

TEACHING PROFESSIONAL ETHICS: SHAPING CIVIL SERVANTS

Integrity Education in University-level Public Administration Programmes

Preliminary study by the Dutch National Integrity Office (BIOS)

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword	3
Executive Summary	4
Introduction	5
Integrity of Civil Servants	5
Shared Responsibility	5
Disturbing Signals	6
Reader's Guide	7
1 The Role of Higher Education in the National Integrity System	8
NIS and Professional Ethics	8
Learning to Stand Firm	9
"Living" Integrity	10
2 Teaching Professional Ethics to Future Civil Servants	11
Introduction	11
Professional Ethics: Code and Character	11
Striving for a Professional Ethical Attitude	12
Teaching Professional Ethics	12
Conclusion	14
3 Professional Ethics in University-level Public Administration Programmes	15
Introduction	15
Reader's Guide	15
Conclusion	20
4 Conclusions and Recommendations	21
Introduction	21
1 Take responsibility	21
2 Don't be afraid to be normative	21
3 Develop practical skills	22
4 Provide an Ethics Course	22
5 Take a comprehensive approach	22
6 Policy-makers: carry out a follow-up study	23
7 Authorities: strengthen the introductory course	23
Conclusion	24
About the Authors	25
References	26

FOREWORD

Emphasis on the right competencies and values in Dutch public administration programmes is very important for the quality of our public administration. Most public administration students will end up working in or around the public sector after their studies as civil servants, advisors, administrators or politicians. The BIOS study on the attention to ethics and integrity in Dutch public administration programmes is important for this reason alone. The results provide us with a mixed picture.

Dutch public administration programmes hardly pay specific attention to ethics, values and integrity – or on the normative aspects of administration and politics general – in the literature referenced and course material. This picture also emerges from interviews with key stakeholders. A few programmes include a dedicated course. A commonly held view is that normative issues are automatically dealt with in other subjects or form part of academic development in a broader sense. The question of course is whether that is enough.

Do we now have reason to be very pessimistic? Not necessarily. A large-scale international survey among public administration students in which I have been involved over the past few years shows that they are motivated by the public cause when they start their studies, appreciating the values associated with public service. They consistently score higher on public service motivation and public values than business administration students. This value orientation is probably an important reason to actually enrol in a public administration programme, i.e. there is a certain psychological preselection.

At the same time, these studies show that student recognition of public values and motivations and their preference for public office remains stable or diminishes slightly during study programmes. Therefore, more work needs to be done. In this respect, the results support those of the BIOS study. With regard to this issue, we can learn something from many MPA programmes in the United States, where a compulsory course on ethics is practically standard in the study programme. In short, the results of the study raise important questions about the importance of normative issues and moral competencies in the prior education of civil servants and introductory courses and on-the-job training throughout their careers.

The Ien Dales Chair and CAOP will continue to put these questions on the agenda. This report is an important step in the right direction. All of us responsible for study programmes for (aspiring) public servants, and not only for those at universities, should continually ask themselves how effective and ethical 21st century administrative craftsmanship should look like in the. And how they can adequately prepare future civil servants and administrators for a rapidly changing working environment characterized by frequent and complex moral dilemmas. This study highlights the key importance of this this at a crucial juncture, which is why I heartily recommend it to you.

Prof. Zeger van der Wal

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

University-level programmes in public administration in the Netherlands are not making sufficient efforts for civil service ethics education. It is more sideshow than purposive moral shaping of future civil servants. This is shown by interviews which BIOS held with thirteen representatives of eight university-level bachelor programmes and eight master programmes in public administration in the Netherlands.

Ethics education in public administration programmes is implicit, limited, fragmented, intellectual and optional. Students receive very little assistance in their moral development to become good public professionals. Practical objections and other priorities play a role here. However, the main obstacle is the resistance to a more normative, practical and developing content of ethics education. Students are therefore insufficiently prepared to begin a career in public service with a basic qualification in ethics.

There is much room for improvement. There is actually a great willingness, and there are many initiatives, to make improvements. BIOS is submitting seven recommendations to educational institutions, policy-makers and government employers:

- 1 Take responsibility.
- 2 Don't be afraid to be normative.
- 3 Develop practical skills.
- 4 Provide an ethics course.
- 5 Take a comprehensive approach.
- 6 Policy-makers: carry out a follow-up study.
- 7 Authorities: strengthen the introductory course.

BIOS handled the coordination, interviews, conclusions and recommendations with assistance from CAOP. At the request of BIOS, Willeke Slingerland (Saxion University of Applied Sciences) and Wouter Sanderse (Fontys University of Applied Sciences) contributed to the underlying theoretical framework.

In the introduction BIOS outlines the reasons for this report and the underlying questions. In Chapter 1 Willeke Slingerland describes the role and responsibility of the educational system in a national integrity system. In Chapter 2 Wouter Sanderse shows what a professional ethical attitude is and how it can be developed. In Chapter 3 BIOS presents the results of the interviews. In Chapter 4 BIOS assesses these results and makes seven recommendations.

INTRODUCTION

Integrity of Civil Servants

How do study programmes in the Netherlands contribute to the moral development of prospective civil servants? It takes a broad study to answer this question. About 1 million civil servants, from all kinds of educational backgrounds, at different levels, work for the government.

Still, in order to be able to form an impression, BIOS carried out a preliminary study on the professional ethical education of university-level public administration students. This programme focuses on public administration. Many graduates find work as a policy-maker, manager, adviser or administrator in the public sector. What kind of moral education do they receive? What do they know about the responsibility and ethics of a civil servant or administrator? What do they learn about integrity?

Shared Responsibility

Government employers carry a major responsibility for the government's integrity. Section 12 of the (Dutch) Central and Local Government Personnel Act and the mutually agreed Basic Integrity Standards for Public Administration and the Police Force form the starting point. For instance, an integrity policy needs to be developed and determined, various schemes and registers need to be maintained, risk analyses need to be carried out and there needs to be a focus on integrity throughout the HRM cycle: from recruitment and selection, through making an inventory of vulnerable positions, to offering training and schooling.

Government employers should therefore create a working environment in which civil service ethics are given proper attention and can thrive. BIOS advocates a comprehensive approach for this, and has developed an infrastructure for integrity management for this purpose. Of course professional ethics instruction starts at an earlier stage. It builds on the general moral education which children receive. Parents and educators lay the foundation. They teach children what is appropriate and inappropriate, which general moral rules they should observe and how, for example, they can be respectful, patient, curious and compassionate.

The educational system also plays an important role. As Willeke Slingerland shows in Chapter 1, the educational system forms an important part of our national integrity system. In school, children ideally develop a general moral sense: honesty, respect, responsibility. They learn to get on with classmates and, through various subjects, gain deeper insight into their civic role in society.

Students are particularly prepared for the labour market during the final stage of their educational career. In this stage, they are also able to learn about the ethical aspects of their future jobs and how to deal with them. Prospective civil servants will therefore also have to develop a sense of morality. In Chapter 2 Wouter Sanderse shows that such a development calls for more than just the transfer of knowledge. We therefore hope that curricula will contribute to the moral development of students, which is required for the integrity of the civil service.

Universities are increasingly pointing out the importance of moral education in the educational system. For example, the law faculty of VU University Amsterdam has identified a demand for "lawyers who can see beyond the legal-technical aspects of a case, who appreciate the fact that something which is forbidden is not necessarily allowed" (Breedveld, 2016). In his inaugural address, Prof. Wempe called on universities to "ensure that students learn to be guided by their values in their studies and, later on, in their work so that they will discover what their roles are in the greater scheme of things" (Wempe 2016).

