



CODE OF ETHICS

(approved by the Board of Governors on 12 January 2024 and amended on 31 May 2024)

SCOPE

The code of ethics ("Code") applies to everyone at Ghent University:

- professorial staff (permanent or temporary staff);
- assistant academic staff (temporary staff);
- research staff, including IOF business developers and IDC coordinators (contract staff);
- administrative and technical staff (permanent or contract staff);
- visiting professors and clinical professors (contractual outside the staff configuration);
- doctoral students and postdocs, including scholarship recipients (scholarship agreement) and those who are completing their doctorate with external and own resources;
- students;
- visiting and exchange students;
- students of the University Language Centre;
- participants in educational activities or programme initiatives (for example, in the context of a lifelong learning initiative);
- internal and external board members;
- other staff members outside the staff configuration, non-statutory staff members or staff members without an employment contract but against whom Ghent University can take disciplinary action and/or use disciplinary measures.

Suppliers, (sub)contractors and others who provide services or goods to Ghent University or act on behalf of Ghent University are expected to act in accordance with the spirit of this Code.

This Code applies to all activities that make up university life: teaching, research, service, administrative, managerial, social, student and alumni activities. The private conduct of any person at Ghent University also falls within the scope of this Code when it concerns actions that have or may have a serious negative impact on the functioning of that person, the functioning of Ghent University, or on the cooperation with or well-being of the other people of Ghent University.

This Code refers to specific regulations and guidelines that are periodically evaluated and amended. In those cases where a specific regulation or guideline does not correspond to the Code, the specific regulation or guideline takes priority.

In the light of its own operations and possible integrity risks, each entity may lay down additional agreements or concrete policies, based on the values and standards set out in the Code.

INTRODUCTION, CORE VALUES AND OBJECTIVE

Based on the fundamental principles of the Magna Charta Universitatum 2020, Ghent University recognises that as an academic institution, it has a responsibility towards the society it serves and must earn and maintain the trust of that society by striving for a university-wide organizational culture with integrity in which maintaining high ethical standards and compliance with laws, regulations and contractual obligations is essential. An ethical organizational culture contributes to the legitimacy and stability of high-quality education and research and the community service we aspire to with our institution.

Ghent University is a socially engaged and pluralistic university and cherishes and defends **academic freedom** and **freedom of expression**. It values **honesty**, **respect**, **trustworthiness** and **responsibility** and strives to integrate these values into its teaching, research, community service and business operations.

This Code is a shared declaration of commitment that sets out the ethical standards that we use as the basis for all our actions and decisions, and that enables us to work and study with integrity.

The Code is structured around six sections:

- Acting responsibly and independently
- Treating each other with respect
- Careful and sustainable use of organizational resources and time
- Qualitative and ethical research and teaching practices
- Safe and confidential handling of information
- Exemplary behaviour, addressing, reporting and compliance

The objective of this Code is to promote integrity awareness and ethical actions in accordance with the core values and standards within the institution and among everyone at Ghent University and to avoid integrity violations. This Code has a protective and controlling function. The protective function entails Ghent University encouraging everyone to think about what it means to work and study (together) with integrity according to Ghent University's core values and the concrete application of these in their own daily work and study practice. It encourages an open discussion culture in which everyone at Ghent University can and dares to discuss integrity dilemmas, which contributes to better agreements and faster detection of sticking points and possible integrity risks. In addition, the Code has a monitoring function to assess the integrity of the institution and everyone at Ghent University.

1. ACTING RESPONSIBLY AND INDEPENDENTLY

1.1 Knowledge of and compliance with laws, regulations, policies and the Code

Everyone at Ghent University is expected to be familiar with and comply with all applicable laws and regulations, policies and ethical values and norms that guide our work. Everyone at Ghent University is individually responsible for their own actions and everyone at Ghent University is collectively responsible for maintaining the ethical standards and complying with all applicable laws, regulations and policies.

If the actions of the institution or everyone at Ghent University are not regulated by the Code or by specific laws, regulations or policies, the values laid down in the Code will always determine our actions.

No act that lacks integrity – an act that is contrary to the standards set out in the Code – will be tolerated, even if the act is common within or outside Ghent University, or if some of the objectives it achieves are dignified or honourable. The appearance of unethical behaviour can also be harmful to the people of Ghent University, the institution and its activities.

Related internal regulations:

- [Codex Ghent University](#)

1.2 Conflicts of interest

Conflicts of interest can jeopardise objectivity, equal treatment and transparency in judgement and action. Everyone at Ghent University is expected to deal with (possible) conflicts of interest vigilantly and transparently.

