

## **FONDAZIONE BRUNO KESSLER'S GUIDELINES FOR TENURE TRACKS<sup>1</sup>**

### **1. INTRODUCTION: THE TENURE TRACK**

This document intends to address the need from FBK to have a recruitment tool that defines a clear and transparent career path, oriented to the consolidation of the employment status of deserving and excellent researchers.

This document, which proposes and formalizes the tenure track procedures for FBK, has been structured through discussion with FBK researchers, with the Directors of Research Centers, with the Secretary General and with representatives of trade union organizations at the Foundation and at the Province Government.

Accordingly, the tenure track, in particular, is a type of profession classification indicating a path (track) aimed at achieving a permanent position (tenure) and is recognized in the context of international research as a professionalizing career path that looks primarily to the development potential of researchers.

The purpose of the tenure track is to offer excellent researchers the opportunity to pursue a transparent, formalized, structured career path aimed at directing the tenure-track researcher to the consolidation of the skills required to become a tenured researcher, i.e. a researcher that holds a permanent employment position.

The tenure track also has a clear implication from an institutional point of view because it was designed as a process of staff development that requires precise responsibilities from the tenure-track researcher, but also from the institution that promotes their professional career. For its part, in fact, the proposing research institution, subjecting the tenure-track researcher to a number of opportunities for discussion, assessment and evaluation, can constantly monitor the achievement of the predefined objectives, ensuring transparency, traceability and visibility to the entire course.

Finally, it should be noted that research and innovation centers are now proceeding towards a global comparison that expects the offer of ever-increasingly advanced knowledge and requires to prepare 'structure tools' suitable for the purpose and recognizable everywhere. Many countries have indeed adopted the instrument of tenure track to make access to a scientific career more competitive and selective, but at the same time more attractive and motivating.

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<sup>1</sup> This document has been under the scrutiny of FBK's research staff, the Directors of the Research Centers, the Secretary-General Andrea Simoni and representatives of the Province and the Foundation's trade unions.

## **2. TENURE TRACK AT FBK**

With a view to increasing internationalization of its staff, the Bruno Kessler Foundation, aligning itself with major international research centers, is being equipped with an instrument (tenure track) aimed at the identification of a qualifying, motivating and structured career path that is recognized and recognizable in the scientific community. To be an effective instrument for growth and social advancement, the world of research is in fact required to accept the challenge to innovate and become transparent in conduct and results.

Considering tenure track as FBK's main procedure for recruitment and consolidation means, therefore, on the one hand increasing the attractiveness to the outside, on the other hand providing FBK researchers with a professional qualification accredited in the international scientific community. At the provincial level there is also, at least in terms of planning, the possibility of a *system* approach in the selection and development of research staff that gives a glimpse of a space of 'accessibility and interoperability' common to the Foundation and the University of Trento. The positive experience of cooperation in the field of research doctorates, could actually be further developed and implemented also through this procedure for tenure track positions.

The guidelines for tenure track that are presented here are reflected as well on the contracts. In fact, to ensure transparency and the organic unity of the entire tenure procedure, tenure track researchers' contracts will explicitly show the objectives, purpose and technical-soft skills that they must acquire for obtaining tenure and the initial contractual status that must take into account the contractual frameworks of corresponding internal professional classifications. The committee may also indicate the possibility of a higher professional classification when achieving tenure; this, however, will have to follow procedures similar to those in place at FBK for vertical progressions.

With reference to the latter, without prejudice to the specificity of each situation with respect to the context at FBK, the prevailing application area of the tenure track will be the one between the junior 2 researcher and the senior researcher. Through these methods the content elements of the tenure track are formalized and the reciprocity of responsibilities and expectations of both FBK and the tenure-track researcher emerge.

It should be noted, finally, that this process of formalization of the tenure track is fully embedded in the mission of the Bruno Kessler Foundation which aims at recognizing, implementing and exploiting the potential of human capital and professionalism that characterizes it and on which it invests. The tenure track can thus be included within a broader planning of career paths towards which FBK has been oriented for a long time.