Disturbing Signals

The question is: How does the educational sector contribute to professional ethics instruction? The initial signals are disturbing. In a recent debate with the Polish top economist Tomáš Sedláček, Joris Luyendijk argued that universities, which instruct economics and business administration students, share responsibility for the moral system failure in banks. They argue that universities pay little or no attention to ethical development (see [YouTube](#), 00:11:00).

The same position emerged earlier on from a survey among 157 HR professionals employed at Dutch companies with over 250 employees. More than 90 per cent of these professionals believed that the educational system has an important role to play in the ethical and moral development of students, but only 50% of them thought the educational system is doing enough about this (KPMG 2009). One out of every three respondents is dissatisfied with the ethical and moral development of graduates and labour market entrants.

Other researchers also think ethics should play a more prominent role in higher education. For example, Hoogervorst and Desmet (2015) showed that managers need to be made more aware of ethics. They argued that the educational system can make an important contribution by teaching students that it is not only about the results, but also about the way these results are achieved.

These examples are from the corporate sector. However, similar signals are coming from the public sector. Heres (2016) recently carried out a study on top managers in public office. According to Heres, bachelor and master programmes in public administration, business administration and related fields of study mainly give instruction based on a techno-economic reality. There is not enough focus on moral reasoning and the moral aspects of policy-making and decision-making.

To check these signals, we carried out a survey of the course material of the public administration programme (see insert). Seven editions of *Openbaar Bestuur* (Public Administration), a much-used textbook, were examined for content on integrity and professional ethics. We also did not find many handles here for students as far as their moral development is concerned. Integrity and professional ethics are dealt with summarily and in a fragmented manner.

OPENBAAR BESTUUR (PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION) LITERATURE STUDY

The textbook *Openbaar Bestuur* (Public Administration) is an important source of information for first-year public administration students. What will we find on civil service integrity and (professional) ethics in seven successive editions, covering a 35-year period (1977-2012)?

The word “integrity” did not appear (in the TOCs and indexes) until the last three editions (2001-2012). In these editions, integrity is referred to as “moral rectitude” in a short section. A few incidents concerning civil service and administrative integrity are also highlighted, and the authors emphasised that authorities (should) actively pursue an integrity policy in order to prevent such incidents from occurring.

It is notable that “integrity” is consistently defined very narrowly and negatively as “satisfying the standards, and the absence of fraud, corruption and other transgressions”.

This view on integrity is not in line with the developments which have taken place in this area over the past ten years. Integrity is not only about the absence of “criminal” behaviour, it is also (and especially) about promoting morally responsible behaviour.

The term “(professional) ethics” is used in both the earlier and later editions. However, it is only used in a very abstract way. The textbooks provide very little information on the practical application of integrity or civil service ethics. Students do not learn what the values and standards of being a good civil servant are exactly, while a great deal has been set out on the subject: in all kinds of codes, oaths, the (Dutch) Central and Local Government Personnel Act and the General Civil Service Regulations. As a result, students do not learn about the practical application of integrity and civil service ethics.

Reader's Guide

The key question of the study was: do university-level public administration programmes in the Netherlands contribute enough to civil service ethics instruction? We will answer this question on the basis of the following subquestions:

Chapter 1: What is the role of higher education in the national integrity system?

Chapter 2: What defines proper professional ethics education?

Chapter 3: How is professional ethics education currently implemented in university-level public administration programmes in the Netherlands?

Chapter 4: Is this professional ethics education up to standards? If not, how can it be improved?

In Chapter 1 Willeke Slingerland describes the role of the educational system in a national integrity system. In Chapter 2 Wouter Sanderse shows what is required to develop a professional ethical attitude. In Chapter 3 BIOS presents the results of a study on professional ethics education in university-level public administration programmes in the Netherlands. In Chapter 4 BIOS concludes that this education is still not up to standards and makes seven recommendations for improvement.

This report originally appeared in Dutch as *Beroepsethiek in het onderwijs: van bijzaak naar Bildung. Morele vorming en integriteit bij wo-opleidingen bestuurskunde*. We translated all quotations from Dutch sources in this report, both from interviews and (academic) literature.

1 THE ROLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE NATIONAL INTEGRITY SYSTEM

Willeke Slingerland

NIS and Professional Ethics

Integrity is not only the responsibility of the government, but also of every institute or organisation. The “National Integrity System” or NIS country study (Slingerland et. al. 2012), which was presented by Transparency International in 2012, is based on the belief that fighting against corruption and promoting integrity requires an integrated integrity system in which everyone has a role to play, learning from and with others about how integrity can be better guaranteed. This European country study assessed the ability of every country to promote integrity and prevent, discourage and punish corruption.

The thirteen main government and non-government organisations (so-called “pillars”) were examined, including the Lower House, the public sector, the media, civil society and the corporate sector. These pillars rest on the politico-institutional, socio-political, socio-economic and socio-cultural foundations of society. This included an assessment of whether integrity is sufficiently regulated, the degree of self-regulation and how this works out in practice.

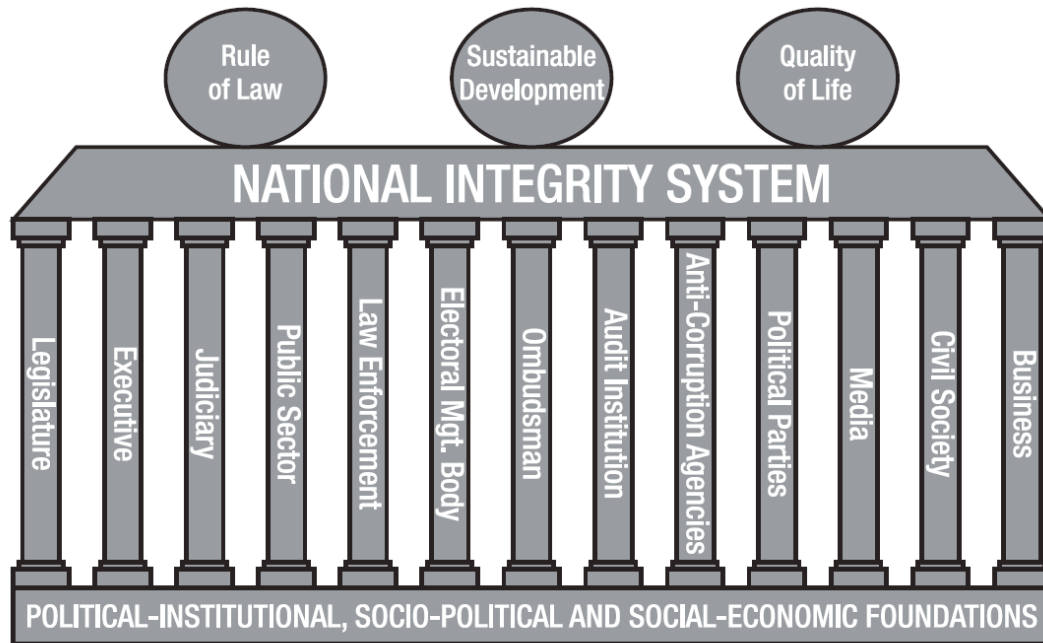
In addition to the literature study, more than forty representatives of governments, civil society and the corporate sector were asked about their role in this integrity system. The assessment focused on the factors which are particularly relevant to the promotion of integrity, namely the independence, transparency and responsibility of each pillar.

The metaphor of the Greek temple is used to showcase the NIS model. This concerns the relationship between and dependency of the various institutions and practices. If one of the pillars were to weaken, it would lean more heavily on the other pillars, risking their collapse and undermining the entire NIS. On the other hand, properly functioning institutions set an example for other institutions and it is collaboration between these institutions which makes learning from and with each other possible. This makes the entire NIS stronger.

