

Instructions for applying the Code of Conduct for Research Integrity¹

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Introduction

The University of Tartu Senate adopted the [Code of Conduct for Research Integrity](#) on 27 October 2017. On 1 November 2017, the University of Tartu, 20 research and development institutions, the Estonian Research Council and the Ministry of Education and Research signed the [Research Integrity Agreement](#)

¹ These instructions were inspired by *Guide to Managing and Investigating Potential Breaches of the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research* (National Health and Medical Research Council 2018) and the descriptions of corresponding procedures by the U4 universities (Ghent, Groningen, Göttingen and Uppsala). The recommendations of the ENRIO handbook *Recommendations for the Investigation of Research Misconduct* have also been taken into account.

The instructions were compiled by staff members of the Centre for Ethics at the University of Tartu Marten Juurik, Kristi Lõuk, Mari-Liisa Parder, Margit Sutrop and Katrin Velbaum in cooperation with the UT Legal Counsel Aliis Liin and Academic Secretaries Andres Soosaar (until 31 December 2019) and Tõnis Kark (from 1 January 2020). In addition, feedback to the instructions was given by Faculty Councils, UT Academic Committee, Rector's Office and doctoral students who attended the course of research integrity in autumn 2019.

by which they took the obligation to support the observance and promotion of research integrity among university members.

Science and art and their teaching in Estonia are free, and universities and research institutions are autonomous within the limits prescribed by the law (Constitution of the Republic of Estonia), but the freedom is not absolute. It is limited by responsibility to people, society, natural and cultural environment. Taking responsibility is the precondition that ensures the society's trust in research.

The Code of Conduct for Research Integrity divides the responsibility for adhering to values and principles of action between the research institution and the researcher, emphasising the role of the university in shaping the research environment. The responsibility of the research institution encompasses:

- 1) training and instruction
- 2) counselling
- 3) shaping of work environment
- 4) dealing with suspicions and complaints of violation of research integrity

A detailed overview of the responsibility of both the researcher and the university is provided in the Code of Conduct for Research Integrity which includes the main values of research integrity and principles of action. The main values of research integrity are freedom and responsibility, honesty and objectivity, respect and caring, justice, openness and cooperation. The principles of action concern different aspects of research: planning and conduct of research; problems of authorship, publishing and application of research results, research environment, and questions of adhering to, promotion and application of research integrity.

An essential role in creation of an organisational culture supporting and fostering research integrity belongs to heads of the structural units of the university and each researcher. On the one hand, researchers have the obligation to follow the principles of research integrity and, on the other hand, make their contribution to shaping an organisational culture supporting research integrity, which includes helping and advising colleagues and drawing attention to possible violation of research integrity. In addition to society's trust in research, research is based on researchers' mutual trust; therefore, it is essential that all researchers adhere to the principles of research integrity and presume the same from their colleagues.

Research integrity does not equal merely avoiding violation of research integrity but is a broader concept which includes both remaining true to essential values and such an organisational structure of research that ensures the reliability and integrity of research. Research integrity is characterised by ethical studies which emanate from social and epistemic values.

Dealing with suspicions of violation of research integrity and complaints about them needs common understanding what should be considered misconduct. This understanding, however, is developing in time. The more cases of potential misconduct are discussed, the more uniform the approach will be. The procedure of dealing with them is made more complicated by certain differences in practice according to specialities – some practices are specific to the area of research; therefore, a certain way of conduct may be acceptable in one area but considered bad practice elsewhere.

1. Institutional support to research integrity

The research institution has an essential role in maintaining and promotion of research integrity and ensuring responsible research. The number of universities who have understood the importance of support for research integrity is growing. In a certain sense, the existence of the support system for

research integrity and procedural rules for handling violation shows the quality of the research organisation. Institutional responsibility includes the following areas:

- Arrangement of training in research ethics. Teaching of research integrity should be integrated into university curricula in a natural way. Ideally, the university should ensure that all students in contact with research get basic knowledge and skills about the functioning of research integrity and researchers' responsibility at a possibly early stage from experienced and competent supervisors.
- Creation of a competent counselling system. One of the components of the counselling system is the existence of counsellors with good knowledge of ethics, the necessary personal qualities, impeccable reputation and good academic and research results who could be approached when questions or dilemmas appear. Another component is promotion of a non-accusatory discussion culture which enables the staff to discuss their own and others' errors freely.
- Work environment at the institution. The staff should feel that election to posts and promotion is fair and transparent. The manifestations of the conflict of interests (including conflicts of interests specific to the academic world) must be taken seriously to avoid the potential threat of corruption and nepotism. Supervisors, supervisees, heads of structural units, researchers, etc. must have confidence that they work in a safe environment where there is no place for manifestations of discrimination.
- Establishment of committees (e.g. the ethics committee) and commissions (e.g. the commission on violation of research integrity) necessary for functioning of research integrity or drawing up instructions which help researchers and students to decide whom to approach with questions.
- Reaction to violation of research integrity by creating rules of procedure for dealing with suspicions of violation of research integrity 1) to solve disputable questions and, through their solutions, to create examples for situations of the same type (educational aim), 2) to give people who feel that they have been treated unfairly (e.g. they have unjustly been deprived of the authorship of the article) an opportunity to submit complaints, and 3) in more difficult cases, to apply sanctions against the violators of research integrity.

In the context of the current instructions, the **researcher** is any member of the University of Tartu who participates in research. According to the [Statutes of the University of Tartu](#), the members of the university are the members of the UT Council, the rector, students, staff members, medical residents, professors emeriti, associate professors emeriti, honorary doctors and honorary members.

