

INTEGRITY POLICY



Content integrity policy

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What is integrity?

Integrity is the principle of acting in accordance with values, standards and ethical beliefs, even when these are under pressure. Integrity relates to the content of decisions, the decision-making process itself and the respect shown to every individual.

Acting with integrity operates on multiple levels: the individual, the entity, the organisation and the society.

Why an integrity policy?

This integrity policy is important for many different reasons, both for HOGENT and for staff, students, and other stakeholders:

- It defines the **ethical principles** of the organisation. This ensures that HOGENT and every entity, employee, student and other stakeholders are aware of what **acting with integrity** actually entails for our institution.
- A good integrity policy provides us with the **necessary tools** to treat authority, knowledge, relationships, resources, facilities, infrastructures and the environment in a correct way.
- It holds everybody **accountable** for their own actions and provides a framework to act fast and effective when integrity gets violated.
- It is essential for the **credibility and reputation** of HOGENT.
- It protects our **integrity in relation to third parties** (suppliers, partners and other external parties).
- At the **societal level**, it **strengthens trust** in HOGENT and highlights **HOGENT's active commitment** to promoting integrity.
Integrity violations can damage the credibility of HOGENT and its employees (e.g. researchers) and students, as well as harm the society or the environment.
- It meets the **legal requirements** according to the Special Decree and the Decree on Transgressive behaviour.
- It serves as an addendum to, amongst other things, the Employment regulations and the Education and Examination Regulations (EER) of the university college of applied sciences and arts.
- Perhaps the most important reason; it contributes to an **open and safe environment** where staff and students feel appreciated and know what is expected of them.

Goal of the integrity policy

Firstly, the integrity policy has an **awareness raising function** – it activates us, staff and students, to think about how we can work and study with integrity.

The integrity policy requires an analysis of the risk factors in order to establish a set of practical principles that **guide** the implementation of (new or existing) policies, the development or revision of procedures and day-to-day practices within each entity of HOGENT.

At the end of the day, not everything that happens within HOGENT is contained in (legal) rules and procedures. The reality is much more complex and presents us often with a ‘moral dilemma’¹. This integrity policy provides **support** to act with integrity if a dilemma occurs and contributes to **an open culture** where integrity risks and their resulting dilemmas are open for discussion.

Code of ethics

HOGENT’s code of ethics consists of **seven ethical principles** that together form the foundation of ‘our’ integrity-driven actions. ‘Our’ being **HOGENT as an organisation, every entity within HOGENT, every employee, every student, every partner and every stakeholder**.

The ethical principles are **connected intrinsically**, one principle reinforcing the other, and they help us make good choices in daily operations and in contact with others. Each principle is equally important; there is **no hierarchy** between them. They are **within the frame so you do not harm yourself, others or HOGENT**. These principles enable us to establish concrete, HOGENT-wide behavioural guidelines.

¹ A dilemma is a difficult situation in which somebody has to make a choice between two or more alternatives, where possible alternatives present us with a moral choice.

The seven integrity principles

Principle 1 – Involvement

You feel **connected to HOGENT**, to your job or study, to your colleagues and/or your (fellow) students. You show **dedication and enthusiasm** to help shape things, to contribute ideas and to help build HOGENT.

You **are** also **involved**.

Examples:

- *You participate (actively) in your own way in activities, projects,...*
 - *You show interest in (the work of) others*
 - *You involve others in decision-making*
 - *You help out when necessary, even when you don't really have to*
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Principle 2 – Caring

You **care for humans, animals, the environment and yourself**.

You keep in mind the needs of others, as well as your own. You show empathy and take time to help and support where necessary.

You are understanding towards others and yourself without compromising the interests of yourself, others or HOGENT.

You deal carefully with the provided resources, facilities and infrastructure, and in general with the living environment.

Examples:

- *You help colleagues, fellow students, ...*
 - *You have attention for the personal situation of colleagues/ students without disadvantaging other colleagues, students or yourself.*
 - *You take care of the equipment and infrastructure that you use*
 - *You respect the choices of others, even if you don't always agree, as long as they don't cause harm to others and HOGENT*
 - *You are patient when adjustments and changes occur*
 - *You are tolerant to differences in opinions, backgrounds and behaviours*
 - *You don't gossip, bully or swear*
 - *You support sustainable and ethical practices*
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Principle 3 – Openness

Open communication is key to connection. You can say what you think and feel openly, with respect for others. You make things discussable and **choose dialogue**. That way, you provide insight into things that are relevant for the team, function, range of tasks,... and you create understanding. You also avoid misunderstandings and misinterpretations.

