

## **Annual report 2021**

### **Scientific Integrity Committee**

DATE  
April 21, 2022

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## **1 Preface**

At the time we were finalizing this annual report, chairs and secretaries of Scientific Integrity Committees (CWI) in the Netherlands were able to meet for the first time since two years again to discuss developments in scientific integrity cases and to assess whether the Netherlands Code of Conduct for Research Integrity is sufficient adequate for handling complaints. As an university and a research institute in one, Wageningen University and Research (WUR) is in a way a special case among the Dutch universities – and therefor for me, as relative outsider, one of the most interesting. In the past, our experience with complaints about possible violations of scientific integrity in applied research projects, has been instrumental in making the Code of Conduct more relevant for this type of research – which definitely also has to comply to the same principles, but it comes with different kind of dilemmas.

Because WUR works on many topics which often have direct societal and political impact, we have always had complaints related to these topics. They require special care to prevent scientific integrity complaint procedures from becoming yet another political battlefield. One of the conclusions of the annual meeting was that these kind of complaints are not specific anymore for the WUR. Other scientific integrity committees get them as well, and struggle, like we have to do every time, to find the right balance between the idea of scientific integrity as it is meant by the Code of Conduct and the interpretations of it by the outside world. That balance cannot only depend on the CWI, but needs reflection and maintenance throughout the university.

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 an infringement of scientific integrity or of the standards referred to in Paragraph 5.2(B) of the Netherlands Code of Conduct for Research Integrity. On 30 March 2020, a new complaint procedure entered into force at WUR that was adjusted to the Code of Conduct that was renewed in 2018.

Official complaints, regardless of whether or not a confidential counsellor has been consulted, can be submitted in writing or by e-mail to the Executive Board of WUR. WUR has appointed a Scientific Integrity Committee (CWI) that will investigate the complaint and present advice to the Executive Board. The CWI consists of an external independent chair and no less than two but preferably three other members. 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.

### 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 WUR](https://www.wur.nl/en/About-Wageningen/Integrity-and-privacy/Scientific-integrity.htm)<sup>1</sup> 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 2021, the members of the CWI were:

- Prof. Barend van der Meulen (*chair: professor University of Twente*)
- Prof. Tiny van Boekel (*vice-chair: emeritus professor WUR*)
- Prof. Johan Bouma (*emeritus professor WUR*)
- Prof. Cor van der Weele (*emeritus professor WUR*)

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

### **3 Complaints handled**

In 2021, the CWI held three meetings. The CWI received no formal complaints. It did receive a report on the lack of transparency about ancillary activities of special professors, a request for advice on authorship and a request to share its opinion on an article on the influence of WUR research on the "Farm to Fork" strategy of the European Commission. Only admissible complaints will be published anonymously by the Association of Universities in the Netherlands ([VSNU](#)).

#### **3.1 2020-5 report on transparency about ancillary activities**

On 25 May 2021, the CWI received a second report of Foodwatch Nederland, titled 'Transparantie over Nevenactiviteiten: Wageningse voedingswetenschappers overschrijden -nog steeds- de regels' (Transparency about Ancillary activities: Wageningen food scientist are still breaking the rules). The report indicated that six months after the publication of the report "Transparency over nevenactiviteiten" seven of the in total twenty-four special professors in food of WUR still did not publicly disclose their ancillary activities sufficiently. The accompanying email urged WUR to take stricter measures against the concerning professors. The CWI has notified corporate human resources about the report and accompanying email. The CWI has informed Foodwatch about the Scientific Integrity Complaints Procedure of Wageningen University and its role within the organization. A general statement was sent by the spokesperson of the executive board of WUR to Foodwatch.

#### **3.2 2021-11 request for advise on the authorship of three manuscripts**

On 6 October 2021 the CWI received a request from a journal to advise on the authorship of three single-authored manuscripts submitted to the journal that are based on multi-authored chapters from a dissertation with which a doctorate was obtained at Wageningen University. The executive board of WUR asked the CWI to advise on the matter. The investigation was still running at the end of 2021.

#### **3.3 2020-12 opinion CWI**

On 13 December 2021 the CWI received an email with a request to the CWI to give its opinion on an article about the possible influence WUR research may have on the "Farm to Fork" strategy, a proposal of the European Commission for transformation of the food system. The CWI has acknowledged the receipt of the email and has informed its senders about the Scientific Integrity Complaints Procedure of Wageningen University & Research.

## **4 Other activities of the CWI**

### **4.1 Meeting with Confidential Counsellors Scientific Integrity**

On 3 November 2021 the CWI met with the dean of research, the counsellor's scientific integrity, the policy officer scientific integrity and the rector magnificus. During the meeting the policy officer scientific integrity gave an update and shared her experiences on the scientific integrity sessions for employees of Wageningen University & Research. Furthermore, the possible threshold people may experience for contacting the counsellor's scientific integrity and the CWI was discussed and the role that the ombudsman may have in preventing patterns of breaching scientific integrity. Also the idea was put forward to install a higher body within WUR preferably with representatives of the five science groups of WUR that discusses overarching societal issues and the relation these have with science and from which cases may arise in which scientific integrity is violated.

### **4.2 Symposium on plagiarism**

On 27 January 2021, the secretaries of the CWI joint "De Themamiddag Plagiaat in Onderwijs en Onderzoek (symposium Plagiarism in Education and Research) organized by the Universities of the Netherlands (before VSNU)

### **4.3 Round table discussions**

On 14 October 2022 and 2 November 2022, Astrid Mars joined two roundtable discussions on the evaluation of the implementation of the Netherlands Code of Conduct for Research Integrity (NGWI) organized by the Universities of the Netherlands and the working group Evaluation NGWI.

## 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, or aspect related to related to handling complaints. The aim of the advice is to improve the process around research quality.

The CWI has the following advices and observations:

- The committee advises the executive board to install a higher body preferably with representatives from the five Science Groups of WUR that discusses overarching societal issues and the relation these have with science and from which cases may arise in which scientific integrity is violated. The CWI has noticed that WUR as an organization is addressed in the media and more recently (2022) also through complaints on subjects that are more in political spheres. These recent complaints were not so much on scientific integrity as well as on politically sensitive issues related to scientific discourse and disagreement. The CWI therefore suggests that the proposed body serves as a platform that discusses these issues internally to raise awareness that there are different perspectives within society about the role of science in politically sensitive issues. Also, these issues may be differently perceived within the organization itself. Furthermore, it has its bearings on communication strategies. Since Science Groups operate rather independently in this respect, it may help to have such discussions across Science Groups so that experiences can be shared.
- The committee notes that researchers incorrectly use WUR as an affiliation. Sometimes these are former employees that use a WUR affiliation for research done at their new organisation or foreign researchers who have studied at WUR.
- The CWI noted that no complaints were filed in 2021 and is concerned that the threshold for contacting the CWI is too high.