

Ethical Code of Conduct and Principles for Scientific Research University of Antwerp

I. Objective and scope

- i. The University of Antwerp considers it necessary that the institution always respects the necessary ethical standards and values in its scientific research and knowledge creation, so that the quality of the research is guaranteed. In this way, the university can present itself to the government and society as a reliable and responsible knowledge actor and partner. Through this set of guidelines, the University of Antwerp offers its researchers an ethical framework that they are expected to use in all phases of their research. Among other things, these guidelines further explain the procedures for ethical advice, provide the concept of 'academic freedom' with an institutional interpretation, and explain the university's position with regard to important ethical issues such as conflicts of interest, defence-related research, human rights and the treatment of research subjects and animals.
- ii. This code applies to all scientific research carried out in the name of or on behalf of the University of Antwerp, including consultancy and scientific services. This also applies to research within consortia for which the university is not the coordinator. This code covers all actors involved in conducting scientific research, such as members of the AP, OP and ATP, students, volunteer employees, emeriti, consultants and contractors across all scientific disciplines and specific domains. Everyone involved in the investigation is expected to respect this code. This Code of Conduct elaborates on desirable behaviour of researchers during the investigation, whereby each issue must be considered within the appropriate context. In addition, researchers can also gain a thorough insight into research integrity in all aspects and phases of research through the interuniversity [Mind the GAP tool](#). From developing a research design, to developing a Research Data Management plan, to reporting results, dealing with conflicts of interest, scientific communication and evaluating research(ers). In the event of (perceived) violations of this, the Regulations of the Committee for Scientific Integrity will be invoked.
- iii. This code is more broadly embedded in the general policy of the University of Antwerp and has the necessary overlap with other guidelines, both within and outside the university. These are explicitly stated as much as possible. The most important external guidelines to which the University of Antwerp subscribes are the '[Global Code of Conduct for Equitable Research Partnerships](#)', better known as 'The TRUST code', and the '[European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity](#)', better known as the ALLEA code.

II. Ethical Principles and Standards

- i. As a general rule, research activities within the University of Antwerp must take place within the boundaries of all applicable laws and regulations, as well as this code of ethics. Ideally, researchers should conduct a risk analysis prior to the start of the study, describing how potential risks and/or harm to the well-being of participants or third parties will be handled. If necessary, researchers request an ethical opinion from the relevant ethics committee(s) within the university (see Chapter III).

- ii. All ethical standards for scientific research as determined by the University of Antwerp stem from the core principles of quality assurance and risk mitigation. This principle encompasses a wide range of considerations, including:
- The well-being and interests of human participants;
 - The well-being and interests of those carrying out the research activity;
 - The welfare and interests of (laboratory) animals;
 - The well-being and interests of the wider society;
 - Respect for cultural heritage;
 - Respect for nature and the environment;
 - The reputation of the research group, the faculty, the university and the academic practice as a whole;
 - Safeguarding academic freedom.
- iii. For research activities involving human participants (through active participation, observation and/or the use of personal data), the default position of the University of Antwerp is that researchers must always conduct such activities in accordance with the basic principles of this Code of Ethics, in accordance with [the General Data Protection Regulation](#) and the relevant national legislation. Additionally, a formal review process by an ethics committee must always precede such activities. Participants must always give their consent voluntarily and this after a clear explanation of the nature of the study. Where research includes high-risk groups (e.g. children, prisoners, people with mental or physical disabilities,...), particular care should be taken with regard to their well-being and interests.
- iv. In the event that medical experiments involving human subjects are carried out as part of the study, these studies must strictly comply with specific [applicable legislation](#) (in Dutch) and [guidelines](#). Where regulatory approvals and/or permits are required, these must be obtained in good time and finalized before the experiments start, always in accordance with the relevant university and/or departmental procedures. The [Committee for Medical Ethics UAntwerp-UZA](#), legally recognized by the government, provides advice on all ethical aspects in the context of patient care and scientific research.

