



WAGENINGEN
UNIVERSITY & RESEARCH

Annual report 2016

Scientific Integrity Committee

Wageningen
University & Research

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1 Preface

Scientific integrity is high on the agenda of the Dutch science system, and for good reason. The progress of science depends in many ways on trust between scientists and trust from its societal stakeholders. Over the last years awareness has grown that integrity needs to be organised. It is not just a personal characteristic of individual scientists. After all, there is little reason to assume that scientists are better people. We can organise scientific research in such a way that for scientists scientific integrity is an integral part of how things are done, and we do not facilitate things that should not be done.

This is more easily said than done. The university plays a vital role in our society and therefore research findings become part of economic, political and other societal dynamics. Notions of scientific integrity do not always fit with these dynamics. The mission and profile of Wageningen University & Research often result in researchers from Wageningen becoming part of controversies. In previous years, the scientific integrity committee has had to handle several cases in which accusations and complaints about violation of scientific integrity became an argument in such controversies.

Fortunately, we did not have many new cases in 2016 and as a committee we were able to spend time to reflect on the implication of our work. Some of the results of these reflections were presented and discussed in November 2016 at an internal workshop with the title Integrity for Impact. As chair of the scientific integrity committee, I was happy to see that awareness among the Wageningen community of the importance of both integrity and impact is high. I feel it is a task for our committee to align these two crucial aspects further in the coming years.

Prof. Barend van der Meulen
Chair of the Scientific Integrity Committee

2 Complaints handling at Wageningen University & Research

Every person at Wageningen University & Research who is involved in scientific education and research is individually responsible for monitoring and safeguarding scientific integrity. The Netherlands Code of Conduct for Academic Practice sets out the principles to which every student, educator and researcher must adhere. These principles are scrupulousness, reliability, verifiability, impartiality and independence. WUR has drawn up a Scientific Integrity Complaints Procedure based on a model obtained from the Association of Universities in the Netherlands (VSNU). It explains the steps that complainants need to take if they suspect a breach of scientific integrity.

The confidential counsellors (Prof. Adri van den Brink and Prof. Marcel Zwietering) should be contacted for any questions about scientific integrity. If feasible, the confidential counsellor will try to mediate or to solve the complaint amicably. The confidential counsellors can advise on how to submit an official complaint.

Official complaints, regardless of whether or not a confidential counsellor has been consulted, can be submitted in writing or by e-mail to the Scientific Integrity Committee.

2.1 Guidelines for complaints handling

The committee bases its judgement regarding violation of scientific integrity on – but not exclusively - the standards of scientific integrity that are primarily derived from The Netherlands Code of Conduct for Academic Practice and the Scientific integrity complaints procedure WUR.

2.2 Visibility of the committee and procedures

A webpage about Scientific Integrity at WUR is available on the WUR website; the relevant documents and procedures¹ and the composition of the Scientific Integrity Committee are listed here.

This webpage is part of the information on integrity presented by the organisation and also contains information about non-scientific integrity issues such as the Wageningen University & Research Integrity Code and other codes that apply to WUR employees².

2.3 The committee

To ensure secretarial capacity, from 2016 the task of secretary to the committee has been divided over two employees of the Corporate Governance & Legal Services department.

In 2016 the schedule of resignation of the committee members was adopted and the first steps were taken to fill the vacancies that will arise from 2017 onwards. In order to enable a smooth transfer of the committee members, the term of the current committee members has been extended by eight months.

¹ <http://www.wur.nl/en/About-Wageningen/Integrity/Scientific-integrity.htm>

² <http://www.wur.nl/en/About-Wageningen/Integrity.htm>

3 Complaints handled

The Committee met seven times in 2016. The committee received one new complaint in 2016 and continued handling three complaints that started in 2015 or before. An overview of the complaints is given below.

On 13 October 2016 the committee received a request for advice from the Executive Board and on 31 October 2016 concluded that the complaint was admissible. The handling of the complaint was not completed in 2016.

The committee received a complaint on 27 March 2014 and on 17 April 2014 concluded that the complaint was admissible. The committee sent its advice to the Executive Board on 19 August 2014. The Executive Board decided to follow the advice and to declare the complaint unfounded. The complainant asked the National Board for Research Integrity (LOWI) to re-evaluate the decision of the Executive Board. LOWI confirmed that the complaint was unfounded and advised the Executive Board to maintain its preliminary decision. On 9 October 2015 the Executive Board converted its preliminary decision into a final decision.