It was concluded that the Netherlands has a relatively strong NIS but that many find discussing the (possible) unethical behaviour of immediate colleagues and confronting them about it difficult. Also, it is not always clear whether something is an integrity violation or not. Partly for this reason, the government has invested in the development of integrity policy over the past few years. The NIS shows that the pillars which represent the authorities are making progress with the introduction of integrity laws and the implementation and monitoring of integrity policy. Offices such as BIOS can provide assistance with this, by providing information, manuals and trainings courses to ministries, local councils, water authorities and other government organisations, by which means they can further shape their own integrity policy. The Transparency International report rated BIOS as a very useful organisation for promoting integrity in public administration (Slingerland et. al. 2012: 198-201). BIOS was even referred to as a best practice in the EU Anti-Corruption Report (European Commission 2014: 10).

However, this does not alter the fact that there are vulnerabilities in the Dutch NIS. The socio-cultural basis of the NIS is particularly vulnerable since not enough attention is paid to the younger generation’s awareness of norms and values (Slingerland et. al. 2012: 40-41). It also appears that the public has not been educated and that Dutch civil society hardly plays a role in raising awareness of integrity among its citizens.

The NIS concept



Learning to Stand Firm

Civil society consists of numerous organisations concerned with important public interests such as human rights, health care and education. The NIS makes the realisation of integrity contingent on the existence of an active civil society dedicated to achieving an ethical society (Slingerland et. al. 2012: 241-253).

The role of education is highly relevant here, since there is no clear-cut integrity framework. You need to have sufficient knowledge, skills and competencies in order to be able to identify integrity issues and dilemmas and do something about them. Upbringing and education are the key concepts here. With regard to the integrity of the public administration, government organisations train their civil servants in this. The role of the educational system in integrity education and the attention paid to professional ethics within the system are both minimal (Slingerland et. al. 2012: 40-41, 123-127).

However, this raises the question whether highly educated professionals and civil servants can be encouraged to develop their integrity awareness if no or little attention was specifically paid to this during their prior education. It is quite legitimate to ask whether enough attention is paid to professional ethics in higher education.

GIVING VOICE TO VALUES

Education specialist Mary Gentle (Yale University) wrote the book *Giving Voice To Values: How To Speak Your Mind When You Know What's Right* (2010). This book is intended for professionals in the corporate sector, but the didactic concept can also easily be applied in higher education.

Gentle offers her readers an innovative method teaching them skills which enable them to translate the prevailing values into words and actions and to align their professional attitude with their principles. The method pays attention to the pressure sometimes exerted on people to stray from their norms and values. It shows people

how to resist this. The method is now used by more than 800 educational institutions and organisations to give practical shape to ethics.

The method provides advice, practical exercises and scripts on how to deal with ethical dilemmas. It is not a question of discussing shared values but of talking through the practical application of these values with one another. It transpired that it was discussing ethical issues in particular that proved to be a weak point of the Dutch NIS. The interactive *Giving Voices to Values* curriculum can be accessed free of charge on the internet (marygentile.com).

“Living” Integrity

The educational system educates the professionals and civil servants of the (near) future. It is important that professional responsibility is discussed within the educational system. Lecturers and students ideally enter into a discussion about the norms and values which apply in our society and how these correspond to and/or differ from the norms and values which apply in their own profession or sector.

The educational system has a role to play within the NIS, as a trainer of professionals and (in particular) civil servants. As already stated, education plays a role in teaching how to recognise integrity issues, in helping to form an opinion and in deciding on an appropriate course of action. This not only requires a theoretical basis, but also an introduction to these issues in practice. This can be done in the form of case-studies, role-plays, experiments and TEDx conferences. Integrity must be practised and “lived”.

Knowledge of the applicable rules is important, but it is particularly important to identify and weigh up dilemmas and apply ethics to everyday life and future professional practice. This essentially concerns *Bildung* (edification); the intellectual, cultural and (especially) moral education of students and lecturers. Throughout the world there are good examples of concrete educational concepts which satisfy this requirement (see insets).

SUMMER SCHOOL FOR DEMOCRACY

Another example is from Romania, where the *Summer School for Democracy* is organised (Slingerland et. al. 2014: 67-68). The authorities and civil-society organisations organise this summer school, in which approx. 200 students enrol every summer. These young people receive training and together set to work on issues such as the rule of law, transparency and norms and values. The teaching methods range from lectures, fora discussions, theatre to preparing policy papers. Both lecturers and students put ethics into practice during this course. Awareness is the main objective.

The strength of the programme lies in the collaboration between government organisations and civil society. This collaboration makes it possible to relate various everyday experiences to the issue in hand. This also means that the speakers must be from various walks of life (journalists, judges, CEOs and activists) so that it will be possible to draw upon theory and, above all, their practical experiences. It is important that there is an open and informal atmosphere and that emphasis is placed on acquiring skills rather than knowledge. In this way, students will develop a moral compass and learn how to act before they enter the labour market.

2 TEACHING PROFESSIONAL ETHICS TO FUTURE CIVIL SERVANTS

Wouter Sanderse

Introduction

Government institutions promote the professional ethics of current civil servants in a number of ways. However, most civil servants will have already received moral education before they enter government service, during their preparatory education in, for example, public administration. This does not mean that Dutch government is no longer responsible for promoting the professional ethics of civil servants. However, it does mean that it makes sense to seriously examine the quality of the prior education of future civil servants. The main theme of this chapter is what professional ethical education in a study programme such as public administration is actually about. How can prospective civil servants be educated so that they have a basic qualification in terms of professional ethics?

Professional Ethics: Code and Character

What does it mean for civil servants to have a code of professional ethics? In practice we use all kinds of concepts, such as norms, rules, ideals, values and virtues to talk about the moral dimensions of life and work. Roughly two different approaches to professional ethics can be distinguished in the academic literature (Sanderse 2013b): the deontological approach and the aspiration approach.

The deontological approach (derived from the words *to deon*, “duty”) regards professional ethics as a collection of professional standards which are usually laid down in a code and enforced by committees. Such codes are mostly about the duties and rules by which professionals are bound. The emphasis is on the absolute dos and don’ts. Codes are rarely about conducting yourself optimally within these limits (Kole & De Ruyter 2007: 3). You have to comply with certain rules, whether you are personally interested in them or not (Van Tongeren 2003: 28). Therefore it is still an open question whether professionals are motivated to act according to the code.

We cannot do without rules in the professional ethics of civil servants, but rules alone will not get us where we want to be (Paine 1994). Ethics not only specifies what is required, but also “what is good and worth pursuing in a broader sense, what could be done even if it is not required, what personal positions and attitudes contribute to the search for quality in work and happiness in life” (Kole 2007: 3). This is why, apart from rules and duties, the ideals, values and virtues of good civil servants also play a role in professional ethics. This is also referred to as the aspiration dimension. Over the past few decades, the idea that the work of civil servants can also be characterised by such an aspiration dimension, and that the public ethos and the motivation, values and virtues of civil servants are important for being a good employee (Talsma & Becker 2015) has become rooted in the academic literature. This shift is not only evident in the literature, but also in policy practice (Becker, Van Tongeren, Hoekstra, Karssing & Niessen 2010).

WHAT IS A PROFESSIONAL ETHICAL ATTITUDE?

An example can clarify what it means when someone has a certain attitude or virtue (Hursthouse 2012). Take Aidan for example, an honest civil servant. What does this mean in practice?

