



Annual report Committee Scientific Integrity 2014

Committee Scientific
Integrity

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Table of contents

1	Preamble	5
2	Complaints handling at Wageningen UR	6
2.1	The code of conduct for academic practice	6
2.2	Visibility of the committee and procedures	6
3	Handled complaints	7
4	Other activities of the committee	8
4.1	LOWI symposium	8
4.2	Research Integrity Network	8
4.3	World Conference on Scientific Integrity	8
4.4	Evaluation of the committee	8
5	Recommendations	10
5.1	Who should handle complaints	10
5.2	Tools to detect and analyse plagiarism	10

1 Preamble

The year 2014 was a busy year for the committee scientific integrity. Especially during spring and summer various complaints had to be handled simultaneously. In addition, complaints tend to have a strong juridical nature covering aspects beyond scientific aspects leading to a growing tendency of "juridification" of the work of the Integrity Committee. We have therefore used legal terms to make the procedure insightful for the persons involved. However, we always aim to review and evaluate cases by content.

2 Complaints handling at Wageningen UR

Every person at Wageningen UR who is involved in any way whatsoever in scientific education and research is individually responsible for monitoring and safeguarding scientific integrity. The Code of Conduct for Scientific Practice sets out the principles which every student, educator and researcher is required to adhere to: scrupulousness, reliability, verifiability, impartiality and independence.

Wageningen UR has drawn up a complaints procedure for scientific integrity on the basis of a model acquired 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 Professor Adri van den Brink or Professor Marcel Zwietering can be contacted with any question about scientific integrity. If feasible, the confidential counsellor will attempt to mediate or find another way of solving the matter in an amicable fashion. He can also advise on submitting an official complaint.

Official complaints, regardless of whether or not a confidential counsellor was consulted, should be submitted in writing or by e-mail.

2.1 The code of conduct for academic practice

The committee bases her judgment about violation of scientific integrity on – but not exclusively - the standards of scientific integrity that are primarily deducted from the Netherlands Code of Conduct for Academic Practice and the Scientific integrity complaints procedure Wageningen UR. The Netherlands Code of Conduct was revised in 2014 by the VSNU. The main change is the addition of an article with a provision on self-citation without acknowledgment. Another change explicates two principles that are important in the practice of science: 'honesty' and 'responsibility'. Reasons for these changes were the reports of the committees Bensing (Correct Citation Practice¹) Algra (Trust in Science²) and Schuyt (Responsible Research Data Management and the Prevention of Scientific Misconduct³) of the Royal Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW).

2.2 Visibility of the committee and procedures

In 2014 a webpage was set up about Scientific Integrity at Wageningen UR within the Wageningen UR website, listing the relevant documents and persons⁴. This webpage is part of the information presented on integrity in our organisation, also containing information about non-scientific integrity issues such as the integrity code and other codes to be known by employees of Wageningen UR⁵. The composition of the committee is also shown at this webpage.

¹ https://www.knaw.nl/en/news/publications/correct-citation-practice?set_language=en

² <https://www.knaw.nl/nl/actueel/publicaties/vertrouwen-in-wetenschap>

³ https://www.knaw.nl/nl/actueel/publicaties/responsible-research-data-management-and-the-prevention-of-scientific-misconduct?set_language=en

⁴ <http://www.wageningenur.nl/en/About-Wageningen-UR/Integrity/Scientific-integrity.htm>

⁵ <http://www.wageningenur.nl/en/About-Wageningen-UR/Integrity.htm>

3 Handled complaints

The committee has met 14 times in 2014 and handled nine complaints. An overview of the complaints is given below.

The committee received complaint 01 on March 27, 2014 and decided to handle the complaint on April 17, 2014. The committee sent its advice to the Executive Board on August 19, 2014. The Executive Board decided to follow this advice and to declare the complaint unfounded.

The committee received complaint 02 on April 11, 2014 and decided to handle the complaint on April 22, 2014. The committee sent its advice to the Executive Board on August 26, 2014. The Executive Board decided to follow this advice and to declare the complaint founded.

The committee received complaint 03 on April 11, 2014 and decided to handle the complaint on April 25, 2014. The committee sent its advice to the Executive Board on August 5, 2014. The Executive Board decided to follow this advice and to declare the complaint unfounded.

The committee received complaint 04 on May 11, 2014 and decided not to handle the complaint on May 13, 2014. The committee sent its advice to the Executive Board on May 27, 2014. The Executive Board decided to follow this advice and to declare the complaint not admissible.

The committee received complaint 05 on April 25, 2014 and decided to handle the complaint on April 22, 2014. The committee sent its advice to the Executive Board on August 26, 2014. The Executive Board decided to follow this advice and to declare the complaint founded.

The committee received complaint 06 on June 16, 2014 and decided to handle the complaint on July 15, 2014. The committee sent its advice to the Executive Board on October 7, 2014. The Executive Board decided to follow this advice and to declare the complaint unfounded.

On July 29, 2014, another institution received a complaint 07 that was partly related to an employee of Wageningen UR. Both institutions decided to set up a joint committee to handle this complaint and to advise both Executive Boards about this complaint. The handling of the complaint was not finished in 2014.

The committee received complaint 08 on July 18, 2014. Handling of this complaint has been suspended because of a discriminating statement made by the complainant.