2. Violation of Research Integrity

Violations of research integrity can be divided into major (serious) and minor (less serious). Major violations are falsification, fabrication and plagiarism (FFP), allowing unauthorised access to research subjects' personal data or unauthorised publication of them and other severe violations which have been committed knowingly, resulting from extreme negligence or carelessness in a situation where it is reasonable to assume that the person could or should foresee the consequences. Researchers' honest errors should not be treated as violations of research integrity.

The violation of research integrity means that researchers or research institutions do not fulfil their obligations. A violation could be either a one-time or a recurrent event. **Violations of research integrity involve but need not be restricted to the following cases.**

2.1 Not following the framework requirements for research integrity

- Failure to meet the principles of research ethics, standards or legal norms.

- Conduct of research without the required permits, consents or approvals of the ethics committee.
- Conduct of research in a way not approved by the ethics committee.
- Not following the rules established by the funders of research or misuse of the received funds.

2.2 Misconduct in carrying out research

- Unethical treatment of research subjects (not ensuring the subjects' wellbeing or direct harm to it, not honouring the subjects' free will, autonomy and human dignity)
- Falsification and fabrication of research data or making arbitrary additions to them
- Not following the principles of research data processing (misconduct concerning storing, destruction and sharing of data)
- Ignoring the principles of research safety
- Damaging of natural environment and cultural heritage during research
- Unethical treatment of animals in experiments

2.3 Misconduct in publishing and reviewing

- Attribution of authorship to someone who does not meet the authorship criteria
- Not mentioning the deserved authorship or third parties' contribution to research publications and presenting someone else's work, including theories, concepts, research data or source materials as one's own
- Recurrent issuing of one's publication without reference to the original place of its publishing
- Not informing the publisher about essential shortcomings discovered after the publication was issued
- Ignoring the principles of reviewing (impartiality, confidentiality, carefulness)

2.4 Misconduct in the research community

- Not recognising (academic) conflicts of interests, not informing about them or dealing with them
- Acting in private interests and causing unsubstantiated damage to the interests of the university or other researchers
- Not following the principles of equal treatment
- Disrespectful or malevolent attitude to colleagues, damaging of good collegial relations in the team
- Supervisors not requiring their supervisees to follow the principles of research integrity and not drawing attention to their errors

2.5 Misconduct in application of research integrity

- Concealment of violation of research integrity or not notifying about them
- Obstruction of dealing with suspicions of violation of research integrity or not dealing with them
- Submission of malevolent accusations

3. The Code of Conduct for Research Integrity and other regulations

The Code of Conduct for Research Integrity covers several areas where other regulations also apply. At the University of Tartu, these are, for example:

- **Following of the Code by students** – students’ obligation to follow good academic practices is stipulated by clause 204 of Study Regulations, which deals with improper conduct². There, the rules of procedure have been laid down only for cases of academic fraud³, which, in the context of research integrity covers primarily the problems related to plagiarism.
- **Work relations and good work environment** – Section 4 of the Estonian Code of Conduct for Research Integrity lists the principles to be guided by in relations with other persons, including colleagues, students and the public. Several of such relations are regulated by good practices already established at the University of Tartu. [Good practice of leadership](#) applies to persons working in leading or managerial positions. For the teaching staff and supervisors, [Good practice of teaching](#) and [Good practice of doctoral studies](#) are applied. For the whole university staff, there are [Guidelines for equal treatment](#), which provide an overview of themes related to equal treatment and workplace bullying, instructions for informing about violations of principles of equal treatment and resolving the cases of discrimination and bullying. If violation of research integrity involves interpersonal relations, it should first be considered whether the question is a case of unequal treatment or bullying. The University of Tartu also has **guidelines for crisis communication**, which advises how to keep the threats and contradictions in the work environment under control in a reasonable way.
- **Conflicts of interests** are also addressed in the Code of Conduct for Research Integrity (see 4.1⁴, 4.2 and 4.5). From 2018, [measures for prevention, identification and elimination of conflicts of interests and corruption cases](#) have been in force at the University of Tartu. The university has also drawn up [guidelines](#) for applying these measures. The measures are primarily based on the concepts of the *connected person* and the *official position* as defined in the Anti-corruption Act, but these do not cover all the potential conflicts of interests in the context of research integrity. For example, the concept of the *connected person* does not cover the relations of subordination and collegial relations within the university, and the concept of the *official position* does not cover several situations in publishing (reviewing, submitting an article to a journal) where the conflict of interests can be an essential theme. Thus, it is possible that some conflicts of interests should be resolved according to the principles of research integrity, others, however, by trying to prevent the conflicts of interests and corruption cases. Additionally, the University of Tartu has created [instructive materials](#) for avoiding conflicts of interests in entrepreneurial cooperation.
- **Processing of personal data** – to some extent, the Code of Conduct for Research Integrity also deals with cases of processing of personal data and asking for informed consent (see 2.1). In such situations, other regulations also apply in addition to the Code of Conduct for Research Integrity, primarily the General Data Protection Regulation (stipulates the general principles of data protection and the rights of data subjects) and the Estonian Personal Data Protection Act (stipulates the exceptions in data processing for research purposes). The requirements of [ethics committees](#) should also be considered, primarily, if consent by the committee is needed. If there

² Study Regulations, clause 204: “Improper behaviour means, in addition to academic fraud, also serious violation of generally accepted rules of behaviour or academic code of conduct, forgery of documents or an intentionally committed criminal offence by a student.”

³ Study Regulations, clause 206: “The faculty council may establish a procedure for processing cases of academic fraud.”

⁴ Here and henceforth, the items with no specific reference refer to the clauses of the Code of Conduct for Research Integrity.

is no suitable ethics committee for the field of research, consent should be acquired from the [Data Protection Inspectorate](#), and their requirements and guidelines be followed. The Inspectorate also conducts surveillance on the fulfilment of the requirements of the Act and the Regulation. Therefore, depending on the situation, the breaches of personal data processing requirements can be processed by the Data Protection Inspectorate, the ethics committee who gave its approval or the research institution.