A conflict of interest exists when, in the context of an action, decision or recommendation, the impartial and objective performance of your duties or compliance with the principles of fair competition, non-discrimination or equal treatment is compromised, risks being compromised or may be compromised, or that there is a reasonable perception that such a risk may arise due to any direct or indirect, financial or non-financial interest that you share with a person, institution, organization or company.

If you sense or notice that there is or will be a conflict of interest or the appearance of a conflict of interest, you take the necessary action to recognise and acknowledge, address or avoid the conflict and to deal with it appropriately in accordance with the institution's conflict of interest policy.

You refrain from any commitment, decision or action that may be related to the conflict of interest until the established procedure has been fully completed.

At the end of the procedure, you comply with the agreements made with regard to managing the conflict of interest.

In accordance with the policy on family ties, intimate relationships and personal involvement at the institution, you are required to be open and transparent about any family ties, intimate relationships, or personal involvement with other people of Ghent University when you are in a hierarchical or educational relationship, or when you are serving on (advisory) councils and committees.

Related internal regulations:

- [Code of conduct for conflicts of interest](#)
- [Code of conduct regarding capital participation or taking other financial or ownership interests in a Ghent University association spin-off](#)
- [Regulations for secondary employment IOF business developers and TT advisors](#)
- [Regulations for IOF-business developers and technology transfer advisors on secondary employment activities and the \(day-to-day\) management in companies](#)
- [Purchasing conflict of interest treatment committee](#)
- [Guidelines on conflicts of interest in professorial staff selections](#)

1.3 Secondary employment

Secondary employment may entail an (appearance of) conflict of interest and/or a conflict of commitment to the main job at the institution, for example, but not only, in terms of time spent.

You ensure that the accumulation of activities does not entail a(n) (appearance of) conflict of interest or is in conflict with other standards laid down in the Code.

You always discuss the accumulation of activities openly with your supervisor¹.

You apply for formal approval for secondary employment where required in accordance with the institution's policy on secondary employment.

Related internal regulations:

- [Regulations concerning secondary employment activities of academic staff](#)
- [Regulations for IOF-business developers and technology transfer advisors on secondary employment activities and the \(day-to-day\) management in companies](#)
- [Regulations concerning secondary employment activities of academic staff employed with the integration framework](#)

1.4 Donations, gifts and invitations

In order to avoid any appearance or form of bribery, you do not ask for or accept any gift or benefit from other people of Ghent University or external parties (private persons or organizations) that is related to your performance in return for the handling of a file, the provision of information or any other service.

You do not accept gifts from or participate in activities paid for by external parties (private persons or organizations) unless the gift or invitation is part of a normal professional or educational relationship and has a low material value. Gifts that were accepted in error are returned to the sender.

If you want to accept a gift or an invitation, you must openly discuss this with your lecturer or supervisor².

¹ This does not apply to professorial staff members, who do not have a supervisor anyway. They can discuss the accumulation of activities with one of their peers if they wish. This does not prevent ZAP members from being bound by decision-making processes and regulations as known at UGent, and there are normative frameworks to which ZAP members must also adhere.

² This does not apply to professorial staff members, who do not have a supervisor anyway. They can discuss the accumulation of activities with one of their peers if they wish. This does not prevent ZAP members from being bound

When accepting a gift or invitation, you take the following factors into account:

- Why is something given?
- When and in what situation is something offered?
- Is there a risk that you will be asked to do something in return?
- Is the acceptance of the gift or invitation part of a normal professional or educational relationship and is it of low value?
- Does the acceptance of the gift or invitation violate the principle of the general interest of the institution?
- Is it an isolated case or do you regularly receive a gift or invitation from the same person or organization?
- Do you dare to speak openly about the gift offered or the invitation received?

It is advisable to inform external parties with whom you work of the ethical rules that apply to our institution. By avoiding donations, gifts or invitations, you can prevent them from putting you in a difficult situation.

1.5 Right and duty to speak and duty of confidentiality

Everyone at Ghent University has the fundamental right to speak and in some cases, a duty to speak and a duty of confidentiality.

Ghent University cherishes and defends the right to freedom of expression. Everyone at Ghent University has the freedom to express their personal opinions. You speak in your own name and make this clear as such. You take personal responsibility for what you say.

Official statements and positions that are related to Ghent University's policy may only be shared by employees who are explicitly designated to do so.