### ***A. Procedure initiating and opening of a tenure track position***

First, the request by the Director of the interested Center to recruit or consolidate a stable position through a tenure track process must be reflected in FBK's Personnel Planning Program approved by the Board of Directors.

The procedure activation for the opening of a tenure track position may take place in two different ways:

- (1) The Center Director interested in opening the position asks the Human Resources Department to publish an international call according to the procedures currently in force at FBK;
- (2) If, however, the Center Director were to identify an internal resource suitable to cover the position, he or she can open a call for that specific researcher if he or she has already been previously selected through a public call that met the criteria of transparency, traceability and advertising and has already accrued three years of service at the time FBK formally opens the tenure track position.

In addition, to ensure integrity and transparency to the procedure, the union representatives must be given prior notice of the intention to initiate the process of tenure track for the identified resource indicating the reason behind the choice of that particular employee. At the same time, the employee chosen for the position, along with organizational detailed scientific reasoning behind the decision and, once identified by the Committee, the names of the evaluators of the tenure track, shall be published on the website of the Human Resources Department.

The above is a necessary condition to ensure the highest levels of integrity and transparency of both the opening of the tenure track position, and its entire process. The purpose of this procedure is to develop and ensure accountability to parties outside the Foundation and encourage widespread forms of control based on respect for the principles of impartiality.

#### ***B. Establishment and duties of the tenure track committee***

Once the holder of the tenure track position has been identified (according to the procedures under (1) (2) above), the Human Resources Department shall convene the Tenure Track Institutional Committee composed by the Head of the Human Resources Department, by the Head of the Research Assessment Department, by the President of FBK's Scientific Committee (or his or her delegate) and by the Director of the Center concerned. The Tenure Track Institutional Committee is an organ that guarantees and protects transparency, traceability and advertising to the tenure track researcher, to the research community and to all FBK stakeholders.

The Institutional Committee shall meet at least 15 days prior to the signing of the contract and identify, in agreement with the tenure track researcher and the head of unit/center (or his or her delegate):

**a. the objectives** to be achieved by the *tenure track*;

**b. the assessors of the tenure track** identified among experts in the specific research field of the tenure track researcher and whenever possible internal to the Foundation (or at least one of them)<sup>2</sup>. The assessors have the task of monitoring the achievement of the objectives, providing feedback to the researcher during the course of the tenure track and submitting annual assessment reports to FBK's Tenure Track Institutional Committee. They

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<sup>2</sup> The assessors may be appointed from the members of the Committee in the case that the resource has been identified through international call.

also have the task of constantly reviewing, with the head of unit/center (or his or her delegate), the progress of the tenure track.

**c. a list of** technical/professional and soft **skills** that the tenure-track researcher must achieve in order to obtain tenure;

**d. any training program** designed to improve the professionalism of the tenure-track researcher. In fact, additional technical and/or soft skills can be identified, that facilitate the tenure-track researcher's achievement of the objectives set forth for the specific profile of tenure required;

**e. the tools** that the Foundation has in place to ensure that the tenure track researcher will achieve the defined objectives;

**e. the duration** of the track before reaching the tenure. (Pursuant Italian legislation, the particular research path and the specific objectives of the researcher, the approximate duration of the tenure track is 3 years.)

### **C. *Tenure track progress***

Once initiated, the tenure track provides for:

**1) Progress reviews (yearly)**, managed by assessors, who shall provide assessment reports to the Institutional Committee. These reviews have the task of monitoring the activity of the tenure-track researcher up to that point, in order to provide feedback and, whenever appropriate, to provide the researcher with constructive guidelines aimed at optimizing or, if necessary, redirecting him/her to the best strategies to accomplish their goals. It is also appropriate that the assessors have (every 6 months) progress talks both with the tenure-track researcher and the Unit/Center (or his or her delegate) Head of reference in order to identify any critical elements of the progress and the methods of the track.

