

## **The Netherlands Code of Conduct for Academic Practice**

Principles of good academic teaching and research

*This text is an English translation of the Dutch original. In case of any divergence of interpretation, the Dutch text shall prevail.*

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Association of Universities in the Netherlands (VSNU)

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## Preamble

This Netherlands Code of Conduct for Academic Practice was drawn up at the request of the Association of Universities in the Netherlands (Vereniging van Universiteiten, VSNU) in 2004. The wish for a Code of Conduct stems from the generally shared conviction that staff members<sup>1</sup> at institutions that fulfil a societal role are held to a proper exercise of their duties. Rules governing that correct exercise of duties should be established in writing to provide a shared frame of reference and, if necessary, a basis for calling each other to account.

1. The Code applies to academic practice, which is understood to include scientific and scholarly teaching and research at all universities<sup>2</sup> that have declared to uphold this Code. More precisely, the Code is intended for the individual academic practitioner, this being any person who is involved in academic research and teaching under the auspices of a university; this includes students. The Code also applies to those who bear administrative responsibility for academic practice.
2. The Code presumes the autonomous setting in which universities operate, which is a fundamental aspect of academic freedom. It is a university's responsibility to promote this freedom within the framework of its curricula and research programmes.
3. At the same time, the Code presumes that a university is a collaborative venture of diverse parties. This includes academic staff and academic practitioners in training, such as students and PhD students, as well as bodies that commission research and valorisation, such as the government, civil society organisations, businesses, research-funding organisations and users. The integrity of each academic practitioner is an essential condition for maintaining these stakeholders' faith in science and scholarship. Integrity is the foundation of good and reliable academic practice.
4. The Code contains principles that all members of the academic community should observe both individually and vis-à-vis each other and society. These principles can be read as general notions of good academic practice and as a self-regulatory instrument. The overarching principle is that every academic practitioner is bound by the frameworks established by Dutch and international legislation. These legal frameworks are not discussed in this Code of Conduct. A second overarching principle is transparency; every academic practitioner must (be able to) demonstrate how they put these principles into practice.
5. The principles defined in this Code are detailed further in the respective "Elaboration" sections. These elaborations, which provide a set of standards for the conduct of teachers, researchers, students and administrators, reflect the national and international best practices of good academic teaching and research. Under particular circumstances, deviation may be justified.

The applicability of the provisions depends on the concrete circumstances under which the academic practitioner operates. Moreover, the circumstances under which the university operates are also subject to change. Nonetheless, every academic practitioner must be able to explain and motivate if – and if so, to what extent and why – they are at variance with the elaborations of the Code of Conduct (the rule of 'apply or explain').

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<sup>1</sup> Under the Code, a staff member is defined as a person who is or was employed by the university or who works or has worked under the university's responsibility pursuant to the Collective Labour Agreement of the Dutch Universities (*Collectieve Arbeidsovereenkomst Nederlandse Universiteiten*, CAO-NU).

<sup>2</sup> For the purposes of this Code, a university is understood to include the research organisations and other organisations that have declared to uphold this Code.

6. The Code contains this preamble, the principles and their associated elaborations, violations of academic integrity, and the universities' prevention policy. It sets out six principles of proper academic practice:
  - Honesty and scrupulousness
  - Reliability
  - Verifiability
  - Impartiality
  - Independence
  - Responsibility
7. All universities and their academic staff will make the necessary efforts to familiarise themselves with the content of this Code. In addition, they will ensure that the Code is discussed within the academic community in order to enhance awareness of what good academic teaching and research entails.
8. Academic practitioners must comply with the Code of Conduct and have a duty to promote the best practices amongst their peers. University administrative bodies are under an obligation to promote and enforce compliance with the Code. Universities have public and binding regulations governing the independent resolution of complaints regarding violations of academic integrity.
9. The authors of this Code of Conduct are well aware that the Code does not address all problems. There are conceivable 'grey areas' and dilemmas in science and scholarship to which this Code is not directly applicable. Researchers are urged to put such cases forward for discussion within the academic community.
10. As the focus of the Code is on describing the conduct expected of academic practitioners, it does not contain complaints procedures. Such procedures are described in institutions' own academic integrity complaints regulations. The institutional complaints regulations and the *Landelijk Model Klachtenregeling Wetenschappelijke Integriteit* all include an appendix clarifying to which violations of academic integrity the complaints regulations in any case apply. It should be emphasised that a deviation from one of the rules in this Code of Conduct does not necessarily constitute a violation of academic integrity.
11. The Netherlands Code of Conduct for Academic Practice was adopted by the General Board of the Association of Universities (*Algemeen Bestuur van de Vereniging van Universiteiten*) on 17 December 2004, and came into force as from 1 January 2005. The Code was revised on 25 May 2012, and again on 31 October 2014 in consultation with the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW).

