

Responsible thesis

**Ethical recommendations for thesis
writing at universities of applied
sciences 2020**

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Why have common recommendations?

- The aim is to harmonise the thesis process of universities of applied sciences, promote responsible conduct of research, prevent scientific dishonesty and improve the quality of theses
- Based on legislation and the international and national ethical research principles, policies and recommendations of the scientific community
- Universities of applied sciences have committed to following the guidelines and recommendations of the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity (TENK):
 - *Responsible conduct of research and procedures for handling allegations of misconduct in Finland*(TENK, 2012)
 - *Ethical principles of research with human participants and ethical review in human sciences in Finland*(TENK, 2019)

Student's checklist

1. I have ascertained my possible conflicts of interest
2. I have acquainted myself with the topic of my thesis
3. I have, together with my supervisor, ascertained the resources required by my work
4. I have acquainted myself with the guidelines of research ethics
5. I have acquainted myself with the principles linked with the handling of personal information and data protection and the instructions from my university of applied sciences.
6. I have ascertained together with my supervisor whether my thesis requires an preliminary ethical review and/or research permit, and if needed, I have taken care of these
7. I have signed the required agreements together with my supervisor and my collaborative partners
8. The authorship of my thesis and possible other publications connected with my thesis has been agreed upon
9. Storage, ownership and usage rights of the materials for my thesis have been agreed upon in a manner accepted by all parties
10. I have reported on the funding and other significant linkages connected with my thesis
11. I am aware that my thesis will be examined in a plagiarism identification system
12. I understand that my thesis is a public document
13. I have a right to a high-quality thesis process

Supervisor's checklist

1. I have ascertained my possible conflicts of interest
2. I shall supervise the writing of the thesis in a competent manner
3. There are adequate resources for producing the thesis
4. Guidelines of research ethics shall be followed in the thesis work
5. Legislation on the handling of personal data and data protection shall be followed in the thesis work
6. Before starting on the thesis a favourable statement from the ethics committee and the appropriate permissions for research have been procured, if necessary
7. Necessary agreements have been signed together with the student, a representative of the university of applied sciences, and possible collaborative partners.
8. If necessary, an agreement has been signed with the student about the authorship of publications connected with the thesis
9. Storage, ownership and usage rights of the materials for my thesis have been agreed upon in a manner accepted by all parties
10. Funding and other significant linkages connected with the thesis have been declared
11. The thesis shall be examined in a plagiarism identification system and the student is aware of this
12. The thesis is a public document and the student and the collaborate partner are aware of this
13. The student has a right to a high-quality thesis process

1. Do I have a conflict of interest?

- **Conflict of interest:** a person is involved in the matter at hand or with related parties or other persons otherwise affected by the relevant decision in a way that may jeopardise his or her impartiality
- Disqualification provisions of the Administrative Procedure Act
- According to the “Responsible conduct of research and procedures for handling allegations of misconduct in Finland (TENK, 2012)” guideline:
 - “researchers refrain from all research-related evaluation and decision-making situations when there is reason to suspect a conflict of interest. Researchers also need to comply with the practices listed above when working as teachers, instructors or experts”
- Some fields also have their own ethical standards

2. Have you familiarised yourself sufficiently with the topic?

- A thesis is a student's learning process that must promote the student's expertise, professional development and working life skills
 - The student is a key actor
 - The instructor provides support, encouragement and quality management and ensures that the thesis meets the criteria of a bachelor's or master's thesis
 - The partner mentor/supervisor provides the student with support and a working life perspective
- Different fields of education have guidelines on what stage of studies the student is sufficiently competent to start a thesis
- Degree programme curricula include studies that support the thesis process