- **Conduct of animal experiments** – the Code of Conduct for Research Integrity also deals with animal experiments (see 2.4). Animal experiments, taking care of experiment animals and their euthanasia are regulated by the [Animal Protection Act](#) and the corresponding regulations of the Ministry of Rural Affairs; surveillance over them is conducted by the Veterinary and Food Board. In addition, it is necessary to get a permit from the [animal experiments project committee](#), which sets additional restrictions to researchers' activities. Therefore, there are several potential agencies dealing with violations related to experiment animals.
- **International cooperation projects** – in situations where researchers from different countries cooperate, it may happen that different regulations and traditions apply to similar activities in the partners' countries of origin. As a general principle, the Code of Conduct for Research Integrity stipulates that in the case of cooperation, an agreement should be reached which norms are followed and what is done in the case of potential deviations and disagreements (see 1.1.3). It should also be agreed upon who deals with possible violation of research integrity.
- **Dealing with intellectual property** – the principles of research integrity stipulate that the researcher ensures that the intellectual property created during research will get the necessary protection and, as early as possible, agrees with cooperation partners whom the corresponding rights belong. Dealing with intellectual property is stipulated by the [Copyright Act](#), the [Patents Act](#) and other laws and the rector's directive [Procedure for treatment of intellectual property created at the University of Tartu](#).

3.1 Which regulations to follow?

The choice of the pertinent regulation is primarily the responsibility of the research institution, in both the stage of counselling and later assessment of the complaint. When dealing with suspicions of violation of research integrity, it should be considered which regulation or good practice is the best in a concrete case, and who should apply it. When a suspicion of violation is received and at each stage of its handling, it may become necessary to forward the case to some institution outside the university (e.g. the Data Protection Inspectorate or the police), to another structural unit of the university (e.g. the Human Resources Office or the ethics committee of human research) and/or to dismiss the case.

For the clarity of the procedure, situations should be avoided where several institutions or structural units deal simultaneously with the same case. Therefore, considering the responsibility, the following could be recommended:

1. If several institutions can deal with the same case, the institution conducting legal surveillance should be preferred.
2. If an institution outside the University of Tartu is already processing the case, a new investigation should not be initiated at the University of Tartu. In substantiated cases, an investigation can be initiated at the university if the other investigation has been concluded, but they did not solve the violation in the context of the Code of Conduct for Research Integrity.

4. Action when violation of research integrity is suspected

When only advice is asked or a suspicion has appeared that research integrity has been violated, it is possible to follow the general practice at the university, i.e. to approach one's direct superior or head of the structural unit. In many situations, however, the questions of research integrity are directly or indirectly entwined with power or work relations, which may render their impartial solution difficult. In such cases, it is advisable to use the special research integrity counselling system or the system dealing with violation of research integrity, which are described below.

Questions related to research integrity can be directed to the research integrity counsellor of the faculty or to the academic secretary. Dealing with complaints and suspicions is the task of the academic secretary of the University of Tartu.

4.1 Asking for advice and help from the research integrity counsellor

If university members have questions about adhering to the principles of research integrity or suspect that research integrity has been violated, it is advisable to turn to the research integrity counsellor. Each faculty of the university has at least one research integrity counsellor who has been appointed by the dean of the faculty. The research integrity counsellor must be an academically recognised researcher competent in research ethics.

To ask questions or to speak about suspicions, the person need not definitely prove his/her suspicions. The counsellor is obliged to guarantee the confidentiality of the communication and to protect the university member asking for advice or speaking about his/her suspicions from harmful consequences. Asking for advice does not obligate the person to submit a complaint.

If the person who has approached the counsellor does not want to be involved in the investigation, but the potential violation is severe enough and requires intervention by the university, the counsellor can refer the suspicion of violation of research integrity to the academic secretary. In this case, the counsellor must guarantee the person's confidentiality during investigation. Still, it should be considered that the lack of witnesses may make proving the possible violation of research integrity essentially more difficult, and the counsellor should use such an option only in exceptional cases when the damage caused by the potential violation or inaction justifies it.

When asking for advice, it is not essential whether the person turns to the counsellor because of an incident that happened to him-/herself or to a third person. Advice can be asked both orally and in writing. Asking for advice and giving it should be as informal for university members as possible. Depending on the essence of the problem, the counsellor can refer the person who needs advice to his/her direct superior or to the head of the structural unit.

Asking for advice is not documented, and it is not followed by any official procedure. The counsellor can still take notes about the circumstances of the case or the general description of the problem and, if necessary, consult other counsellors or the Centre for Ethics or draw up a generalised summary of the worries of the persons who approached him/her. In such a case, the counsellor must guarantee that third persons do not find out the name of the person who approached him/her or other sensitive circumstances that might harm concrete persons.

You have the right to express yours suspicions without being afraid of potential setbacks to yourself. If the suspicions concern a person closely connected to you, you have the right to ask for advice and present the potential suspicion confidentially. According to the Code of Conduct for Research Integrity, the university has the obligation to protect bona fide whistleblowers (see 5.4.3). It should be considered that the principles of research integrity do not allow malevolent accusations against colleagues (see 5.2.2).

4.2 Notifying about possible violation of research integrity

Everyone who has substantiated suspicions that a violation of research integrity has happened has the right to notify about it. With suspicions of violation, everyone can turn to the head of the structural unit (according to the general practice) or directly to the academic secretary.

If someone approaches the head of the structural unit and the problem is solved, the head of the structural unit later sends a short description of the problem and the results to the academic secretary and the dean. If the problem cannot be solved in the structural unit, it will be forwarded to the academic secretary.

The academic secretary documents all the pertinent materials. The content of the application and the person who submits it are confidential, but the persons conducting the investigation can acquaint themselves with the materials. All the persons related to the investigation must keep the obligation of confidentiality.