## Principles and elaborations

### 1. Honesty and scrupulousness

#### Principle

*Academic practitioners are honest and forthright about their research and its applications. Scientific and scholarly activities are performed scrupulously and should remain unaffected by the pressure to achieve.*

#### Definition

Researchers are called upon to be open and nuanced about margins of uncertainty and other limits on the interpretation and applicability of their own research and that of their fellow practitioners. Communication regarding research results should be dispassionate and realistic. The actions of an academic practitioner are scrupulous when they are performed with the dedication and precision that a proper exercise of the profession requires.

#### Elaboration

- 1.1. Academic practitioners know that the ultimate aim of science is to establish facts and they therefore must present the nature and scope of their results with the greatest possible precision. Accordingly, they do not prevaricate about their findings or about attendant uncertainties. Scrupulousness also entails the presentation of doubts and contraindications.
- 1.2. Every academic practitioner demonstrates respect for the people and animals involved in scientific teaching and research. Research on human subjects is exclusively permitted if the persons concerned have freely given informed consent, the risks are minimal and their privacy is sufficiently safeguarded. Research involving animals is only permitted if the statutory permits have been granted and in conformity with the relevant legislation.
- 1.3. Accurate source references provide a clear indication of the intellectual provenance of cited and paraphrased text. This also applies to information gathered from the Internet and from anonymous sources. The texts and research results of others are never reproduced without a reference.
- 1.4. Authorship is acknowledged. Rules common to the academic discipline are observed.
- 1.5. Academic practitioners do not republish their own previously published work or parts thereof as though it constituted a new contribution to the academic literature. When republishing previously published findings, they indicate this with a correct reference to the source or by another means accepted within the discipline. In many disciplines it is permissible and even customary to reprint short texts from works published with or without co-authors without a source reference when it concerns brief passages of introductory, theoretical or methodological explanation.
- 1.6. Scrupulousness is expressed through precision and nuance in academic instruction and research, in publishing research results and in other forms of knowledge transfer.

- 1.7. Scrupulousness is not restricted to academic research or to reporting on research activities, but also applies to relationships among scientific practitioners, between supervisors and PhD students, between teaching staff and students and with society.
- 1.8. Good mentorship is essential: students, PhD students and junior staff members occupy hierarchically subordinate positions. The responsibilities of persons involved in teaching and research at the institution are clearly defined and observed at all times.
- 1.9. Academic practitioners avoid personal relationships that may give rise to reasonable doubts concerning the objectivity of their decisions, or that may result in any form of coercion or exploitation of a hierarchically subordinate person.
- 1.10. Academic practitioners ensure that they maintain the level of expertise required to exercise their duties. They do not accept duties for which they lack the necessary expertise. If necessary, they actively indicate the limits of their competence.
- 1.11. Academic practitioners are co-responsible for the quality of the curricula they teach and for the scientific or scholarly and societal value of the research programmes in which they participate. They act according to their own preferences only insofar as these are reconcilable with this responsibility.

## 2. Reliability

### Principle

*Every academic practitioner supports and strengthens the fundamental reliability of science and scholarship through their own conduct. Academic practitioners conduct and report on their research and transfer their knowledge through teaching and publishing in a reliable manner.*

### Definition

Academic practitioners act reliably when they perform their research in a conscientious manner and provide a full account of the research conducted. This ensures that scientific and scholarly research can be traced, verified and re-tested. Reliability applies both to the conduct of academic practitioners and to their written work. Research publications should make mention of the statistical uncertainty of research results and the margins of error.

### Elaboration

- 2.1. Research data have indeed been collected. The statistical methods used are in accordance with the methodological standards for the type of data used. The selective omission of research results is reported and justified.
- 2.2. Speculation spurred by results of academic research is recognisably presented as such in reports. Conclusions on the basis of the presented results are not speculative in nature.
- 2.3. Peer and other reviewers do not misuse an author's ideas as formulated in the article under review.
- 2.4. Academic practitioners provide a complete and honest overview of their skills whenever a decision concerning their career or duties is pending.
- 2.5. When transferring information to students, the selective representation of available knowledge is either avoided or justified. A clear distinction is made between transferred academic knowledge and personal opinion or related speculation.

