

Annual report 2023

Scientific Integrity Committee

Wageningen
University & Research

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1 Preface

In recent years, public interest in scientific integrity in The Netherlands has declined. Perhaps because universities pay more attention to this subject internally. And it seems that their procedures are in order. But that will be determined by the evaluation of the current code of conduct for scientific integrity. We expect the results this year.

It may also be due to the increased attention to academic freedom in The Netherlands. The two concepts are not the same, but closely related. Academic freedom should protect researchers and students from external pressure or threats when doing research and teaching and when publishing the results. It is a freedom that is guaranteed by law. For long we thought it to be self-evident. Of course there is academic freedom at our universities.

Scientific integrity requires us as researchers to use that freedom well and with integrity. Through all kinds of integrity cases, big and small, universities know now that integrity cannot be taken for granted. That's why they have organized it better and try to improve it again and again.

Unfortunately, the current public climate is such that researchers are increasingly being reviled and threatened. More and more colleagues are wary of contributing to the public debate. Yet, universities do not have the proper procedures to respond to such situations, nor clear actions and advises how to manage infringement of academic freedom. I think it is time for universities to organize academic freedom as well as they have organized scientific integrity.

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 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 Universities in the Netherlands ([UNL](#)). 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. The current complaint procedure at WUR entered into force on 30 March 2020.

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 works for its judgement regarding violation of scientific integrity with 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 Information about the CWI and procedures

Information about scientific integrity, the CWI and the complaints procedure can be found on the website of WUR ([Scientific integrity - WUR](#)). This webpage is part of the information on integrity that is presented by the organisation, which also 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 2023, 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*)

The CWI was supported by two secretaries: Dr Rixt Komduur and Dr Astrid Mars

3 Handled requests and complaints

In 2023, the CWI held three regular meetings and presented advice on one complaint.

3.1 Complaint 2023-1

On 31 March 2023, the CWI and the Executive Board (EB) both received a letter that contained a complaint about lack of scientific integrity and wrongful use of intellectual property by a WUR employee, and a liability claim for the alleged intellectual property infringement. The Executive Board asked the CWI to investigate the (admissibility of) the complaint about the lack of scientific integrity and to advise the EB on this matter.

The CWI noticed that the complaint about the lack of scientific integrity was incomplete as the complainant did not substantiate the alleged violation(s) of scientific integrity. The CWI specified what was required and offered the complainant the opportunity to supplement the complaint. The supplement was received on 24 April 2023.

The CWI decided to handle the complaint. After completion of the investigation, the CWI concluded that the defendant did not violate scientific integrity, nor engaged in research practices that would qualify as questionable or as minor shortcomings. The CWI presented its advice to the EB. The EB followed the advice and decided in its initial ruling to declare the complaint unfounded.

The complainant asked the Netherlands Board on Research Integrity (LOWI) to present advice on the initial ruling of the EB. This advice is still pending at the end of 2023.

3.2 Feedback request

In autumn 2023, The CWI received questions and a request for feedback about a presentation that was given by a WUR employee during an external meeting. The CWI could not comply to the request, given its role to handle complaints about scientific integrity. The CWI forwarded the request to the EB and informed the sender of the request accordingly.

3.3 Complaint 2023-2

On 30 December 2023, the CWI received a complaint about a lack of scientific integrity of a supervisory committee. The CWI will handle the complaint in 2024.

4 Other activities of the CWI

4.1 Advice on academic freedom and freedom of speech in social media use

In February 2023, the CWI advised the EB of WUR to broadly think and discuss how academic freedom should be defined, can be protected and maintained at WUR, also in relation to its significance for communication with the outside world. The CWI recommended to strive for an unambiguous elaboration of this for both Wageningen Research and Wageningen University. The CWI made a remark in its advice that discussing cases within the organisation will contribute to safeguarding, stimulating and a broadly shared understanding of academic freedom within WUR.

4.2 Symposium

On 21 April 2023, Barend van der Meulen, Rixt Komduur en Astrid Mars attended the symposium 'Scientific integrity: the boundaries explored', which was organized by the CWI of Leiden University and Leiden University Medical Center and intended for CWI chairs and secretaries from Belgium and The Netherlands and LOWI members. The topic of the symposium was the Code of Ethics for Scientific Research in Belgium and the Netherlands Code of Conduct for Research Integrity 2018 in relation to academic freedom.

4.3 Symposium

On 6 June 2023 Barend van der Meulen and Rixt Komduur attended a symposium organised by the Netherlands Research Integrity Network (NRIN) for chairs and secretaries of the CWI's in The Netherlands in Utrecht. During this symposium, case studies of different universities were discussed.

4.4 Evaluation Netherlands Code of Conduct for Research Integrity

On 16 November 2023 Barend van der Meulen en Rixt Komduur participated in the consultation session of the Evaluation Committee of the Netherlands Code of Conduct for Research Integrity.