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## WORKING GROUP ON FUNDAMENTAL VALUES

Hosted by Malta, Second meeting, Online  
29 October 2021  
09:30-13:30 (Brussels Time)

### Minutes

### List of Participants

No.	Country	Name	Last Name
1	Austria	Liviu	Matei
2	Council of Europe	Sjur	Bergan
3	Croatia	Leonardo	Marušić
4	EI - ETUCE	Rob	Copeland
5	ENQA	Anna	Gover
6	ESU - European Students' Union	Matteo	Vespa
7	EUA - European University Association	Anna Lena	Claeys Kulik
8	European Commission	Kinga	Szuly
9	European Commission/ Eurydice	David	Crosier
10	Finland	Maija	Innola
11	France	Mathieu	Musquin
12	Germany (Co-chair)	Marit	Metternich
13	Holy See	Melanie	Rosenbaum
14	Iceland	Una	Strand Viðarsdóttir
15	Malta	Rose Anne	Cuschieri
16	Norway (Co-chair)	Tone Flood	Strøm
17	Poland	Ewa Agnieszka	Lekka-Kowalik
18	Romania (Co-chair)	Mihai Cezar	Hâj
19	Turkey	Aslı	GÜNAY
20	United Kingdom (Scotland)	Michael	Watney
21	EACEA	Susanna	Zellini
22	DAAD (Guest)	Hans	Leifgen
23	BFUG Secretariat	Kristina	Metallari
24	BFUG Secretariat	Aida	Myrto
25	BFUG Secretariat	Alesia	Gegushi

Switzerland sent in its regrets. Italy, Kazakhstan, The Netherlands, North Macedonia, Russia, Sweden and United Kingdom did not attend the meeting.



## 1. Welcome by the Co-chairs

The Co-chairs welcomed everybody to the second meeting of the WG on Fundamental Values (FV). Rose Anne Cuschieri (Co-chair) underlined the importance of cooperation among members, to attain concrete results and achieve the objectives of this WG. Marit Metternich (Co-chair) introduced herself as the new Co-chair of this group and shared her commitment to provide the necessary support for the work of the group. The agenda of the meeting was adopted without changes and the minutes of the first meeting of the WG on FV were approved without additional remarks.

For more detailed information, please see *WG FV\_SI\_AM\_2\_Draft Agenda*.

## 2. Presentation of updates on existing projects

### 2.1. Presentation of the report "*Brief Mapping - Comparative Research on Fundamental Values in Higher Education*" – DAAD

Hans Leifgen (DAAD) provided an overview of the "Brief Mapping" report, highlighting that this was a general mapping of the current data and research, rather than a comprehensive one. The Academic Freedom index (AFi) was introduced as an annual updated dataset that looks at different dimensions of academic freedom. The index is aimed at decision makers in academia and politics to get a better understanding of academic freedom on a global scale. As discussed at the DAAD conference, the index is limited to academic freedom and does not cover all fundamental values. In addition to the AFi, there is a qualitative study available on the scientific investigation of academic freedom, which provides qualitative case studies that deliver necessary contextual information to interpret and validate the quantitative results from the AFi.

The Autonomy Scoreboard of the EUA was introduced, with the aim of measuring the flexibility and independence of universities during a decision-making process, in the context of rules and regulations that shape the HE system. Most likely, the scorecard will be updated in a year as the current data has been obtained in 2017.

A study on strategies regarding research cooperation and exchange with non-democratic countries, with the objective of contributing to the reflection on values and red lines (problematic areas) that underlie cooperation with partners in "non-democracies" was referenced.

### 2.2. Presentation of the application for the project "*New building blocks of the Bologna Process: fundamental values*" (NewFAV) submitted under the Erasmus+ call

Cezar Haj (Co-chair) presented an overview of the application of the NewFAV project, which was submitted under the Erasmus+ call. The application was submitted based on the need for technical support and concrete approaches for the work of this group (i.e., organization of



meetings, communication with different stakeholders, involvement of field researchers), which were identified from the previous work experience of the Ad Hoc Task Force on Fundamental Values (2018-2020). The objective is to support the implementation of the Bologna process commitments, in line with the Rome Communique and contribute to the WG on FV, by proposing a set of indicators on monitoring and assessment of fundamental values, while also exploring the contribution of micro-credentials to social inclusions. Specific objectives include:

- The development of a technical policy framework to measure and assess FV;
- Piloting the technical framework for assessing FV in 4 countries;
- Building up a pilot policy framework for developing flexible learning paths for students based on a micro-credentials approach.

The work that will be carried out is linked to several actions including: the previous work of the Task Force on FV (2018-2020), the current work of this WG on FV (2021-2024), the work of the Council of Europe in mapping the issues related to FV, different indexes and existing tools to measure the different fundamental values. An Advisory Board will ensure the link between the technical approach and the political/representation role of the WG on FV within the BFUG, through.

### 2.3. Questions and comments – input from WG members

The project outline was highly praised, especially the combination of the political dimension with the technical aspect. WG members involvement in the project with the coordinated by the Co-chairs. In addition, all the project milestones will be deliberated within the WG during the project meetings, PLAs and events, which will be opened to the WG members.

