

Guidelines for handling of questions regarding research ethics

This is a translation. The Norwegian version is the official one.

Laid down by: The Board of the University of Tromsø pursuant to Section 9-1 (1) of the Act relating to Universities and University Colleges

Date: 14.2.2008

Archive ref: DL 200602792-17 S 7-08.

I. Purpose

1. The purpose of these guidelines is to establish routines to ensure that research ethics norms are attended to in a good manner at the University of Tromsø. They shall advance a high level of knowledge about questions concerning research ethics and arrangements for good scientific practices by increasing knowledge about, interest in and the debate about ethics in connection with the university's activities.

II. Principles of research ethics

2. Research ethics covers ethical aspects of both the researcher's role and the research process. Research ethics dilemmas can also arise at the meeting point between research and other activities such as teaching, communication of results, expert activities, subject and institution management and engagement in other activities.

3. National and international principles shall form the basis of ensuring good research ethics at the University of Tromsø, as stipulated in the following:

- Guidelines for research ethics in Social Sciences, Humanities, Law and Theology
- Guidelines for research ethics in Science and Technology
- Ethical principles for medical research involving human subjects (Declaration of Helsinki)
- Uniform Requirements for Manuscripts Submitted to Biomedical Journals (Vancouver Convention)

III. Responsibility

4. All researchers and students have a responsibility to follow the norms for good research ethics in research/studies and adjacent activities, with reference to subsection 2.

5. Ensuring that research ethics norms are well attended to is an aspect of professional responsibility and personnel management responsibility. Academic leaders at all levels have a responsibility to ensure good research ethics practises and assess any questions relating to breeches of the principles within their area of responsibility.

6. A Central Research Ethics Committee shall express an opinion on cases where there is doubt about whether the principles of research ethics have been breached. The committee may also express an opinion about general questions relating to research ethics.

IV. Procedure in the event of suspicion of cheating or other breeches of good research ethics

7. Complaints or notification of suspicion that an employee or student has breached the principles of research ethics shall be sent in writing to relevant unit where the person in question is an employee/student. The case shall be handled and settled by the Dean, Museum Director or Centre Manager. Delegated authority can be passed to academic leaders/boards/committees.

In the event of suspicion of cheating in examinations, the procedural rules apply with reference to subsection 4 and Chapter 16 of the Handbook for academic administration.

The person(s) directly affected shall receive information about the case and copies of relevant documentation as quickly as possible, but within three weeks.

Cases pursuant to the Act relating to Universities and University Colleges Sections 4-7 (Annulment of examinations or tests), 4-8 (Exclusion), 4-9 clause 5 (Exclusion owing to criminal offences) and 4-10 (Exclusion following aptitude assessment) shall be handled by the university's Central Appeals Committee with reference to Section III c in the Rules about the Central Appeals Committee.

8. The affected party and/or the academic leader may ask for the case to be presented to the Research Ethics Committee for an opinion.

9. Procedure at all levels shall follow the Public Administration Act to the extent applicable.

10. When the matter is first raised, the academic leader must consider his/her impartiality and if necessary refer the matter to his/her superior, with reference to Sections 6-10 of the Public Administration Act.

11. At the start of each meeting of the Research Ethics Committee, the chairperson shall remind members to assess the issue of impartiality. Any member who has participated in the preparation of the case in question or previously ruled on it may not be involved in the handling of the case.

12. The academic leader and the Research Ethics Committee may seek advice from one or more people with expert knowledge on the subject as part of their handling of the case.

13. The academic leader, the Research Ethics Committee, the affected party and their respective representatives can ask that the parties and witnesses provide an explanation. The information provided shall be documented in a justifiable manner and presented to the party/parties for an explanation. A party has the right to make such an explanation orally or in writing and to be acquainted with and comment upon explanations from the other party, witnesses and experts.

14. Cases handled by the university's Central Appeals Committee may not be referred to the Research Ethics Committee. However, the Central Appeals Committee may request that the Research Ethics Committee expresses an opinion in connection with cases it is considering.

15. When the academic leader or the Research Ethics Committee have concluded a case, the academic leadership must, dependent on the conclusion, assess how the university shall handle the situation as an employer/education institution.

V. Research Ethics Committee – composition, etc

16. The Research Ethics Committee shall comprise five members with personal deputies and is appointed by the University Board. The committee chairperson and the personal deputy for the chairperson shall fulfil the legal requirements for a presiding judge and district court judge. Four of the members must be employed in academic positions at the university, one of which shall be an expert on ethics. In matters relating to studies, there shall also be two student representatives.

17. The student representatives shall be appointed for a one-year period, while the other members are appointed for a three-year period.

18. A committee member and his/her personal deputy remains in office until a replacement member and deputy are appointed even though their term of office has expired. A committee member must also remain in office until cases being considered by the committee have been resolved.

Decisions on opinions – including reasoning – shall generally occur while the meeting is in progress. The committee may provide an opinion if the chairperson or his/her deputy and two other members are present. The opinion shall be based upon a concrete assessment of the document and evidence which has been presented. The conclusion shall state whether a breach of good research ethics/principles of research ethics has occurred. The conclusion must also state which documents have been assessed and which facts form the basis of the decision. If there are dissenting votes, the conclusion shall also state the minority's reasoning.

19. The Department of Research and Academic Affairs is secretariat for the Research Ethics Committee.

VI. Taking effect

20. These guidelines take effect from 1.3.2008.