

Lunch lecture VLAG PhD counsellor/adviser Professor Willem van Berkel, 7 May 2015

He might have already helped some of you with an issue, while some of you never heard of him: Professor Willem van Berkel. He is available as a confidential counsellor for all VLAG PhD students, and on 7 May 2015, he explained more about his tasks during a VLAG PhD Council lunch lecture. Vesna Prsic (program coordinator VLAG) and Remko Boom (Scientific Director VLAG) were also present to provide complementary information relevant to the lecture.

After going through his interesting career path (from a lab assistant to a full professor), Professor Van Berkel explained his role as a counsellor, illustrating the issues that he could help with. For example, he does offer advice regarding the mandates and expertise of the graduate school, such as the research process, publishing, and PhD supervision. However, in case of issues that go beyond the mandate of the graduate school, such as unwanted behaviour, personal problems, and labour disputes, Professor Van Berkel helps you in finding other relevant institutions within Wageningen University.

Professor Van Berkel underlined the importance of the PhD guide, and that it is often the case that PhD students are not fully aware of their rights and duties. He mentioned several times the Training and Supervision Plan during the lecture, referring to the set balance between training activities (15%), education duties (10%), and research duties (75%). Several of the present PhD students suggested that those proportions were difficult to comply with, as the education duties can dominate during busy education periods.

Regarding supervision problems, Van Berkel noted that its origin can be found in miscommunication between the PhD students and their supervisors. Therefore, most of the time, his role in finding a solution is to identifying the real reasons behind problems, and discussing them with the parties involved. He noted that the most important issue to keep in mind is to have an open and constructive attitude, discuss unpleasant feelings and especially, do not feel the 'underdog' compared to your supervisor.

He talked about more common issues that are encountered by PhD students and how these issues are dealt with, to which the audience reacted, sharing their own experiences. One of these issues were regarding co-authorship, as the audience commented that it is difficult to determine when input of other researchers was "substantial" enough to justify co-authorship, and how you decide on the order of all authors.

When you have an issue that could benefit from involving him as a confidential counsellor, do not hesitate to contact him!