3. Are the resources adequate?

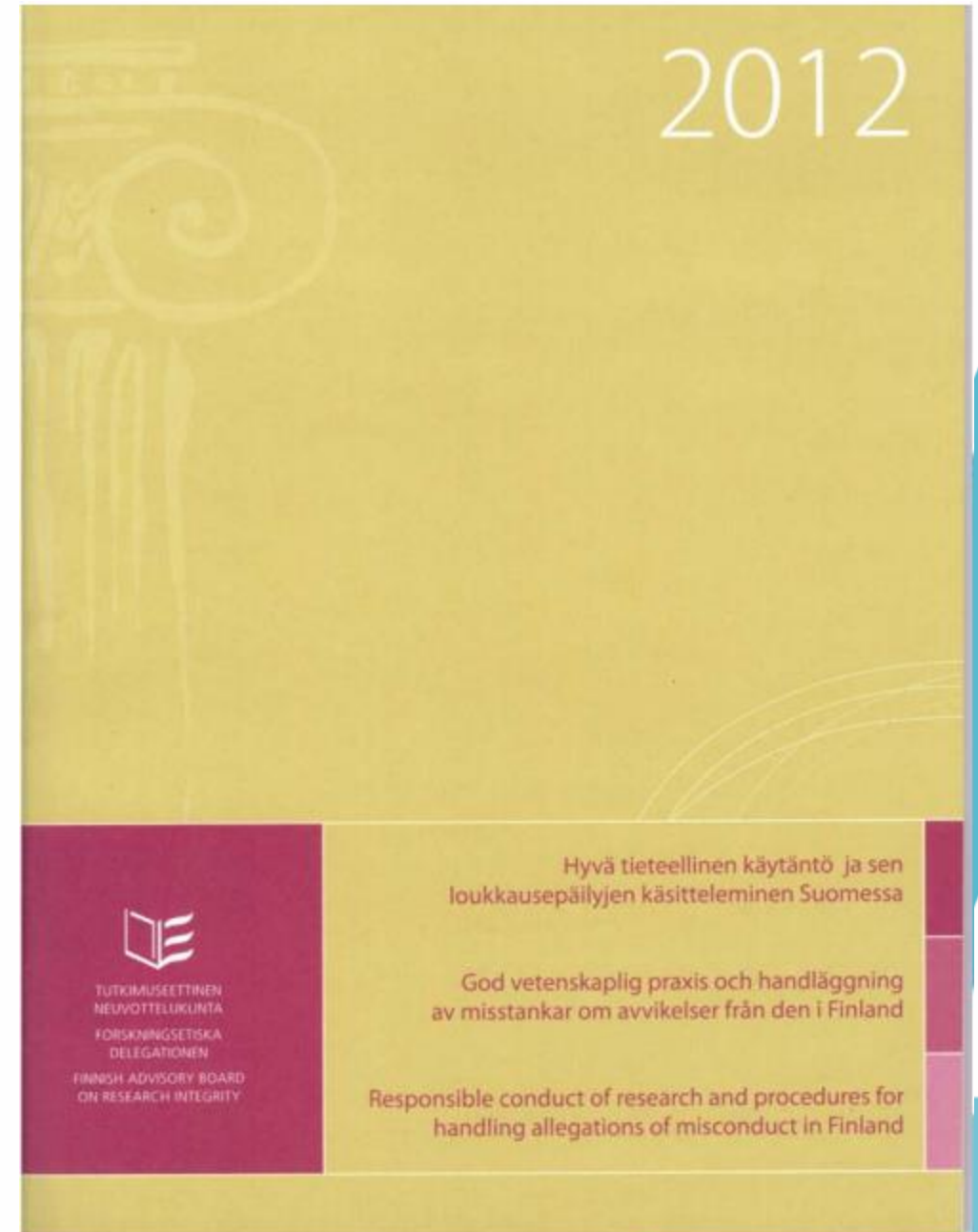
- For outlining a topic and making a thesis plan, the student and instructor assess the resources required for carrying out the work (including personnel and equipment resources, costs) and ensure their availability and schedule
- There may be requirements for the scientific competence of the research group:
 - Statutory, such as studies falling under the Medical Research Act
 - Financiers will also assesses the scientific competence of the research group when making a funding decision

4. Am I familiar with research ethics?

- The teacher supervising the thesis is responsible for ensuring that the student is familiar with the ethical principles of research. The instructor must inform the student of the key ethical principles and permit procedures related to the research process
- The author of the thesis is responsible for the ethicalness of his or her thesis
- The partner must accept that the principles of responsible conduct of research and the professional ethics guidelines of the field as well as applicable legislation are followed when carrying out the thesis process.
- Universities and universities of applied sciences must ensure that responsible conduct of research and the ethics of research are an integral part of the basic and advanced education they provide.

