

ERC | Code of Conduct

1. Purpose

The ERC is committed to fostering a supportive, friendly, and professional environment, providing a safe and respectful workspace for all staff and volunteers in all situations. This commitment applies to all interactions and activities undertaken in the context of the organisation's work, whether conducted in person, remotely or through written communications.

This Code of Conduct sets out the standards of behaviour, integrity, and accountability expected of all individuals acting for or on behalf of the organisation. It aims to protect patients, learners, members, partners, and the public; to safeguard the organisation's reputation; and to ensure compliance with applicable national, international and European Union law.

2. Scope

This Code of Conduct applies to all individuals acting on behalf of the ERC, including:

- Volunteers, including but not limited to, voting and associated members, Board members, Science and Education Committee (SEC) and other Committee members, Working Group members and Task Force members.
- Instructors and Educators
- Employees (full-time, part-time, temporary), it being understood that the applicable employment contract and mandatory labor law provisions shall take precedence in case of any conflict.

3. Structure

The document is divided into four sections

1. General principles
2. External relationships
3. Courses and Educational Programmes
4. Appendices

4. General principles

Ethical behaviour refers to actions, decisions, and conduct that are guided by principles of honesty, fairness, integrity, equity, and responsibility. It involves making choices that:

- consider the rights and well-being of others
- adhere to legal and regulatory requirements
- uphold moral standards.

Ethical behaviour is fundamental in fostering trust, transparency, and ethical culture within organisations as it respects the dignity, diversity, and rights of individuals and groups of people.

All persons falling within the scope of this Code of Conduct when acting in the name of or on behalf of the ERC shall:

- **Integrity and Honesty:**
 - act with honesty, integrity, and transparency in all dealings, both within the association and with external parties.
 - accurately represent their qualifications, expertise, and affiliations when required to do so or when relevant.

- **Respect and Diversity:**
 - treat all individuals with respect, regardless of their background, identity, or beliefs.
 - create an inclusive and diverse environment that values different perspectives and experiences.
 - refrain from engaging in discrimination, harassment, or bullying in any form (see in the Complaints Policy).
 - treat colleagues with fairness, equity, and courtesy.
- **Professionalism and Social Media Behaviour:**
 - uphold the highest standards of professionalism in interactions, conduct, and communication (written, verbal and non-verbal).
 - act or make decisions on behalf of the ERC only when explicitly authorised to do so, ensuring that the ERC's values and mission are upheld.
 - avoid any activities that may compromise the reputation, integrity, or credibility of the ERC or its members.
 - engage in respectful debate during decision-making processes, but once a decision is formally adopted by the General Assembly, Board, or Committees, members shall abide by the decision that has been taken.
 - operate within the social media environment and other online platforms in an open, respectful and professional manner that does not bring the ERC, by association or otherwise, into disrepute.
- **Confidentiality:**
 - protect the confidentiality of financial, personal, strategic and any other sensitive or proprietary information entrusted to the ERC.
 - not disclose confidential information without proper authorization.
 - exercise caution when discussing association matters in public forums, ensuring that the information shared is accurate and appropriate.
 - participation in sensitive projects may require a confidentiality or non-disclosure agreement (NDA). Individuals who do not sign the required agreement cannot participate in such work.
- **Accountability:**
 - take responsibility for their actions and decisions, acknowledging both successes and failures.
 - address any mistakes or ethical lapses promptly, openly, and in a way that upholds the ERC's values.
 - cooperate fully with any review or inquiry into governance or ethical matters.
- **Conflict of Interest:**
 - avoid any situation where personal, financial, or professional interests could interfere with duties to the ERC.
 - disclose any potential conflicts of interest in advance and in writing via the approved COI declaration process, or verbally during meetings if a specific conflict arises.
 - avoid situations where conflicted interests might compromise the best interests of the ERC.
- **Compliance with Laws and Regulations:**
 - comply with all applicable laws, regulations, and standards related to the ERC's activities.
 - promote a culture of compliance and ethical behaviour among all members.
- **Social and Environmental Responsibility:**
 - actively contribute to the betterment of society and the community through the ERC's activities and initiatives.
 - consider the environmental, social, and ethical implications of any actions and decisions.
- **Continuous Improvement:**
 - strive for continuous improvement in ethical standards, seeking feedback and adapting to changing circumstances.
 - actively engage in discussions about ethical standards.

- **Use of Resource**
 - use organisational assets, including funds and educational materials, services and other resources belonging to the ERC responsibly and for their intended official purposes only. Permission must be sought for any reproduction outside of their intended use.
- **Human Rights and Non-Discrimination**
 - respect and act in accordance with all human rights laid down in Belgian, European and international legislation.
 - refrain from discriminating on any ground protected under applicable law, including but not limited to age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnerships, pregnancy and maternity, sex, race and ethnic origin, religion or belief, nationality, and sexual orientation¹.

4.1. Compliance

The ERC is committed to upholding these rules of conduct and ensuring compliance with the Code. In case of a violation, appropriate action will be taken.

