



FUNDAMENTAL VALUES OF THE EHEA

Background

The ministers who signed the Bologna Declaration (on 19 June 1999) pledged their commitment to academic freedom and institutional autonomy (*“European higher education institutions, for their part, have accepted the challenge and taken up a main role in constructing the European area of higher education, also in the wake of the fundamental principles laid down in the Bologna Magna Charta Universitatum of 1988. This is of the highest importance, given that Universities’ independence and autonomy ensure that higher education and research systems continuously adapt to changing needs, society’s demands and advances in scientific knowledge”*).

In previous communiqués, the ministers have committed to implementing the necessary reforms in the framework of the Bologna Process to ensure the enhancement of fundamental values in higher education systems and institutions:

Prague Communiqué (2001): “Ministers affirmed that students should participate in and influence the organisation and content of education at universities and other higher education institutions. Ministers also reaffirmed the need, recalled by students, to take account of the social dimension in the Bologna process”.

Berlin Communiqué (2003): “Ministers accept that institutions need to be empowered to take decisions on their internal organisation and administration. Ministers further call upon institutions to ensure that the reforms become fully integrated into core institutional functions and processes.” This communiqué declares the need for the participation of student organisations in the Bologna Process and underlines the necessity to include the students continuously and at an early stage in further activities.

At Ministerial Conference Bergen in 2005, criteria such as academic freedom, institutional autonomy and student participation were included as part of the Bologna Process accession criteria.

London Communiqué (2007): Ministers made a commitment to develop an EHEA “based on institutional autonomy, academic freedom, equal opportunities and democratic principles that will facilitate mobility, increase employability and strengthen Europe’s attractiveness and competitiveness”.

Leuven Communiqué (2009): Ministers committed to carry out the necessary reform of the higher education system and policies to make academic freedom and institutional autonomy a reality.

Bucharest Communiqué (2012): Ministers expressed a commitment of the support the engagement of students and staff in governance structures at all levels, and the ministers reiterated their commitment to autonomous and accountable higher education institutions that embrace academic freedom.

Yerevan Communiqué (2015): Ministers committed to working towards achieving an EHEA in which higher education contributes effectively to the development of inclusive societies founded on democratic values and human rights. Also, ministers promised to support the higher education institutions in enhancing their efforts to promote intercultural understanding, critical thinking, political and religious tolerance, gender equality, and democratic and civic values in order to strengthen European and global citizenship as well as lay the foundations for inclusive societies.

A thematic discussion about the fundamental values of the EHEA was held at the meeting of BFUG in Bratislava on 8-9 December 2016 and on 24-25 May 2017 in Gozo.

At those meetings, the BFUG members agreed that the values discussed during the meetings (academic freedom, institutional autonomy and involvement of student and staff by governance issues) should be better related with other core values of higher education (e.g. integrity, human rights, inclusiveness) and with national legislative national framework.

Paris Communiqué

Proposed text into future priorities

.....

Academic freedom, institutional autonomy and the participation of students and staff in higher education governance are key elements of our shared values and commitment to democracy, human rights and the rule of law. They are also essential to fostering high quality education and research. We reaffirm our commitment to these fundamental values of the EHEA as well as to the responsibility of public authorities in ensuring that they are a living reality. Furthermore, we recognise the role and responsibility of higher education institutions and we encourage them to engage in critical self-analysis and strategic value development.

At the same time, societal changes require that we explore new aspects of the fundamental values, which go well beyond the legal relationship between public authorities and the academic community. We will ensure that policy measures are compatible with and further the fundamental values of the EHEA, together with encouraging the contribution of higher education institutions to society.

Questions for ministers

Academic freedom, institutional autonomy and the involvement of students and staff in the governance of higher education are fundamental values agreed in EHEA. How should the developments in society be reflected in the key elements of our shared values?

The non-implementation of key commitments and agreed fundamental values threatens the credibility and continuation of EHEA. Should there be consequences when countries joined to EHEA are not showing progress in implementing key commitments and fundamental values? If yes, what is the range of consequences envisaged?

What is the responsibility and accountability of higher education institutions in reaching the commonly agreed goals? As institutional autonomy in itself will not guarantee academic freedom, how could autonomous higher education institutions be involved and supported?