Aidan not only does honest things, he does them for a certain reason, namely because he thinks the truth is important, and not for example because he wants to make an impression on his supervisor. He chooses to work with honest people and mostly establishes friendly relations with people who are also honest. He disapproves of colleagues who lie. He is not impressed by people who boast or exaggerate and thinks colleagues who achieve success by dishonest means and are promoted are not “smart”. He rather feels sorry for them. When he finds out that friends or acquaintances have done dishonest things, Aidan is shocked.

In short, a desirable attitude or virtue is a quality which is reflected in someone’s thoughts, perceptions, feelings, actions and relationships (Annas 2011: 8).

Striving for a Professional Ethical Attitude

The ethical theory which recognises this aspiration dimension of professional morality the most is eudemonic or virtue ethics (*eudaimonia* means “happiness”). Although this theory dates back to the Greek philosopher Aristoteles, the virtue approach experienced a renaissance in the mid-20th century, and later in professional ethics (Solomon 1993; Oakley & Cocking 2001) and in discussions on professional ethics in public administration (Cooper 1987; De Vries & Kim 2011). Characteristic of virtue ethics is that it focuses on the attitudes or virtues of a professional (Kole & De Ruyter 2009). We can also use a concept such as ‘moral competency’ for this, since a professional attitude is more than just knowing what is good. It includes the ability and willingness to act on this knowledge (Bosch & Wortel, 2009: 39).

While codes, rules and duties are extrinsic, virtues address the intrinsic motivation of civil servants. A civil servant who develops justice as a virtue, does so because he wants to and is motivated to do so, and not because he has been told to do so by someone else. Furthermore, virtues do not set a moral minimum, but rather a moral optimum. “Virtue” is the English translation of the Latin word *virtus*, which in its turn is the translation of the Greek word *arete*, which means “excellence”. A virtuous civil servant is not someone who simply acts in accordance with the code and correctly keeps within the boundaries set by the rules. No, a virtuous civil servant is someone who excels in his work and gets satisfaction therefrom (Garndner, Csikszentmihalyi & Damon 2001). A good civil servant does work which is good and does him good.

Teaching Professional Ethics

What can a civil servant’s prior education contribute to the development of an appropriate professional attitude? How can students learn to be virtuous? In the first place, by means of a separate course in “(Professional) Ethics”. Such a course is an important building block: students are explicitly introduced to the norms and values of public administration, are familiarised with ethical concepts and ideally practise moral reflection on cases. However, a separate Ethics course will not be sufficient to develop a professional ethical attitude. Much is known these days about the development of attitudes through a school-wide approach called “character education” (Sanderse 2012). In this approach, the specific emphasis is less on a separate ethics course and more on students’ wider character development during the entire study programme.

What can character education contribute to the instruction of civil servants in professional ethics? The approach is an old one but is still very much alive. It is philosophically rooted in Aristotelian ethics, enlightened by a realistic moral psychology, recommending methods which are examined for their pedagogical effectiveness (Berkowitz & Bier, 2006). This approach partly developed in response to the concept of professional ethical education, which was popular until the seventies, in which students learned to discuss moral dilemmas using a decision-making model. Although this may benefit their capacity for moral judgement, it does not ensure that they will feel a personal connection with the results or that they will act accordingly in practice (Lawton, Rayner & Lasthuizen, 2013: 130; Maesschalck 2012). Character education does not go for this one-sided cognitive focus, but considers the formation of attitudes of the civil servant as a whole person.

The entire curriculum is relevant for study programmes which take instruction in desirable professional attitudes seriously. Although there are other methods, we will limit ourselves here to four pedagogical pillars which are usually regarded as the “heart” of character education (Sanderse 2012 & 2015). The advantage of these four pillars is that they can be used by any lecturer in any lecture. The professional ethicist who gives a separate course can assist colleagues with this. Below, the following will be dealt with:

- 1 observing attitudes from role models,
- 2 hard-wiring attitudes through practice,
- 3 watching and listening to the arts, such as books and films and
- 4 conducting critical dialogues.

1 Role Modelling

From an early age, copying and imitating behaviour is an important learning mechanism, which is also used by adults (Bandura 1963). To a large extent, colleagues, managers and employees also act as role models in organisations, as shown by Gibson’s (2003) study on bankers and consultants. Likewise, we can expect students to look for examples of “being a good employee” in universities, whereby they follow the example of their lecturers as well.

Although many lecturers endorse their exemplary moral role, the potential of this strategy is far from being always fully used. Behaviour is often open to more than one interpretation and it is often necessary to give an explanation so that students will know what example a lecturer is trying to set. Studies on the use of exemplary roles in medical instruction show that, for example, non-verbal modelling by itself is not enough to pass on complex information or skills (Benbassat

2014; Egnaw & Wilson 2011). Moreover, “imitation” can be associated with blindly following charismatic leaders, which is not what we are after. Students need to adopt a critical attitude so that they will not follow the wrong example. As a lecturer, it is one thing to recognise that students look up to you, but it is quite another to deliberately and systematically use this exemplary role as a critical method to work on the professional ethics of prospective professionals (Kristjánsson 2006; Sanderse 2013c). This makes the exemplary role more demanding, going beyond “simply being yourself”.

2 PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

Acquiring a professional attitude can be compared with acquiring skills; just as you become a footballer by playing football or a pianist by playing the piano, you develop an honest attitude by, for example, doing honest things (Annas 2011). It is only through a lot of practice that behaviour will gradually become a hard-wired attitude or personality trait, which then enables a person to make new choices. By emphasising practice, professional ethical education not only revolves round the transfer of knowledge, for example about ethical theories and concepts. As long as this knowledge is not related to students’ desire to do “good work”, which also gives them satisfaction, theories will at most be interesting and intellectually challenging but quickly “too far from their world” to touch them.

Recently, René Gude (2012) argued that a university was originally intended as a “gym” where one could practise in order to stay morally fit, thereby creating a society which is wiser, braver, more just and more moderate. Practising a professional attitude can take shape in all kinds of different ways. First of all, their time studying offers students in a broad sense all kinds of opportunities to practise, for example, through jobs on the side and administrative and volunteer work, when students can show what they are made of. From the point of view of “learning by doing”, work placements and final projects towards the end of a study programme are important, whereby students, who are not yet burdened with any major responsibilities, have to deal with real-life moral issues and dilemmas, which ideally they can discuss with work placement or thesis supervisors. Practice can also be encouraged by giving students assignments for which they have to maintain contact with civil-society parties. Finally, difficult situations can be simulated by means of role-plays or interactive and participatory theatre (Banks 2014).

3 Books, Films and Other Arts

Reading, listening to and watching art, such as books, films, theatrical performances, but also music, does not only have to be an aesthetic experience. Art can also be used as a means to stimulate moral sensibility (Verbeke 1990). When considering the arts for educational purposes, our thoughts might turn mostly to books or films with a “moral of the story”, such as the fables of Aesopos or De la Fontaine. However, this quickly results in an exercise in finding out the author’s intention, so that there is less scope for one’s own interpretation and a discussion on the story’s moral aspects. However, at the centre of books and films are all kinds of main characters who give us a glimpse of good and bad attitudes and their possible consequences, without making it immediately clear what is “good” and “bad”.

The usefulness of art for teaching professional ethics to civil servants also lies in something else. You must be able to empathise with the characters to read a book or watch a film, and for this you need to have a capacity for literary fantasy. According to Marta Nussbaum (1997), this could be the start of a moral form of imagination with the fate and suffering of real people: empathy. This strategy is already being used in other programmes. In some medicine courses, novels are used to increase the capacity of prospective doctors for empathy. This strategy has been empirically proven to be effective (Maxwell 2016). It would seem that the arts also help civil servants to put themselves in the place of the citizens they are dealing with. That is important, since empathy with and consideration for citizens helps them to have trust in the authorities (Röell & Brenninkmeijer 2012). This can also be achieved by means of the works of art adorning the walls in the department and a *studium generale* (a programme of lectures, debates, lecture series) for students which organises, for example, film debates.