Freedom of expression is not unlimited:

- You do not incite discrimination, hatred, violence or segregation against others;
- You do not spread ideas about racial superiority or hatred;
- You do not join groups or associations that promote discrimination or segregation;
- You abstain from any form of negationism.

You have the right to exchange information with other people at Ghent University, to assess ideas and to defend your point of view. Such smooth communication is also a duty, as it contributes to the proper functioning of the institution and balanced decisions.

If, as a person at Ghent University, you observe actions that are or may be in violation of this Code, the obligation to speak applies.

If you work in a position that is subject to legal professional secrecy, you cannot (be obliged to) speak about information that you find out in the performance of your duties, unless a legal exception applies.

The right to speak is limited by the obligation to keep confidential information secret from anyone – both the people of Ghent University and those not affiliated with Ghent University – who is not authorized to take note of it. This duty of confidentiality includes the following information:

- information on the internal deliberations that precede a final administrative decision;

by decision-making processes and regulations as known at UGent, and there are normative frameworks to which ZAP members must also adhere.

- medical, social, tax or other data relating to the privacy of other staff members or students;
- confidential commercial, industrial or intellectual data.

The duty of confidentiality continues to apply after the termination of your employment.

The duty of confidentiality is subordinate to constitutional, legal or decree provisions that oblige you to speak.

2. TREATING EACH OTHER WITH RESPECT

Ghent University is open to all staff and students regardless of their philosophical, political, cultural and social background. The institution does not tolerate any form of discrimination and transgressive behaviour, and is committed to fostering a safe and inclusive culture that strives for and promotes equality, values diversity and maintains a positive study and work environment that respects the rights and dignity of all members of the university community. Everyone at Ghent University acknowledges that there is a reason for every boundary and respects the boundaries of others.

You treat everyone at Ghent University and everyone you come into contact with within the Ghent University community with respect and dignity.

You refrain from any form of discrimination and transgressive behaviour, and do not abuse the power granted to you in your role or position.

You do not look the other way when disrespectful behaviour – regardless of severity – occurs or when you become aware of it, and take appropriate action taking into account your own role and position, and in accordance with applicable laws, regulations and policies of the institution.

You comply with the applicable regulations for the supply, availability and use of alcohol, drugs and medication at the institution.

Related internal regulations:

- [Code of conduct on transgressive behaviour](#)
- [Ghent University's declaration of non-discrimination](#)

3. CAREFUL AND SUSTAINABLE USE OF ORGANIZATIONAL RESOURCES AND TIME

Organizational resources include, but are not limited to:

- physical infrastructure such as all buildings, campuses, auditoriums, labs and science parks;
- ICT infrastructure such as all network infrastructure and other physical IT-related equipment (data centres, servers, storage, desktops, laptops, printers, telephones, etc.) owned or used by the institution, as well as all internal and external ICT applications and services managed by or on behalf of the institution;
- physical resources such as office supplies, tools, consumables, and vehicles;
- financial resources such as budgets made available, (cash) money and debit cards;
- property rights to inventions and research results, unless otherwise stipulated;
- the institution's logo and corporate identity.

Organizational resources may only be used by the people of Ghent University and for legitimate activities that are part of the normal functioning and objectives of the university, in particular for research, education and services, and for activities in support thereof, and that take place in accordance with all applicable laws and regulations, policies and agreements made.

Organizational resources remain the property of Ghent University.

You always ensure the careful, sustainable and economical use of the organizational resources that the institution makes available to you (and, if applicable, to yourself as budget holder) for research, work or study. You use them with an eye for economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

You are willing and available to account for the use of those resources.

You actively look for the option with the best value for money and you always comply with public procurement legislation – with particular attention to conflicts of interest – when spending Ghent University's financial resources.

You use organizational resources for their intended purpose and do not make unauthorised use of organizational resources for private purposes or personal gain.

You spend your working time in function of Ghent University. If there is or may be a (possible) conflict between your time spent as a person at Ghent University and your time spent in connection with an external engagement (for example, by but not limited to secondary employment), you should always discuss this openly with your supervisor³.

During working hours, there is a right to respect for privacy, which means that the sporadic maintenance of private contacts is allowed. When maintaining private contacts, it must be indicated that this message is of a private nature. In addition, in the actual content of the message, you must remove any mention of Ghent University, as well as any indication that could lead the addressee to believe that the message was written by you in the context of or as a result of the performance of your duties or your role within the institution.

