



Online Rules of Conduct

For staff and students

Socially safe and ethical behaviour is just as important in digital university life - from lectures and tutorials to Teams meetings and social media - as it is on campus. These Rules of Conduct help to ensure a respectful, inclusive and professional online environment where everyone feels safe and heard.

1. Be respectful and professional

- Treat others online with respect and consideration regardless of their position, background or opinion.
- Use a professional tone in emails, chats, forums and video meetings.
- Avoid sarcasm, cynicism or words with double meanings, which can often be misinterpreted online.

2. Be mindful of the language you use and images you convey

- Consider your choice of words carefully.
- Do not use discriminatory, sexist, racist or offensive language.
- Never send or share inappropriate images, memes, emojis or gifs that could hurt or intimidate others.

3. Respect boundaries and privacy

- Learning and working at the Open University often takes place outside regular working hours. For that very reason, it is essential that we respect each other's boundaries between work, study and private life. Communication outside regular working hours is of course permitted, but an instant response should not necessarily be expected.
- Do not record video conference meetings or other meetings without the express consent of all participants.
- Do not share others' personal information or confidential information without their consent.

4. Online discussions: focus on the content, not the person

- Lively substantive debate is welcome; personal attacks are not.
- Be mindful of your tone and the purpose behind your words: criticism is allowed, but should always be constructive.
- Do not vent your frustration; step back if you feel angry or hurt.

5. Be alert to power dynamics

- Lecturers, supervisors and managers bear an additional responsibility when it comes to ensuring a safe online setting.
- Do not use online channels to make jokes, innuendos or remarks that arise from or exploit a position of power.

6. Use digital resources for their intended purpose only

- Do not use university channels for commercial purposes, gossip or harassment.



- Keep discussions within the confines of the course, project or meeting.
- Keep work and private life separate, including online.

7. Use of generative AI

The use of generative AI in teaching, research and support is permitted under the current policy, provided it takes place in a transparent, honest and ethically responsible manner.

8. Behaviour on social media¹

- If you associate yourself online with the university (e.g. through your profile), make sure you act accordingly.
- Be responsible in what you say publicly about colleagues, students, teaching or research.
- Freedom of expression is important, but it is not a licence for hurtful or harmful behaviour.

9. Online meetings and teaching

- Turn your camera on for small online meetings, unless agreed otherwise.
- Use a clear and neutral background, dress appropriately and maintain a professional attitude.
- Respect speaking time limits and show you are listening, including when online.

10. Report transgressive behaviour

- If you feel unsafe, belittled or that someone is acting inappropriately with you online, report this to your lecturer, manager, confidential adviser or the Social Safety and Integrity Hotline.
- As an 'online bystander', you also have a responsibility. Speak up or report.

11. Finally: be mindful and engaged

- Online behaviour comes with consequences. It has just as much impact as behaviour on campus.
- If you are unsure whether something is appropriate, ask yourself: would I say or do this if we were in the same room together?

These Online Rules of Conduct are linked to the university's General Code of Conduct and staff and students receive them during the onboarding process. Repeated transgressive behaviour may result in disciplinary measures, in accordance with the Students' Charter, the Open University's Internal Rules and Rules of Conduct or the Collective Labour Agreement for Dutch Universities.

These Online Rules of Conduct were adopted by the Executive Board on 7 October 2025 following consultation with the Management Team. The Online Rules of Conduct are periodically evaluated and updated where necessary.

¹ See also: KNAW (2021). *Academische vrijheid in Nederland - een begripsanalyse en richtsnoer*. [Academic freedom in the Netherlands: a conceptual analysis and guidance] Amsterdam, KNAW