

EXECUTIVE BOARD'S RESPONSE *

The Executive Board at Erasmus University Rotterdam set up an independent fact-finding committee in June 2017 to investigate the potential impact of contractual and non-contractual relations between RSM and various companies on independence and scientific integrity at RSM. One specific reason for this was the social and political discussion sparked off by a report published by 'Changerism'. This report is entitled 'A pipeline of ideas'. (Rotterdam: Changerism, May 2017).

The independent fact-finding committee was chaired by Professor G.P.M.F. (Gerard) Mols. Its members were Professor H. (Harmen) Verbruggen and Professor J.G. (Hans) Kuijl, RA. Drs R. (Riëtte) te Lindert provided the committee with secretarial support.

This committee, known as the 'Mols Committee', reported its findings to the Executive Board. In this document, the Executive Board gives its response to these findings and announces the subsequent steps to be taken as a result of these findings.

The facts

The Changerism report 'A pipeline of ideas' (May 2017) raises certain questions on the potentially negative impact on independence and scientific integrity in education and science resulting from the business community's involvement with Dutch universities in general and RSM in particular.

Naturally, the Executive Board takes the criticism expressed by Changerism seriously, resulting in setting up the Mols Committee. This independent committee carried out in-depth investigations into collaboration between RSM and the business community, and its potential impact on the curriculum. In addition, the committee examined whether sufficient provision has been made at RSM for compliance with regulations and procedures in force at Erasmus University relating to the safeguarding of scientific integrity.

On 1 June, this independent committee notified the Executive Board of its findings and its recommendations based on these findings in a report entitled *Research Committee: Agreements between RSM - Business*. This report contains detailed conclusions resulting from the research questions, and a number of recommendations.

The tenor of these conclusions and recommendations is that there is no direct influence from business on the education or scientific research carried out at RSM. However, the committee does feel that RSM's work methods should be improved and tightened up, and it has compiled specific and valuable recommendations to this end.

Considerations

The Executive Board is of the opinion that the report has been compiled with due care and attention. The Executive Board does not have any cause to doubt the value of the findings and the committee's recommendations based on these findings. The committee subjected the core element of the investigations into the degree of independence and scientific integrity at RSM to a thorough examination.

The Executive Board is pleased with the committee's conclusion to the effect that there is no direct influence from the business community on education or scientific research at RSM.

At the same time, the Mols report contains specific, meaningful and valuable considerations and recommendations, which the Executive Board intends to follow up as soon as possible. It is clear that there are important lessons to be learned and additional specific action must to be taken in order to reinforce independence and scientific integrity in education and research at RSM. Measures have already been taken for a number of the areas specified in the report.

The Executive Board is confident that the decision below will result in the addressing of any remaining concerns that the minister and society as a whole may feel about independence and scientific integrity at RSM with due care and attention.

The report has been discussed with the Dean RSM.

Decision

The Executive Board has taken cognisance of the report and all the findings and recommendations. The Executive Board resolves to give priority to the following courses of action. Some of these have already commenced, while others will start up in the near future. The Executive Board requests the Dean RSM to complete the points for action at RSM and to report to the Executive Board on their status by 1 January 2019. The Executive Board will monitor the progress and impact of all action taken, and provide guidance in respect of such action wherever necessary.

Collaboration contracts between RSM and the business community

- As RSM had already announced previously, contracts between RSM and the business community have meanwhile been recorded in an overview (Corporate Register). This will be published after all the explicit non-disclosure stipulations have been vetted (see the following point for action). We are considering implementing this register at other faculties as well.
- All contracts between RSM and the business community will be examined in order to discover if they contain any non-disclosure stipulations that are too explicit, where any information of interest to competitors is completely excluded from publication anonymously or in the long term as well; this would not benefit scientific substantiation. We will be discussing this once again with the parties concerned wherever possible; new contracts will be adjusted in conformity with the Mols Committee's recommendations.
- The contracts between RSM and the business community as identified in the report have been vetted and will be adjusted wherever necessary in respect of stipulations that might give rise to any degree of influence on education on the part of the business community.
- We are working on a model services contract, and we will encourage the relevant parties to use this model contract for each assignment.
- All educational tools will be vetted for use of company logos resulting from sponsorship contracts. Company logos will no longer be used in educational tools.
- We will be monitoring compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation during recruitment activities and providing guidance wherever necessary.

Safeguarding scientific integrity

- The new Code of Conduct for Scientific Integrity – which is endorsed by EUR – primarily focuses on scientific research and to a lesser degree on education. The Executive Board will consult the VSNU about this matter.
- Although a great deal of attention is devoted to scientific integrity at EUR, the committee has established that the scientific integrity policy needs to be tightened up a little more. The Executive Board considers it extremely important for the scientific integrity policy in force at EUR to be maintained at EUR Holding's private limited companies as well. The implementation of the new Code of Conduct for Scientific Integrity is an appropriate time to increase attention for scientific integrity. An action plan has been drawn up for this purpose.

Ancillary activities

- The committee has established that the sectoral regulations on ancillary activities and the administrative procedure are known. The Executive Board monitors the ancillary activities annually. The Executive Board will ask RSM and all the other faculties to ascertain whether the ancillary activities have been properly registered. Also, activities such as consultancy and education within the scope of the EUR Holding subsidiaries will be registered as ancillary activities.
- The Executive Board will ask RSM and all the other faculties to ascertain whether the rates maintained are in conformity with the market.
- The Executive Board has asked the Dean at RSM to evaluate the policy on ancillary activities at RSM Faculty in connection with the committee's recommendations on undesirable incentives. This policy will be adjusted wherever necessary to increase transparency with extra attention for transparency in the field of consultancy activities.

Culture

In its report, the committee raises the matter of relative autonomy for professors in general, and senior professors in particular. This might contribute towards a culture in which staff members do not feel at liberty to express their views on scientific integrity. This is a phenomenon that is not unknown elsewhere in the academic world. The committee recommends RSM to continue implementing the change in culture – as recommended by PWC in 2013 – with renewed vigour. The committee believes that a culture in which there is openness and debate on acting with scientific integrity is a better guarantee for maintaining scientific integrity than developing or tightening up new guidelines and regulations. The Executive Board endorses this opinion and has instructed the Dean at RSM to report on the state of affairs with respect to implementing the recommendations on the culture, and to compile an action plan for any recommendations that might not yet have been addressed. The Executive Board will monitor progress on this implementation.

Organisational structure

The committee has stated that the organisational structure connected with the relationship between RSM Faculty on the one hand and the relevant private limited companies on the other hand is a complicated one, and that this might give create risks for the governance of the values involved. For this reason, the Executive Board will set up an independent committee whose task is to analyse the possibilities for revising the governance structure.

****PLEASE NOTE: this is a translation of the original text, which was written in Dutch. The original Dutch text takes priority in every case.***