### **3. Verifiability**

#### **Principle**

*Presented information is verifiable. Whenever research results are published, it is made clear what the data and conclusions are based on, from where they originate and how they can be verified.*

#### **Definition**

Conduct is verifiable when it is possible for others to assess whether it complies with relevant standards (for instance of quality or reliability).

#### **Elaboration**

- 3.1. Research must be replicable in order to verify its accuracy. The choice of research question, the research set-up, the choice of method and the references to sources used are accurately documented in a form that allows for verification of all steps in the research process.
- 3.2. The quality of data collection, data input, data storage and data processing is closely guarded. All steps taken must be properly reported and their execution must be properly monitored (lab journals, progress reports, documentation of arrangements and decisions, etc.).
- 3.3. Raw research data are stored for at least ten years. These data are made available to other academic practitioners upon request, unless legal provisions dictate otherwise.
- 3.4. Raw research data are archived in such a way that they can be consulted at all times and with a minimum expense of time and effort.
- 3.5. The source of all educational material, written as well as oral, is stated.



## 4. Impartiality

### Principle

*In their scientific or scholarly activities, academic practitioners are led by no other interest than academic interest, and they are always prepared to account for their actions.*

### Definition

Academic practitioners are impartial and objective when they do not let personal interest, preference, affections, prejudice or the interests of the commissioning or funding body affect their judgement and decisions.

### Elaboration

- 4.1. Academic practitioners allow others to take an independent intellectual position on topics. This applies particularly in the case of hierarchical relationships such as the relationship between a teacher and a student or a supervisor and a PhD candidate.
- 4.2. The choice of methods and criteria is made solely to establish facts, and is not led by external goals such as commercial success or political influence.
- 4.3. A reviewer carefully reflects whether they can offer an impartial assessment of a manuscript, for instance when it concerns a competing research group.
- 4.4. In assessing the performance of others (peer review of research and manuscripts), academic practitioners are led by scientific or scholarly arguments, and they refrain from assessing a manuscript if there could be any doubt about the impartiality of their opinion.
- 4.5. Academic practitioners only take up and defend a certain scientific or scholarly viewpoint when there are sufficient grounds to support that viewpoint. Competing viewpoints must be mentioned and explained.
- 4.6. Academic practitioners avoid exclusively using their own textbooks for courses, in any case at undergraduate level.
- 4.7. Every academic practitioner affiliated with a university provides an up-to-date and complete list of their relevant ancillary activities on the university website.
- 4.8. In its annual report or on its website, every university explains its procedures for reporting the ancillary activities of staff.

## **5. Independence**

### **Principle**

*Academic practitioners operate in a context of academic freedom and independence. Where restriction of that freedom cannot be avoided, this is clearly stated.*

### **Definition**

When presenting insights as correct and relevant, academic practitioners are independent when they only allow themselves to be influenced by others' judgements to the degree that such judgements are based on scientific or scholarly authority. They do not allow themselves to be influenced on other grounds.

### **Elaboration**

- 5.1. Whenever third parties engage an academic practitioner to teach or conduct research, the practitioner is allowed to perform the assignment – within the parameters defined – without interference by the commissioning party. The research question is of a scientific or scholarly interest and should go beyond the commissioner's particular concern. The method employed is scientifically valid. The commissioning party has no influence on the research results.
- 5.2. Assignments carried out with third-party funding demonstrably contribute to academic teaching and/or research.
- 5.3. The relationship between the commissioning party and the performing party is always made explicit, for instance where there is a consultancy assignment or other connection. Any possible appearance of a conflict of interest is always avoided, or mentioned in publications.
- 5.4. The option to publish academic research results is assured. Arrangements with external research funders always stipulate that the academic practitioner is at liberty to publish the results within a specified, reasonable period.
- 5.5. External funders of scientific and scholarly activities are identified by name. In the case of research activities, this can mean their names are stated in publications or in conference papers presenting the results of sponsored research; in the case of teaching activities this can mean they are referred to in the course announcement and teaching material.

## 6. Responsibility

### Principle

*Academic practitioners acknowledge their responsibility for the societal implications of their work. They are willing to discuss and explain their choice of research themes.*

### Definition

Academic practitioners are cognisant of the fact that they receive funds and facilities to conduct academic research and that they are free to make their own research choices, which they explain to the best of their ability.

### Elaboration

- 6.1. Researchers are willing and able to justify their choice of research themes both in advance and in retrospect. Researchers provide a clear and full account of how research funds were used and which choices this involved.
- 6.2. Academic practitioners allow themselves to be judged on the quality of their output in an honest and loyal fashion, and they cooperate in internal and external assessments of their research.