**2) a final review** which will evaluate the entire path of tenure and the career development of the researcher. The final assessment will be conducted by the Tenure Track Institutional Committee and by the evaluators. The final assessment, so as to provide the tenure-track researcher with a recognition external to the Foundation, may include the request for national and international assessment letters and for the opinion of the board of reference. The assessment letters are not generic letters of reference, but a request for 'objectively measurable' assessment (based on publications, projects in which the researcher has participated, impact on the scientific community, innovation skills, etc..) and include a precise evaluation grid. If the final review is positive, the fixed-term contract will become permanent. The final evaluation of the tenure track must take place about 6 months before the expiration date of the contract to facilitate the identification of the exit trajectory of the researcher in case tenure is not granted.

### **3. GOOD PRACTICE IN TENURE TRACK ADMINISTRATION**

On the initiative of the Head of the Human Resources Department, the collegial bodies provided for by the Tenure Track Guidelines will be selected through methods that guarantee, each time, gender equity.

The reasons for the failure to obtain tenure cannot be linked to lack of funds of the institution offering the position, but must relate solely to scientific or soft skills related reasons, i.e. failure, by the tenure-track researcher, to achieve the predefined goals.

In case of failure of tenure, in line with FBK's outplacement policies, alternative paths (which can also result in a fixed-term contract of up to one year) will be outlined to help the researcher find a professional trajectory external to the Foundation.

In the case of events which may require a period of leave without pay, maternity leave, part-time (see FBK's legislation regulating employment contracts) during the course of tenure track, the Foundation will seek solutions that allow to make the annual tenure track progress reviews and predefined objectives compatible with the contractual rules in force.

Generally, at last, in order to allow the tenure track process to confirm itself as rigorous, ambitious and able to serve its purposes, the Foundation will put effort into positively responding to the new issues and conditions which the candidates could express, even with the introduction of new methodologies and tools in support of the tenure track (to be evaluated and gradually implemented) that involve the necessary interlocutors, thus contributing to raise the general level of the process and the mutual expectations.

### **4. TEMPORARY REGULATION**

Until these Guidelines are adopted, with a Determine by the Head of Human Resources Department, and enter into full operation, the processes of tenure track already started will be aligned as far as possible, with the principles and tenets of this document.

The Human Resources Department pledges, once one year since the adoption of these guidelines has elapsed, to study any changes that may be necessary or were to be reported by the actors involved in their drafting.

Amendments to the present document will be possible by involving the necessary interlocutors and with means of a Determine of the Head of the Human Resources Service.

## PROCEDURE FOR TENURE-TRACK EVALUATION STEPS

Once the tenure-track has been initiated (from the signing and the start of the agreement), the tenure-track chief shall contact the evaluators of the Institutional Committee in order to verify their readiness to accept the task and to send them any necessary information material (tenure-track guidelines + minutes of the Institutional Committee + Tenure track evaluation steps + contacts of the tenure-track researcher and his/her head of unit + evaluation format). The contact of the evaluators shall be communicated to the tenure-track researcher and his/her head of unit.

As we mentioned earlier on the *Guidelines*, the main tasks of the evaluators are as follows:

- Carrying out interviews (preferably) half-yearly with the tenure-track researcher to discuss the progress and any issues of the research project;
- Constantly reviewing, with the head of unit/center (or his or her delegate), the progress of the tenure track;
- Drawing up an annual summarized report and completing the evaluation form one month before the annual review;
- Participating in the tenure-track final review (with voting right).