Failure to comply with this code may result in disciplinary actions, up to and including:

- formal discussions and verbal agreements, formal discussions with written action plans, formal written warnings,
- mandatory training sessions,
- the initiation of dismissal or exclusion procedures, in accordance with applicable Belgian law and in compliance with the ERC's Articles of Association and Internal Rules, and subject to the relevant procedural safeguards.

4.2. Reporting violations

Anyone who witnesses a violation of the Code should report it in accordance with the guidelines and procedure laid down in the Complaints Policy.

While reports can be made confidentially, certain information may subsequently be required to enable a full investigation.

Retaliation against whistleblowers, in the sense of art. 19 of the EU Whistleblower Directive, will not be tolerated².

5. External Relationships

Independence and transparency are key principles for the ethical interaction between healthcare societies and external parties, particularly when dealing with sponsorship and advertising, organising meetings and educational programmes, awarding research grants, and producing clinical practice guidelines.

5.1. Scientific Meetings

The primary objective of medical and scientific meetings is to exchange professional or scientific information.

In scientific meetings, information should be presented in an objective and evidence-based manner, free from the influence of any sponsoring organisation.

Speakers, chairpersons, and organisers must declare any personal, institutional, or commercial interests, as well as any support provided by a sponsor.

A meeting can be recognised as continuing medical education (CME) if

- commercial entities acting as sponsors have no influence on the programme, content, presentation, speakers, or publication of the results.
- sponsorship is accepted only as a contribution to the general costs of the meeting.

¹ Charter of fundamental rights of the EU, 2000/C 364/01, OJ C-364/1.

² Directive (EU) 2019/1937 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2019 on the protection of persons who report breaches of Union law, OJ L.305/17.

5.2. Interaction with medical companies

- ERC shall only interact with companies that agree to the ERC Code of Conduct, and act accordingly.
- In printed or electronic materials or communications for target audiences (e.g. manuals, courses, publications, journals...), representatives of the ERC shall not actively promote, announce, or advertise commercial products in any way.
- Commercial products shall only be referred to by the ERC from a scientific point of view
- In all advertisements by industry, it must be made clear to the reader or target audience that the content is an advertisement and not scientific content under the auspices of the ERC.
- The ERC may allow its members to receive information from business partners only on an "opt in" basis.
- The ERC shall not communicate any member, or participant lists or personal details to third parties, except with the explicit approval of the individual.
- The ERC shall interact with all its business partners equitably.

5.3. Education for Health Care Professionals

- In all educational programmes, information shall be presented objectively and in accordance with the principles of evidence-based medicine.
- Authors of educational materials, instructors, and organisers must declare any personal or institutional commercial interest, or support provided by a sponsor.
- All instructors and educators are required to follow the Code of Conduct (see under Scope). Breaching the code will result in action being taken, and potential loss of accreditation.

5.4. Interaction with NRCs

- ERC will discuss and sign agreements with NRCs setting out the requirements of the partnership.
- NRCs are represented within the General Assembly (GA) by their designated representative, who shall be required to agree to and abide by the ERC Code of Conduct.
- ERC and NRCs will work in partnership to promote and further the mission of the ERC.
- Specific concerns and or disagreements may be raised by either party and will be acknowledged and responded to in accordance with the ERC Code of Conduct.
- ERC will interact with all its NRCs equitably.

6. Courses and other Educational Programmes

This section applies to all instructors (including instructor candidates and instructor potential), educators (including educator candidates), course directors, course organisers and administrators, as well as to those who otherwise assist on courses and educational programmes held under the auspices of the ERC.

While participating in courses, educational programmes, or social events related to courses which are run under the auspices of the ERC, individuals mentioned in the definition above shall:

- fully understand that accreditation and continuing accreditation is dependent on adhering to this Code as well as completing the necessary requirements for re-certification.
- represent information in an objective and evidence-based manner.
- declare any personal or institutional commercial interest, as well as any support provided by a sponsor.
- ensure that the ERC courses are run in accordance with its contemporary Course Rules, including the use of (online, pdf, or printed) manuals, blended learning tools, and other materials to ensure that consistent standards of knowledge and skills are achieved.
- communicate in a polite and constructive manner, aiming to resolve issues in good faith.
- prioritise the learning experience of the participants when balancing interests of different stakeholders.

- co-operate with other faculty colleagues (teaching and administrative) and recognise and respect their individual contributions.
- uphold the reputation of the ERC at all times by promoting the guidelines, values, and work of the ERC in order to maintain the trust and confidence of the members and wider public. Where there is a difference of opinion in relation to the ERC guidelines these should be addressed with the Director of Guidelines.
- avoid any abuse of their position.

Any data collected during the ERC courses or educational programmes is confidential and those accredited by the ERC to teach on its courses must ensure that the information is kept confidential, and that candidate, instructor and/or centre confidentiality is not compromised. Photographs and/or video recordings may only be taken with the prior informed consent of the persons concerned. Those accredited by the ERC to teach on its courses must adhere to relevant data protection regulations.

7. Guidance for raising concerns/complaints

Please refer to the ERC complaints policy. The policy describes the filing and handling of complaints.

8. Review

This code of conduct will be reviewed every three years, or more frequently if required, to ensure its effectiveness and compliance with relevant legislation.

Version 1.0

Approved by the ERC Board on 10th June 2026