THE LECTURER AS A ROLE MODEL: MELA

The MELA model is an instrument which can help lecturers to reflect on their position as a moral role model (Geursen, Korthagen, Koster, Lunenberg & Dengerink 2012). The first step is to think of the professional attitudes which you would like to *Model* as a lecturer. The second step is to *Explain* to yourself and others how you put these attitudes into practice. How do others recognise this? The third step is to *Legitimise* the chosen attitude by pointing out a concrete objective which you wish to achieve with it. And the fourth step is to think about how you can enable students to *Apply* this professional attitude themselves. Following these steps will not only help lecturers to present students all kinds of implicit images of what being a good employee is, but will also enable students to determine if these images are worth imitating.

4 Critical Dialogue

Character education does not aim to cultivate obedient, disciplined civil servants, but educate independent-minded, critical professionals. Students should therefore develop their own ability to make judgements. This can be done in different ways. The above-mentioned strategies already contain critical elements, but a separate strategy can be used as well. You can also take the time for sessions that provide the opportunity to philosophise in smaller groups. In doing so, “philosophy” will not be a lecture on the theories of philosophers, but on-the-spot thinking in a community of inquiry. Not in any haphazard way, but systematically, for example by means of the Socratic method (Kessels, 1997; Kessels, Boers & Mostert 2015).

A dialogue in which moral judgements and choices can be systematically exchanged has two different features (Sanderse, 2013a). Firstly, a dialogue helps participants to find out what an attitude means in a specific situation. If honesty forms part of the professional attitude of civil servants, this raises the question what being honest is in a particular situation. That is an exercise in one’s capacity for moral judgement. For example, the “Integriteit deugt” (“Integrity is virtuous”) method, which was developed by order of BIOS, is used to teach civil servants to examine a moral case from four different attitudes (BIOS, 2011). However, a dialogue is not only about devising a “solution” for a difficult problem. In a dialogue, a judgement given in the past (“That was unprofessional!”) can prompt a question about the apparent underlying values or convictions (“You are a professional if you...”). Students can practise putting their choices into words and substantiating them in sessions.

Although the meaning of a concept such as honesty is broached on in a dialogue, the discussion is of course an exercise of virtue in itself. Students learn relevant attitudes, such as empathy with the other participants, the courage to stand up for your convictions and voice opposition and the patience to listen to someone else’s story.

Conclusion

Professional ethics is about what is good and worth pursuing, and what positions and attitudes of civil servants contribute to work quality and satisfaction. This chapter provided insight into the way university students can start building such a professional ethical attitude. This requires specific attention to ethics in a separate course, but instruction in professional ethics is emphatically something which concerns the curriculum and the didactics of an entire programme. All lecturers contribute to this. That is why this chapter specifies how an exemplary role, practice, art and dialogue can be used to deliberately and systematically use much of what is already available in the programme as a way to lay the foundation of professional ethics for prospective civil servants.

LEARNING FROM *HOUSE OF CARDS*

All kinds of appropriate examples of television series can be found for public administrators. For example, think of the British ‘80s series *Yes Minister* about the relationship between a recently appointed minister and his civil servants and colleagues, or the popular series *House of Cards*, in which a sly member of Congress stops at nothing to gain power. Lecturers can discuss fragments from such films so that students can begin to get an idea of the tensions and risks which they may have to deal with in public administration. The trick is not to uncover “the” message together, but to compare and assess students’ interpretations.

3 PROFESSIONAL ETHICS IN UNIVERSITY-LEVEL PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION PROGRAMMES

Introduction

How is professional ethics education currently implemented in the university-level programmes in public administration in the Netherlands? Are students prepared for this during their programmes? Do future civil servants receive any instruction in civil service ethics and integrity? With these questions in mind, BIOS carried out a preliminary study on the bachelor and master programmes in public administration in the Netherlands, since these programmes concentrate specifically on public administration. Many students will eventually have to deal with government issues as a civil servant, administrator or adviser.

For this study, interviews were held with academic staff members who share responsibility for the course content, such as programme coordinators, directors of education and university lecturers. Quotes from these interviews have been rendered anonymous and translated from Dutch. The interviews were about the role of the educational system in offering professional ethics and how this is implemented in their programmes. A total of thirteen representatives of eight university-level bachelor programmes and eight master programmes in public administration in the Netherlands were interviewed. Some of these representatives only represented the bachelor programme, others represented both the bachelor and master programmes in public administration.

Reader's Guide

The key question of the study was: How is professional ethics education currently implemented in the university-level programmes in public administration in the Netherlands? Four themes kept recurring during the interviews. The results of the interviews are therefore discussed on the basis of the following themes:

- 1 Does the educational system play a role in offering professional ethics?
- 2 How much focus is there on professional ethics in university-level programmes in public administration?
- 3 What form do professional ethics take in the programmes?
- 4 When is it best to offer a course in (Professional) Ethics?

WHAT IS MEANT BY "PROFESSIONAL ETHICS"?

Professional ethics focuses on the attitudes and virtues of a professional (see Chapter 2). It is about what qualifies as work which is good and worth pursuing, and about the positions and attitudes that contribute to work quality and satisfaction. There are generally accepted civil service standards and core values for professional conduct specifically for the civil servant. These have been included in the Dutch Code of Conduct for Integrity in the Central Public Administration:

- independence and impartiality,
- reliability and conscientiousness and
- personal responsibility.

Civil servants are also bound by specific standards and rules for preventing conflicts of interest, handling information and communication and the careful handling of (human) resources. For instance, civil servants are not allowed to commercialise government information and confidential information must remain confidential. Furthermore, civil servants may not speak in a personal capacity whilst in office. All in all, a civil servant should conduct himself "as befits a good civil servant" (Dutch General Civil Service Regulations, Rule 50).

1 Does the educational system play a role in offering professional ethics?

Interviews with representatives of the public administration programmes show that opinions on the role of the educational system are divided. Most of the representatives think that offering professional ethics is the responsibility of the educational system, more specifically, of an university-level programme in public administration. They feel that most of their students eventually end up in the public sector.

“95% end up in public administration, where they have to deal with dilemmas. It is therefore useful to prepare them for this.”

These representatives think the educational system has a formative role to play for students and should prepare them for the workforce. After their studies students find work in public-sector organisations and positions, work with public funds for the common good and, according to the representatives, should be prepared for their responsibilities as public professionals and the ethical dilemmas they will have to deal with.

Doubts about the Role

However, a few representatives doubt whether universities are the right place to focus on professional ethics. They think ethics education is a form of skills training which fits in better with a university of applied sciences. Some hold the view that students “automatically” acquire ethical skills during an academic programme.

“Students are academically schooled. They end up in public-sector organisations. However, it is not our aim to make our students into good civil servants. They must be critically-minded and be able to carry out proper primary source research. They must know a great deal about public administration. However, whether they end up working there is up to them.”

Integrity is regarded by several representatives as a part of skills training, such as drawing up and presenting policy documents. There already appears to be much discussion within study programmes, departments and universities as to whether universities should focus on these practical skills.

“We will now focus more on skills which students can develop during their education in preparation for their working lives. However, that has been an obstacle in the programme (“If they just want to acquire skills, they had better go to a university of applied sciences”). While our students did want to improve their presentation and writing skills. So we have addressed that. But it’s been a long process.”