- v. When animal research is carried out within the University of Antwerp, the research must be relevant with regard to the possible acquisition of knowledge and insights that can contribute to biomedical applications at a later stage. When making this assessment, the welfare of the animals must always be central with a view to the three R's: **replacement** where possible, **reduction** and **refinement** of animal experiments (better known as the *3 R principle*). The University of Antwerp is aware of the fact that the necessity and ethical aspects of the use of laboratory animals are the subject of a public debate, but it is indisputable that medical progress is partly due to animal testing. If a scientist wants to start an experiment with laboratory animals, this must of course comply with all [applicable legislation](#) (in Dutch) and [recommendations](#). The [Ethics Committee for Animal Experiments](#), which is recognized by the government, examines every research project submitted. The University of Antwerp is committed to continuously following developments in the field of animal experiments, always with a view to animal welfare.
- vi. If a research project involves environmental risks (e.g. use of (environmentally) hazardous products, discharge of waste water, storage of gases, working with pathogenic or genetically modified organisms, disposal of cadavers,...), the researchers must respect the necessary safety procedures and, if necessary, apply for the appropriate permits and authorisations, in close consultation with the [Environmental Office](#) of the University of Antwerp.
- vii. Good management of research data leads to a better quality of research and to greater visibility and reuse of research data. Forward-looking and well-thought-out research data management ensures the most hygienic handling of data from collection to processing to archiving, with minimal data loss and maximum sharing and reuse as key assets. The University of Antwerp has developed an ethical and practical framework for the correct handling of research data during the various steps specific to the entire (research) data life cycle. This framework has been elaborated in the ['Policy Plan Research Data Management of the University of Antwerp'](#) (in Dutch) and relates to all research data generated by researchers or students affiliated with the University of Antwerp, whether or not in collaboration with others, or by external parties who use the infrastructure of the University of Antwerp.

When collecting, managing and storing sensitive information and/or personal data in the context of an investigation, particular attention should be paid to the [General Data Protection Regulation](#) and the associated [university policy on privacy and information security](#). It is essential that all sensitive information and/or personal data of participants during and after the study is stored or destroyed in a correct, secure manner, in accordance with the legal obligations and guidelines of research funders in this regard.
- viii. The provisions concerning the financial rights of the institution with regard to research data and findings made by staff members of the institution in the context of their research tasks have been laid down in the ['Policy Plan Research Data Management of the University of Antwerp'](#) and the ['Valorisation Regulations University of Antwerp'](#) (both in Dutch) respectively.
- ix. It is fundamental to academic freedom that the interests of funders and other stakeholders do not

determine the design, conduct, or findings of the research. The policy of the (public or private) client may only be translated into the choice of research themes. The researcher does not renounce his independence by accepting contracts or responding to calls for proposals in this context, provided that he retains the freedom to conduct his research as regards the organisation of the research, the hypotheses, the methods used and the formulation of the conclusions. A scientific decision can only be formulated on the basis of scientific arguments.¹