Related internal regulations:

- [Regulations for the correct use of Ghent University's ICT infrastructure](#)
- [Code of Conduct for the use of the IT system for education administration OASIS](#)
- [Valorisation regulations](#)

4. QUALITATIVE AND ETHICAL RESEARCH AND TEACHING PRACTICES

Ghent University strives for high-quality and ethical research and teaching practices in which, in addition to a reactive policy with regard to violations of academic integrity, preventive efforts

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are also made to improve academic integrity and the general quality culture of research and education.

Everyone at Ghent University is expected to know and comply with the applicable laws and regulations, international standards, policies and codes of conduct regarding academic integrity, research ethics and educational quality assurance.

Ghent University requires all research to meet high ethical standards with regard to, among other things, working with persons, personal data, human bodily material and laboratory animals, but also with regard to, for example, artificial intelligence, dual use and international cooperation (including fieldwork, access and benefit-sharing, ethical dumping). Research that negatively impacts human rights, the environment, health and safety should be avoided.

Guiding principles in qualitative and ethical research and teaching practices are diligence, prudence, honesty and reliability, verifiability, independence and impartiality, and responsibility:

- **Diligence** includes using academic methods and striving for accuracy in the design, conduct, publication and dissemination of research.
- **Prudence** includes acting with foresight and being guided by a desire to avoid harm to others.
- **Honesty and reliability** include not making unsubstantiated claims, reporting correctly on the research process, not fabricating or falsifying data or sources, taking alternative views and counterarguments seriously, being open about margins of uncertainty, and not presenting results as more favourable or unfavourable than they are.
- **Verifiability** means, among other things, that it is clear to others what data you have relied on, how you obtained it, what results you have achieved and by what means, and what the role of external stakeholders has been. If parts of the research process or of the data are not made accessible, you must give good reasons for this. Colleagues must be able to easily follow the method of implementation and phasing of the research process. In any case, this means that the argument must be clear and that the steps in the research process must be verifiable.
- **Independence and impartiality** mean, among other things, that you do not allow yourself to be guided by considerations outside the realm of science (for example, considerations of a commercial or political nature) in the choice of method, in the assessment of the data and in the weighing of alternative explanations, but also in the assessment of research or research proposals by others.
- **Responsibility** means, among other things, that you must consider the fact that you do not operate in isolation as a researcher. Therefore, you must take into account, within reason, the legitimate interests of persons and animals involved in the research, any clients and financiers, and the environment.

These guiding principles can sometimes conflict with each other. For example, responsibility towards a client or with regard to public safety can sometimes limit the transparency and, therefore, verifiability you can strive for.

You refrain from any form of fraud, misconduct, or unacceptable teaching and research practices, including, but not limited to, plagiarism, forgery and fabrication.

Throughout your academic career, you are always actively committed to maintaining the quality of your teaching and research and to applying good teaching and research practices.

As a (doctoral) student, you refrain from any form of fraud or irregularity in accordance with the Education and Examination Code (Doctorate), and you actively work to develop skills that encourage good teaching and research practices.

You always ask yourself whether your teaching or research can raise ethically sensitive questions, and consider what these issues might be and what ethical standards and procedures apply in that case.

You supervise the ethically correct conduct of teaching and research activities and immediately take responsibility when this is not (or appears not to be) the case. If they contain known serious errors, you withdraw publications or, if possible, correct them.

As a lecturer, you are responsible for ensuring that the price of the teaching material is acceptable, manageable and reasonable and is established in a transparent manner.

As a lecturer, you have the freedom in the field of education on the condition that it is based on academic research, on an academically sound approach and on Ghent University's educational vision that is based on multiperspectivism. This educational vision implies that a critical sense, a change of perspective, openness, pluralism and tolerance towards different points of view have a central place in our educational practice.

As an academic, you have academic freedom. This means that as an academic, you have the maximum freedom to conduct research on any topic and communicate about it. This freedom is not unlimited and goes hand in hand with the responsibility to fully pursue the guiding principles of qualitative and ethical research and teaching practices laid down in this Code and the principles of the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity.

