Letters, called "Mutkat suoriksi ja kärjet teräväksi, Tiedejournalismin pelisäännöt" (Straightening the curves and sharpening the points, the ground rules for scientific journalism). The papers given at the seminar can be accessed at the Committee for Public Information's website (www.tjnk.fi).

The seminar/education session concerning ethical review that was due to be held in 2009 has been postponed until 2010 when the ethical review of research in the humanities actually commences.

2. Development of mechanisms for handling conflicts in research ethics

In 2009 the National Advisory Board on Research Ethics was notified of six cases of alleged violation of good scientific practice, which had been handled locally, but requests were made for the Advisory Board to deal with the cases. Two of these concerned suspected plagiarism and in one case the matter concerned problems regarding the research ethics of a commissioned research. In one case the researcher was suspected of fraud (unauthorised borrowing and theft) in scientific activity and violation of good scientific practice, because the researcher had, without permission, used and presented in the researcher's own name, an original research plan that the researcher had been given in confidence, and had mentioned the other researchers as collaborators without informing them. In one case the allegation concerned, among other things, that the researchers were alleged to have repeatedly attempted to justify their research plan by presenting fabricated data to the scientific readership and misleading the scientific community and decision-makers regarding the significance of their work, as well as being guilty of dishonesty in their writings and in their letters. There was also criticism of the length of the time taken in the university to deal with this matter. In one case it was alleged that disregard of good scientific practice had occurred in the acceptance of a thesis in a university. The person asking for the Advisory Board's opinion believed that the entire university was responsible, and not just the researcher concerned.

In one instance of alleged plagiarism, the Advisory Board was of the opinion that in dealing with the matter, the university involved had not followed the guidelines of "*Good scientific practice and procedures for handling misconduct and fraud in science*". The master's thesis of the student who had asked the Advisory Board for its opinion had been rejected on the grounds of plagiarism under Section 20 of the rules concerning studies, and the student had been given a warning under Section 20 of the Universities Decree. The opinion of the Advisory Board was that the matter should be reinvestigated in accordance with the Advisory Board's guidelines. The investigation should pay attention to the researcher's and the supervisors' obligations and responsibilities under the Advisory Board's guidelines and in the spirit of the said

university's quality handbook. The Rector later notified the Advisory Board that an investigation group to clarify the matter had been set up.

In the second plagiarism case the opinion was that the student's legal rights had been safeguarded in the investigation of the suspected plagiarism in accordance with the university's own rules for studies. The case concerned a minor thesis at the level of 5 study points. The student's legal rights did not require the implementation of the lengthy process set out in the Advisory Board's guidelines. Of significance also was the fact that the university was prepared to grant an extension of study time to the student who had been granted study rights for a specific period, in order to enable the student to complete the studies.

In one case the Advisory Board did not deem the case to be such that would have generally been settled under the Advisory Board's procedures for violation of good scientific practice. Although the study had been undertaken in a separate institution under the control of the university, it did not meet the requirements set for scientific research. The research had been carried out to meet the objectives of those commissioning the research, and had been published on their website, not in the university's scientific publication series. For this reason the Advisory Board did not regard the matter on as a case for investigation under the "*Good scientific practice and procedures for handling misconduct and fraud in science*" guidelines.

In one case it was deemed that the researcher had been guilty of disregard of good scientific practice when in a research plan submitted to the Academy of Finland the researcher had included material borrowed from other researchers' grant applications that had been given in confidence, and had mentioned them as collaborators without their knowledge, and had not kept them appropriately informed at the different stages of dealing with the matter. However, the researcher was found to be not guilty of the theft of a research plan as the researcher had not presented the research work of other researchers as his own, but had described the collaboration to be carried out with them. The references to these studies were appropriate.

In one case the Advisory Board found that it was primarily a question of a long-running scientific dispute between two different schools of thought, and not a problem of research ethics. It is not for the Advisory Board to take sides in scientific differences of opinion. Although the incorrectness in one reference method did in itself constitute deviation from good scientific practice, this complaint did not give rise to any action, as this was neither fraud nor misconduct. The question of establishing the research design is primarily a scientific question. Although the university had taken considerably longer than normal in the preparation of the preliminary clarification, the opinion of the Advisory Board was that this was not, however, deliberate stalling. In this case significance must be attached to the extent and degree of difficulty of the matter, and to possible delays arising from translation.

In a case concerning the examination of a thesis, the Advisory Board decided that it was a question of scientific dispute and not of research ethics.

