

The Hague University of Applied Sciences (THUAS)

Ethical considerations when working with external partners

24 January 2024

Introduction

De Haagse Hogeschool (THUAS) has laid down its mission, values and strategic ambitions in the Institution Plan 2023-2028. This institution plan is the framework for our actions; for THUAS as a whole and for each of our students and staff individually. We contribute to a sustainable and just society, educate students to become critically thinking and learning world citizens and work with our partners to find concrete answers to social issues. We do this on the basis of our core values Curious, Connecting and Caring.

Co-creation with the professional field is indispensable for our education and research and prominently included in our institution's plan. We collaborate intensively with our external partners: our students do internships with companies, we participate in research consortia, formulate joint ambitions with governments and pull together with other schools. We cooperate with a wide variety of partners, each with their own mission and values. It is precisely in bringing together interests and bridging differences that co-creation emerges.

In some cases, however, the desire to cooperate may clash with our own values or detract from our mission to contribute to a sustainable and just society. In such cases, it is important to include ethical considerations when choosing to cooperate.

It is worth noting that such ethical discussions quickly lead to polarisation. They are sensitive in the face of academic freedom, public perception, social safety and the balance between justice and cancel culture. This makes it all the more important to have the conversation together, to view situations in a nuanced way and to reason from the substance. This guide aims to help with ethical considerations regarding external cooperation.

Context: strategy, policy and educational field

Our ethical considerations regarding external cooperation are primarily based on our Institutional Plan 2023-2028. Our actions (and thus the choice to enter into cooperation or not) must contribute to our mission, fit our three values and be in line with our strategic ambitions. This applies to cooperation on education, on research and on operations.

Specific ambitions that touch on this are:

- 6: Teaching and research with external partners;
- 9: Integrating sustainability and equity in education and research;
- 10: Sustainable and equitable business practices;
- 12: Inclusive culture.

The vision document 'An inclusive university of applied sciences' (November 2021) elaborates on how THUAS gives substance to this inclusive culture. This is done on the basis of three

principles: anti-discrimination, inclusive manners and inclusive governance. This vision contains general principles and concrete guidelines regarding inclusion and thus provides ethical considerations when entering into a collaboration (with whom, but most importantly: how). A concrete translation of this includes the Manifesto against internship discrimination.

A Sustainability Action Plan outlining our sustainability ambitions is in the making. Cooperation with the fossil industry will be more explicitly reflected in this.

Furthermore, THUAS has committed to a sustainable and just world by signing the SDG-charter. THUAS is committed to achieving the sustainable development goals, such as Gender Equality (SDG 5), Responsible Consumption and Production (SDG 12) and Climate Action (SDG 13). Collaborations with external parties should preferably contribute to these SDGs and in any case should not detract from the SDGs.

Since 2009, THUAS has been a UNESCO school. International connectedness, tolerance and solidarity are key objectives for schools that are members of this international school network. Schools are committed to the four UNESCO themes: peace and human rights, world citizenship, intercultural learning and sustainable development. THUAS pays attention to all four themes and includes them when engaging in collaborations with external partners.

Cooperation and equal opportunities are key themes in the Hague Educational Agenda 2022-2026 (HEA). The municipality of The Hague, THUAS and other educational institutions pull together when it comes to educational quality, accessibility and the contribution of education to the broad welfare of all inhabitants of The Hague.

Finally, THUAS also relates to the wider educational field in its own ethical considerations. National government legislation, the education policy of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (OCW), sector agreements with the Association of Universities of Applied Sciences and knowledge exchange with other educational institutions. A concrete example of this is the Knowledge Safety Desk of the Ministry of OCW, where THUAS can get advice regarding specific collaborations in relation to knowledge safety. THUAS is therefore not alone in its ethical considerations.

What are our ethical considerations?

Basically, THUAS is extremely positive about entering into collaborations with external partners. We think in terms of opportunities, look outwards and, where possible, cooperate with other organisations. Knowledge arises in the exchange, co-creation is a cornerstone of our institutional plan. The purpose of this memorandum is certainly not to inhibit cooperation, but rather to enable intensification through clear frameworks.

When embarking on a partnership, we include ethical considerations across the board. Sustainability, justice and inclusion are the most salient of these. A cooperation should preferably contribute to these goals, but in any case should not detract from them.

Making that assessment is pre-eminently a responsibility of all of us. Staff and students are primarily responsible for identifying opportunities for cooperation and considering whether such cooperation is appropriate. This is not just a practical choice; based on our institutional plan, it is important that everyone feels ownership of our mission and values. In case of large-scale collaborations or doubts, we consult each other. The Public Administration Department can advise on this.

When considering whether a cooperation is appropriate, we distinguish between the content of the cooperation and the profile of the partner.

- Content is leading: Does the collaboration contribute to our mission? It is impossible to indicate in advance of all possible collaborations whether they are desirable; the key is *explainability*. Can THUAS explain why a collaboration contributes to our mission and fits our values? It is important to make this explicit in advance, both for ourselves and for the external partner.
- We also consider the profile of the external partner. Are the partner's mission and values compatible with those of THUAS? Does the partner demonstrate acting in line with its mission and values? Have there been any incidents that detract from the partner's profile? Using a 'declaration of honour' can support this.

In principle, THUAS only initiates cooperation if the assessment on both aspects is positive. In exceptional cases, the profile of an external partner may not fully satisfy, but the content of the cooperation more than compensates. In all these considerations, there will be a large grey area. THUAS considers it important to seek nuance, put content first and substantiate considerations transparently. For that reason, THUAS does not exclude specific partners, but will always make an individual assessment. This does not detract from the high standards we set, as we are 100% committed to a sustainable and just society.

Working arrangements

- ✓ Colleagues are primarily responsible themselves for entering into and maintaining external cooperation. Therefore, assessing whether a collaboration fits within our mission and values is in principle a consideration that colleagues make themselves. This suits the professionalism of our colleagues and our content-driven partnerships.
- ✓ We make explicit what trade-offs we make when cooperating with external partners, both for ourselves (internally) and for the partner (externally). This enhances explainability. We will eventually work with a 'declaration of honour' for external partners.
- ✓ We provide awareness and education on the importance of cooperation with external partners, including considerations when cooperation is/is not desirable.
- ✓ In case of large-scale cooperation or a formal cooperation agreement, or in case of serious doubts, the Department of Administration is contacted. Formal cooperation agreements are included in the register managed by BZ.
- ✓ Where necessary, we seek external advice from, for example, Association of Universities of Applied Sciences, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science or the Office for Knowledge Safety.
- ✓ We are attentive to ethical considerations even after the start of the collaboration: incidents during the collaboration can also be reasons to reconsider a collaboration.
- ✓ We organise knowledge sharing in an THUAS External Relations expertise network, with participants from all faculties and Centres of Expertise.