There are two options for notifying of the possible violation of research integrity. The cases where the person who notifies of the violation has no personal interests or claims are treated as **suspicions**. The cases where a university member or a person from outside the university has personal interests or claims are treated as **complaints**.

Suspicions can be submitted anonymously, but it should be considered that, if during the investigation there are problems about finding additional information about the case, and the violation cannot be proved, the case could be dismissed. The research integrity counsellor and the head whom the university member approaches also have the right to submit the suspicion if the person does not want to do it him-/herself.

When a suspicion is submitted, the academic secretary's primary task is to give an assessment of the case. If necessary, s/he can approach the person who submitted the suspicion or other university staff members.

Complaints cannot be submitted anonymously, as the aim of the complaint is protection of a person's rights or interests, e.g. arguments about attribution of authorship or application of data. In the case of complaints, the academic secretary tries to find a solution to the situation that satisfies both parties. If this cannot be done, the complaint must be assessed in the context of a potential violation of research integrity. When the complaint is based on a serious violation, the academic secretary can forward the complaint to the commission on violation of research integrity.

The person who submits a complaint about violation of research integrity or a suspicion has the right to be notified of the results of the investigation. When the academic secretary has given initial assessment of the suspicion or complaint of violation of research integrity, s/he notifies the person who submitted it. This does not mean that the person who submitted the suspicion or complaint has the right to see all the materials collected during the investigation, but s/he must be notified of the academic secretary's assessment and the reasons for it.

When notifying of a potential violation of research integrity, one should consider that the action which caused the suspicion or complaint may not be proved, in which case the investigation is finished, and no further action will follow. It should also be considered that, in the case of a minor violation or interpersonal disagreements, the situation is resolved by conciliation or corrective activities. If the person who submitted a suspicion or complaint about violation of research integrity is not satisfied with the results of the investigation, s/he has the right to ask for a secondary assessment. To get a secondary assessment, the academic secretary forwards the suspicion or complaint of violation of research integrity to the commission on violation of research integrity.

Thus, only the academic secretary can forward the suspicion or complaint of violation of research integrity to the commission on violation of research integrity if 1) s/he has assessed the initial suspicion

or violation and found that it can be an essential violation of research integrity, or 2) the person who submitted the suspicion or complaint wishes to get a secondary assessment. The commission assesses all the factual circumstances and, based on them, forms an assessment whether violation of research integrity took place or not.

The person who submitted the suspicion or complaint must consider that s/he can be summoned to the commission as a witness to answer additional questions. To protect the rights of the parties, each person summoned to the commission has the right to ask for advice and help from a legal expert or a person s/he trusts. In this case, the helper will also participate in the meeting of the commission.

The assessment of the commission cannot be challenged within the university. If the parties involved in the suspicion or complaint have any claims after receiving the assessment by the commission, they have the right to submit additional opinions or evidence to which the commission has not given an assessment yet. In this case, the commission examines the case again and forms its final assessment, considering the opinions and evidence received later.

5. Processing of suspicions and complaints about violation of research integrity

5.1. Principles of fair procedure

As stated in Section 5 of the Code of Conduct for Research Integrity, transparency, investigation impartiality and fair treatment of all parties must be ensured when dealing with suspicions and complaints about violation of research integrity (see 5.4.2). In addition, bona fide whistleblowers and the dignity and private life of all parties must be protected (see 5.4.3), and the confidentiality of the investigation must be ensured (see 5.4.3). The essential procedural principles are explained below.

Impartiality presumes the impartial treatment of the person against whom an accusation has been made in the complaint or suspicion. This also means that the researcher must not be considered guilty before his/her guilt has been proved. This also presumes that the assessment of the circumstances of the case must be as objective and prudent as possible. Persons closely connected with the case or its participants must not participate in conducting the investigation. If necessary, a substitute who has no personal relation to the case must be found for the commission members, the academic secretary or the rector.

When assessing complaints or suspicions, **justice** presumes weighing all circumstances including the earlier activities of the person against whom the complaint or suspicion has been launched, the severity and intentionality of violation, the damage caused by violation to third parties or the potential damage to the prestige of the university. Justice presumes that the assessment given to the complaint or suspicion and the following reaction by the university are proportional to violation committed by the researcher. Therefore, disciplinary sanctions should be applied only in the case of severe violation where the researcher is directly guilty. In the case of less severe cases other corrective activities should be preferred.

Transparency presumes that the whole procedure is understandable to the person against whom the complaint or suspicion was launched and can be followed by him/her. Essential materials and information that could have a significant impact on the assessments given to his/her activities must not be concealed from him/her during the investigation. Transparency also presumes that the procedure of dealing with suspicions and complaints, the persons participating in the discussion and the final assessment are understandable to persons who did not participate in the investigation. In exceptional cases, the academic secretary can declare the procedural materials either partially or completely public because of great public interest. If possible, all the materials used in the investigation must be documented in digital form.

Protection of participants means that the private life and dignity of all the persons involved in the investigation is sufficiently protected. In general, the bona fide whistleblower should also be protected, which means that his/her person is not revealed to the persons participating in the investigation. In exceptional cases, if there is sufficient evidence that the suspicion or complaint was malevolent, the submitter of the suspicion can be made public. Protection of private life and dignity presumes that all the persons participating in the investigation must keep confidentiality. Particular care should be taken that the circumstances concerning persons' private life and damaging their reputation do not become public before the end of the investigation. If the academic secretary has not ruled otherwise, all the participants must consider all the information received during the investigation confidential. Therefore, a confidentiality agreement is concluded with all the participants in the investigation if necessary.

Timeliness presumes that the investigation is conducted without unsubstantiated delay and reaction to suspicions and complaints is immediate. Timeliness requires prompt action from the persons conducting the investigation in situations which need intervention to avoid damage or where there is substantiated doubt that the evidence may become outdated.