***Note. No compensation is provided for tenure-track evaluators. They will, however, be reimbursed a lump sum covering travel, accomodation and meal expenses for the half-yearly interviews, when it is deemed appropriate that they be carried out in person, as well as costs for the final evaluation, which they are required to attend.***

### 1. HALF-YEARLY INTERVIEWS (evaluators and tenure-track researcher)

Tenure-track procedures provide for intermediate meetings between the evaluators and the tenure track researcher (approximately) every six months. These interviews are not to be considered as actual tests; they represent an important opportunity for the discussion and monitoring of the tenure track itself. During these half-yearly meetings, the evaluators will go over the project with the tenure track researcher and

will provide their individual feedback on the researcher's work to date. Each tenure-track provides for six interviews.

*Note. Schedules and dates will be managed by the tenure track researcher who may decide to either have the interviews individually or to organize group interviews (including videoconferences via Skype) in order to enhance communication among the evaluators.*

## 2. ANNUAL REVIEWS

Annual reviews are composed of two parts:

- a) The annual evaluation report by the evaluators;
- b) The individual interview by the Institutional Committee with the tenure-track researcher (excluding evaluators).

### a) **The Evaluator annual report**

**One month prior** to the annual review and to the meeting of the Tenure Institutional Committee (that will be attended only by the tenure track researcher and the members of the FBK Institutional Committee), tenure track evaluators shall send an *evaluation report*.

To facilitate the evaluation, the tenure track researcher is required to provide the evaluators with detailed information on the conduct of his or her research (publications, conferences, projects, funding obtained etc.).

The report which the evaluators must produce as their annual review will include (1) a **summarized recommendation** (minimum 200 words) covering the activities conducted by the tenure-track researcher in the year to be evaluated, and (2) a **monitoring form** of the progress of tenure-track researcher's skills, containing the general criteria required for FBK tenure-track researchers.

The writing of the report and the completion of the form are not collegial, but individual. The evaluations will be collected by the tenure track chief and delivered to the Tenure Institutional committee and to the candidate head of unit. The head of unit will have the chance to express or transmit to the Committee his/her own opinion with respect to the evaluations before the annual review.

The tenure-track researcher will be able to view the opinions of the evaluators and the Committee once the annual review has been completed; the evaluation results will be communicated to the head of unit and to the evaluators as well.

*Note. FBK's Human Resources Office will be in charge of reminding the evaluators of the deadline for the submission of the annual report and of setting the schedule for the annual review.*

**b. Annual interviews**

Annual interviews (performance evaluations) are one of the main tools within the tenure-track system. They are designed so as to, on the one hand, allow the FBK Committee to assess and monitor the candidates' performance at regular intervals and, on the other hand, to help the tenure-track researcher identify his or her goals and verify that he or she is in line with them. In addition, the annual review is an occasion for a comprehensive assessment of the progress status of the tenure-track and of any issues that might have emerged.

Annual reviews are attended by: the tenure-track researcher, the Tenure Institutional Committee.

**Procedures for annual interviews:**

For the annual interview, the tenure track researcher is required to:

- (1)** Write up a **presentation/report** (about 20 minutes) of the activities conducted to date and of the activities planned for the subsequent period (activity plan).
- (2)** one week prior to the review, he or she shall submit to the Committee (send to [sviluppopersonale@fbk.eu](mailto:sviluppopersonale@fbk.eu)), a **summarized report** (approximately, 1000 words) on his or her activities (publications, projects –if any-, conferences, etc.) carried out during that year
- (3)** and a self-evaluation regarding the track's progress.

The Tenure Institutional Committee will formulate a **recommendation** based on the following items:

- a. Report of the evaluators
- b. Individual interview with the tenure-track researcher
- c. Report on the course of the training program (by the representative of FBK's Human Resources Service)
- d. opinion of the head of unit/center (or his or her delegate), if any expressed or transmitted to the Committee.



The **recommendation** (summarized + final score obtained by the parts in which the review has been divided into) will be disclosed to the tenure track researcher to the evaluators after the session of the Committee.

### 3. THE FINAL REVIEW

The final review of the tenure-track shall occur (see the document titled “*Tenure-track guidelines*”) about six months prior to the expiration of the tenure track researcher’s contract.

