

Annual report 2019

Scientific Integrity Committee

Wageningen
University & Research

DATE
November 5, 2020

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1 Preface

It has been a quiet year for the Scientific Integrity Committee. That is good news. In the past, the WUR has faced a number of integrity cases that unsettled regular interactions between academic colleagues and with the outside world. Not in all cases we found evidence of scientific misconduct. Still, also these cases taught us that scientific integrity is more than following methodological rules. It is very much part of an academic attitude towards colleagues, towards the idea of science and towards society. As such these cases helped the committee to develop a better understanding of scientific integrity. Some of these lessons have found their way in the current Code of Conduct.

From conferences on scientific integrity, experiences at other universities and in other countries I have learned that no complaints and many complaints can be indications that scientific integrity is not really taken seriously. However there are good reasons to think for WUR the case is different. As external member and chair of the committee I am always impressed that at many places, staff works on implementing the idea of scientific integrity as a professional and organisation responsibility, and transfer this idea to students and colleagues. Therefor I dare to interpret the low number of complaints in the past period as an indication that scientific integrity has become well embedded at WUR.

Scientifically, this interpretation is not really robust. Let's hope that next year, it will not be falsified.

Prof. Barend van der Meulen
Chair Scientific Integrity Committee Wageningen University & Research

2 Handling complaints at Wageningen University & Research

Every person at Wageningen University & Research (WUR) who is involved in any way whatsoever in scientific education and research is individually responsible for monitoring and safeguarding scientific integrity. All academics and researchers at WUR are required to act in accordance with The Netherlands Code of Conduct for Research Integrity. The principles of good academic teaching and research in terms of scientific integrity are honesty, scrupulousness, transparency, independence and responsibility.

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.

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 (CWI). The Executive Board of Wageningen University & Research has appointed the CWI. Members are appointed for a period of four years. At the end of a term, members may be re-appointed for a subsequent four years. The CWI is to consist of a chair, vice chair and at least two members. The CWI investigates whether there is a breach of scientific integrity and presents its advice to the Executive Board.

2.1 Guidelines for handling complaints

The CWI 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 Research Integrity* and the Scientific Integrity Complaints Procedure of Wageningen University & Research.

2.2 Visibility of the CWI and procedures

A webpage about [scientific integrity at WUR¹²](#) is available on the WUR website; the relevant documents and procedures and the composition of the CWI are listed here.

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

2.3 CWI

In 2019, the members of the CWI were :

- Prof. Barend van der Meulen (*chair*)
- Prof. Tiny van Boekel (*vice-chair*)
- Prof. Johan Bouma
- Prof. Cor van der Weele

Prof. Akke van der Zijpp has left the CWI as of January 2019. She was succeeded by Prof. Cor van der Weele. Hante Meester and Astrid Mars staffed the secretariat of the CWI.

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

² Since March 2020, a new Scientific Integrity Complaints Procedure has been put into use. For this report the former procedure applies.

3 Complaints handled

In 2019, the CWI held 3 meetings. The CWI received one formal complaint, which was withdrawn before the admissibility could be determined. Only admissible complaints will be published anonymously by the Association of Universities in the Netherlands ([VSNU](#)).

3.1 LOWI advice on Complaint 2018-01

On 2 March 2018, the CWI received a complaint and concluded shortly afterwards that the complaint was admissible. The CWI investigated the matter and presented its advice to the Executive Board of WUR. On 29 May 2018, the Executive Board drew up its initial opinion that the defendant had seriously breached scientific integrity, which was in line with the CWI advice.

The defendant applied to the National Board for Research Integrity (LOWI) for the provision of advice to the initial opinion of the Executive Board. Upon request of the Executive Board, on 20 December 2018 the CWI reacted on the initial statement of the defendant to LOWI.

On 1 April 2019, the LOWI presented its advice to the defendant and the Executive Board of Wageningen University. LOWI is of the opinion that the application is well-founded but only in so far as it addresses the addition of the epithet, 'serious', to the ruling 'breach of academic integrity'. For the rest, the application was deemed to be without grounds. The Executive Board of Wageningen University followed the advice and amended its initial opinion in the sense that its final opinion stipulated that the defendant had breached academic integrity. The remaining parts of the initial opinion remained unchanged. The complaint has been published in anonymous form on the VSNU website.

3.2 Complaint 2019-1

On 9 November 2019, the CWI received a complaint about a possible violation of the Netherlands Code of Conduct for Research Integrity together with two other complaints about certain aspects of human resource management. The rector decided to handle these complaints separately and the two other complaints were dealt with by the Corporate HR department. On 19 November 2019, the CWI requested additional information about the complaint concerning scientific integrity to be able to decide whether the complaint was admissible. The CWI also pointed out that the complainant could consult a confidential counsellor for scientific integrity for advice. The same day, the complainant provisionally retracted the complaint, as a solution seemed to have been reached. The complaint was not resubmitted and the CWI has closed the dossier.

3.3 Request for information concerning case 2016-1

On 9 November 2019, the CWI received an email in which a lawyer of a third party expressed discontent with the investigation of the CWI with respect to case 2016-1. The dossier of this investigation was closed in 2017. The representative inquired where the third party could complain about this. On 22 November 2019, the CWI replied to this request by providing information about the complaint procedures of WUR and LOWI.

4 Other activities of the CWI

4.1 Scientific Integrity Complaints Procedure WUR

The CWI provided input for the new Scientific Integrity Complaints Procedure of WUR.

4.2 Action Plan of Integrity Coordination Group

The CWI provided input for the Action Plan of the Coordination Group Integrity ('Regiegroep Integriteit').

4.3 NRIN theme meeting (Utrecht, 19 March 2019)

Hante Meester and Astrid Mars attended the theme meeting of the Netherlands Research Integrity Network (NRIN) about the relation between CWI and LOWI.

4.4 LERU meeting and workshop (Leiden, 21 May 2019)

Barend van der Meulen and Astrid Mars attended the yearly symposium of the Research Integrity Thematic Group of the League of European Research Universities (LERU). The theme of the symposium was "Handling cases of research misconduct". Barend presented an anonymized CWI case at this meeting.

4.5 NRIN Symposium 2019 (Amsterdam, 29 May 2019)

Astrid Mars attended the NRIN Symposium 2019. The theme of the conference was "Research Integrity in Education".

4.6 6th World Conference on Research Integrity (Hong Kong, 2-5 June 2019).

Astrid Mars attended the 6th World Conference on Research Integrity in Hong Kong. The theme of the conference was "New challenges for research integrity". The conference report was shared with the members of the CWI.

4.7 Broad WUR meeting Scientific Integrity (Wageningen, 4 July 2019)

The CWI organised a broad WUR meeting about scientific integrity. Participants were the members and secretaries of the CWI, the confidential counsellors for scientific integrity, the Dean of Research, the Compliance Officer, the Spokesperson of the Executive Board, a representative of the executive secretaries of the graduate schools of WUR and the policy advisor (scientific) integrity. Various topics were discussed, including the revision of the scientific integrity complaints procedure and the action plan of the Coordination Group Integrity to better implementation the integrity codes of conduct within WUR.

5 Advisory role of the CWI

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

In addition, when handling complaints, the CWI makes observations that do not belong in an advisory report, but are still relevant for the organisation. The CWI may include such recommendations and remarks in the annual report.

In 2019 the CWI had no reason to give such recommendations.