

Annual report 2018
Scientific Integrity Committee

Wageningen
University & Research

DATE
June 2019

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1 Preface

When I was a chemistry student, I learned in my first year about CUDOS. CUDOS stands for Communalism, Universalism, Disinterestedness and Organized Scepticism. Four norms, which according to Robert Merton were essential for good science. Robert Merton, a sociologist, introduced these norms in 1942, decades before it was common practice in science to develop catchy acronym labels for departments, projects, initiatives, consortia etc. Thanks to Merton, I could be introduced into the scientific ethos in less than a morning.

Merton's ideas still reflects most of our understanding of good research conduct. Nevertheless, CUDOS has been moved to the background, scientific integrity to the foreground. One of the reasons is that scientific integrity has been formalized in codes of conduct. Another reason is that we have learned over time that the development of science comes with all sorts of ethical dilemmas that are difficult to capture in an acronym or a code. Therefore these days, scientific integrity requires more attention than teaching it in a few hours to first-year bachelor students.

Because of the importance of scientific integrity and the formal and informal activities we have developed within academia to support it, our understanding of it has developed quickly. In 2018, the universities decided to adopt a new code of conduct, one that reflects the lessons learned, including lessons from the WUR, such as that the code should also be applicable to applied research and that editing and reviewing manuscripts are serious scientific activities.

One could call it the essential tension in the work of Scientific Integrity Committees: to find for each case submitted a passable route between the formal code and the practice of doing research. One of our committee members who mastered this path finding extraordinarily well was prof. Herman Eijsackers. He stood not only at the cradle of the CWI, but timbered it as well. In 2018, Herman left the committee, after serving it two full periods. I do believe that at the WUR, thanks to Herman we all know better what it implies to take scientific integrity seriously.

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*, as of October 2018 *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.

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 Executive Board of Wageningen University & Research has appointed the Scientific Integrity Committee. 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 Committee is to consist of a chair, vice chair and at least two members. The Committee investigates whether there is a breach of scientific integrity and presents its advice to the Executive Board.

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 / The Netherlands Code of Conduct for Research Integrity* and the Scientific Integrity Complaints Procedure of Wageningen University & Research.

2.2 Visibility of the committee and procedures

A webpage about [scientific integrity at WUR¹](#) 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 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 2018, the members of the committee were as follows:

- Prof. Barend van der Meulen (*chair*)
- Prof. Tiny van Boekel (*vice-chair*)
- Prof. Johan Bouma (as of 1 February 2018)
- Prof. Herman van Eijsackers (until 1 April 2018)
- Prof. Akke van der Zijpp.

Hante Meester and Monique van de Griendt staffed the secretariat of the committee.

In complaint 2018-01 prof. Eijsackers has been involved as an external expert as of 1 April 2018.

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

3 Complaints handled

In 2018, the Scientific Integrity Committee held eight meetings. The committee received one formal complaint. 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. 2018-01

The committee received a complaint on 2 March 2018 and concluded shortly afterwards that the complaint was admissible. The committee investigated the matter and presented its advice to the Executive Board of WUR. The Executive Board decided to follow the advice of the committee and took a preliminary decision on 28 May 2018 concluding that in this matter the defendant has seriously breached scientific integrity.

The complainant asked the National Board for Research Integrity (LOWI) to re-evaluate the decision of the Executive Board. At the end of 2018, this complaint is still in process at LOWI.

4 Other activities of the committee

4.1 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, a 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. In 2017, the committee consulted amongst others the Scientific Integrity Committees of the Dutch Universities. In 2018, the committee consulted individual researchers to reply on the concept version of the Code. The new code applies as from 1 October 2018.

In October, the VSNU organised the meeting 'New Code What's Next' and a meeting for chairs and secretaries of Scientific Integrity Committees concerning the new Code. At both meetings member of the Committee of WUR were present.

4.2 Meeting with the Supervisory Board WUR

In March 2018, the chair of the Scientific Integrity Committee was present at a meeting of the Research & Education committee of the Supervisory Board of WUR to address the topic scientific integrity. The issues addressed in this meeting were the organisational responsibility for scientific integrity, how to implement scientific integrity within applied research and scientific integrity in the context of societal controversies. Additionally, the implementation of the Netherlands Code of Conduct for Research Integrity was addressed.

4.3 Introductory talk with new confidential counsellors scientific integrity

In 2018 two new confidential counsellors' scientific integrity have started. The counsellors and the committee members have met each other in two regular meetings of the Scientific Integrity Committee.

4.4 Joint meeting with other scientific integrity bodies of WUR

The Committee handles complaints about possible violations of scientific integrity by employees of Wageningen University & Research. During the handling of these complaints, the Committee regularly discusses matters, which are not directly related to a possible violation of academic integrity. The committee considered it useful to share these experiences with bodies whose task it is to advise the Executive Board in these areas. As a follow up to the last meeting in 2016, a new meeting with other bodies of Wageningen University & Research involved in the topic of scientific integrity was held in March 2018. These bodies include the confidential counsellor's scientific integrity, the Dean of Research, the Compliance Officer, the Spokesperson of the Executive Board and a representative of the executive secretaries of the graduate schools of WUR. During this meeting, topics that the various bodies encountered during the past year were addressed. In addition, the implementation of the Netherlands Code of Conduct for Research Integrity and the revision of the scientific integrity complaints procedure were addressed.

4.5 Other meetings

In addition to the meetings mentioned above the Committee contributed to various workshops and presentations within or related to WUR (Wageningen Economic Research, RIKILT and the 'Natuurwetenschappelijk Gezelschap').

5 Recommendations and remarks

When handling complaints, the Scientific Integrity Committee makes observations that do not belong in an advisory report, but are still relevant for the organisation. The committee 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, related to the handled complaint. The aim of this advice is to improve the process around research quality.