Summaries of the more important statements of opinion can be found on the Advisory Board's website (www.tenk.fi).

Furthermore, the Chair of the Advisory Board, many members, and the Secretary General, gave advice to various groups on the content of good scientific practice and of the mechanisms for handling violations in respect of good scientific practice.

3. Initiatives, publication and information

In 2007 The Advisory Board established a working group to deliberate the ethics of humanities and social science research, which completed its work according to plan at the end of 2008 and submitted its findings to the National Advisory Board on Research Ethics at the beginning of 2009. At the beginning of 2009, the Advisory Board circulated the working group's proposals extensively for comments, based on which the working group made some further amendments. In April 2009 the Advisory Board approved the publication *Ethical principles of research in the humanities and social and behavioural sciences and proposals for ethical review*. The document was also translated into Swedish and English. The different language versions can be read on the Advisory Board's website. The document was also submitted to the Ministry of Education in August 2009, at which time information about the document was sent to university communication

officers, amongst others. At the same time it was decided to initiate seeking of commitments to the ethical principles from, for example, universities, research institutes and other organisations, following the coming into effect of the new Universities Act in January 2010. The document was sent for signature to all the chancellors and directors of universities and other research organisations that had signed up to the “*Good scientific practice and procedures for handling misconduct and fraud in science*” guidelines.

In a letter to the Ministry of Education on 2.11.2009, the Advisory Board proposed that the ministry commence actions for amending legislation so that the right, safeguarded both in the Finnish constitution and in the UN’s Convention on the Rights of the Child, for children to influence matters that concern them themselves, according to their level of maturity, could also be implemented better than at present, also in matters concerning the participation of children in research.

Most of the Advisory Board’s dissemination of information is by means of the seminar papers and articles published by the members and the Secretary General.

Articles and other publications written by the members of the Advisory Board and the Secretary General in 2009:

- Arja Kuula and Eero Vuorio: ”Eettinen ennakoarviointi laajenee ihmistieteisiin” (Ethical review extends to the humanities) *Tieteessä tapahtuu* 1/2009: Editorial,
- Arja Kuula: ”Alaikäisiltä kerätyn tutkimusaineiston arkistoinnin ja jatkokäytön etiikkaa. Lasten ja nuorten tutkimuksen etiikka” (The ethics of archiving and further use of research material collected from minors. The ethics of research on children and youth) (ed. Kaisa Vehkalahti & Niina Rutanen & Tarja Pösö & Hanna Lagström). Nuorisotutkimusseura, Helsinki 2010.
- Ari Salminen and Kirsi Lähdesmäki: Ethics – Does it Play a Role in the Finnish University Reform?, *Hallinnon Tutkimus* 28 (2009:3), pp. 48–61,
- Liisa Nieminen: ”Lapset tutkimuskohteena: Kuka päättää lapsen osallistumisesta tutkimukseen?” (Children under research: Who decides on a child’s participation in research?), *Lakimies* 2009, pp. 226–253,
- Liisa Nieminen: Book review: Henrika Clarkeburn and Arto Mustajoki, ”Tutkijan arkipäivän etiikka” (A researcher’s everyday ethics), *Lakimies* 2009, pp. 532–537,
- Liisa Nieminen: ”Lasten ja nuorten tutkimus: oikeudellinen tarkastelu. Lasten ja nuorten tutkimuksen etiikka” (Research on children and youth: judicial review. The ethics of Research on children and youth) (ed. Kaisa Vehkalahti & Niina Rutanen & Tarja Pösö & Hanna Lagström). Nuorisotutkimusseura, Helsinki 2010.
- Liisa Nieminen: Ethical Principles of Research in the Humanities and Social and Behavioural Sciences and Proposals for Ethical Review. *Ethically Speaking* 13/2009,
- Liisa Nieminen: ”Lapsen etu ja tutkimukseen osallistuminen: Kuka määrittelee lapsen edun?” (The child’s interest and participation in research: Who determines the child’s interest?) in monthly column, National childhood research network, December 2009.

