



Task Force for future monitoring of values

Progress report

In the Paris Communiqué, Ministers made a strong commitment to promoting and protecting fundamental values throughout the EHEA:

Academic freedom and integrity, institutional autonomy, participation of students and staff in higher education governance, and public responsibility for and of higher education form the backbone of the EHEA. Having seen these fundamental values challenged in recent years in some of our countries, we strongly commit to promoting and protecting them in the entire EHEA through intensified political dialogue and cooperation.

The issue of how to develop an approach to promoting and protecting these values was assigned by the BFUG to a Task Force established under the auspices of WG1. The Task Force has worked with input from experts, researchers and organisations working in these areas.

The three specific tasks agreed for the Task Force were:

- 1) To consider how fundamental values can be clearly understood in higher education systems across the EHEA.
- 2) To propose a methodology for future reporting to Ministerial Conferences on the issues defined as the fundamental values in the Paris Communiqué that recognises the limits of self-reporting and goes beyond this approach.
- 3) To recommend indicators of fundamental values, as well as the evidence required to assess them, and the source for such evidence.

The draft report of the Task Force was presented to the BFUG in Helsinki.

The Task Force has stuck closely to the values outlined in the Paris Communiqué - academic freedom and integrity, institutional autonomy, participation of students and staff in higher education governance, and public responsibility for and of higher education. While other values could also be considered as fundamental, these particular values have been identified as fundamental values of the EHEA since the beginning, and Ministers have committed to them in acceding to the EHEA and in successive communiqués

The Task Force recognised that all of these fundamental values are of crucial importance, but it has at the same time considered that the biggest challenge related to monitoring, i.e. the area probably most lacking in reporting, is the area of academic freedom. Academic freedom is a long established and widely recognised fundamental value, but indicators have so far not been prominent in the Implementation Reports, and less reporting than on other fundamental values have taken place from international and European organisations and stakeholders on academic freedom.

For the remaining values - institutional autonomy, public responsibility for and of higher education and the participation of students and staff in higher education governance - a lot of work has been done by various actors such as the EUA, the Council of Europe, ESU, EI and other bodies, and there are also indicators that have been used in previous Bologna Process Implementation Reports that can continue to be used in the future for some of these areas. This is by no means sufficient, and further work will be required to strengthen the protection and promotion of these particular values as well, but the fact remains that some reporting and monitoring exists either through the current data collection or through the work of others. So whilst not leaving the other values behind, the Task Force chose to focus in a first instance particularly on academic freedom.

In order to be able to assess the level of protection, the Task Force agreed that there is a need to outline a clear and common understanding of academic freedom. The Task Force proposed that this EHEA common understanding should be adopted by the ministers at the ministerial meeting in Rome along with an explanatory accompanying text. The Communiqué and the accompanying text would then provide an agreed reference point for understanding, implementing, protecting and promoting academic freedom.

A future monitoring framework would need to consider two levels. Firstly the nature of legal protection given to these values, that is the *de jure* realities and secondly the level of respect for values as experienced in practice within higher education institutions, i.e. the *de facto* realities. The evidence base for the indicators will have to come from a variety of sources in order to reflect the variety of contexts in the EHEA. The potential use and development of already established Bologna mechanisms should also be considered.

The task force also proposed to extend the mandate of the Task Force beyond 2020 in order to pursue the work on fundamental values.

Feedback from the BFUG

The Task Force presented its draft report and its recommendations to the BFUG at the meeting in Helsinki, and the report was all in all well received by the BFUG. The BFUG agreed that a definition of academic freedom should be adopted by the ministers in Rome. The BFUG also commented on the fact that it is important to continue the work on the remaining fundamental values as well. The status and mandate of the sub-group was raised, bearing in mind that the decision of giving the mandate to the Task Force as a sub-group of WG1 was made at the BFUG in Vienna. Participants agreed that the BFUG should consider whether a formal working group should be established post-2020.

Further work

The Task Force concluded its work for this stage of the process at a meeting on 14 January 2020. At its meeting the Task Force confirmed the final report to be submitted to the BFUG, including the recommendations for a definition on academic freedom in the Communiqué and an explanatory text to be annexed to the Communiqué.

The Task Force members then discussed the work ahead in the next phase. The next step will be to focus on the remaining fundamental values mentioned in the Paris Communiqué and to develop mechanisms to protect and promote all fundamental values of the EHEA. The discussion followed the line taken by the BFUG in Helsinki that there will be a need to apply the same kind of approach to the exploration of other values as the Task Force has done for academic freedom, i.e. to establish a common understanding of these values during this period. All relevant organisations with experience of the different issues at stake in addition to experts and researchers working in the fields, should be invited to contribute to this work, most likely through the format of hearings as this proved successful in the work on academic freedom.

The Task Force also recognised that the BFUG had suggested that for the period after the ministerial meeting in Rome it should be considered whether the work on fundamental values should be undertaken not by a sub group of Working Group 1 but rather by a separate working group or advisory group. The decision on the structural form and status of any future group is a matter for the BFUG, and the Task Force members understand and share the concern that the work should be undertaken within the most appropriate framework possible. In order not to lose momentum in the work on fundamental values, the Task Force proposed that draft Terms of Reference for a future group on fundamental values regardless of such a group's status in the next work programme could be drafted by the Task Force in time for the BFUG meeting in Berlin in September.

No new meetings are planned for the Task Force. Work will continue via e-mail.