Related internal regulations:

- [European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity \(ALLEA-code\)](#)
- [Regulations regarding human rights policy and dual-use research](#)
- [Policy framework for research data management](#)
- [Framework for Good Practice in Research](#)
- [Policy paper on the use of laboratory animals in academic research and education](#)
- [Regulations regarding the procedure for investigating presumed breaches in research integrity](#)
- [Policy on academic publishing](#)
- [Policy on authorship and recognition of contributions in academic publishing](#)
- [Education and examination code](#)
- [Education and examination code for doctoratal matters](#)
- [The TRUST Code - A Global Code of Conduct for Equitable Research Partnerships](#)

5. SAFE AND CONFIDENTIAL HANDLING OF INFORMATION

Information is an organizational resource of special value for Ghent University to which everyone at Ghent University has access when performing their work or studies. Whatever the form of that information, and how it is collected, stored, processed, shared or transmitted (electronic or not), it must be appropriately protected and secured.

The protection of privacy is of paramount importance to Ghent University. The institution pursues a general data protection policy that focuses on the security, accuracy, diligence and responsibility of the processing of personal data and confidential information, together with compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation.

As a public institution, Ghent University is obliged, except in the application of certain exceptions by decree, to communicate all administrative information to third parties in the context of open governance.

Everyone at Ghent University is expected to adopt a responsible attitude towards information they possess, have access to or become aware of, to think about the type of information and to determine whether or not it is confidential information and how it should be handled. Only disseminate information if you are sure that it is not confidential data.

You take the necessary measures to protect information, both on campus, at home, in student accommodation, onsite and offsite, in accordance with our institution's information security policy.

You take the necessary measures to prevent misuse of your research later on. For example, certain (dual-use) technologies or research results are susceptible to misuse because they can be used for human rights violations or can endanger national security due to too wide a distribution.

If you come into contact with personal data during your research, work or study, for example, but not limited to, information about students or other people at Ghent University, you fully comply with the general data protection policy of our institution.

If you receive an application in the context of open governance, you must immediately inform the institution's communications officer.

You do not misuse information that you possess due to your position, not for yourself or for others.

You do not withhold or manipulate relevant information.

You do not try to access information that is not meant for you.

You handle audio and/or visual recordings with care, and you do not share them without the permission of those involved.

Related internal regulations:

- [Generic code of conduct for the processing of personal data and other confidential information](#)
- [Code of conduct for educational data at Ghent University](#)
- [Guideline for the classification of information and data](#)
- [Guideline for the use of mailing lists at Ghent University](#)
- [Guideline for the use of cookies](#)
- [Guideline for the use of \(online\) survey tools](#)
- [Ghent University policy framework for research data management](#)

6. EXEMPLARY BEHAVIOUR, ADDRESSING, REPORTING AND COMPLIANCE

Everyone at Ghent University recognises the positive purpose of exemplary behaviour in complying with the ethical standards laid down in this Code and in stimulating a university-wide ethical organizational culture.

In particular, board members, management, supervisors, lecturers and student representatives are aware of the ethical exemplary role they play within the university community. This exemplary role means, among other things, that they:

- make their exemplary behaviour visible to everyone at Ghent University;
- engage in regular and explicit discussions with the people of Ghent University about the (application of the) Code;
- create a safe space for questions and uncertainties from the people of Ghent University about the (application of the) Code;
- respond consistently and visibly to unethical actions, taking into account their own role and position and provided that this can be done safely;
- actively support the (application of the) Code.

At Ghent University, everyone encourages each other to act with integrity in accordance with the Code.

You discuss questions or uncertainties about the correct application of the Code in your daily work or study practice.

Addressing (apparently) minor integrity incidents at an early stage helps to prevent escalation and normalization. If you observe actions that are or may be in violation of the Code, you are expected to take appropriate action, without endangering yourself. It is best to discuss minor violations in a respectful manner with the person concerned. If this is not safe or if the person does not or will not take the comment seriously, you can share your concerns with your own or another supervisor⁴ or lecturer.

People at Ghent University who do not comply with the Code will be held accountable, for example, but not limited to, during feedback and evaluation interviews.

⁴ This does not apply to professorial staff members, who do not have a supervisor anyway. They can discuss the accumulation of activities with one of their peers if they wish. This does not prevent ZAP members from being bound by decision-making processes and regulations as known at UGent, and there are normative frameworks to which ZAP members must also adhere.

You can always report and submit a complaint via the standard reporting channels that apply within the institution.

The code of ethics bundles and explains the common values and rules of conduct that apply to everyone at Ghent University, in view of the laws and regulations that apply in this regard. The provisions contained therein are based on the underlying laws and regulations. Non-compliance with these laws and regulations may in certain cases be considered as a breach of the employment contract, or as the case may be, the applicable legal, statutory, regulatory or other provisions, by the staff member or student, which may give rise to disciplinary procedures as provided for in the disciplinary regulations for staff and students.