The final review will include three steps:

- a) a public seminar (about 2 hours) held by the tenure-track researcher;
- b) 3 referee letters;
- c) a group evaluation by the Committee (Institutional Committee + evaluators).

#### a) The seminar

Attendance to the seminar is *mandatory* for the Institutional Committee and for the evaluators, while the attendance of the board and the interested staff of the Center in which the tenure track researcher works is *optional*. The seminar will be *public* to ensure transparency and traceability to the tenure track and to the evaluation.

For the seminar, the tenure track researcher shall send the Institutional Committee (about 1 month and a half before the evaluation) **three possible topics** relevant to his or her tenure track to be presented. The Committee will assess the relevance to the track and to its goals of the topics proposed and, after asking for the opinion of the head of unit/center (or his or her delegate), will identify a theme.

The Committee shall communicate to the tenure-track chief the selected topic **30 days prior to the review**. The tenure-track chief will inform the tenure-track researcher about the Committee’s selection.

The public seminar will include a presentation by the tenure-track researcher and a discussion between the candidate, the Institutional Committee, the evaluators and, if present, the Board.

Upon the conclusion of the seminar, the Institutional Committee and the evaluators will gather for the collegial evaluation discussion. They will also ask the opinion of the candidate head of unit/center (or his or her delegate).

#### b) The Referee letters

At the conclusion of the second annual review, the Tenure Institutional Committee, in accordance with the evaluators of the tenure-track will identify the names of 3 international referees who will be asked to write a letter of personal assessment of the research work conducted by the tenure-track researcher. The letters shall be

submitted to the Institutional Committee at least one month prior to the final evaluation.

### c) The final collegial evaluation

The participants to the final evaluation are as follows:

- The FBK Tenure Institutional Committee (4 members)
- The tenure-track evaluators (2/3 members)
- The tenure-track chief (who will be in charge of collecting all necessary documents and of organizing the schedule for the evaluation).

For the final collegial evaluation, the evaluators shall produce, **one month prior to** the final review, the same documents submitted for the previous annual reviews (see item 2.a), namely an annual evaluation report and the completed skills evaluation form.

The Committee shall provide a **final summarized opinion** of the tenure track based on:

- The opinions that the tenure track researcher has obtained in each annual evaluation;
- The referee letters;
- The evaluation of the public seminar.

The Committee's final decision shall result in a **statement of positive or negative outcome** of the tenure-track.

Once the evaluation session has ended, the Committee – after asking the opinion of the candidate head of unit/center (or his or her delegate) – will meet with the tenure-track researcher to inform him or her on the outcome of the evaluation.

In the event of a **negative** outcome, the Institutional Committee, together with FBK's Human Resources Service, will identify the most appropriate *outplacement* trajectory for the researcher.

## 4. EVALUATION GOOD PRACTICE

- a. The organization should **make evaluation criteria as transparent as possible** and ensure that they are applicable and recognizable for other academic and research organizations.
- b. Should negative elements arise during the tenure track or the annual reviews, the Evaluation Committee **shall be required to promptly inform the tenure-track researcher** so as to give him or her the opportunity to develop strategies for improvement (the half-yearly meeting with the evaluators have the same goal). The communication of a denied tenure **shall not** be, as a matter of fact, the only disapproving remark that the candidate has received throughout his or

her tenure track, but must be consistent with the trend of the tenure track throughout the three years.

In order for this consistency to be verified, the minutes of the annual reviews may be consulted by the tenure-track researcher and by the Institutional Committee evaluators.

- c. The request for referee letters (for the tenure-track final evaluation) shall be fair, consistent and transparent for all tenure-track researchers.
- d. **Consistency and fairness of evaluations:** the decisions/assessments of the Committee shall be consistent with and respect the diversity of character, nationality, gender, disability of the candidates. Equal rights shall be ensured throughout the tenure track.
- e. Each review (both annual and final) shall be reported in a **written record**, signed by the Committee, registered and made available for consultation by the tenure-track researcher after the evaluation session.

