Preamble

The VUB is committed to research freedom for the benefit of humanity. This commitment implies that researchers should be able to form their own judgments free from arbitrary authority. In this way, they can generate results that other researchers and society can rely on. *The Charter for the Researcher* (hereafter 'The Charter') describes the principles and practices of good research for VUB researchers.

Reflection about the ethics of research, its impact on participants, the environment or society, and compliance with relevant laws, is in the first place the responsibility of the researcher. However, there is an increasing need to define clearly the principles and practices that ensure science functions correctly and fulfils its societal role. In this way, the VUB's values can be respected and applied by VUB researchers, and can be understood by all those who work with or come into contact with the VUB.

The Charter fulfils four roles:

- Providing a normative framework and reference point that all VUB researchers - be they staff, students or visitors - are expected to follow.
- Forming a basis for the VUB's policies that support good research practices.
- Enabling the VUB to explain its values and practices to its partners.
- Helping to determine whether violations of good research practices have occurred.

1. Regulatory and Policy Basis

The Charter contributes to fulfilling the VUB's policy priorities, as set out in the *Policy Declaration for 2018-2022*[1] and in particular the priority: *'An Optimal Research Environment: An Ethical Scientific Framework'*.

The Charter respects the founding principles and procedures described in the VUB's *Organic Statute*[2]. The Charter fulfils the commitments resulting from the VUB's status as holder of the *HR Excellence in Research Label*[3] and its endorsement of the *European Charter for Researchers*[4].

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[1] Policy Plan for Research.
[2] Organic Statute
[3] Human Resource Strategy for Researchers.
[4] European Charter for Researchers.

2. Principles of Good Research at the VUB

The Charter is based on five broadly accepted principles: professionalism; responsibility; conscientiousness; accountability and openness. In each case, examples of the application of the principle are given. These principles form both the basis for the good research practices described in section 3, and for a more general conception of 'the good researcher'.

Professionalism

- Treating colleagues with respect, and taking well-founded ideas and arguments seriously.
- Taking care of one's own professional development and helping others with their professional development.
- Carrying out managerial duties appropriately.
- Supervising students in a structured and constructive manner.
- Being aware of and supporting the strategic goals of one's research group[4].

Responsibility

- Adhering to recognised ethical practices and fundamental ethical principles appropriate to their discipline(s) as well as to ethical standards as documented in national, sectoral or institutional Codes of Ethics[5].
- Ensuring that research makes a significant scientific and/or societal contribution.
- Taking account of the relevant interests of those affected by research.
- Taking adequate steps to protect persons, animals, plants, and the environment from possible negative consequences of research.
- Ensuring that, if any aspect of their work is delegated, that the person to whom it is delegated has the competence to carry it out.

Conscientiousness

- Respecting standards of research integrity.
- Reporting research hypotheses, methods, and findings honestly and in a manner that allows critical evaluation by peers.
- Gathering and storing data carefully.

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[4] These can be found in each group's Strategic Policy Fiches

[5] Examples of such codes and guidelines include the ALLEA *European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity* (here); the *Singapore Statement on Research Integrity* (here) and the *Code of Ethics for Scientific Research In Belgium* (here).

- Justifying claims and interpretations of results carefully and clearly.

- Using appropriate methods and clearly defined protocols.

- Using and acknowledging the work of others correctly.

Accountability

- Respecting contractual and legal obligations, including obligations relating to working conditions, obligations resulting from contracts with sponsors and funders, and obligations relating to intellectual property.

- Using research funding and other financial support appropriately and for the purposes for which it was intended.

- Maintaining appropriate records of research, use of funding, and other professional activities.

- Participating in quality control activities[6].

- Reporting conflicts of interest.

Openness

- Publishing and disseminating research results through appropriate channels[7].

- Engaging the public in a manner that makes research accessible to a wide audience[8].

- Seeking opportunities for the social or commercial valorisation of research, and/or opportunities to make research available for public use[9].

- Respecting policies and regulations for Open Access, Open Data and privacy[10].

