



WAGENINGEN
UNIVERSITY & RESEARCH

Annual report 2017

Scientific Integrity Committee

Wageningen
University & Research

DATE
11 October 2018

AUTHOR
Monique van de Griendt

Table of contents

1	Preface	5
2	Handling complaints at Wageningen University & Research	6
2.1	Guidelines for handling complaints	6
2.2	Visibility of the committee and procedures	6
2.3	Scientific Integrity Committee	6
3	Complaints handled	7
3.1	Complaint no. 2016-01	7
3.2	Complaint no. 2017-01	7
3.3	Complaint no. 2017-02	7
4	Other activities of the committee	8
4.1	Internal communication within Wageningen University & Research	8
4.2	Revision of the Netherlands Code of Conduct for Research Integrity	8
5	Recommendations and remarks	9
5.1	Advisory role of the committee	9
5.2	Completion time	9

1 Preface

There is a famous saying about integrity which states that it is something rather like pregnancy: you are either pregnant or you aren't. You cannot be 'somewhat' pregnant. This saying suggests that the notion of integrity is something of a binary concept, and that for scientists there are only two options one is faced with when conducting research: acting with integrity or not.

It seems attractive to think of in these terms, but may consequently lead to the wrong conclusions. Besides, we know that laboratory life can be complex, and reflects a reality far from that of the committee boardroom. In many cases, as the Scientific Integrity Committee of Wageningen University & Research has found, it simply is not crystal clear whether a researcher has breached codes of conduct or not. Furthermore, we also know that laboratory life is like daily life: full of dilemmas.

It has not gone unnoticed that the committee had to deal with one of its most difficult cases in 2017. We were faced with the paradoxical situation that some scientists, while considering peer review of manuscripts an important prerequisite, somehow managed to overlook their own code of conduct. But how can we define what is appropriate peer behaviour in the first place, in these competitive scientific times? This is the kind of question that makes our meetings more than just any other committee discussion.

Despite what has happened, we are happy to announce that a new code of conduct is being finalized as we speak. It is one that addresses many more aspects of being a scientist than simply being an employee at a university. It acknowledges the responsibilities that each member of the scientific community and professional in a knowledge society has. The code of conduct fits better to the broad mission of Wageningen University & Research.

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 Academic Practice. The principles of good academic teaching and research in terms of scientific integrity are honesty and scrupulousness, reliability, verifiability, impartiality, 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.

The confidential counsellors can be contacted for any questions about scientific integrity or to report a possible breach of scientific integrity. The confidential counsellor will try to mediate or otherwise resolve the matter. 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. The Scientific Integrity Committee has been appointed by the Executive Board of Wageningen University & Research.

2.1 Guidelines for handling complaints

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 of Wageningen University & Research.

2.2 Visibility of the committee and procedures

A webpage about [scientific integrity at WUR](#)¹ is available on the WUR website; the relevant documents and procedures 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 employees.

2.3 Scientific Integrity Committee

In 2017, the members of the committee were as follows:

- Prof. Barend van der Meulen (*chair*)
- Prof. Herman van Eijsackers
- Prof. Fons Voragen (until 1 October 2017)
- Prof. Tiny van Boekel (as of 1 October 2017)
- Prof. Akke van der Zijpp.

The secretariat of the committee was staffed by Hante Meester en Monique van de Griendt, the latter replacing John ten Böhmer as of 1 September 2017.

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

3 Complaints handled

In 2017, the Scientific Integrity Committee held eight meetings. The committee received two new complaints and continued handling a complaint that was submitted in 2016. An overview of the complaints is given below. Complaints are published anonymously by the Association of Universities in the Netherlands ([VSNU](#))

3.1 Complaint no. 2016-01

On 13 October 2016 the committee received a request for advice from the Executive Board and concluded on 31 October 2016 that the request was admissible. The committee investigated the matter and presented its advice to the Executive Board. The Executive Board decided to follow the advice of the committee and took a preliminary decision on 27 February 2017 concluding that in this matter scientific integrity has not been violated. The National Board for Research Integrity (LOWI) was not requested to re-evaluate the preliminary decision of the Executive Board. On 18 April 2017 the Executive Board converted its preliminary decision into a final decision.

3.2 Complaint no. 2017-01

The committee received a request for advice from the Executive Board on 21 February 2017. The committee investigated the matter and presented its advice to the Executive Board on 22 June 2017. The Executive Board decided to follow the advice of the committee and took a preliminary decision on 27 June 2017 concluding that in this matter, although the defendant demonstrated reprehensible behaviour, scientific integrity has not been violated. The defendant did not request the National Board for Research Integrity (LOWI) to re-evaluate the preliminary decision of the Executive Board. On 21 August 2017 the Executive Board converted its preliminary decision into a final decision.

3.3 Complaint no. 2017-02

The committee received a complaint on 2 March 2017 and concluded shortly afterwards that the complaint was admissible. The committee investigated the complaint and presented its advice to the Executive Board. The Executive Board decided to follow the advice of the committee and took a preliminary decision on 18 April 2017, concluding that:

- with regard to element one of the complaint, there is no reason to assume that scientific integrity has been violated. The complaint will be handled internally in accordance with the quality control procedure of the concerning Wageningen University & Research subdivision.
- with regard to element two of the complaint, the complaint is declared unfounded.

The complainant did not request the National Board for Research Integrity (LOWI) to re-evaluate the preliminary decision of the Executive Board. On 6 July 2017 the Executive Board converted its preliminary decision into a final decision.

4 Other activities of the committee

4.1 Internal communication within Wageningen University & Research

In joint work with the Integrity steering committee an infographic has been developed, giving an overview of how Wageningen University & Research in general deals with integrity issues. It illustrates how the organisation guarantees different aspects of integrity. This infographic is placed on the intranet. Members of the Scientific Integrity Committee were involved in several workshops that were given at various levels within the organisation to address the topic scientific integrity.

4.2 Revision of the Netherlands Code of Conduct for Research Integrity

At the request of the Association of Universities in the Netherlands (VSNU) and several other stakeholders, an independent drafting committee was appointed to revise the Netherlands Code of Conduct for Research Integrity. The new code elaborates on the principles of research integrity, standards for good research practice, procedures for non-compliance with these standards and the responsibilities of institutions.

The independent drafting committee consulted amongst others the Scientific Integrity Committees of the Dutch Universities. The Wageningen University & Research Scientific Integrity Committee emphasized the scope of the revised code (scientific research versus scientific practice) and the distinctive position of applied research. Furthermore the Scientific Integrity Committee of WUR suggested to address strategic behaviour such as reference pushing and stacking.

It is vital that research is carried out in accordance with the principles of research integrity. In September 2018, the new Netherlands Code of Conduct for Research Integrity will be published. As of 1 October this new code of conduct will officially replace the previous 2004 code.

5 Recommendations and remarks

When handling complaints, the Scientific Integrity Committee makes observations that do not belong in an advisory report, but that are – however - relevant for the organisation. The committee therefore includes such recommendations and remarks in the annual report as mentioned below.

5.1 Advisory role of the committee

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.

5.2 Completion time

The committee is to present its advice to the Executive Board regarding the merits of the complaint within twelve weeks after receiving the complaint. The committee may extend this deadline once by four weeks.

In practice this period of 12 plus 4 weeks is quite a challenge for the committee. In 2017 two complaints took slightly longer, despite the immediate availability of the Scientific Integrity Committee. The year before there was a complaint that took almost twice the permitted time. This was mainly due to the fact that two universities were involved. This led to setting up a joint committee, advising the Executive Board of the other institution.