## TENURE TRACK TIMELINE (IN YEARS)

### FIRST YEAR

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
HALF-YEARLY INTERVIEW						•					•	
REPORT BY EVALUATORS											•	
REPORT BY TTR											•	
ANNUAL REVIEW												•

### SECOND YEAR

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
HALF-YEARLY INTERVIEW						•					•	
REPORT BY EVALUATORS											•	
REPORT BY TTR											•	
ANNUAL REVIEW												•
LETTERS BY REFEREES												→

### THIRD YEAR

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
HALF-YEARLY INTERVIEW						•						
REPORT BY EVALUATORS					•							
REPORT BY TTR					•							
SUBM SEMINAR TOPICS				•								
FINAL SEMINAR						•						
FINAL EVALUATION						•						

## APPENDIX 1: COMPETENCES

### FBK tenure-track annual monitoring form

**Feedback with respect to the periodical interviews, the course of activity and the professional development of the tenure-track researcher (also with respect to the interviews with his/her head of unit/center or his or her delegate)).**

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**Feedback on the activity of the tenure-track researcher with respect to the objectives of the tenure track (please, rate and comment on each objective).**

Objectives	Comment
[Objective 1]	<div></div> <div>Rating*: _____</div>
[Objective 2]	<div></div> <div>Rating*: _____</div>
[Objective 3]	<div></div> <div>Rating*: _____</div>

<b>Soft skills – general (for all tenure tracks)</b>	<b>Comment</b>
<p><b>Organisational awareness</b> Ability to accurately recognise the implicit mechanisms that rule the organisations by easily identifying the fundamental social networks and the underlying social and political dimensions.</p> <p><b>Sense of belonging to the organisation</b> The sense of feeling part of an organisational environment; think about “us” and recognise the organisation as part of one’s own professional identity (see one’s own within the organisation).</p>	<p><b>Rating*:</b> _____</p>
<p><b>Creativity</b> Ability to find innovative and original solutions, widening the feasible approaches to the situations and problems, designing and producing unconventional ideas in order to take new opportunities or reach one’s own objectives.</p>	<p><b>Rating*:</b> _____</p>
<p><b>Communication and interpersonal skills</b> Ability to communicate efficiently and build positive and collaborative relationships with different interlocutors, by understanding the specific characteristics of the other person, of the context and of the relationship within which communication is happening.</p>	<p><b>Rating*:</b> _____</p>
<p><b>Proactive behaviour</b> Ability to look for opportunities, to step forward in order to improve the present circumstances or build new sceneries and determine a significant change. Act following one’s own inspiration, conducting the tasks before being asked, invent new ways to perform things and finalise tasks and processes in an unconventional manner.</p>	<p><b>Rating*:</b> _____</p>

<b>Soft skills – role-specific (specific for the role of the tenure-track researcher)</b>	<b>Comment</b>
<b>[Soft skill 1 – role specific]</b>	<p><b>Rating*:</b> _____</p>
<b>[Soft skill 2 – role specific]</b>	<p><b>Rating*:</b> _____</p>

\*Rating means a synthetic grade of the progress of the activities of the tenure track researcher, with respect to the objectives at the moment of evaluation.

The rating scale to be used is the following: excellent – very good – fair – poor – seriously flawed.

*Note. The competences required are aligned with the competences criteria existing and used at FBK. Given the diversity of the profiles and the specific objectives of each tenure track, it is the Committee's task to formulate an institutional recommendation that takes into account, in a transparent manner, the required profile and the specific objectives of the tenure track. Nevertheless, the competences mentioned here respond to general skills required to excellent researchers in the international context and can be a useful tool to 'steer' the progress of the tenure track. Such competences are described in Appendix A. It will be the task of FBK's Human Resources Service to identify tailored training courses to ensure that tenure-track Researchers have the possibility of enriching their professional curricula.*