3. Good Research Practices at the VUB

The following sections provide guidelines and advice for implementing good research practices. The following parts of the research process are addressed: funding; ethical evaluation; scientific integrity; privacy and processing of personal data; data management; publication and dissemination; and

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[6] Information on the VUB's quality control mechanisms is available in the *Central Working Regulations for Research* (here) and in the *Policy Plan for Research 2018-2022* (here).

[7] Guidance on valorisation of research results is available from the VUB's Technology Transfer Office.

[8] WECOM, the VUB's Expertise Centre for Science Communication, is responsible for assisting researchers with public engagement and science communication

[9] The VUB Technology Transfer Office has valorisation rules available here.

[10] The VUB has an *Open Access Policy* that emphasises awareness raising and collaboration between the University Library and PURE (here). The VUB has a *Privacy Policy* that is applicable to data collected by researchers (here). The VUB's *Data Protection Officer* is responsible for the VUB's data protection policies (here).

supervision of researchers. In each section, good practices that apply before, during and after the research are described.

3.1. Funding

VUB researchers treat funding applications as they would any other academic work. The following guidelines define professional practices for applying for and using research funding.

3.1.1. Before

o Provide clear, accurate and detailed information in applications. o Respect the funding body's procedures for peer-review and evaluation. o Be aware of and respect the funding body's conditions for application. o Ensure letters of support or commitment are obtained in a timely manner. o Ensure partners costs are appropriately included in the project budget.

o Apply standards of academic integrity to the application text, so that it does not involve any form of misrepresentation, fabrication, falsification or plagiarism.

o Follow VUB rules relating to obtaining funding from specific sources or for particular activities[11].

o Ensure that formal agreements are approved and signed before the collaboration starts.

3.1.2. During

o Use research funding for the purposes for which it was granted.

o Follow the research funder's procedures in case changes to the use of the funding are necessary.

3.1.3. After

o Retain relevant records relating to the project and its funding, and assist the VUB with any evaluations or audits.

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[11] In particular: VUB *Valorisation Rules* (available from VUB Tech Transfer here); the *Code of Conduct and Financial Management for Fundraising* (available from: VUB Foundation). The VUB Foundation's *Code of Conduct and Financial Management for Fundraising*: This code provides rules and guidance for accepting philanthropic funding for research.

3.2. Research Ethics

Research ethics consists of rules that are intended to protect individuals, animals, plants, the environment and society from possible negative aspects of research. The following guidelines will help VUB researchers fulfil their ethical responsibilities.

3.2.1. Before

o Researchers should identify ethical issues with their research before starting, in order to ensure that they can address the issues and obtain any ethical approvals required by funders, publishers, hosts, or by law.

- The VUB will not release research funding until the required ethical approvals have been obtained, or it can be demonstrated that they will be obtained before the activity requiring approval is due to begin.

- The VUB has the following ethical committees and contact points, which can provide both formal approval and informal advice:

  - *The Ethical Committee for Social Sciences and Humanities[12]* provides approvals and advice for research involving human participants, where the participants are not undergoing medical treatment, the participants are not patients and where medical personnel are not involved.

  - *The Medical Ethics Committee[13]* provides approval for all research that involves experiments on human persons; the use of human tissues; retrospective studies; and clinical trials.

  - *The Ethical Committee for Animal Testing[14]* is responsible for: evaluation of planned and executed animal experiments, i.e. applications and retrospective analysis; formulating criteria for the ethical use of animals in experiments; and offering advice to the labs concerning ethical aspects of animal experiments and concerning the supervisory authority.

  - *The Ethical Committee for Dual Technologies, Military Research and Misuse of Research[15]* provides approvals for research that has (potential) military applications

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[12] Here: Ethical Committee for Social Sciences and Humanities.
[13] Here: Committee for Medical Ethics & Clinical Trials Centre.
[14] Here: Ethical Committee for Animal Testing.
[15] Here: Ethical Committee for Dual Use, Military Research and Misuse of Research Results.

and for research that could be misused to harm people, the environment, animals, plants or property. The committee also provides support in obtaining licences for dual use and military items[16].