Most educational institutions think public administration has a role to play in the moral education of students. The programme is essentially about training students to become critical and analytical professionals. This goes beyond knowledge transfer.

“Why do we have universities? Why do we impart knowledge to students? Because you want to contribute to society. Not just because you want to transfer knowledge. This particularly holds true for public administration. The education we provide is more or less vocationally oriented.”

Lack of Attention

However, the real question is whether there is sufficient focus on this educational task. Representatives are signalling a shortage of attention for ethics. It emerged from the interviews that this can be partly attributed to the priorities in the programme. They attach less importance to professional ethics than to other learning objectives, or the subject is simply not top of mind.

“Like other programmes, we think students will pick this up from the more general courses they are taking. Compared with other priorities, it is not considered to be important enough.”

Even if the importance of ethics education is recognised, it is difficult to include professional ethics in the existing curriculum. It is not easy to adapt a curriculum. This has to be coordinated with various parties and approved at several levels. Moreover, a course in Professional Ethics would then compete with other courses.

2 How much focus is there on professional ethics in university-level public administration programmes?

The interviews with the representatives examined how professional ethics is being implemented in public administration programmes. Surprisingly enough, not all the representatives are fully aware of the way ethics is incorporated into their curriculum. Moreover, lecturers are scarcely (if at all) consulted about professional ethics. The representatives do not have much insight into the extent to which lecturers are aware of professional ethical aspects in their courses.

Despite these objections, the representatives were able to give a general picture of the focus on professional ethics in their programmes. It appears that professional ethics in public administration can be dealt with in four different ways:

- implicitly in the programme,
- as part of other activities,
- in a dedicated course or
- by means of a comprehensive curriculum.

In two instances, ethics is not part of the programme at all. Half the programmes opt for an approach whereby ethics forms both an implicit and explicit part of the curriculum. Ethics is then identified as a topic in exercises, cases and theory. This is done in several ways. Some programmes have opted for a separate, dedicated course in Ethics or Professional Ethics. Other programmes include ethics in other courses or activities. A few programmes have combined these elements into a comprehensive approach.

Implicit Approach

Ethics is only dealt with implicitly in six of the sixteen programmes. Topics such as justice, responsibility, independence, decision-making and weighing up arguments, political control and the role of the civil servant are dealt with in courses and lectures.

“It has been incorporated into our programme, but not explicitly. I don’t know if they recognise it. If you were to ask students afterwards if your talk was about ethics, you would get different answers.”

However, the focus on topics relating to ethics and being a good civil servant remains implicit. Lecturers do not explicitly relate the topics being dealt with to professional ethics. It is up to the students to make the connection to integrity.

“If it is dealt with during the programme, it is done implicitly. For example, there is a simulation exercise where students assume various roles and discuss conflicts of interest. However, it is not explicitly boxed as ethical dilemmas, so that students do not reflect on the ethics. To make explicit what is now implicit would have added value.”

Incorporated into Other Activities

Some programmes integrate professional ethics into other courses or activities, including learning objectives related to integrity, ethics or professional ethics. For example, one programme organises an introductory week for second-year bachelor students during which a simulation exercise and a guest speaker (an integrity consultant) are used to deal with professional integrity. Although these programmes do not include a course in Ethics, this is explicitly dealt with.

“Some programmes include Ethics as a course, which is useful. However, that seems to imply that it comes down to this course alone. Frequent repetition is important for your development on this subject. And they should know that integrity is something which comes up in all kinds of fields. It therefore works best when you let it come back in various parts and as part of the whole.”

In order to integrate professional ethics into other existing courses, it is important to get other lecturers on board and that they realise that this does not demand very much of them.

“So many demands are already being made on lecturers. They feel that this only adds to their workload. However, you do not need a great deal of theoretical knowledge for this. They can already make a difference by making minor adjustments. I refer them to social developments and scandals in the media. It’s about establishing a link to practice.”

Professional Ethics Course

Three of the eight bachelor programmes and four of the eight master programmes include a separate, dedicated course on *ethics in a general sense*. Most of the representatives indicated that they use this wide approach because they do not regard their programmes as preparing students for the civil service. Only two of these courses, one in the bachelor programme and one in the master programme, focus specifically on *civil service or administrative ethics*. These courses focus explicitly on specific integrity issues which civil servants have to deal with, such as billing practices and their role as a civil servant.

“I think it should definitely be a separate course. Taught by a dedicated lecturer. I don’t think it’ll work when you say that it should come back in every other course. Then everyone is responsible, so no one is responsible. Such a lecturer could also assist other lecturers by giving them suggestions on how they can incorporate ethics into their course. He can inspire lecturers. If it is a separate course, it will have a different status.”

Two bachelor programmes and one master programme initially included the course (Professional) Ethics, but removed them from the curriculum. The courses did not come into its own and were dropped in favour of other courses.

Comprehensive Approach

During the interviews, several representatives expressed their doubts about offering a separate course if there is no focus on ethics in other parts of the curriculum. They indicated that ethics should play a role in the entire programme, both implicitly and explicitly, as part of other courses and as a dedicated course. A few programmes have opted for this comprehensive approach (see inset for a practical example).

“Professional Ethics forms an integral part of the programme, but also receives specific attention in courses. Issues related to integrity and good governance should be dealt with throughout the programme. Normative questions should also be asked, i.e. throughout the programme. However, there are also a few dedicated courses where ethics is the main focus. Such a course is included in every programme.”

3 What form do professional ethics take in the programmes?

Not only are there different views on the way professional ethics education should be organised, there is also debate on the content of this instruction. Two different points emerged from the interviews: Firstly, is ethics education about skills or theory? Secondly, should ethics education be normative?

Skills vs. Theory

As previously stated, some programmes are reluctant to integrate professional ethics into the programme since professional ethics is regarded as skills training.

“We deal with public administration, not with individual civil servants and all that that involves. The aspect of professional practice is hardly ever dealt with, while our programme has a strong focus on the profession.”

None of the courses on (professional) ethics focus on developing skills. All courses offer a theoretical approach to professional ethics. Instruction is given in the different schools of philosophical ethics, such as utilitarianism, deontology and virtue ethics and their applications to policy, administration and organisation. The aim is usually to instruct students in moral reasoning.

“Students are very naïve about ethics when they start on the course. This is made more apparent by the fact that they don’t have any practical experience. Ethics is therefore often associated with major scandals. And their thinking on the subject is simplistic. What you see in my course is that students become more aware of how ethics is dealt with in various parts of their field. Think of the impartiality of a judge. As the course progresses, they come to realise that ethics are important for the very fibres of the work. And they learn the terminology to talk about ethical issues and add nuances.”

Very much lacking is the link between (professional) ethics and the actions of the students themselves. The students do not learn to reflect on their own performance and attitude. One of the representatives thinks this theoretical approach is risky since it is more difficult for lecturers without a background in ethics to integrate it into their own course.

“I think it’s useful to have a philosopher for professional ethics, but I would like to make it much more practical. And not scare off lecturers too much when it gets too philosophical. This will make them feel that they can’t teach the course.”

Normativity

An issue which has often been raised is how normatively professional ethics should be discussed with students. Should you teach students what the norms and values of public administration are? Most of the representatives are wary of this. They think students should first learn to form an opinion so that they can weigh up all the facts in a grey area.

PRACTICAL EXAMPLE: ETHICS EDUCATION IN A LEARNING CONTINUITY PATHWAY

Radboud University offers public administration students a learning continuity pathway in ethics education in the bachelor and master programmes. The programme approaches ethics education at three different levels: as an integral part of the programme and as a dedicated course, implicit and explicit, narrow and wide.