- x. With a view to international research collaborations, the University of Antwerp is also based on the principle of academic freedom, with due respect for human rights. The university always strives for professional collaboration with established research groups across national borders and political and cultural fault lines. The University of Antwerp values its academic relationships with colleagues and institutions around the world and starts from the point of view that scientific networks can be used constructively in conflict situations where diplomatic channels have failed to date. In such a context, researchers at the University of Antwerp are expected to always reflect on the implications and possible consequences of the research in question. This can be done using the [Strategic Framework for Global Engagement](#). Researchers must also take their responsibility by carefully considering possible cooperation with third parties in advance. The [human rights assessment](#) can provide support in this regard.
- xi. Researchers at the University of Antwerp are expected to always take into account possible political, social and cultural sensitivities, both in their research design and during its implementation. With regard to developing countries, the research activity ideally takes place in collaboration with local research groups. Activities carried out abroad must comply with the legal requirements of the countries concerned, as well as those applicable to Belgium. Specifically with regard to the collection and use of genetic resources during research, access and benefit sharing legislation that may be applicable under the [Nagoya Protocol should always be taken into account](#).
- xii. In the context of collaborations with the defence sector, research must always undergo a specific ethical screening. In addition, each research project must be verified prior to the start of each research project whether it falls under the heading of 'dual-use' research, defined as research that can have both military and civilian applications and/or whether there is potential misuse of research results by third parties. To this end, the University of Antwerp can appeal to the [Ethics Committee for Misuse, Human Rights & Security](#) (see point III). When conducting this type of research, the benefits must always be weighed against the risks of direct or indirect damage on a case-by-case basis. It is important that appropriate measures are always taken to ensure information and knowledge security (see 2.7 above) in order to prevent misuse.
- xiii. The University of Antwerp expects its researchers to always correctly refer to the work and ideas of others in their research and publications, with clear accreditation of the original source. This guarantees the rights of the original author(s) in relation to their intellectual output.²

¹ [Code of Ethics for Scientific Research in Belgium](#), p. 9

² [ALLEA, The European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity](#), p. 8

Specifically with regard to potential plagiarism in project applications for research funding, researchers should always clarify in the application forms for obtaining internal funding who has been explicitly involved in the conceptualisation of the research topic, indicate the contribution of each person involved, as well as indicate whether there are other applications from the researcher(s) concerned that partly or completely overlap with the current application and on which manner.³

Specifically, the University of Antwerp is of the opinion that there is plagiarism in project applications if a significant overlap is established between the current project application and a project application from another researcher, and the description of the division of labour of both applications shows that the overlapping part was not developed by the applicant of the current application and the current applicant does not indicate in any other way that the overlapping work was done by others. delivered. Self-plagiarism occurs when a significant overlap is established between the current project application and another project application from the same applicant and the current application does not contain any information about this overlap.⁴

- xiv. In terms of authorship, the University of Antwerp endorses the [international guidelines](#) of the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors. These guidelines stipulate that authorship should be based on the following criteria: the researcher has made a meaningful contribution to the design of the work, or contributed to the collection, analysis or interpretation of the data; AND the researcher was involved in the drafting or critical revision of the content of the work; AND the researcher is jointly responsible for the final approval of the version that is published; AND the investigator shares responsibility for all aspects of the work to ensure that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of each part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved. In addition, the institution has its own [internal guidelines](#) that elaborate on the criteria for authorship, the responsibilities of authors and the practices to be avoided.
- xv. Researchers take on an important service function by assessing and evaluating publications, applications for funding, applications for research positions and/or PhD dossiers.⁵ The University of Antwerp expects its researchers to do this in a transparent and responsible manner and to make this known in the event of a conflict of interest.
- xvi. Reviewers always respect the confidentiality and rights of authors/applicants and seek appropriate permission to use the proposed ideas, data or interpretations.
- xvii. The specific requirements, expectations and modalities for obtaining a doctorate at the University of Antwerp, as well as the applicable practice for the various parties involved in the doctoral process, are laid down in separate regulations: '[General regulations on obtaining the academic degree of doctor at the University of Antwerp](#)'.

³ [General Advice: Plagiarism in project applications Flemish Commission for Research Integrity](#)

⁴ idem

⁵ [ALLEA, The European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity](#), p. 9

III. Ethics Committees

There are four Ethics Committees to monitor ethical standards within the University of Antwerp: the [University of Antwerp's Medical Ethics Committee](#), the [Ethics Committee on Animal Experiments](#), the [Ethics Committee for Social Sciences and Humanities](#), and the [Ethics Committee for Misuse, Human Rights & Security](#). These ethics committees provide binding advice to researchers if they wish to start a research project that may have ethical implications in terms of subject matter or methodology. A researcher can also request an ethics opinion if requested by the internal or external funder. In principle, it is up to the researcher to decide to which committee an application is submitted, but this does not alter the fact that the chosen committee may decide that the dossier fits better within the scope of one of the other committees.