▪ In addition, the VUB has the following contact points and offices that support researchers with ethical and legal compliance:

- *Data Management*: The VUB *Research Information and Data Management* department (RIDM)[17] provides support with data management, in particular with Data Management Plans.

- *Data Protection*: The VUB *Data Protection Officer*[18] is responsible for implementing the *General Data Protection Regulation*[19] and related national legislation.

- *Data Security*: The VUB *Information Security Officer*[20] is responsible for monitoring the confidentiality, integrity and availability of data produced by the VUB.

- *The Contact Point for Access and Benefit Sharing*[21] assists with fulfilling the legal requirements for research involving genetic resources and traditional knowledge defined the *Convention on Biological Diversity* and the *Nagoya Protocol*[22]. The Contact Point can also assist with collaboration with developing countries[23].

- *The VUB Service for Prevention and Environment* provides support on security and safety in relation to biological and radiological materials[25].

- *The VUB Legal and Ethics Office* offers legal advice regarding the composition, checking and/or amendment of calls for tender and contracts relating to basic research[24].

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[16] The committee is responsible for ensuring compliance with, among other legislation, *Council Regulation (EC) No 428/2009 of 5 May 2009 setting up a Community regime for the control of exports, transfer, brokering and transit of dual-use items.*

[17] Here: Research Information and Data Management.

[18] Here: Data Protection Office.

[19] Here: General Data Protection Regulation.

[20] Here: VUB Information Security Office.

[21] Here: Contact Point Access & Benefit Sharing.

[22] Here: Convention on Biological Diversity.

[23] See the guidelines in *The Global Code of Conduct for Research in Resource Poor Settings* (here).

[25] Here: VUB Committee for Prevention and Protection at Work.

[24] VUB Legal & Ethics Office.

3.2.2. During

o VUB researchers pay attention for unforeseen ethical issues that may arise during their research. They will contact the relevant ethical committees for advice and will follow procedures for adapting their research in response to such issues.

3.2.3. After

o The VUB will retain ethical approvals and other relevant records in compliance with relevant legal requirements and other rules. Researchers should ensure that any external approvals and other records are shared with the relevant ethical committee or contact point.

3.3. Scientific Integrity

Researchers are expected to respect the highest standards of scientific integrity. The following guidelines define basic good practices regarding scientific integrity:

3.3.1. Before

o Researchers should ensure they aware of fundamental research integrity principles, in particular the following:

- *Fabrication*: Observations or results that are invented without being based on the proposed scientific methods, or reporting of results that are produced without any actual scientific observations.
- *Falsification*: The deliberate mis-reporting or mis-representation of results.
- *Plagiarism*: Deliberate misappropriation of others' original ideas or observations, and acts that violate obligations of confidentiality[25].

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[25] The need to validate new observations by showing that experiments are reproducible should not be interpreted as plagiarism, provided that the methods and data to be confirmed are explicitly quoted. When using text from previous publications in new works by the same author(s), care should be taken to ensure proper references to the original source, and to ensure that it is clear that a previous work is being cited.

- *Questionable Research Practices*: These include, but are not limited to: negligence in setting up, conducting and reporting scientific research; dubious practices regarding authorship; and inappropriate use of research-related property and materials[26].

- *Conflicts of Interest:* Conflicts of interest refer to any interest that may interfere with a researcher's obligation to carry out research with impartiality, rigour, integrity and accountability. Researchers should declare any such conflicts to the ethics committee responsible for approving their research, and if relevant to third parties such as funders and publishers.

3.3.2. During

o VUB researchers should pay attention for violations of scientific integrity. If they need advice, the VUB's Contact Point for Scientific Integrity[28] is available to help them. If they need to report a violation of scientific integrity, they can do so via the Contact Point. Alleged violations of scientific integrity will be treated in the strictest confidence[27].

3.3.3. After

o Follow standard rules and practices regarding the retention and availability of material such as datasets, in order to enable research integrity checks. Researchers should check with their research funders, publishers and colleagues to ensure they comply with any such requirements.

o Correct any errors or inaccuracies in published work – check with publishers about their policies for corrections and errors.

