Rector’s decision on joint publications at Åbo Akademi University

Dnr: 27/37/2016

Background

The increasing collaboration between researchers has led to scientific advances and is something Åbo Akademi University wants and tries to support. One result of the scientific collaboration is that co-authorships, reporting research results together with other researchers, are becoming more common. As the collaboration increases the ethical questions of scientific co-authorship have rightly gained in prominence. Inquiries show that there is a grey area regarding when a researcher is to be included as a co-author and when a researcher is to be acknowledged without being included as a co-author. Unfortunately there are also cases when the researcher’s contribution is not noted at all. The problem is expected to grow as the funding granted to the universities decreases and also is increasingly bound to quantitative results. The possibility to generate common regulations for co-authorship is investigated through international co-operation. Some research areas already have recommendations. The doctoral students are in an especially vulnerable position as they are dependent on their supervisors and can thus have problems asserting their rights. There are disputes also at Åbo Akademi University regarding personal contribution, order of co-authors, the use of material etc., but the magnitude of the problem has been unknown.

On 20 March 2015 Rector asked the Åbo Akademi Research Ethics Board (FEN) to investigate

- the need for clearer rules regarding co-authorship and for a process to resolve conflicts before publication
- the need for a written agreement regarding the contribution of the co-authors for journal articles included in doctoral theses

FEN submitted its report on 18 December 2015 with the suggestion that Åbo Akademi University implements common guidelines for determining the autors' contribution for common articles. The individual author's contribution should be noted in a form that is signed or approved by e-mail by all authors. The report where the background and model are presented as well as the proposed form are attached as appendix 1 and 2. The matter has been handled by the Board for Research and Doctoral Studies on 20 January 2016 and by the Rector’s Executive Group on 21 March 2016.
Rector also requested the opinion of the Faculties regarding the need for common guidelines at Åbo Akademi University for establishing the contribution of individual authors in a research project. Should these guidelines apply to all common research efforts at Åbo Akademi or only to the co-authored journal articles included in licentiate and doctoral theses?

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Through this decision Rector directs all researchers at Åbo Akademi University to pay attention to the commonly acknowledged principles of research ethics and their application in the co-authorship of an article or a monograph. Åbo Akademi University introduces an electronic form to be used as a tool to facilitate co-authorship and the division of labour in research groups based on the recommendation of the Research Ethics Board. Research Services is given the task to develop the electronic form.

Åbo Akademi University will on 1 January 2017 start using a form for all co-authorships at Åbo Akademi University, a so-called authorship model (attached to this decision). The following stipulations apply for the use of the form:

1) Everyone may use the form to continuously discuss publication ethics within the research group
2) The use of the form is not obligatory but conditional (see point 3)
3) Any member of a research group may request that the form be used in conjunction with the publication of results from a collaborative research project. The research group member can either contact the project manager directly or contact Research Services anonymously. In this case the use of the form is obligatory for the whole research group for this particular instance. International and national co-authors not directly affiliated with Åbo Akademi University can approve and sign the form through e-mail.
4) The form will be available in an e-version
5) Research Services will have the responsibility of archiving the forms in use

Åbo, 1 September 2016

Rector

Mikko Hupa

Director

Mats Lindfelt