Responsible conduct of research and procedures for handling allegations of misconduct in Finland (RCR guideline) 2012

<https://www.tenk.fi/en/responsible-conduct-of-research>



The ethical principles of research with human participants and ethical review in the human sciences in Finland

<https://www.tenk.fi/en/>



5. Do I handle personal data?

- Personal data refers to all information related to an identified or identifiable person
- Processing of personal data must always be based on the General Data Protection Regulation or the Data Protection Act.
 - If there is no basis for processing data, personal data may not be processed
 - Only data necessary for the purpose of processing may be processed
- Categories of sensitive personal data include:
 - racial or ethnic origin
 - political opinions
 - religious or philosophical beliefs
 - trade union membership
 - health-related information
 - sexual orientation or behaviour
 - genetic and biometric data processed to identify a person.
- The processing of sensitive personal data belonging to these categories is primarily prohibited

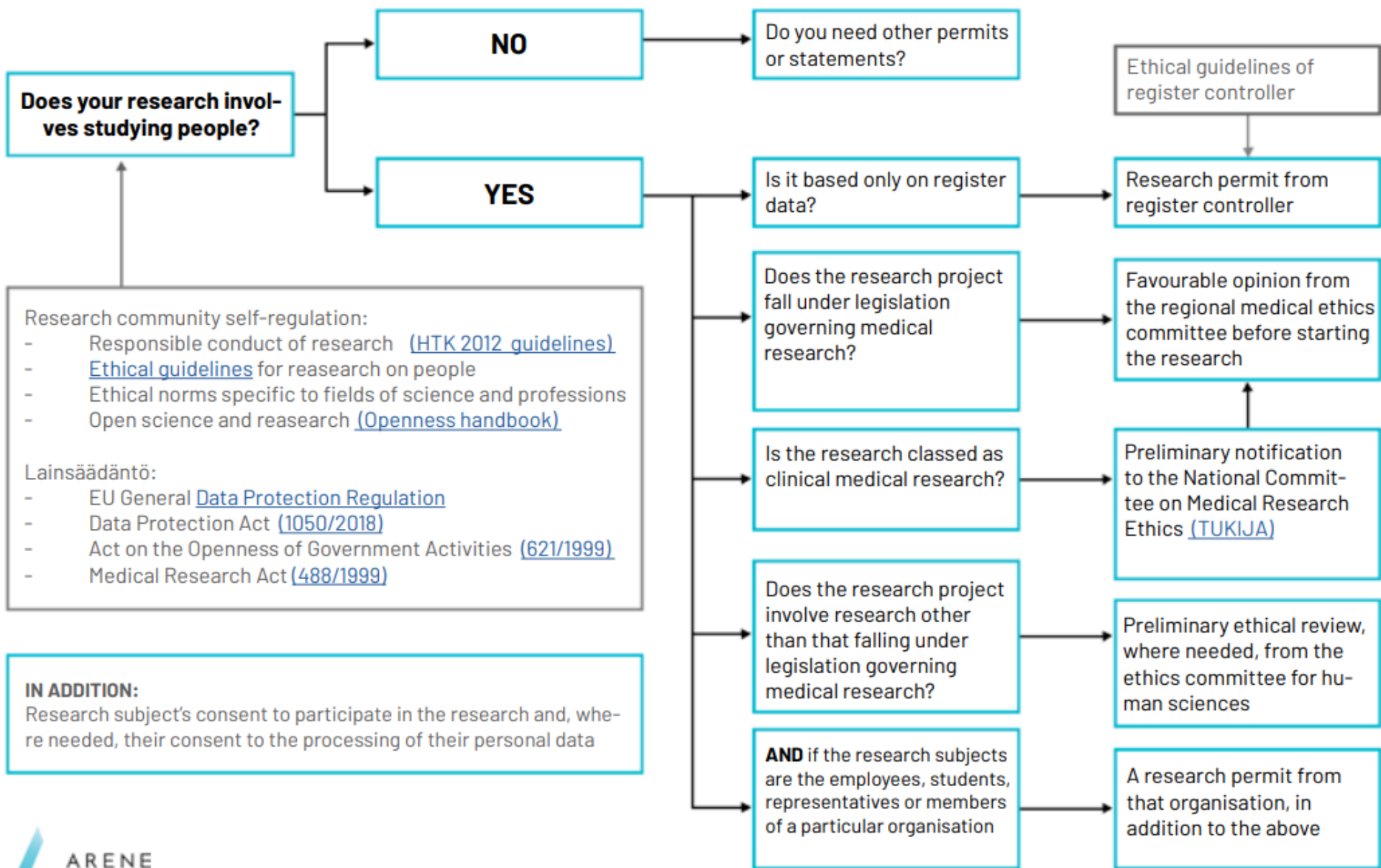
- Do not process personal data unless you have grounds for processing in accordance with the GDPR
- Consider which categories of personal data are necessary for processing
- If processing personal data is necessary, obtain consent from the subjects
- Plan the life cycle of processed data in advance and describe it comprehensibly in the privacy statement
- Assure data protection and security throughout the process
- Code the research data as early as possible using for example aliases (pseudonymisation)
- Once the thesis is approved and the appeal period has expired, destroy all material containing personal data
- If the material could be useful for reusing, remove identifying data from it irreversibly (anonymisation) and save the data with the help of your instructor in accordance with your school's instructions

