

## Guidelines for Working in Multicultural Settings

*'Quality needs diversity'*

### 1. Introduction

These Guidelines contain a detailing of the Wageningen UR core values "Scope for Talent and Growth and Cooperation".

*We attach importance to providing scope for personal talent and encouraging everyone's individual development. We continually strive to improve by learning from our successes and errors. We are proud of our international recognition, our impact and of the cultural diversity within our organisation. We make use of everyone's unique background and talents in jointly working on innovative ideas and solutions for global themes that will benefit both society and individual development. During our work we actively seek the added value offered by diversity: 'quality needs diversity'.*

Wageningen UR has adopted Codes of Conduct which are related to these guidelines:

- Integrity code, as part of our corporate governance, to ensure the reliability of the employees of Wageningen UR in interactions with clients, with partners and with each other;
- Code of conduct for scientific practice, principles of moral scientific teaching and research;
- Code of conduct with respect to international students in Dutch higher education, to regulate information to and care for international students.

These Guidelines contain the preamble, four principles and best practices. The principles and best practices are elaborated in Chapter 2. The principles are:

1. Empathy
2. Respect for each other
3. Scope for authenticity
4. Communication and, in particular, listening carefully

### Preamble

- These Guidelines lay down principles which should govern the staff and students at the university and research institutes in their conduct towards each other. The principles relate to the social conduct between people from a variety of backgrounds, i.e. the differences between people's social backgrounds and origins, religion and ideology, and social and political preferences.
- Wageningen UR attaches importance to an agreeable and safe working climate for all staff and students, whereby collegiality, respect and attention for others are normal social conduct. These Guidelines are specifically intended to provide for transparent, respectful interaction between people from different cultural backgrounds. The Guidelines are determined by the Netherlands Constitution (inclusive of the detailing of Article 1 of the Equal Treatment Act) and the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
- The Guidelines specify *desirable social conduct*. Undesirable social conduct, such as discrimination or (sexual) harassment, can be reported to Wageningen UR's confidants.
- These Guidelines complement the statements on respectful conduct included in The Wageningen Code of Conduct for Scientific Practice. *'Wageningen UR expects students and their teachers to respect each other's opinions. Differences in opinion will be clarified but will not lead to feuds. There is also a place for minority points of view.'*
- Since Wageningen UR is a neutral organisation, Wageningen UR does not support any (party-) political or religious activities.
- Wageningen UR is an international organisation in terms of its products, its education, international cooperation and its international internal organisation. The organisation expects students and staff affiliated with Wageningen UR to exhibit an international orientation.
- The principles referred to in the Guideline are further detailed in best practices. These best practices formulate standards for the interaction between people from different backgrounds.

- Wageningen UR intends to promote awareness of the need for respectful social conduct between people from different backgrounds and for this reason communication plays a prominent role in these Guidelines. Wageningen UR's Executive Board ensures that the Guidelines are discussed within the Wageningen UR community and that the Guidelines are included in the information supplied to new students and staff. All staff and students are expected to make the effort required to become cognisant of the content of these Guidelines as soon as possible.
- These Guidelines were approved by the Executive Board on January 30, 2012 and came into force on the same date.

## **2. Principles and best practices**

### **2.1 Empathy**

#### *Principle*

Empathy is required for effective communication between people, especially with regard to intercultural communication. Empathy refers to the willingness to devote attention to the other person's perspectives.

#### *Best Practices*

1. Empathy involves listening carefully to each other, striving to understand the other person's feelings, exhibiting interest in the other person, devoting attention to the other person's needs and understanding the other person's point of view.
2. We exhibit empathy when we can imagine how the other person feels. Imagine, for example, how it would feel to work or study in another country for a period of time. Which form of social conduct and interaction would then be required to rapidly 'feel welcome'?

### **2.2 Respect for each other**

#### *Principle*

We are all equal, but not identical. Exhibiting respect and friendliness promotes equal, positive communications. Communicating with respect also implies that people communicate with each other in a shared language, usually English, when organisations accommodate many different nationalities. When the members of a group do not all have a command of the same language then the group communicates in a shared language.

#### *Best practices*

All members of staff and students:

1. give others room to form their opinion, share the opinion and ask others further questions in the event of any uncertainty.
2. take account of the fact that people are more than just one part of their identity (religion, culture, history of their country of origin, etc.).
3. endeavour to accommodate the individual needs of colleagues or fellow students. Promote any interest in a culture or language and accommodate this interest, for example by explaining backgrounds to specific concepts or conduct, or by speaking Dutch more slowly to a colleague or fellow student who wishes to learn to speak Dutch.
4. exhibit respect by making clear that they devote attention to the other person.

### **2.3 Scope for authenticity**

#### *Principle*

Everyone must be offered scope to exhibit and retain their authenticity, thereby ensuring Wageningen UR offers an agreeable working and learning environment in which everyone can feel accepted and included.

#### *Best practices*

1. Wageningen UR is an education and research organisation that is open to everyone, irrespective of their social background and origins, religion and beliefs, and social and political preferences: 'Inclusion is the norm'.
2. Everyone feels included when they are offered an opportunity to discuss their identity and how they can and wish to contribute to a shared objective. Scope for authenticity is a precondition for togetherness. At Wageningen UR (team)work is usually done in multicultural groups: diversity is regarded as providing an important added value to quality ('quality needs diversity').

3. Devoting attention to the other person's natural talents promotes everyone's development of their talents into strengths. Everyone's talents are unique and sustainable. Personal strength offers the greatest scope for growth.

## **2.4 Communication and, in particular, listening carefully**

### *Principle*

Effective communication is only possible when misunderstandings are minimised and the equality of the interpretation of information is maximised. Good interaction is only possible by communicating shared objectives, personal expectations and the expectations of others, and personal standards and values and the standards and values of others. Start the discussion and ask for clarification in the event of any uncertainty about the communication or non-verbal communication. Listening to each other and observing the verbal and non-verbal conduct of each other, and having an open mind, increases mutual understanding.

### *Best practices*

1. Other cultures can interpret specific forms of conduct very differently. As customs and social rules of conduct can have a great influence on the form of non-verbal and verbal communications it is necessary to be aware of this phenomenon.
2. Awareness of the own way of communication avoids the imposition of the personal frame of reference on others. Being open to new information offers scope for the admission of a number of perspectives. Be mindful: this avoids stereotyping.
3. The required quality of a joint product is only achieved when sufficient attention is devoted to issues relating to the various cultures within the group at an early stage of the process.