The committee received complaint 09 on October 15, 2014 and decided not to handle the complaint. The committee sent its advice to the Executive Board on October 21, 2014. The Executive Board decided to follow this advice and to declare the complaint not admissible.

Not all advices given complied with the deadlines specified in the complaint procedure scientific integrity. This was partly because a lot of the complaints were received in a short timeframe and partly because of the complexity of some complaints. When crossing terms, the committee always attempted to inform the parties concerned as good as possible.

4 Other activities of the committee

4.1 LOWI symposium

On the occasion of its 10 year anniversary the National Board for Research Integrity, in Dutch: Landelijk Orgaan voor Wetenschappelijke Integriteit (LOWI) organised a seminar. The committee was represented by the chair and the secretary at this meeting

4.2 Research Integrity Network

Prof. Lex Bouter, professor of Methodology and Integrity has initiated a plan to establish a Research Integrity Network⁶ in the Netherlands, connecting the actors in the field of scientific integrity in the Netherlands. The chair and secretary of the committee visited Prof. Bouter to discuss this initiative which is welcomed very much by the committee.

4.3 World Conference on Scientific Integrity

In 2015 the third World Conference on Scientific Integrity takes place in Rio de Janeiro. The committee submitted a –accepted- proposal named “Integrity complaints as a strategic tool in policy decision conflicts.” The proposal reads:

Integrity complaints as a strategic tool in policy decision conflicts.

Wageningen University and Research Centre is a large organisation which combines fundamental science with the application of scientific knowledge to create value for society and nature. Wageningen UR is a collaboration of the university and a number of applied research institutes. It upholds a shared code of conduct on scientific practice and a shared procedure for handling integrity complaints for both the university and the applied research institutes. This position creates unique challenges in the discussions on scientific integrity at Wageningen UR.

Wageningen scientists play crucial roles in the transfer of scientific insights to public and private decision-making by supplying a factual and expert knowledge base. The relation between scientific evidence, policy decisions and societal perception, however, is complicated. Decision-makers interpret, frame and structure evidence in order to apply it to their decision-making needs and policy-perspective. Sometimes the evidence from the researchers plays a strong justification role in defending a certain position. Political opponents and stakeholders with commercial or other interests who disagree with this position may and do try to disvalue the justificatory evidence in order to open the debate. They might consider the given evidence flawed or suspect that researchers deliberately influenced evidence to serve non-scientific interests.

Therefore a well-established scientific integrity complaints procedure functions as the platform for discussion about the relation between scientific research, evidence for policy, application in practice and decision-making. Scientific reports become the object of integrity complaints that appear to move beyond the traditional realm of scientific integrity: falsification, fabrication and plagiarism.

Wageningen UR has dealt with several cases in which the impact of research in society underlies the submitted complaints.

In the presentation these case studies and the way WageningenUR acts to deal with these complaints will be discussed.

4.4 Evaluation of the committee

On the appointment of Prof. Frans Brom it was agreed that an evaluation of the committee should be executed in due time. Since the committee in its current constitution has been functioning for over a year, the committee considered this period sufficient to allow for a meaningful evaluation. Furthermore, the committee noted that the amount of work done this past year is higher than initially estimated. To secure the work of the Committee well for the future, the committee considers it therefore the right time

⁶ <https://www.nrin.nl/>

to evaluate its activities. On October 6, 2014 the committee therefore sent a request to evaluate the committee to the Executive Board.

The evaluation should provide clarification about the quality of the work of the committee and their advices to the Executive Board. Also, the relationship between the amount and nature of the work including support and the nature of the problems of complaints about academic integrity will be reviewed. Finally, the evaluation can clarify what type of support (executive secretariat, legal advice, external technical expertise) is needed in order to ensure a proper continuation at a high quality level of the work of the committee.

An evaluation committee was not yet established in 2014.

5 Recommendations

5.1 Who should handle complaints

As stated also by LOWI in its advice 9 from 2013, it is undesirable for two institutions to handle the same complaint simultaneously. Although LOWI states that complaints are to be judged by the institution where the activities giving rise to a complaint were performed, it is common practice amongst Dutch universities that a complaint is handled by the current employer. A uniform agreement on these matters would be useful and the committee requests the executive board to bring this matter to the attention of the relevant bodies (VSNU, KNAW, LOWI).

5.2 Tools to detect and analyse plagiarism

The committee has found that software to detect plagiarism cannot be applied without problems for analyses in a complaint procedure of a possible violation of scientific integrity:

1. Nature of plagiarism software

Plagiarism Software is designed to check whether a script is original and therefore to check that there is no written overlap in texts. The software automatically searches in a large amount of files for potential overlap. For the work of the commission this sometimes goes too far as there are often defined texts submitted from which the plagiarized texts are copied.

2. Confidentiality of plagiarism program Turnitin

If a manuscript is submitted to Turnitin, one of the widely used plagiarism detection programs, this text is directly part of the database of Turnitin. If overlap with another text is found in the manuscript, the user is given the opportunity to request this text. Turnitin then automatically contacts the person who provided the document. This may cause problems with the confidentiality of the investigation.

Plagiarism Software, and Turnitin in particular is therefore not always the adequate instrument to investigate cases by the committee.