



**COMETS**  
CNRS Ethics Committee

OPINION n°2005-10

**« THE FUTURE OF YOUNG PEOPLE AND  
RESEARCH INTEGRITY »**

Approved at plenary session of may 2005



## SUMMARY

COMMUNICATION - Many questions concerning the organisation and conduct of research, which have been debated by public opinion as well as by researchers for several months, require ethical deliberations. Rather than undertake the task of issuing an Opinion on each and every one, the CNRS Ethics Committee, COMETS, has chosen to express itself concisely herein on only one, which falls within its remit. It appears to COMETS that this subject deserves special attention in the critical period currently being experienced by the research community, a period that affects decisively and in particular the future of young people in French research.

Each generation has a moral duty to pass on to those who will follow the best of what it has received and developed. It must ensure that the resources on which it has been built are equitably shared, while leaving avenues open for those who will continue its work. Knowledge is a common good, the end result of collective and critical construction over time. The concern for equity requires that the youngest people, trained and motivated to embrace this future, find support in their first steps in order to create the most favourable conditions so that they, in turn, can make their own contribution.

It is not acceptable that young people, having provided proof of their ability to carry out research — as attested by the fact that they have obtained a very demanding doctoral degree — should find it very difficult to enter the workforce, either as a researcher in an academic setting or, taking advantage of their initial training through research, by obtaining a job in the public or private sector. Both the scientific community as a whole and its partners, the public authorities which assign it tasks, are jointly responsible for this integration in the workplace and must take responsibility for it. By offering alternatives, it is also up to them to challenge the dominant organisation of the international scientific job market. Indeed, losing this talent to employers not having paid anything towards the cost of training is detrimental to France, to Europe — which aspires to enter a knowledge-based society — and more especially to emerging countries.

It is morally unfair for young people, who can make a major contribution to discoveries, laboratory activities and data processing, to be used — as is often the case at this level of competence — as mere labour, without actually passing the baton on to them to build a sustainable future. If young people are not given the means to take initiatives and given the responsibility that they deserve in the exceptional period of creativity that often accompanies the years following their doctorate, whether in public or private research, skills are being wasted and the common good undermined.

In the difficult situation often faced by newly-qualified doctoral graduates, it is important that companies explicitly recognise this level of qualification; likewise, it is important that the actual arrangements for setting up public competitive examination procedures do not penalise certain candidates, such as young expatriates, by imposing on them multiple and/or unnecessary procedures or journeys that are more costly when decided late in the day. The impact of such dysfunctions on both public opinion and the family and friends of young people interested in research, is far from negligible. It strengthens the idea that the broadening of knowledge is not a goal worth pursuing as a career.

All these difficulties erode the quality and ambitions of education by limiting it to acquisitions that are considered to be of immediate use which thus encourages a consumerist approach.

The passion to seek knowledge, make discoveries and contribute to the common good, which determines the proper exercise of the profession of researcher, cannot overshadow the ethical issues raised by the acquisition and use of knowledge. On this point, younger people — who are particularly sensitive to public debates and the questions that society addresses to researchers — are often disadvantaged. It is the responsibility of their elders to introduce them to these expectations through genuine, attentive listening and appropriate training. In this way, the younger generation will truly be able to become players in the new founding pact between research and society for which they are responsible.