

# **Annual report 2020**

## **Scientific Integrity Committee**

Wageningen  
University & Research

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## Table of contents

1	Preface	4
2	Handling complaints at Wageningen University & Research	5
2.1	Guidelines for handling complaints	5
2.2	Visibility of the CWI and procedures	5
2.3	CWI	5
3	Complaints handled	6
3.1	2020-1 Complaint	6
3.2	2020-2 Letters	6
3.3	2016-1 Case	6
4	Other activities of the CWI	7
4.1	Protocol Confidential Counsellors Scientific Integrity	7
4.2	Guidelines for supervisors	7
4.3	Evaluation Netherlands Code of Conduct for Research Integrity	7
5	Advisory role of the CWI	8

## **1 Preface**

Research integrity cases that are reported to the Scientific Integrity Committee (CWI) usually have quite some impact in the academic community. Of course directly on those who are involved, but often also on other members of the community who hear about the case. For a long time there was a tendency to see integrity as something that is an individual characteristic. Fortunately this has changed. Since universities have taken the issue of academic integrity more serious, both the code of conduct and the actual practices to promote integrity reflect that academic integrity is a matter for which the community – be it at the level of the research group, discipline, programme or laboratory – has also responsibilities.

This year the CWI received two reports of breaches of academic integrity. One of them which came from inside was retracted. The other one came from outside, and shows how societal stakeholders insist that as a university we can uphold the promises that the code of conduct for research integrity imply: that as scientific researchers we are guided by honesty, scrupulousness, transparency, independence and responsibility.

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 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 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. On 30 March 2020, a new complaint procedure entered into force at WUR that was adjusted to the Code of Conduct that was renewed in 2018.

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 Wageningen University & Research (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 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 Research Integrity* and the Scientific Integrity Complaints Procedure of Wageningen University & Research.

### 2.2 Visibility of the CWI and procedures

A webpage about [scientific integrity at WUR](https://www.wur.nl/en/About-Wageningen/Integrity-and-privacy/Scientific-integrity.htm)<sup>1</sup> is available on the WUR website; the relevant documents and procedures and the composition of the CWI 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 CWI

In 2020, the members of the CWI were:

- Prof. Barend van der Meulen (*chair*)
- Prof. Tiny van Boekel (*vice-chair*)
- Prof. Johan Bouma
- Prof. Cor van der Weele

Rixt Komduur and Astrid Mars staffed the secretariat of the CWI.

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

### **3 Complaints handled**

In 2020, the CWI held one meeting. The CWI received one formal complaint, which was withdrawn before the admissibility could be determined. Only admissible complaints will be published anonymously by the Association of Universities in the Netherlands ([VSNU](#)). The CWI also received two letters regarding the lack of transparency about ancillary activities of special professors.

#### **3.1 2020-1 Complaint**

On 13 April 2020, the CWI received a complaint about an authorship dispute. The rector requested the CWI to investigate the complaint. The complainant retracted the complaint on 21 April 2020 and the CWI closed the dossier.

#### **3.2 2020-2 Letters**

On 5 November and 10 November 2020, the CWI received two letters with a call for attention to a report of Foodwatch Nederland, entitled 'Transparantie over Nevenactiviteiten' ('Transparency about Ancillary activities'). The report indicated that about half of the special professors at Wageningen University that work on topics related to food did not publicly disclose their ancillary activities sufficiently. The CWI urgently requested the Executive Board to pay careful attention to the possible lack of transparency about ancillary activities and affiliations of WUR employees.

#### **3.3 2016-1 Case**

On 18 June 2020 a third party requested the National Board for Research Integrity (LOWI) for advice on the investigation of the CWI and the final opinion of the Executive Board regarding Case 2016-1. On 13 August 2020 the LOWI decided that this request was not admissible (LOWI Besluit 2020, nr. 12).

## **4 Other activities of the CWI**

### **4.1 Protocol Confidential Counsellors Scientific Integrity**

The CWI provided input for a concept protocol for confidential counsellors for scientific integrity at WUR.

### **4.2 Guidelines for supervisors**

The CWI provided input for concept guidelines for supervisors at WUR on how to deal with complaints regarding scientific integrity.

### **4.3 Evaluation Netherlands Code of Conduct for Research Integrity**

The CWI provided input for the VSNU evaluation of the Netherlands Code of Conduct for Research Integrity.

## **5 Advisory role of the CWI**

In addition to the official handling of complaints on scientific integrity, the CWI can advise the Executive Board of Wageningen University & Research on general aspects of scientific integrity, or aspect related to related to handling complaints. The aim of the advice is to improve the process around research quality.

The CWI has the following advices and observations:

- i. The CWI notes that it is important to set up an infrastructure in which patterns of violations of scientific integrity can be discovered. A central integrity unit could take up this function.
- ii. The CWI noted that only one (retracted) complaint was filed in 2020 and is concerned that the threshold for contacting the CWI is too high.
- iii. It is very important to prevent the impression that the role of the CWI is taken up by the confidential counsellors for scientific integrity. The CWI therefore advises to explicitly state that a complainant will be referred to the CWI or, when applicable, to another complaint procedure, in such cases where the complainant is not agreeing with mediation or is not satisfied with the offered help or solution.