

## Professional code for information professionals in libraries and documentation centers

Professional code for librarians / information managers and library assistants / information mediators.

### PREAMBLE

The professional code for information professionals was drafted by a work group of the Flemish Library, Archive and Documentation Association npo (VVBAD), on the authority of the executive board of the association.

The work group consisted of:

- Els Bervoets, Lessius Mechelen (school libraries);
- Paul Heyvaert, Belgian Association for Documentation (scientific libraries and documentation centers);
- Steven Van Impe, Heritage Library Hendrik Conscience (heritage libraries);
- Patrick Vanhoucke, Metropolitan Public Library in Brussels (public libraries);
- Patrick Vanouplines, Vrije Universiteit Brussel (university libraries);
- Bruno Vermeeren, Flemish Library, Archive and Documentation Association (VVBAD).

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Scope**

The information supply sector covers the field between the information production and the demand for information. The sector is in fact a go-between that provides data transmission within the broader process of knowledge development and cultural development. Here, the expert guidance of users with information questions is the most important objective.

The sector's core activity consists of:

- the selection of information;
- the collecting of information;
- the opening up of information;
- the preservation of information;
- providing access to the information;
- offering information and meeting places and/or relaxing facilities;
- the detection and stimulation of the demand for information.

(Based on the professional competence profiles librarian/information manager and library assistant/information mediator.)

## **Objectives**

This code contains general guidelines for the actions of librarians/information managers and library assistants/information mediators. It proposes a handhold for the 'correct' procedure to follow by information professionals. Given that the professional code only contains general principles, the information professionals will always have to interpret this code themselves. Thus, they will have to adapt this code to the actual situation to which they find themselves confronted. They are able to test their proceedings against this code. In this sense, the information professional can also use the code to justify his actions before a third party, within as well as outside the own institution.

Also for the society at large, the professional code is a criterion against which the conduct of information professionals can be measured. The code determines the image that users, higher authorities and other stakeholders have of the 'information professional'.

This code offers, in short, guaranties for the quality control in pursuance of the profession.

The librarian/information manager and the library assistant/information mediator are supposed to comply with the principles stipulated in this code. Obviously, they do have to comply with the regulations applied by their own organisation and to the current legislation. They are actors in a complex field of tensions determined by the rules of the profession, of the organisation and of society. Normally, the law will be given priority to the regulations inside the parent organisation. It is quite possible that the professional code presents arguments that could be used to question rules and legislation. Such a discussion will always unfold itself within the current regulatory and legal framework.

## **Terminology**

The workgroup chooses the designation:

*professional code for information professionals* ("beroepscode voor informatieprofessionals").

The work group selected the term '**professional code**' because it clearly indicates the aspirations of this document: it is a guideline for a specific professional group.

With the term '**information professional**', the work group refers to the library assistants/information mediators and the librarians/information managers. Those terms explicitly point to the professional competence profiles for the librarian/information manager and for the library assistant/information mediator that have been drafted in 2009 by the Flemish socio-economic council (SERV) in cooperation with the sector ([www.vvbad.be/node/55](http://www.vvbad.be/node/55)). These profiles apply to employees of all types of libraries and documentation centers. They describe, in other words, the professionals that (should) comply with this code. With the

reference to both professional competence profiles, the work group also indicates that the code applies to everybody who works in a library, information service or documentation center on a content integrated or technical basis. In this document we use the term 'information professional' as an umbrella term. Every "he" that is mentioned can be replaced by a "she".

In this document the word '**libraries**' is being used in a very broad sense, for instance for documentation centers, heritage libraries, public libraries and libraries of schools, university colleges and universities.

The document uses the term '**user**' rather than 'customer'. After all, information cannot be consumed. The information professional also has to take into account the expectations of possible future users, the demands of the collection and the expectations of society.

In each case, the code supplies a general principle and additional information.

## **1. THE PROFESSION**

1. *The information professional uses his personality to contribute to the positive image of the profession.*

The information professional knows the professional code and disseminates it. He has a broad interest in economical, political, social, cultural and scientific developments. He keeps track of what happens in the professional field. He is thus, among other things, a member of library organisations and of professional networks and takes part in activities and meetings. The information professional makes a stand for the values of the library.