ETHICS THROUGHOUT THE PROGRAMME

Professional ethics forms an integral part of the bachelor and master programmes. It has been agreed with lecturers that ethics should play a role in every course. Issues related to integrity and good governance have been integrated into the entire programme. Lecturers let ethical issues and integrity dilemmas come back explicitly and implicitly in their courses. Moreover, lecturers are expected to be morally upright professionals, setting the example for their students. There are also a few specific courses where ethics is the main focus. For example, the course Philosophy of the Management Sciences in the bachelor programme and the course Administrative Ethics in the master programme.

MASTER COURSE ADMINISTRATIVE ETHICS

The course Administrative Ethics (6 ECTS credits) is compulsory for master students following the master programme Public Administration at Radboud University. The course is intended to enable students to make an ethical analysis of the policy, administration or organisation of the government. Students learn about the different ethical theories and how they can be applied. The course was deliberately included in the master programme so that students will be in a better position to understand how the theories are linked to daily practice.

NARROW AND WIDE

The programme approaches integrity and ethics from both a narrow and a wide perspective. Issues relating to justice and the value of laws and regulations are examined from a wide perspective. From a narrower perspective, students learn what professional integrity is about. Both aspects of professional ethics are explicitly dealt with in the course Administrative Ethics. For example, students work on questions such as:

- What are the concepts of ethics, morals, norms and values about?
- What is a good administrator?
- How does a “broad” interpretation of integrity differ from a “narrow” one?
- What does “being responsible for something” mean?
- What was the moral problem of the financial crisis?
- How do bureaucratic, market-oriented and professional ways of thinking differ from each other?
- What is a fair remuneration in the public sector? Where do you draw the line in billing practices?

MORE INFORMATION

- Dr Marcel Becker, University Lecturer in Practical Philosophy (ethics), Radboud University (Nijmegen, the Netherlands), m.becker@ftr.ru.nl
- Dr Berry Tholen, University Lecturer in Normative Public Administration, Radboud University (Nijmegen, the Netherlands) b.tholen@fm.ru.nl

“There are many grey areas. That’s what it’s all about - conflicting values. These appear to conflict very strongly in practice. We want students to make their own choices. We don’t really explain what is good and bad. We explain which tensions are always there. However, we want to teach them to form their own opinions.”

Educational institutions are reluctant to transfer prevailing norms and values. Only a few institutions indicated that the world of learning also has a social role to play and that there is no avoiding the discussion of standards such as those set in practice.

“I refer to the code of conduct on good governance and the principles set out therein in my lectures. It’s nice when students later remember all kinds of things and put them into practice.”

4 When is it best to offer the course (Professional) Ethics?

It turns out that this question was a difficult one to answer for the representatives. There is more room to include compulsory courses during the first two years of the bachelor programme. The third year of the bachelor programme is mostly taken up by optional courses and the bachelor thesis, and there is also little scope in the master year due to the master thesis.

“I find it very difficult to position. If you give the course too early in the bachelor programme, students will not be ripe for the dilemmas at play. They will fail to recognise this. Too late, it will simply become a “sideshow”.

Despite the practical objections, most of the representatives think the third year of the bachelor programme and the master year are the best times. Students will understand the practical cases better and have more personal experience.

“And a certain level of maturity will be necessary. When you have just completed secondary school, you are still shy, searching and have no or little work experience. You need a background to build on.”

Several representatives think it's important to focus on integrity and ethics during the first two years of the bachelor programme so that there is a gradual increase in subject-related courses and the level of difficulty.

“Frequent repetition is important for your development (...) on this subject. Integrity can already be introduced at an early stage in the programme. Commitment to the programme. Attendance, complying with agreements. You can make this explicit. When they are rude in emails, we let them know they are. A proper attitude and commitment are useful and necessary.”

In one of the programmes, part-time and full-time students take the course (Professional) Ethics together. The part-time students often have a job on the side and can therefore share practical experience and examples. In this way, it will become more real for the other students.

Conclusion

This study on professional ethics in public administration programmes gives a first impression of the current state of affairs. We should like to emphasise that an in-depth follow-up study is required to obtain a more detailed picture of the moral education of future civil servants. Nevertheless thanks to this survey we have a better picture of ethics in academic education.

Most of the representatives think their programme has a role to play in offering professional ethics. They focus on this in different ways: implicitly, explicitly in courses or activities or even as an integral part of the curriculum. The focus here is largely on ethical theories and individual moral judgement. Educators believe that a dedicated course would be best placed in the third year of the bachelor programme and the master year. In the next chapter we draw conclusions from these results.

4 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The key question in this report is whether university-level programmes in public administration in the Netherlands make an adequate contribution to civil service ethics education. If not, how can this be improved? The previous chapters lead us to conclude that public administration programmes are not making a strong enough case for civil service ethics. Ethics education in public administration programmes remains implicit, limited, fragmented, intellectual and optional. Adequate normative, practical and developing efforts are lacking, as a result of which students are insufficiently prepared to begin a career in public service with a basic qualification in ethics. There is still much room for improvement. There is actually a great willingness, and there are many initiatives, to make improvements. We are therefore submitting seven recommendations to educational institutions, policy-makers and government employers.

1 Take responsibility

Does a university-level programme in public administration have a role to play in professional ethics education? A few representatives doubt whether they have a responsibility in this. They hide behind the argument that a university-level programme does not have to contribute anything to the development of professional ethical competency. This argument is not realistic. Most students will not become an academic, but will end up in another profession, probably working directly or indirectly for the government. The programme should therefore teach students what morally upright behaviour means for civil servants and administrators and let them reflect on their own performance and attitude.

“As far as I’m concerned, the “university” in “university education” does not so much refer to its isolation from society, but in critically addressing the role and responsibility which students will assume for this society at a later stage. Because university graduates will end up in important positions, even more so than students at a university of applied sciences, it is extremely important that they are prepared for this, also by means of a course on ethics.”
(Wouter Sanderse)

As Willeke Slingerland showed in Chapter 1, the educational system forms part of our national integrity system. There are no good administrators or civil servants without a good moral education. Fortunately, most educational institutions recognise this responsibility and indicate that they want to concentrate more on professional ethical development.

2 Don’t be afraid to be normative

Public administration programmes focus on the public sector. Many students will end up working in or around public administration after their studies. However, public administration programmes hardly give students a normative moral education. Ethics education is in a certain sense optional. They underline the importance of critical personal reflection on dilemmas and moral issues, but are cautious with regard to the transfer of normative content and the current views on being a good or bad civil servant. We wish to emphasise that students should be trained in civil service morals. Which rules apply, which virtues are expected, which values are important? An understanding of civil service morals is indispensable to professional ethics.

We also recommend that attention is paid to the general moral attitude of students (e.g. commitment and being responsible for the programme, complying with agreements, cooperation, providing feedback) since a general moral attitude supports any professional ethics. This can be done from the first year of the bachelor programme.

3 Develop practical skills

The instruction in ethics we came across is very intellectual. Students learn ethical theories and moral reasoning. However, a professional ethical attitude is developed by learning by doing. As Willeke Slingerland stated: “You need to have sufficient knowledge, skills and competencies in order to be able to identify integrity issues and dilemmas and do something about them.” Wouter Sanderse elaborates on this in Chapter 2: a proper professional attitude or virtue is reflected in “someone’s thoughts, perceptions, feelings, actions and relationships.”

