



**COMETS**  
CNRS Ethics Committee

**OPINION n°2004-08**

# « ETHICS AND ASSESSMENT »

Approved at plenary session of december 2004



## SUMMARY

Assessments are rife among the research community in general, and the public research community in particular. The review of an article by a journal, the recruitment of a researcher, the decision on whether or not to develop an instrument or sophisticated apparatus, the examination of the activities of a laboratory or responses to a call for tenders all require critical examination, an assessment of originality, the evaluation of costs and risks, forward-looking analysis, and therefore comparisons and choices, all of which are central to assessment processes.

The following is the beginning of ethical deliberations on the function of and procedures for assessment within the CNRS. Our aim was above all to consider what should be done in terms of assessment and to explore desirable values, principles and rules. These ethical deliberations aim to initiate a process that will lead in the long term to greater fairness and efficiency in scientific choices and policies.

Our thinking focused first on the principles and standards that assessors must adhere to, both in their individual behaviour and as a group. Ethics cannot, however, be limited to putting forward an ideal model of behaviour to which those involved in the assessment process should conform. The positive effects of each individual's moral attitude must not be neutralised or diverted by explicit or implicit organisational rules, i.e. by a system which, for structural reasons, would not be able to preserve an assessment's objectivity and fairness. However concerned with objectivity and equity somebody may be, personal morality is not enough when organisational rules leave room for bias or hinder the implementation of fairer procedures. This is why we have also considered the way assessments are organised within the CNRS. A third aspect of our deliberations relates to the legitimate demands of those being assessed: they demand a fair, impartial and frank evaluation, in addition to one that is informed and tailored to individual cases.