- i. The [Committee for Medical Ethics \(CME\) of UAntwerp/UZA](#) provides advice on all ethical aspects in the context of patient care in scientific research. The CME is affiliated with the University Hospital Antwerp (UZA) and the University of Antwerp. This committee has been active since 1983 and is officially recognized by the National Council of the Order of Physicians. The committee consists of representatives of both the University of Antwerp and the University Hospital Antwerp and meets on a weekly basis. Specifically, the CME is responsible for: guidance and advice on ethical aspects of hospital care; the assessment of experiments involving human subjects; advice on individual cases where ethical questions are raised. The advice and advice of the CME is confidential. The CME shall consist of a minimum of 8 and a maximum of 15 members, whose mandate shall be renewable for a period of four years.
- ii. Since September 2001, the [Ethics Committee for Animal Experiments \(ECD\)](#) has been monitoring the welfare of laboratory animals. Before an animal experiment can start, it must be submitted to the ECD for evaluation and approval. The University of Antwerp endorses the principle that the importance of animal experiments for fundamental and applied research should be considered in relation to the effect on the laboratory animals involved. The ECD's mission is to ensure that this consideration is carried out in a sound and uniform manner. In doing so, the committee observes the so-called "3R principle" (reducing, refining and replacing animal testing). The ECD is made up of internal and external members with expertise in the field of ethics, alternative methods to animal testing, animal health and welfare, as well as research techniques, experimental design and statistical analysis. The committee, which evaluates files according to a fixed annual calendar, has at least 7 members. Members shall have an unlimited renewable mandate for a duration of four years.
- iii. In 2012, the [Ethical Committee for Social Sciences and Humanities \(EASHW\)](#) was established. Every week, the EASHW discusses the applications submitted by researchers who want to conduct methodological social scientific research, such as interviews, surveys or observational research, in which human participants are involved, with extra attention to sensitive themes and risk groups (children, people with disabilities, prisoners,...). The committee is composed of 9 effective members and 4 observer members, including the chair of the Medical Ethics Committee and representatives of the AUHA partners. A member's term of office shall be four years and shall be renewable indefinitely.
- iv. In 2023, the [Ethics Committee for Misuse, Human Rights & Security \(EC MiHRS\)](#) was established

(previously the Ethics Committee for Science & Technology: dual use, established in 2014). This committee advises and assesses research files with a (potential) military purpose or with a risk of misuse in the context of terrorism or crime. In addition, the committee is also called upon to screen collaborations that may entail risks in terms of knowledge security or human rights violations. In the case of military or dual-use research, researchers are obliged to report to the institution's dual-use contact point (dualuse@uantwerpen.be). The committee consists of 19 voting members, whose term of office is renewable for four years.

IV. Contact point and Committee for Scientific Integrity

Researchers at the university can, with the necessary guarantee of their anonymity, contact the University of Antwerp's Academic Integrity Hotline in case of questions about scientific integrity or to report a perceived violation. In 2010, the [Committee for Scientific Integrity \(CWI\)](#) was established at the University of Antwerp to follow up on perceived breaches of scientific integrity , which deals with cases of scientific fraud in a transparent manner, albeit with due attention to the private sphere. The CWI has an advisory role and, if necessary, submits the file to the competent disciplinary body. She advises the university board on general issues concerning scientific deontology and ethics and takes on an awareness-raising role within the university with regard to raising awareness among researchers about scientific integrity. The CWI is composed of 7 effective members, with a balanced spread over the three major scientific disciplines and the necessary legal expertise is also provided. The mandates have a duration of three years and are not compatible with membership of the disciplinary committees ZAP and AAP, with the mandate of dean and with membership of the [Flemish Committee for Scientific Integrity](#).