



OPINION n°2012-26

**« THE NEED FOR PROCEDURES TO BE SET UP
WITHIN THE CNRS TO FOSTER RESEARCH
INTEGRITY »**

Approved at plenary session of 24 august 2014



SUMMARY

After analysis, COMETS concludes that documented cases of misconduct in research activities are on the rise and lead to conflictual situations. The changing face of research careers and the various pressures on those involved are among the causes. At the laboratory level, the limits of what is permissible are poorly defined. Allegations of ethical misconduct reported nationwide are handled on a case-by-case basis within one or other of the CNRS departments. Training in research integrity has not been institutionalised. Consequently, COMETS makes the following recommendations :

1- The CNRS should consider appropriate methods for responding to staff questions on research integrity and handling contentious cases. Above all, it must ensure consistency between the practices of its various departments (legal affairs, human resources, thematic institutes, the general secretariat (SGCN) of the national committee for scientific research (CoNRS), the INSB ethics unit, mediation, COMETS). COMETS recommends that an internal CNRS working group be set up with representatives from these various departments in order to review the procedures to be applied in the different situations and in particular to define how they relate to criminal law.

2- Without creating a new structure for the time being, the CNRS could appoint a single, clearly identified contact person to receive all reports relating to ethical issues from CNRS entities throughout France. This ethics adviser would make a preliminary analysis of the nature of the problem raised and would send the report to the relevant CNRS department. He or she would have a correspondent in each department and in COMETS.

3- The CNRS should clearly define the procedures to be implemented to handle cases requiring the setting up of an ad hoc committee: constitution of the committee, definition of its missions, its mandate to carry out investigations and duty to submit conclusions to both the ethics adviser and to COMETS, then resolution of the problem by the CNRS department involved. The ad hoc committee would include an observer from COMETS, as recommended by the 2006 Opinion on scientific fraud.

4- COMETS recommends that the CNRS set up training courses on research ethics in relation to staff status: seminars for new recruits to each of the different Institutes, appropriate training for unit directors, addition of an ethics component to thematic workshops, etc.

5- COMETS encourages the CNRS to participate with other bodies in the preparation of a national charter on research integrity designed to be adopted by the French Ministry of Research and Higher Education. This work could be carried out with the participation of COMETS in conjunction with INSERM, which has a Research Integrity Office and has already instigated preliminary discussions on this subject with INRA.