2. *The information professional defends the free access to information and culture.*

He repudiates censorship and does not discriminate. He acts in compliance with the relevant legislation, such as copyrights and privacy laws.

3. *The information professional guaranties a high-quality service in all areas.*

The information professional vouches for an unbiased, dynamical and efficient service. He makes adjustments, based on frequent evaluations, to the quality of service and supply.

4. *The information professional puts the principle of 'lifelong learning' continuously to practice.*

The information professional keeps up with recent developments through literature, study days, courses and other information sources. To this end he will, if this seems necessary, take the initiative himself.

5. *The information professional maintains a high standard of personal integrity.*

The information professional strives to present reliable information. He executes his tasks in compliance with the principles of openness, publicity and equity.

6. *The information professional has an open and unprejudiced attitude towards his colleagues and acknowledges this as a condition for the efficiency of the organization and of the whole professional group.*

The information professional delegates and knows how to encourage responsibility. He communicates with his colleagues on the events in the library and is prepared to share professional knowhow and experience. He works with other information professionals in order to acquire better professional competences. He encourages colleagues to take part in professional activities.

## **2. THE COLLECTION**

1. *The information professional takes care of the collection and her accessibility.* He provides for adequate preservation and user facilities. He secures the accessibility of the physical and virtual collection in a way that complies with the collection type and to the target group.

2. *The information professional sees to it that the collection content fits the aims of the institution and that it is directed at the fulfillment of the needs of the users.*

Preferably, the collection policy is recorded in a collection policy plan.

3. *The information professional strives to attain the highest possible degree of objectivity and interaction concerning the formation of the collection.*

He pays attention to different visions and viewpoints. Moreover, he will not let personal preferences, wishes or opinions get the better of him.

4. *The information professional has a good understanding of the collection profile and of related collections in other institutions.*

He uses this knowledge for the benefit of his institution and her users.

5. *The information professional documents origin, context and treatment (additions, removals or manipulations) of material, which his institution has been entrusted with, in a manner that corresponds to the objectives of his institution.* These actions are being undertaken by the information professional with regard to all material with a heritage value, regardless of the type and the objectives of the institution. When this material does not fit the own institution, he will locate a suitable destination for it.

## **3. THE OVERALL ORGANISATION**

1. *The information professional is loyal to his overall organisation.*

He disseminates her mission and vision. He pursues her constant amelioration and he respects her policy and procedures. Loyalty does not exclude a critical attitude.

2. *The information professional informs his overall organisation about the professional code and asks her to respect this code.*

3. *The information professional defends the value of the library within the own institution.*

He promotes his library within the organisation and offers his expertise in favour of the whole organisation. In this way, the library is able to entirely fulfill her function within the organization.

#### **4. THE USER**

1. *The information professional creates a working environment answering to the needs of the user.*  
The information professional creates a safe and healthy working environment that enables a professional service and suits the ergonomic and technological needs of the user.
2. *The information professional has an open and unprejudiced attitude towards the users.*  
The information professional recognises the autonomy of the user, who solely decides on the use of the information and service obtained.
3. *The information professional stimulates the use of the library.*  
He discloses to (potential) users library sources and services in an active and creative way through a variety of physical and virtual channels.
4. *The information professional practices active information mediation and he foster the user's information literacy.*  
The information professional supports the user in his search for relevant information. He helps the user to formulate his information needs. He stimulates the use of the most appropriate search instrument. He lends a helping hand with the assessment of the reliability, representativity and the topicality of the information provided. He enables the user to consult the available sources of information in the most independent way and provides, if necessary, written instructions, trainings, et al. to guarantee this independence. He may work together with partners to achieve this.
5. *The information professional refers.*  
The information professional refers to internal and external experts when the answer to an information question transcends his specific professional knowledge. He creates an internal procedure, based on teamwork and knowledge sharing, to deal with questions.
6. *The information professional teaches the user to respect the library property.*  
Herewith he points out the right to information of every user and the importance of the conservation of documentary information as a form of cultural heritage for the future generations.