

European Strategy for Universities: towards Guiding Principles for protecting fundamental academic values

Presentation to the King's College London hybrid event

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About the project

- **Origin:** European Commission Communication on the European Strategy for Universities (2022)
- **Objective:** Developing guiding principles on protecting fundamental academic values to:
 - help national public authorities and higher education institutions to further and protect the fundamental academic values
 - identify and recommend appropriate measures the European Commission could take to support these values, with due regard to the principles of subsidiarity and institutional autonomy.
- **Methodology:** systematic review of initiatives, resources and best practices supported by stakeholder consultations
- **The team:**
 - Sjur Bergan (*Senior Expert*)
 - Cécile McGrath (*Senior Researcher, ICF*)
 - Valentina Musso (*Researcher, ICF*)

Process so far

- Desk research
- Steering Group
- First round of consultations
 - Stakeholders (3 meetings + interviews)
 - PLA FV WG/NewFAV
 - EEA Strategic Framework Working Group on Higher Education
- Draft reports
- Second round of consultations
 - 2 upcoming meetings with stakeholders in June

Guiding Principles

Directed to:

- European Commission
- National Public Authorities
- Higher Education Institutions
- [Actors in quality assurance]

Guiding principles – European Commission: overarching EU policy

- Consider fundamental academic values a cross-cutting issue
- Ensure that the fundamental values of higher education remain a core element of the European Education Area and the European Strategy for Universities
- Ensure that these values remain an important part of the EU's contribution to and enhancement of the European Higher Education Area
- Ensure that the reference to the fundamental academic values in relevant EU treaties and texts is made fully operational

Guiding principles – Commission: specific measures

- Ensure the protection, through appropriate EU instruments, of members of the academic community who are subjected to attacks or undue pressure because of their academic work
- Establish a European forum to consider and debate fundamental academic values
- Establish an ombudsman institute for fundamental academic values at European Union level
- Encourage national education systems and higher education institutions to recognize student engagement in governance or otherwise in building a culture of fundamental values

Guiding principles – national public authorities: policy and legislation

- Follow up the commitments undertaken by Ministers within the European Higher Education Area through the Paris, Rome, and Tirana Communiqués.
- Examine how the Framework for monitoring fundamental academic values developed within the EHEA can best be used and followed up within their respective national contexts
- At regular intervals, review their legislation with a view to
 - removing any provision – also in legislation other than education laws – contrary to the fundamental academic values.
 - aiming to ensure de iure protection of these values, including by removing provisions that may not be problematic in normal situations but that could be misused in a worst-case scenario.
 - reviewing their governance (laws and regulations but also practice) of the higher education system with a view to ensuring that it does not violate fundamental academic values, e.g. by being overly detailed or directive.
 - consider fundamental academic values a cross-cutting issue, and therefore considering the impact of national legislation, directives and policy in all areas on these values.

Guiding principles – national public authorities: specific measures

- Establish national arrangements to report and address violations of fundamental academic values
- In cooperation with higher education institutions, establish ways of protecting staff and students who come under attack because of their academic work
- Review to what extent confidentiality clauses are acceptable conditions for funding of teaching and research projects
- Encourage institutions to recognize student engagement in governance or otherwise in building a culture of fundamental values, for example through awarding ECTS credits
- Establish special budget lines or programmes to facilitate assistance to scholars who have had to flee their home countries because of political persecution
- Ensure that public funding for higher education and research is adequate and provided within a framework that ensures the financial autonomy of institutions

Guiding principles – higher education institutions: policy

- Make fundamental values a leadership issue, include fundamental values in institutional strategies, and develop internal guidelines for implementing these values
- Take diverse measures to enable an open discussion of all issues, involve elected student and staff representatives, and be transparent in their discussions
- Create an environment conducive to purposeful and mutually beneficial relations between stakeholders
- Raise awareness of fundamental values within the academic community and offer training to both staff and students
- Establish ways of protecting staff and students who come under attack because of their academic work

Guiding principles – higher education institutions: specific measures

- Engage in public space to counter movements challenging the need for academic knowledge and understanding and the value of research
- Encourage and recognize student engagement in governance or otherwise in building a culture of fundamental values, for example through awarding ECTS credits
- Set up and support responsible partnerships internationally in an autonomous way
- Engage with political decision makers and legislators, especially those newly elected, as well as funders of research to help them develop an understanding of the importance of the fundamental academic values to both democracy and the quality of higher education and research

Guiding principles – actors in quality assurance

- Review quality assurance regulations and practice to ensure that these respect the fundamental academic values and are not overly intrusive

Where do we go from here?

- Adjust the report in the light of the Tirana Communiqué and Commission developments, e.g., the Higher Education Package and response to a European Parliament request
- Steering Group
- Final report submitted to the European Commission by end of June 2024