Make sure research subjects cannot be identified from the publication!

6. Do I need an ethical advance evaluation or a research permit?

- In the thesis plan, the student and instructor must consider:
 - the ethical nature of the work
 - whether advance ethical review or research permits are required
- **Advance ethical review:** in support of the person carrying out the research; to identify and avoid the potential risk or harm to the subject
 - Medical research under the Medical Research Act
 - Non-medical research with human participants in certain research settings
- **Research permit:** an organisation's permission to approach its personnel, students, members, etc. in matters related to research
- The student and instructor cooperate to apply for an advance ethical review and/or research permits

WHAT PERMISSIONS AND OPINIONS DO YOU NEED IN ORDER TO CONDUCT RDI-ACTIVITIES FOCUSED ON HUMANS?



Research permit*

- Find out well before starting the research process whether your research requires a research permit
- Examples of situations where you need a research permit from the target organisation:
 - you are conducting a study on the students or staff of a university of applied sciences by sending them an electronic questionnaire
 - you are interviewing the staff of a kindergarten or observing children in a kindergarten
 - you are interviewing hospital or social counselling staff
 - you are determining the physical performance of the members of a sports club

*The research permit has been discussed more extensively in this material than in Arene's ethical recommendations for theses

Applying for a permit: when and from whom?

- Once your thesis instructor has given you permission to proceed, you can apply for a research permit with the help of your instructor
- If you are recruiting subjects from a specific organisation (company, hospital, school, association, etc.), you will apply for a permit from that organisation
 - The grounds for granting a research permit vary by organisation. In the planning phase of the study, make sure whether it is even possible to carry out the study in the organisation in question
- If your research requires an advance ethical review, apply for a statement from the Advisory Board on Ethics before applying for the research permit
 - Granting a research permit may require that the Advisory Board on Ethics has approved the research
- Remember that an approval from the Advisory Board on Ethics or a research permit does not remove the researcher's/student's responsibility for their research

Research permit process

- Several organisations have published a research permit process on their respective websites
- The person processing the research permit makes a decision based on the material provided
- In most cases, the permit request must contain:
- carefully filled out permit request form / study plan and/or its summary / information and consent document for subjects and other documents, such as data collection forms and possible subject recruitment notifications / responsible researcher's assessment of the ethics of the study and, if necessary, an approval from the Advisory Board on Ethics / privacy statement if personal data is processed in the study

Other instructions and observations

- Carefully read the instructions for conducting research in the organisation in question:
 - For example, health care units may restrict thesis studies regarding patients
- Reserve enough time for processing the research permit. Please note that a permit request with insufficient information will extend the processing time!
- A research permit may be granted for a fixed term
- A research permit does not replace the subjects' consent to participating in a study. Consent is given personally by each subject!