However, such an exercise in practical skills and personal reflection is currently lacking in public administration. Give students the opportunity to practise and reflect on moral issues and dilemmas by means of work placements, practical assignments, role-plays and simulation exercises. Lecturers can integrate these kinds of components into the existing courses, teaching material and assignments (see Chapter 2).

LOOK BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

Professional ethical development can also take place outside the classroom. Professional ethics can also receive attention outside the classic educational settings in a variety of ways:

- Provide forms of dilemma training, Socratic dialogue or moral consultations
- Use books, films, theatrical performances and music (see Chapter 2)
- Organise working visits, possibly with the students’ association.
- Discuss news items and current events with students
- Encourage students to attend a municipal council meeting
- Invite guest speakers who can share practical experience.

4 Provide an Ethics Course

A separate course on civil service or administrative ethics is necessary to impart relevant knowledge and ethics terminology to students. In this way they will learn to talk and think explicitly in terms of rules, values, duties and virtues. Students will not be able to develop a proper attitude if they are not familiar with a moral vocabulary. Incidentally, the relevant basic knowledge can also be offered through alternative teaching methods, such as online videos and ethics lectures. Meetings and working groups then provide the opportunity for practice, discussion and application.

The third year of the bachelor programme and the master year are most suited for an Ethics course. Students will then have sufficiently developed to understand the subject-matter, and will usually have more practical experience to which they can apply their knowledge. Despite the limited scope in the curriculum, we emphasise the importance of a separate course in both years. Repetition and teaching at a deeper level is not only advisable, it is also necessary because of the intake and outflow of students between the bachelor and master programmes.

5 Take a comprehensive approach

Ethics education is not a matter of “either/or” but of “and/and”. Educational institutions have indicated that “Ethics” as a course on its own will not suffice, that ethics should be made explicit and included in other courses. The chapters by Willeke Slingerland and Wouter Sanderse support this idea. As Sanderse pointed out in Chapter 2, “professional ethics education is expressly something which concerns the curriculum and the didactics of an entire programme. Every lecturer contributes to this.” Professional ethical development requires a comprehensive approach.

Chapter 2 gives concrete suggestions on how an entire programme can contribute to the development of civil service ethics. However, this is still very rare in practice (and mostly implicit where it does occur). Practical objections were mostly raised in the study. Lecturers (may) see it as an additional task, have the idea that ethics is an abstract subject or think it is too philosophical. The lecturer in professional ethics can remove these concerns by discussing how they can put the focus on professional ethics in their courses. For example, if you are thinking about the financial implications of a policy decision, you should also consider the moral implications: What do citizens expect? What should the authorities do in their exemplary role? Will there be unwanted integrity risks? How should you deal with the tensions between different values of good governance?

Where to start? We see a role here for programme coordinators and lecturers in ethics to emphasise the importance of professional ethics and take the initiative. Because a large number of parties are involved, someone will have to keep an overview of all the efforts made towards integrity and civil service ethics. Moreover, good initiatives are often already being taken in all programmes. As a practical example of such an inventory, we would like to refer to the approach which Utrecht University has taken (see inset).

PRACTICAL EXAMPLE: INVENTORY OF PROFESSIONAL ETHICS IN THE BACHELOR PROGRAMME

In 2015 the Public Administration and Organization Science Department of Utrecht University asked itself whether it wanted to focus more on professional and academic integrity in the bachelor programme Public Administration and Organization Science. And whether that is possible. University lecturer Dr Kim Loyens set to work with these questions in a working group. The working group made an inventory and a few recommendations.

INVENTORY IN THE PROGRAMME

In 2015 Loyens carried out a survey in the Public Administration and Organization Science programme. She conducted interviews with lecturers and carried out a literature study for this purpose. It turned out that many lecturers were already focusing attention on ethics, albeit implicit and fragmented. They are currently working on a second phase and are carrying out a survey in the Faculty of Law, Economics and Governance. The second phase includes interviews with lecturers and experts, a literature study and focus groups consisting of students and lecturers. The objective is to take stock of what is already being done in the area of integrity and to consider ways of incorporating integrity more effectively into the faculty's programmes. Also, good practices in promoting integrity in academic education are revisited.

INTEGRATION INTO THE PROGRAMME

According to the working group, professional ethics can be integrated into courses in various ways, whereby professional ethics can form an integral part of the programme. All lecturers play a role in this. To assist them here, they

came up with the "dilemma database" with specific cases which students and lecturers can use. The working group also held interviews with lecturers so that they would include integrity/ethics in their courses.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE WORKING GROUP

In 2015 the working group submitted a report on the first phase with recommendations for its own programme. These recommendations are also useful for other public administration programmes.

- Ensure that professional integrity is systematically incorporated into the bachelor and master programmes.
- Make clear that theoretical course material and practical cases are about professional ethics.
- Ensure that students reflect on what they learn about ethics and professional integrity.
- Introduce professional ethics in various courses. Talk to lecturers about the best way to go about this.
- Include professional ethics in the learning objectives and outcomes of the programme (e.g. that students can reflect on professional ethics in the field).
- Include professional ethics in an exam question or make it one of the topics of a paper.
- Give lecturers an overall view of the integrity aspects of the programme so that they can continue to build on what has already been done in other programme components in this area.

MORE INFORMATION CAN BE OBTAINED FROM:

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6 Policy-makers: carry out a follow-up study

This report is a preliminary study on the way attention is paid to civil service ethics in university-level programmes in public administration in the Netherlands. The results call for a thorough and extensive follow-up study on the set-up, content and effects of ethics education at the various levels of education. How can schools and institutions contribute to the moral education of students and professionals? What learning objectives do we want to set here, and what moral competencies do we expect of entrants to the labour market? We therefore call on policy-makers to organise a follow-up study which can give more input and direction and add nuance to the current public debate on this subject.

7 Authorities: strengthen the introductory course

Government organisations should realise that instruction in integrity is currently still limited. They cannot expect recent graduates to be ethically qualified the moment they enter their service. It will therefore require extra effort to raise their new colleagues' moral level to a sufficient standard. Extra attention will therefore have to be paid to an introductory course in the short term. We hereby recommend that specific attention is also paid to the rules, norms, virtues and values of being a good civil servant. A learning continuity pathway from programme to employer, whereby students and young professionals develop in a coherent manner into good civil servants, is advisable in the long term.

Conclusion

Public administration programmes still do not include sufficient instruction in civil service ethics. Although most representatives recognise the social responsibility of their programme, instruction in ethics remains implicit, limited, fragmented, intellectual and optional. Students receive very little assistance with their moral development into becoming good civil servants. Practical objections and other priorities play a role here. However, the main obstacle is the resistance to a more normative, practical and developing content of ethics education. There is still much that can be improved in this area.

At the same time, there are promising initiatives and signs. Many educational institutions, to a greater or lesser extent, are already taking professional ethics more seriously, and sense the urgency to improve their instruction in ethics. Not only the universities, but also the authorities, the corporate sector and society, professionals and even the students are increasingly calling for *Bildung*.

During the interviews, several representatives indicated that they would like to integrate ethics more effectively into their programmes. Moreover, several initiatives, good examples and links can already be found in public administration programmes. Therefore, programme directors and (ethics) lecturers do not have to reinvent the wheel. We hope this report and their colleagues will give them inspiration and new ideas to assist their students, our prospective public professionals, in developing a professional ethical attitude.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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The Dutch National Integrity Office (BIOS) advises and supports public sector organisations in the development and implementation of ethics and integrity policy, both on a strategic as on an organisational level. With a small team of experts we fulfil five tasks, developing instruments, sharing knowledge, hosting network platforms, researching new trends and developments, and advising local governments on breaches of integrity by political office holders. BIOS offers the public sector instruments, manuals and training:

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