4. Statements issued, international activities and other cooperation

The National Advisory Board on Research Ethics issued one expert statement in 2009:

- Statement to the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health on: The amendment to the law on medical research and to the law on the patient’s position and rights; draft for the government’s proposal (13.11.2009)

International meetings in which the Chair, members and the Secretary General participated:

- Chair Eero Vuorio: The European Network of Research Integrity Offices, cooperation meeting, Amsterdam, 11.–12.3.2009,
- Chair Eero Vuorio: ESF–ORI Workshop: “Responsible Conduct of Research: Good Research Practices and Research Integrity Training”, Strasbourg, 27.–28.10.2009,
- Member Paavo Löppönen: EU BONUS research programme seminar, Tallinn, 20.8.2009,

- Member Ari Salminen: Ethics in Higher Education, conference, Vilnius, 23.–26.8.2009,
- Secretary General Liisa Nieminen: The EFGCP Annual Conference 2009: Research Integrity: A European Perspective, Prague, 27.–28.1.2009,
- Secretary General Liisa Nieminen ESF–ORI Workshop. “Responsible Conduct of Research: Good Research Practices and Research Integrity Training”, Strasbourg, 27.–28.10.2009.
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5. Personnel and finance

In 2009 the National Advisory Board on Research Ethics had only one full time employee, the Secretary General. There was also a paid assistant, whom the Advisory Board shared with the Committee for Public Information. In addition, the Advisory Board had the use of the telephone exchange, computer and caretaker services of the Federation of Finnish Learned Societies.

In 2009 the Ministry of Education granted the National Advisory Board on Research Ethics a total of EUR 35,000, of which EUR 10,000 was allocated for running costs and EUR 25,000 for the Advisory Board’s expenditure on publications and seminars, these funds were administered by the Ministry of Education. The salaries of the Secretary General and secretary of the National Advisory Board on Research Ethics and the clerical funds were administered by the Federation of Finnish Learned Societies.

The Annual Report was presented at a meeting of the National Advisory Board on Research Ethics on 28th January, 2010.

Eero Vuorio
Chair

Liisa Nieminen
Secretary General

Appendix 1

List of seminars and educational events other than those organised by the National Advisory Board on Research Ethics, at which the Chair, members or Secretary General participated in 2009

- Chair Eero Vuorio: The ethical values of research, Rauma Chamber of Commerce and Satakunta University of Applied Sciences, Oras-group, Rauma 25.2.2009,
- Chair Eero Vuorio: Research ethics for medical students, University of Turku, 8.4.2009,
- Chair Eero Vuorio: National seminar for ethics committees, University of Turku, 7.5.2009,
- Chair Eero Vuorio: Ethical governance of Biological and Biomedical Research: Chinese-European Co-operation, final meeting, London, 4.9.2009,
- Chair Eero Vuorio: Straightening the curves and sharpening the points, the ground rules for scientific journalism? seminar, Helsinki, 21.4.2009,
- Vice Chair Riitta Keiski: Plagiarism in university studies, ITU cafe, University of Oulu, 19.3.2009,
- Vice Chair Riitta Keiski: Research Ethics, Infotech Oulu Graduate School, University of Oulu, 10.11.2009,
- Member Arja Kuula: Rehabilitation Foundation, Helsinki, 14.1.2009,
- Member Arja Kuula: The Joint Master's Programme in Comparative Social Policy and Welfare, University of Tampere, 5.2.2009,
- Member Arja Kuula: Nordic–Baltic Doctoral Network in Social Work, University of Tampere, 19.3.2009,
- Member Arja Kuula: Ethics seminar, University of Oulu, 3.4.2009,
- Member Arja Kuula: Research ethics for cultural researchers, seminar, Pori, 4.5.2009,
- Member Arja Kuula: IASSIST 2009 Conference, University of Tampere, 28.5.2009,
- Member Arja Kuula: Hospital district ethical committee secretaries, discussion days, Jyväskylä, 29.5.2009,
- Member Arja Kuula: University of Jyväskylä, 10.9.2009,
- Member Arja Kuula: University of Jyväskylä, 6.10.2009
- Member Arja Kuula: University of Helsinki, 9.10.2009,
- Member Arja Kuula: Finnish post-graduate school in social work, University of Tampere, 12.1.2010
- Secretary General Liisa Nieminen: Finnish post-graduate school in geology, University of Helsinki, 4.3.2009.
- Secretary General Liisa Nieminen: Finnish post-Graduate School in Nursing Science, Åbo Akademi University, 5.5.2009,
- Secretary General Liisa Nieminen: University of Tampere, Faculty of Medical Science, 7.10.2009,
- Secretary General Liisa Nieminen: University of Helsinki, Faculty of Behavioural Sciences, 14.10.2009.
- Secretary General Liisa Nieminen: University of Helsinki, Post-graduate students of Natural Sciences, 21.10.2009,
- Secretary General Liisa Nieminen: University of Turku, Faculty of Law, 26.1.2010

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