According to the Code of Conduct for Research Integrity, researchers must be protected from malevolent accusations. Likewise, bona fide submitters of complaints or suspicions must be protected. The researcher, however, cannot assess the motivation of the submitter of the complaint or suspicion if s/he does not know who has submitted it. In such a situation, the investigator of the complaint or suspicion must decide, depending on the situation, how to ensure the best possible protection to its submitter so that this would not obstruct the ascertainment of malevolence. The protection of the submitter of the complaint or suspicion should in no case be taken lightly, as this may influence the readiness to pay attention to potential breaches of research integrity at the university.

5.2 Investigation of suspicions and complaints about violation of research integrity

Suspicions and complaints about violation of research integrity are initially processed by the academic secretary who, as the first step, documents each submitted suspicion or complaint. The academic secretary notifies the person who is suspected of violating research integrity of receiving the suspicion or complaint. In the interests of procedural fairness, the notification should also include information about the suspect's rights and options to defend him-/herself.

During the initial assessment, the academic secretary has the right to collect additional information about the circumstances of the case and to speak to university staff members for this purpose. University staff members are obligated to help the academic secretary during the initial assessment, to give oral statements and to submit written materials. The additionally collected information must also be documented and connected with the initial assessment given to the suspicion of violation of research integrity or complaint.

The initial assessment can be one of the following:

- 1) Dismissing the suspicion or complaint about violation of research integrity – if the collected materials do not refer to violation of research integrity or, based on the collected material, the violation cannot be proved.
- 2) Forwarding the suspicion or complaint of violation of research integrity to some other institution – if the materials collected during the investigation show that some other institution is more capable of dealing with violation. For example, if it is violation of valid legal norms, rules of another research institution or coordination by the ethics committee.

- 3) Solving the problem – if it is a minor violation, or the situation violating research integrity can be solved by corrective activities. If the submitter of the complaint agrees, the academic secretary can forward the issue to the leaders of the faculty. It can also be possible to find a solution satisfying all parties. In this case, the investigation is finished.
- 4) Forwarding the suspicion of violation of research integrity or complaint to the commission – if violation of principles of research integrity is severe and it needs further investigation and assessing the responsibility of the researcher. In this case, the academic secretary forms a report of the suspicion or complaint and forwards it to the commission members.

During the investigation, fair treatment of all parties must be ensured. If the suspicion or complaint concerns a particular researcher, but his/her error or guilt is not revealed, actions to restore the researcher's damaged reputation must be taken if necessary.

According to the Code, the severity of the violation and the violator's earlier conduct should be considered, and a difference should be made between intentional and non-intentional violations (5.4.4). Thus, it is possible that, each time a violation of research integrity is discovered, the complaint or suspicion is not automatically forwarded to the commission, especially when violation was caused by an honest error or it was a one-time minor violation. At first, an attempt should always be made to find a solution satisfying all parties. This depends again on the circumstances of the case and should be assessed and decided by the academic secretary.

5.3 Investigation of complaints and suspicions by the commission

When the academic secretary has decided for additional investigation of the violation or complaint of research integrity, s/he convenes the commission on violation of research integrity. The academic secretary documents the convention of the commission and all its following meetings and decisions. During the investigation of the suspicion of violation of research integrity or complaint, the commission has the right to collect additional information about the circumstances of the case and to speak to university staff members. If necessary, the commission can also speak to the person who submitted the suspicion of violation of research integrity or a complaint if this does not unduly harm his/her interests.

Each person summoned to the commission has the right to ask for legal help or other advice from a person whom s/he trusts. In this case, the obligation of confidentiality also extends to these persons. The accused person has the right to see all the materials collected to prove his/her guilt. To ensure the fair treatment of the parties, it is recommendable to summon the submitter of the complaint and the accused person to the commission separately.

Depending on the circumstances of the case, the commission can make one of the following decisions:

- 1) Dismissing the suspicion or complaint about the violation of research integrity – if the collected materials do not refer to violation of research integrity, or, based on the collected material, the violation cannot be proved.
- 2) Forwarding the suspicion or complaint of violation of research integrity to some other institution – if the materials collected during the investigation show that some other institution is more suitable for dealing with the case. For example, if it is violation of valid legal norms, rules of another research institution or approval of the ethics committee.
- 3) If a severe violation of principles of research integrity has occurred, and the researcher's guilt has been proved, the commission draws up a final summary of all the essential proofs and adds its own substantiation why, in the assessment of the commission, violation of research integrity has occurred.

In more severe cases, the academic secretary sends the assessment of the commission (summary of the case and recommendations about potential sanctions) to the rector of the university. The rector makes the final decision about the university member and decides whether and which sanctions to apply. In less severe cases, the academic secretary arranges corrective activities him-/herself.

5.4 Information related to the investigation

Essential outcomes of handling violation of research integrity can become models or precedents for future cases, but they also have an educational purpose, e.g. for discussions in courses of research ethics. Therefore, the academic secretary publicises short anonymous summaries of processed cases. At that, the privacy and dignity of all parties must be protected; therefore, the publicised information can only include a short general description of the case, its assessment and the final decision. In substantiated cases, if there is great public in the case, the academic secretary has the right to publicise the information related to the complaint or suspicion after the end of the investigation.

The ascertained violation must be documented. Documentation is necessary so that all potential violations of research integrity would leave a trace and, if necessary, could be accessible afterwards. For the sake of transparency, all the documents and other materials of the investigation should be in digital form and linked to one another. Materials of earlier investigations must be accessible according to need, considering, on the one hand, the interests of the public and the university and, on the other hand, the need to protect the right of the parties of the investigation to privacy.