3.4. Privacy and Personal Data

Data protection regulations and guidelines protect individuals' fundamental rights, such as the right to privacy, while providing clarity for researchers who process data. The *General Data Protection Regulation*[28] has been applicable since 25 May 2018, and applies to researchers who process personal data from individuals within the EU and the EEA.

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[26] Further information on these definitions of violations of scientific integrity can be found in the VUB's *Regulations Regarding Violations of Scientific Integrity*. Further information about research integrity and good research practices can be found in the ALLEA *European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity*.

[27] VUB Scientific Integrity Unit.

[28] Here: General Data Protection Regulation.

Researchers should take the following steps to ensure that collection and processing of personal data is carried out responsibly:

3.4.1. Before

o Design the research to take into account the principles of Privacy by Design and Privacy by Default[29].

o Take account of the rights of data subjects (those whose personal data is being processed during the research), and how those rights impact on your research.

o Design projects to minimise the personal data processed, and anonymise data wherever possible.

o Fill in the VUB's internal register for processing activities. This register is managed by the VUB Data Protection Officer.

3.4.2. During

o Take measures to ensure the security of data resulting from the activities, and ensure that such measures are appropriate to the risks involved.

o Respect the data protection principles – lawfulness, fairness, transparency and accountability.

3.4.3. After

o Individuals are entitled to exercise their rights as data subjects under the General Data Protection Regulation. If an individual requests to exercise these rights, forward the request to the VUB Data Protection Officer (DPO). Do not attempt to handle it without first contacting the DPO.

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[29] Privacy by Design and Privacy by Default

3.5. Data Management

Research data is a valuable asset. Good data management allows the verification and replication of research results; ensures that investments made in generating data are not wasted; enables sharing and further use of research data; and stimulates further research. Support and training in research data management is available from the VUB's *Research Information and Data Management* service[30]. The following are key steps to ensure good data management:

3.5.1. Before

- o Researchers should familiarise themselves with the VUB's policy for research data management[33].

3.5.2. During

- o Write and implement a Data Management Plan, particularly where this is required by a sponsor or funder.

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[30] Here: Research Information and Data Management.
[33] VUB Policy Plan for Research Data Management.

3.5.3. **After**

o Be aware of and respect the retention periods for any data they collect, and to ensure that data is deleted once the period has expired.

3.6. Publication and Dissemination

Researchers have an obligation to share their results with the research community through publication and dissemination. The following guidelines define good practices for sharing research results through peer-reviewed publication:

3.6.1. **Before**

Researchers should prepare for publication of their research by ensuring that agreements about authorship have been reached, and that results and conclusions have been recorded correctly. The following guidelines apply:

o *Authorship*: The contribution of researchers to projects is publicly recognised by attributing authorship. Researchers are expected to agree amongst themselves about issues such as the order of authors in publications and the appointment of corresponding authors, paying attention to publishers' rules, and to common practices in their discipline. It is strongly recommended that co-authors come to an agreement about authorship at an early stage of their research collaboration, and keep a record of the agreement. To be recognised as an academic author of a publication, a contributor must meet the following conditions:

o Having made a substantial contribution to the design of the research, relevant data collection, or the analysis or interpretation of the results.

o Being familiar with the entire contents of the publication.

o Participating in the research to the extent that they are able to take public responsibility for the reporting of the project and its results in the publication.

o Having given approval to the final version of the publication. o Meeting any other criteria for authorship, such as criteria defined by publishers. o *Corresponding Author:*

The role of corresponding author is of particular importance, and involves the following responsibilities[31]:

- Taking primary responsibility for communication with the journal to which the prospective publication is submitted.

- Ensuring that the journal's administrative requirements are met. This includes: providing details of authors; ethics committee approval; registration of clinical trials, animal experiments, and collection of personal data; gathering conflict of interest declarations.
  - Ensuring that any tasks delegated to other authors are carried out.