This complaint was mistakenly not mentioned in the annual report of 2015.

The committee received a complaint on 11 April 2014 and on 25 April 2014 concluded that the complaint was admissible. The committee sent its advice to the Executive Board on 5 August 2014. The Executive Board decided to follow the advice and to declare the complaint unfounded. The complainant asked the LOWI to re-evaluate the decision of the Executive Board and the LOWI advised the Board on 5 March 2015. On 31 March 2015, the Executive Board decided to request the committee to reconsider the complaint. The committee sent its advice to the Executive Board on 1 December 2015. The Executive Board took the decision to follow the advice and declared the complaint unfounded. The complainant asked the LOWI to re-evaluate the decision of the Executive Board and the LOWI advised the Executive Board on 17 November 2016. The Executive Board decided to declare the complaint unfounded on 21 November 2016.

On 28 July 2014, another institution received a complaint that was partly related to an employee of WUR. Both institutions decided to set up a joint committee to handle this complaint. This committee advised the Executive Board of the other institution on 18 February 2015. The Executive Board of the other institution decided to follow the advice and declared the complaint unfounded. The complainant asked the LOWI to re-evaluate the decision of the Executive Board. On 14 July 2016 the LOWI advised the Executive Board of the other institution to offer the complainant co-authorship of the publication concerned. The Executive Board of the other institution decided to follow the advice.

4 Other activities of the committee

4.1 Netherlands Research Integrity Network

On 18 March 2016, the Netherlands Research Integrity Network (NRIN) organised a meeting with the chairs of the committee's scientific integrity of the various organisations in the Netherlands. Prof. Barend van der Meulen attended this meeting.

4.2 Internal communication within Wageningen University & Research

In December 2015, outgoing chair of the Scientific Integrity Committee Prof. Frans Brom concluded his work for WUR by giving a presentation during the meeting of the Executive Board with the Board of Directors; in this presentation he addressed some recommendations for the organisation regarding scientific integrity. As a follow up, a document with instructions and advice for employers and employees was developed as an aid when dealing with a complaint. When the committee receives a complaint, this document is sent to the employee concerned and their management. In addition, an infographic has been developed to give an overview of how WUR deals with integrity issues in general in the organisation. This infographic will be placed on the intranet in 2017.

4.3 Joint meeting with other bodies of Wageningen University & Research

The committee handles complaints about possible violations of scientific integrity by employees of Wageningen University & Research. During the handling of these complaints, the committee regularly discusses matters which are not directly related to a possible violation of academic integrity, for example matters affecting the general ethics policy or the monitoring of research quality at WUR. In the opinion of the committee, these matters should be addressed elsewhere within the organisation. The committee considered it useful to share these experiences with bodies whose task it is to advise the Executive Board in these areas. As a follow up to the two meetings in 2015, a new meeting with other bodies of Wageningen University & Research involved in the topic of scientific integrity was held in November 2016. These bodies include the Ethics Committee, the Scientific Advisory Committee (*Wetenschappelijke Adviesraad*), the counsellors of the graduate schools and the confidential counsellors.

4.4 Integrity for Impact workshop

On 9 November 2016, a workshop on scientific integrity was organised at WUR for everybody involved in research and in particular for (senior) scientists who carry out externally funded research. Chair of this workshop was Prof. Barend van der Meulen. He explored the dilemmas that researchers are faced with in scientific integrity issues. About 50 students, PhD candidates, scientists and other staff attended the workshop.

5 Recommendations and remarks

During the handling of cases the committee is confronted with issues that cannot be included in the advisory reports, but which are relevant for sharing with the organisation. The committee therefore includes these remarks and recommendations in the annual report as mentioned below.

Advisory role of the CWI

In addition to the official handling of complaints on scientific integrity, the committee can advise the Executive Board of Wageningen University & Research on general aspects of scientific integrity. The aim of this advice is to improve the process around research quality.

Revision of the Netherlands Code of Conduct for Academic Practice

The Netherlands Code of Conduct for Academic Practice will be revised in 2017 / 2018. The focus of the current code is on fundamental scientific research. The committee would like to emphasise the urgency of making the code also applicable to applied research, where the impact on and interference with financial, political and governmental aspects are addressed.