Depending on the circumstances of the case and the persons' interests, the materials can also remain confidential after the end of the investigation. All the earlier materials must be accessible at least to the academic secretary if necessary. Access of heads of structural units to the materials related to their subjects must not be allowed by default, but it is for the academic secretary to decide in which cases access to third persons is substantiated. Mainly, such access is justified in the case of proved violations after which sanctions are applied.

5.5 Description and scheme of the system for processing of suspicions and complaints about violations of research integrity

The following scheme of procedures is applied in the cases if the suspicion or complaint is submitted about the members of the University of Tartu and its former students (if the suspicion or complaint concerns a graduation thesis that has already been defended).

For the students of the University of Tartu, the provisions of Study Regulations also apply.

To promote research integrity, the most essential is counselling of people. The main component of the research integrity counselling system at the University of Tartu is the counsellors at faculties who are appointed by the deans. Research integrity counsellors must be academically recognised researchers with suitable personal characteristics and impeccable reputation. Coordination and support of the work of research integrity counsellors is the task of the academic secretary in cooperation with the Centre for Ethics at the University of Tartu. The Centre for Ethics supports increasing the counsellors' competence in ethics by conducting training courses in research integrity (including with the participation of foreign experts) for counsellors and other university staff members. The Centre for Ethics also organises regular discussion groups for counsellors to unify the understanding of good practices by different disciplines. Once a year, the counsellors must submit a generalised report to the academic secretary about questions and problems they were approached with.

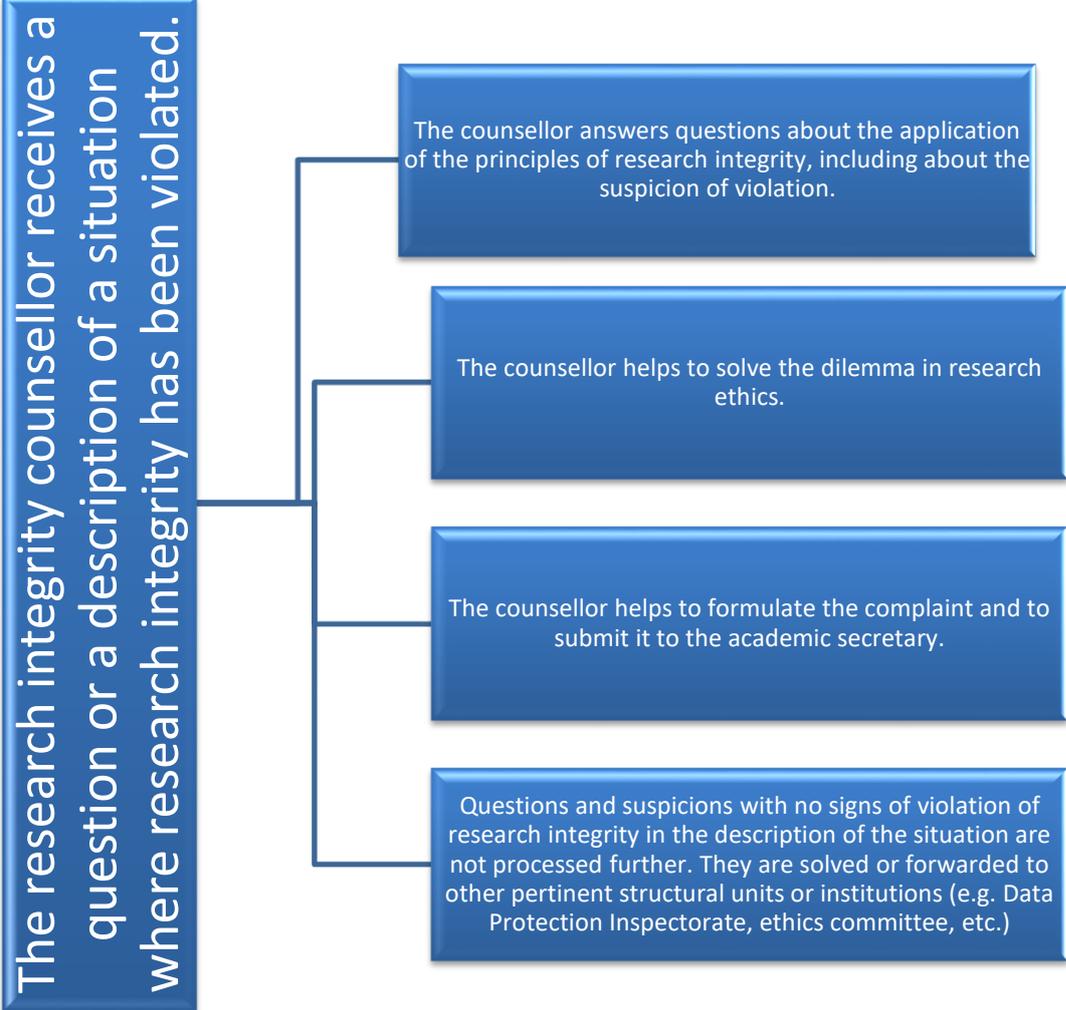
Handling the cases of violations of research integrity and their documentation is the task of the academic secretary. The presumed duration of the investigation is two months, which can be extended if necessary.

Depending on the case to be solved, the academic secretary is authorised to convene the commission which consists of permanent members and, if necessary, additional members with whom confidentiality agreements are concluded. If the cases do not need specific expertise, the commission can consist of permanent members only. The term in office of permanent members of the commission is three years.

The permanent members of the commission are the academic secretary, the legal counsel, an academic staff member with competence in ethics, representatives of four faculties, and one external member.