7. Are there agreements in order?

- Before starting a thesis, a cooperation agreement is made between the commissioner, the university of applied sciences and the student. The agreement outlines important rules, such as:
 - topic and timetable
 - guidance
 - costs and reimbursement
 - background material and its right of use
 - research materials and results generated during the thesis process and their ownership and right of use (including possible compensation and invention fees)
 - confidential and other sensitive material vs. the publicity of the thesis
 - liability and limitations of liability
 - processing of personal data (if necessary)

8. Result of the thesis and publications

- A thesis is a work whose copyright belongs to the student
 - The student may, if he or she so wishes, transfer the economic copyright
- The student carrying out the thesis may also produce material that is covered by copyright protection. If the material is produced together with, for example, an instructor, researchers, or an external partner from working life, the ownership and use of the material will be agreed in advance as part of the cooperation agreement.
- Authorship under the Copyright Act is related to the produced text, computer program, image, etc.

Authorship related to scientific research and responsible conduct of research

- Authorship related to scientific research and responsible conduct of research
- A broader concept than what is laid out in the Copyright Act
- Participation in research work: brainstorming, planning or analysing research material
- Authorship provides recognition for participating in research work
- Also gives responsibility for the content of the work, e.g. the content and results of the study described in a publication
- If the results of a thesis are published outside the actual thesis, authorship will be agreed upon in advance
- Further information: [Agreeing on authorship. Recommendation for research publications by the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity 2018](#)

9. Have you ensured that you have stored, opened or destroyed any materials?

- A research thesis is planned, implemented and reported, and the data generated during the process is stored or destroyed in accordance with the requirements set for scientific knowledge
- Follow the current data security and protection guidelines and material management instructions of your university of applied sciences and the user regulations of each service

10. Did I remember to report potential commitments?

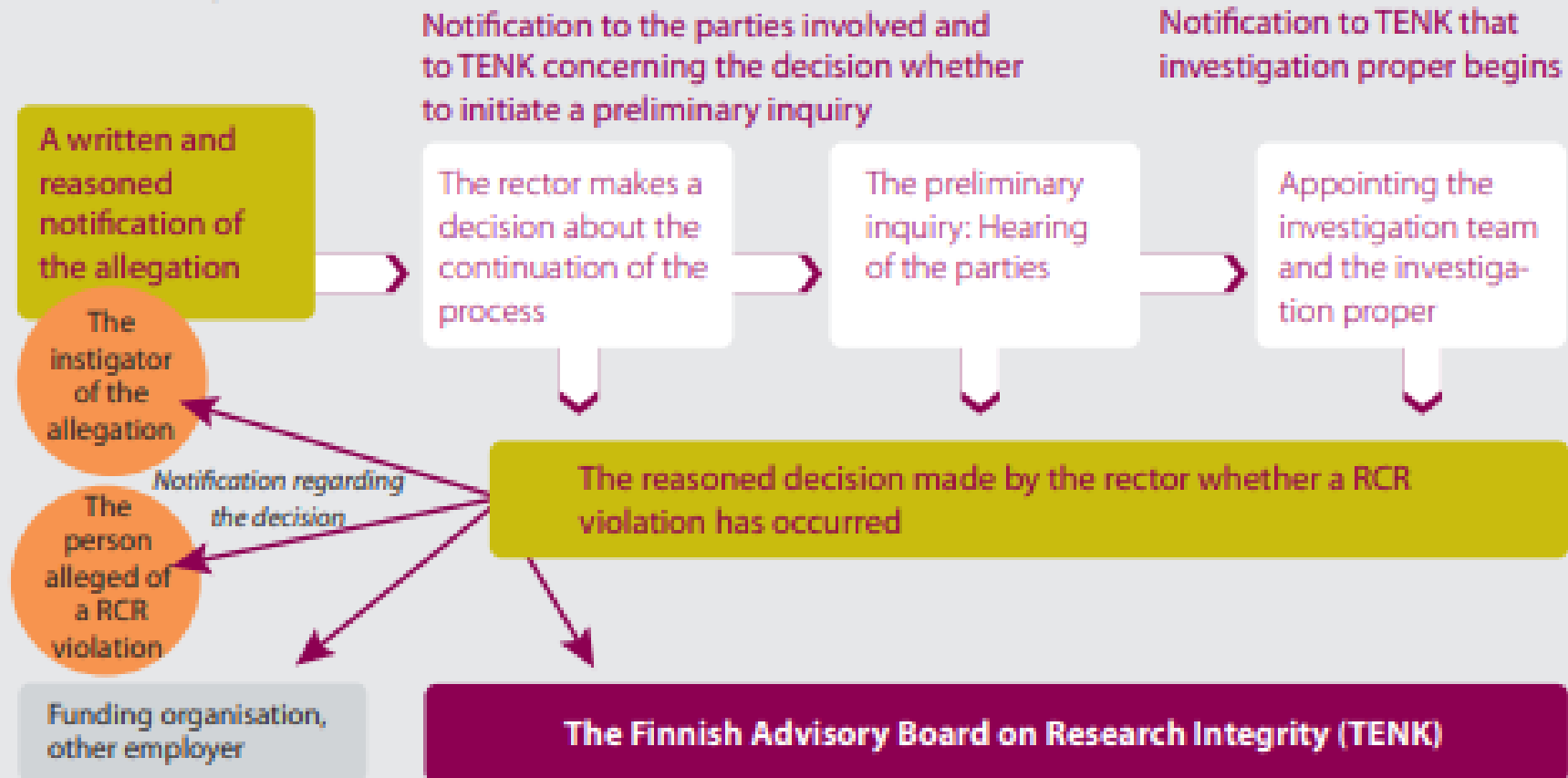
- One of the key premises of responsible conduct of research is that sources of financing or other commitments relevant to the conduct of research are announced to all members of the research project and reported when publishing the research results