- Remaining available during and after publication to deal with critiques or questions about the published work.

o *Recording and reporting results*: Scientific publication involves recording research processes and results in a way that facilitates critical assessment and verification by others. Respecting the following guidelines will help ensure that your publications constitute a valuable contribution to science:

- Report your scientific findings and the significance thereof accurately and objectively.

- Describe the methods, apparatus and procedures in such a way that other researchers can replicate the research.

- Describe the statistical and analytical methods in such a way that a well-informed reader is able to assess the accuracy of the results.

- Provide an adequate justification of the conclusions drawn.

- Provide appropriate references to and interpretation of relevant previous research and provide adequate recognition and accurate representation of the work of others.

- Researchers have a general obligation to make their findings available to others; it is not acceptable to withhold research results without good reason. Report to the Legal and Ethics Office if other parties (such as sponsors or funders) put you under pressure to withhold or suppress publication of results.

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[31] More details on the role of corresponding author can be found here: ICMJE Definitions of Authors and Contributors.

3.6.2. During

When submitting their research for publication, researchers should ensure they respect peer review processes, and that they provide the correct institutional affiliation:

o Peer review is essential to the impartiality, rigour and credibility of scientific research, and organising and carrying out peer review involves considerable effort. Researchers are required to uphold the practice of peer review, both when submitting scientific publications and other outputs subject to peer review - such as conference proposals - and when acting as peer reviewers themselves.

Scientific authors are required to respect peer review in the following ways:

- Only submitting publications to one journal or publisher at a time, in order to ensure the efforts of peer reviewers and editors are not wasted.
- Following the publisher's rules and guidelines regarding submission and review processes
- Not attempting to identify, contact, or influence peer reviewers.
- Only providing proposals for peer reviewers if the editor, funding source, or other responsible body allows this – authors should check this before providing any such proposals.

Researchers acting as peer reviewers are required to respect peer review by acting in the following ways:

- Treating all information received in the strictest of confidence.
- Complying with the procedures and rules of the organisation requesting the peer review.
- Not taking advantage of any information received, and in particular not using any rejected materials (such as publications or funding proposals) to advance their own activities.
- Declaring any conflicts of interest or other factors that could undermine the impartiality and fairness of the review.
- Only accepting peer review tasks for which they have adequate expertise.
- Respecting deadlines and time scales for the completion of peer review activities.

o Institutional Affiliation

It is important that VUB researchers ensure that their institutional affiliation is cited correctly. This ensures that the VUB gets appropriate credit, for example when research outputs are searched automatically for bibliometric data. VUB affiliation must be cited as follows:

- Always use *Vrije Universiteit Brussel*, not 'VUB' and not translations of the university's name.

- Researchers with joint affiliations should always ensure their VUB affiliation is used as well as any other affiliation.

- Ensure that *Vrije Universiteit Brussel* appears as the first element in a citation of affiliation, or if this is not possible, ensure that it is the second or third element.

- The full postal address of the research unit at the VUB to which the researcher is affiliated should be included, if the publisher allows it.

- Check the proofs of any publications to ensure that details of affiliation have been cited correctly.

3.6.3. After

Once a research output has been published, it is important to ensure the output is recorded:

Researchers are required to record their research outputs in PURE, the VUB's current research information system. PURE is used by a range of bodies – including national and international funding bodies - to formally assess the VUB's research outputs. PURE is also used for other purposes, such as assessing the output of VUB research groups; calculating basic research financing; the evaluation of doctoral students; and the automatic generation of researchers' curricula vitae.

As specified in the VUB's *Central Working Regulations for Research*, recording research outputs in this way serves several additional purposes, including: recognising and evaluating VUB research groups (Art. 20); calculation of basic financing based on recent research output (Art. 62); recording of research outputs to meet publication obligations for, among others, doctoral evaluations and the requirements of external funders; the generation of curricula vitae required for funding applications.

It is advised that – in addition to publications and conference presentations - researchers record the following research activities in PURE.