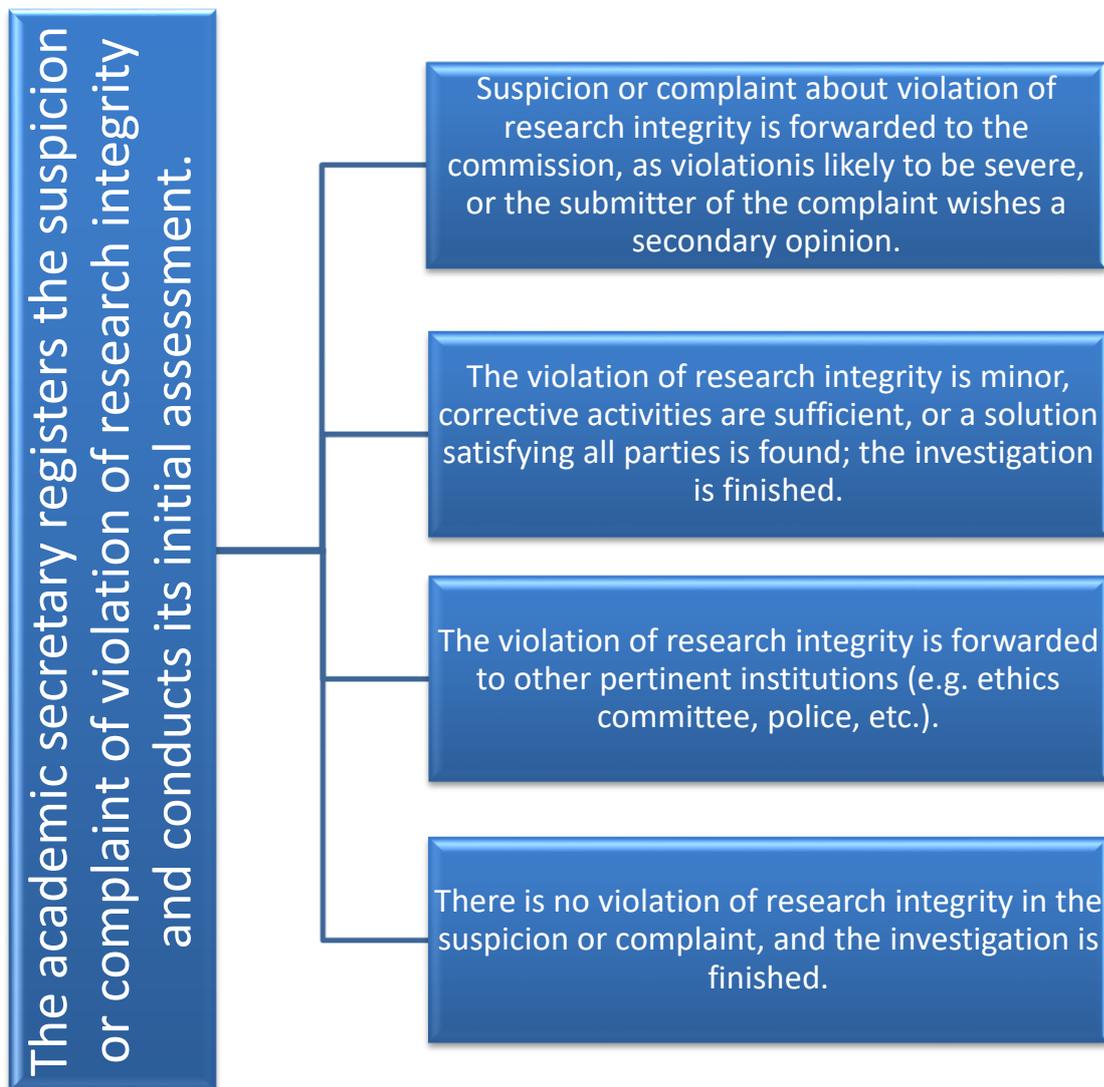
As additional members, a data protection specialist or a lawyer, a representative of students and a plagiarism detection expert can be called to participate in the work of the commission. The list of so-called ad hoc members is not final and depends on the nature of the complaint or suspicion of violation.

THE COUNSELLING STAGE: **Counselling** and **initial assessment** of the situation. Conducted by the person dealing with research integrity counselling. In the interests of the submitter of the suspicion or complaint of violation, the counselling stage is confidential



Stages of processing of suspicions and complaints about violation of research integrity