You are **informed**. This does not mean that all information will be shared. What is shared depends on the situation and the context. Both sender and receiver share a **responsibility** in this.

Examples:

- *You communicate with the members of your team about ongoing projects*
 - *You openly discuss issues with the colleague(s) involved*
 - *You listen to other people's arguments*
 - *You express your opinion in an appropriate manner*
 - *You do not hide important information*
 - *You communicate without manipulating*
 - *You make processes and decisions visible and comprehensible to others*
 - *You are open to feedback from others*
 - *You communicate in an honest and clear way*
 - *You handle sensitive information confidentially*
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Principle 4 – Reasonableness

In the context of a certain situation you take into account what is both **practical and righteous**. You consider the circumstances, interests and the consequences. You search for solutions that are **honest and well-considered**, without exaggerations or extremes.

Examples:

- *You do not abuse trust*
 - *You respect other people's responsibilities*
 - *You take decisions based on facts and circumstances that have been carefully researched and considered*
 - *You act similarly in similar situations*
 - *You consider the consequences for others when making decisions*
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Principle 5 – Professionalism

You have **the competencies** to contribute within your function. You can work independently, make decisions, take **responsibility** for tasks and projects within your role. You represent yourself and HOGENT in a **positive way**. You are trusted to do what is reasonably expected from you and to take care in your own well-being and development.

You get **appreciation for your talents, your performances, your skills, your knowledge,...**
You can fully **develop** yourself within your job or studies.

Examples:

- *You take responsibility for the quality of your work*
 - *You do not postpone your work*
 - *You fulfil appointments and deadlines*
 - *You carry out your work accurately*
 - *You are not influenced by personal interests or preferences*
 - *You take responsibility for the choices you made and their consequences*
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Principle 6 – Authenticity

Within HOGENT, you can **be yourself**. You are acknowledged and appreciated, just like you acknowledge and appreciate others.

You do not have to put on a mask. You are honest with yourself and take responsibility for your own choices and behaviour.

You are seen and heard, and you get the space to experiment/ **make mistakes and learn from them**, in which you can make choices and (re)act from your professional and personal self.

Examples:

- *You are honest in your communication to others without hiding behind what others expect from you*
 - *You are consistent*
 - *You dare to be yourself, even though this might go against the grain*
 - *You do what you say*
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Principle 7 – Amazement

You are curious. **You ask questions.** You listen. **You engage in dialogue.**

Amazement can lead to you **thinking different about certain things**, even questioning your own opinion/position.

Examples:

- *You question yourself*
- *You change to the point of view/ perspective of somebody else*
- *You search for solutions*

The examples accompanying the principles provide direction, but are not checklists to be ticked off. They invite reflection at times when you are in doubt. After all, acting honestly and carefully is always about reflection and consideration ...

Integrity toolbox

A good integrity policy is so much more than a description of the ethical principles of an organisation and the resulting behavioural expectations (i.e. the code of ethics). It also provides the necessary tools to promote and ensure ethical behaviour:

1. **Analysis of the integrity risks**

A risk analysis identifies, assesses and manages potential risks that can undermine HOGENT's integrity.

2. **Training and awareness**

The policy must also describe how the organisation raises awareness about integrity and the policy itself among entities, employees and students. This is possible through (dilemma)trainings, workshops and providing manuals.

3. **Monitoring and follow-up**

How can you ensure that the organisation remains its integrity and that every entity, employee, student and other stakeholder acts with integrity? This section outlines the mechanisms the organisation can implement to achieve this.

4. **Evaluation and revision**

Integrity is a dynamic concept, and the integrity policy is periodically evaluated and updated to ensure it remains relevant in changing circumstances. This section describes how this will happen.

5. **Communication and accessibility**

The policy has to be communicated clearly to all entities, employees, students and other stakeholders within HOGENT. This means that the document is accessible, regularly shared and employees know where to find it when they have questions or concerns.

6. **Elaboration of concrete frameworks**

For the biggest and most urgent risks from the risk analysis for which there is still no strategy and/or measure, frameworks can be worked out.

These tools will be further elaborated and operationalised in 2025/2026.