- hosting academic visitors with a minimum stay of 3 months
- research at an external organisation with a minimum stay of 3 months

- internal and external doctoral theses (as a promotor, co-promotor, advisor or member of the jury)

- peer review and editorial work

- participating in or organizing events
- memberships

- talks or presentations

- press or media participation.

3.7. Research Supervision and Promotion

The VUB is committed to providing an optimal research environment and an inclusive and open research community. Research promotors and other senior academic staff are expected to contribute to this goal as follows:

3.7.1. Before

- Assign specific, responsible and appropriately qualified researchers as promotors. Each research project should have at least one such promotor.

- Pay attention to the number of doctoral students in research groups and academic departments, in order to maintain an active research culture and provide quality supervision.

- Ensure that promotors are aware of and comply with the parts of the teaching and examination regulations that cover supervising students' research projects[32], and any faculty-specific regulations[33].

- Follow relevant guidelines relating to the recruitment of researchers. In particular: *The European Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers[34]* and the VUB's policies on gender and diversity[38].

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[32] Here: VUB Regulations.
[33] Here: VUB Teaching and Examination Regulations.
[34] Here: European Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers.
[38] For information, contact Lisa Wouters.

3.7.2. During

o The VUB emphasises the importance of supporting young researchers during their doctoral or post-doctoral projects. Promotors share part of this responsibility, which they are expected to fulfil in the following ways:

- Ensure that researchers understand the importance of good scientific practices and are able to apply them in their research.
- Ensure that researchers are aware of and comply with this Charter, and any other relevant legal and ethical requirements.
- Refer any problems that fall within the scope of the VUB *Doctoral Regulations*[35] to the *Legal and Ethics Office* as soon as possible.
- Assist researchers in identifying and taking part in both mandatory and (where relevant) non-mandatory training.
- Recognise the contribution researchers have made to publications or other research outputs, preferably by reaching a formal agreement with the researcher at an early stage in the project about how such contributions will be recognised.
- Provide an appropriate working environment, by respecting the relevant VUB employment regulations and policies.
- Help researchers to manage any ethical issues identified before or during the project, where necessary with the support of the VUB's Ethical Committees and/or the *Legal and Ethics Office*.

3.7.3.   After

o Assist researchers with publication, dissemination and (where appropriate) valorisation of their research.

4. Observance and Breaches of the Charter

4.1. *Observance of the Charter*

The Charter is an appendix to the *Regulations for Doctoral Students and ZAP*, and the *Central Working Regulations for Research*. Members of the VUB research community covered by these regulations are

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[35] Available here: VUB Forms and Regulations.

expected to abide by the Charter, and to ensure that those for whom they are responsible are aware of and abide by the Charter.

4.2. Breach of the Charter

The VUB may treat breaches of the Charter as disciplinary matters. The Charter and documents referred to herein may be used to identify whether a disciplinary breach has occurred.

Penalties and Corrective Actions for Breaches of the Charter
The decision about which corrective actions or penalties to apply in cases of breaches is the responsibility of the body responsible for handling the disciplinary case. Corrective actions and penalties for breaches may include:

- Retraction or correction of articles and published materials.
- Withdrawal or repayment of research funding.
- Correction of or termination of research project; prohibition of submitting thesis on the same or a similar topic to that which is subject to the complaint; prohibition on reregistration as a VUB student or researcher.
- Notification of regulatory and professional bodies
- Notification of other bodies involved in research, such as research funders.
- Notification of research participants, patients, and those responsible for medical care of patients.
- Notification of parents of minors involved in research.
- Review of internal management, training and supervision practices.
- The making of a public statement in order to protect the reputation of the VUB.
- Any actions needed to guarantee the safety of research participants, patients, and any other parties involved.
- Actions to address and remedy the specific type of misconduct that occurred.
- Reporting on procedural or organisational issues that the VUB should review.
- Remedial training, mentoring, and monitoring of any subjects of complaints who continue to research, work or study at the VUB.

5. History of Versions

The first version of this Charter was published in 2011. The current version was written in 2019. The Charter was updated in April 2021. The Charter will be revised regularly.