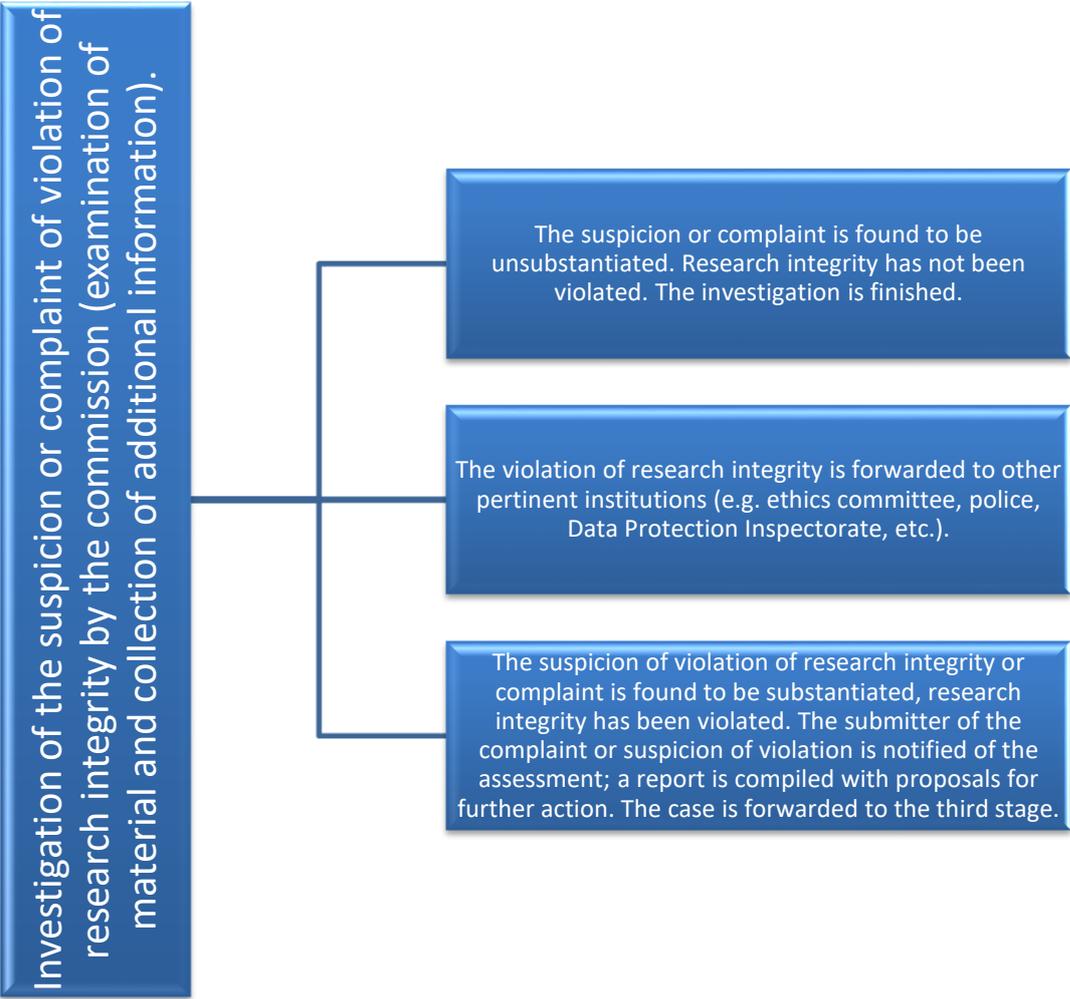
STAGE 1: Submission of suspicions and complaints about violation of research integrity and their initial assessment



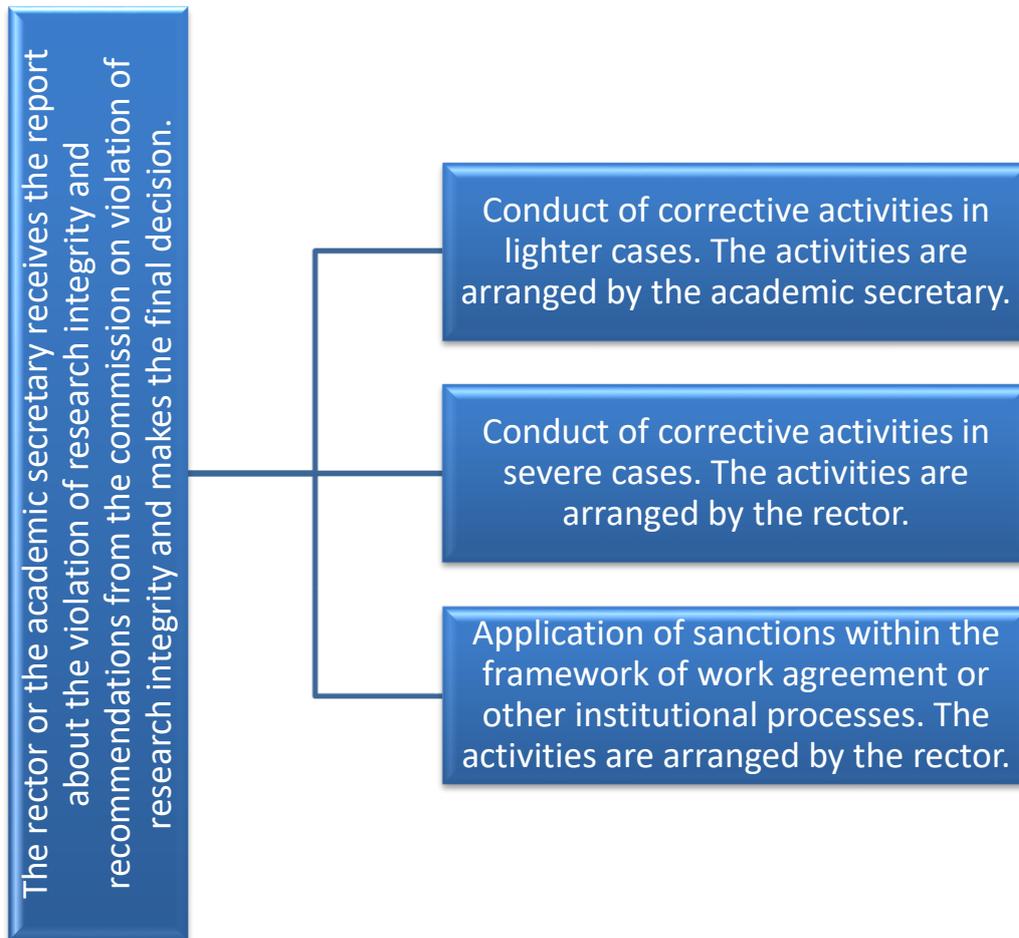
Suspicion of violation of research integrity or complaint can be either personalised or anonymous, but in the case of an anonymous suspicion, it should be considered that, if during the investigation there are problems about finding additional information, the suspicion will be dismissed.

The person who registers the complaint or suspicion of violation registers the date of submission of the complaint or suspicion, topic or description of the problem and adds the enclosed documents and files.

STAGE 2: Investigation of the **suspicion or complaint** of violation of research integrity by the commission on violation of research integrity.



STAGE 3: Reaction to the violation of research integrity by the rector or the academic secretary.



It is obligatory to document the cases from the first stage of the procedure.

If, at some stage of the investigation, a decision is made to dismiss the case, the submitter of the suspicion or complaint is notified of the decision and reasons are given.