11. Have I borrowed without permission?

- The most common violation of responsible conduct of research is **plagiarism, i.e. unacknowledged borrowing**: fraudulent use of another person's material without proper indication of the original source
- **Misappropriation**: more extensive than plagiarism, unlawful presentation of another person's research result, idea, plan, observations or research material as one's own research
- If there is suspicion of plagiarism or misappropriation, the instructor must notify the president of the university of applied sciences who decides whether to initiate a preliminary investigation in accordance with the RCR violation process
 - Bachelor's degree: internal process of the higher education institution
 - Master's degree: unless approved, internal process of the university of applied sciences. If the thesis has already been approved or if the suspect of an RCR violation so demands, the investigation is carried out following the RCR process according to the RCR instructions.

The RCR process

Figure 1. The RCR process



A party dissatisfied (the person alleged of misconduct or the instigator of the allegation) with the rector's decision, with the procedures adopted in the preliminary inquiry, in the investigation proper or with the final report, may request a statement from TENK within six months of the date of notification.

Source: TENK **Responsible conduct of research and procedures for handling allegations of misconduct in Finland Guidelines of the Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity 2012**

Investigations into alleged RDC violations as part of the scientific community's self-regulation do not handle issues that are related to criminal law, immaterial rights or labour law, or into other legal issues that may be related to the alleged violation and that are dealt with in a court of law

12. The thesis is a public document

- A thesis that is produced in a university of applied sciences and that leads to obtaining a diploma is public unless otherwise provided (Section 12.2 of the Constitution of Finland; Section 1 of the Act on the Openness of Government Activities).
- Universities of applied sciences follow the guidelines of the Ministry of Education and Culture: **confidential materials may not be included in any thesis, and theses are public immediately after approval** (Ministry of Education and Culture letter to universities of applied sciences 28 January 2004, Registry number 3/500/2004)
- The student ensures that no confidential information (e.g. personal data) or business and professional secrets specified in the cooperation agreement are included in the thesis when it is submitted for evaluation and publishing.
- Supervising teachers keep confidential all information that must be kept confidential by law as well as the business and professional secrets of the partner (Section 24 of the Act on the Openness of Government Activities)
- Presentation at a thesis seminar or similar event is public. The supervising teacher, partner and student define the content of the presentation together in such a way that the presentation does not violate the protection of personal data or the confidentiality conditions of the cooperation agreement

13. Problems... ?

- A thesis is a student's learning process that must promote the student's expertise, professional development and working life skills
- The student is a key actor / Instructor provides support, encouragement and quality management
- The student is entitled to high-quality guidance
- Issues related to guidance are processed with the student, instructor and a third party, such as an administrative person responsible for education.
- Suspicion of RCR violation: student or instructor notifies the president of the university of applied sciences who decides whether to initiate a preliminary investigation in accordance with the RCR violation process

The background is a solid teal color. On the left side, there are several white geometric shapes: a large triangle pointing downwards, a trapezoid, and a smaller trapezoid below it. The text "Thank you!" is centered in the teal area.

Thank you!