As it was indicated that micro-credentials will be part of this project, a discussion occurred as to where the work on micro-credentials would fit into this project as it is not a topic that this WG is tasked to cover. Mr. Haj explained that the work on micro-credentials was an ongoing part of an already developed Romanian project. The project has two streams, fundamental values and micro-credentials, which is a smaller work package.

Further, the project's content team will deliver a monitoring framework, which will include existing indicators that might need to be adapted to be used within the EHEA framework, as well as new indicators. The team will take an evidence-based approach when establishing the list of indicators and the monitoring framework. They will produce a conceptual framework of all fundamental values, which will be delivered in the form of project proposals that will include a list of indicators for each value. At the end, the WG members will decide which proposals will be taken into account.

As a common conceptual reference for *academic freedom* is already in place from the Rome Communique, it was advised that the group identifies indicators related to that particular conceptual reference. The Co-chairs clarified that indicators will be chosen to measure fundamental values within the definition of the EHEA. Forward looking, definitions for the other



fundamental values should be generated, in order for the content team to come up with a set of indicators that are relevant to the common agreement on the fundamental values within the EHEA.

In terms of the pilot report, due to the large diversity of experiences across the EHEA regions, it was decided that 4 countries would participate in the project as case studies. The goal is to have 4 different countries in terms of geographical spread, type of leadership and organization of the HE system.

From a discussion on high profile issues (political issues) and their impact on the fundamental values, it was deduced that many of these issues arose as a result of the relationship between public authorities and the HE community/HEIs. Quality Assurance agencies have expressed strong doubts on the institutions' quality of education. Thus, it was discussed as to what extent should the public authorities have the competence to decide on the de facto accreditation and recognition of institutions against the advice of the QA bodies. It was suggested that a distinction should be made between system level indicators (national systems) and institutional level indicators, which can be completed by QA bodies. It was decided to continue this discussion in the upcoming meeting.

DAAD and the Bologna Hub will support the work of the group, when it is of common benefit. The support will consist of constant exchange with the group and organization of events/activities from DAAD that will contribute to the work of the group. In terms of the NewFAV project, it was affirmed that the link between the WG and the project is crucial. Tone Flood Strøm (Co-chair) observed that some of the work referenced in the ToRs of this WG is the same as the work entailed in the project. Thus, the results of the project need to be obtained early enough, as to be applied in the work of the group.

While the group waits for the outcome of the project evaluation process in April, 2022, the WG will initiate the work on the tasks the groups has been entrusted with.

### **3. Outcomes of and input from the DAAD Conference "*Fundamental Academic Values in the EHEA – Strengthening co-operation through Fundamental Values*"**

The DAAD Conference was highly praised and the input and outcomes were recognized as very significant to the work of this group. A short report with the main messages from the DAAD conference was presented:

- The conference started with a panel discussion on whether fundamental values ought to be a precondition for international cooperation. A poll was conducted on this question with 78% of the participants answering positively. Nonetheless, it was stated that international cooperation is crucial to the work on fundamental values and some red line ought to be respected, due to pressures that researchers, universities and students face within some countries.



- The presentation by the CoE was highlighted for illustrating key notes on definition and understanding of fundamental values, data, links between the fundamental values and the political system and potential ways to encourage the implementation of fundamental values.
- An overview on the work of the WG on FV was delivered. The framework of measuring and monitoring the degree of academic freedom by this group is an important step to implementing shared values. Thus, the AFi should be the basis for the work of this group.

An outline on the two breakout sessions from the DAAD Conference was also provided:

#### Session A: BFUG WG on fundamental value - Framework for the Enhancement of Fundamental Academic Values

Discussions focused on the definitions of values, the potential data sources to be used in the development of indicators and possible ways of assessing the implementation process. It was noted that the fundamental value should not be considered separately. The values are interdependent and the group should work on some kind of recognition on the linkage of values through a holistic approach. Further, focus should be placed on identifying ways to work in parallel on the definition of values and indicators. Technical and expert discussions, as well as community participation and sector engagement were referenced as ways of encouraging debate broadly beyond the group. Country reviews were brought up during the discussion and it was observed that they are very similar to the case studies introduced in the NewFAV project. They focus on the evaluation and analysis of fundamental values and how these values are experienced in different systems. Other important points that were stressed:

- Building on the existing work and using already available tools;
- Exploring beyond what the AFi offers;
- Linkage between Quality Assurance and fundamental values.

#### Session B: Fundamental Academic Values – From Different Countries Perspectives

Liviu Matei highlighted some important aspects of this session, stating that 3 cases were discussed (2 national and 1 institutional). During these discussions, it was established that, for areas including academic freedom, regulations, policies, practice and fundamental academic values in general, international cooperation should be present, to promote the fundamental values, as this cannot be simply done within an institution.

It was suggested that due to concerns on the organizational work in terms of the AFi, it would be helpful if the Co-chairs would provide a presentation to the group on the index, so that everyone has a clear understanding and knows what to use and apply from this index on the work of the group. Discussions also took place on whether the WG ought to define fundamental values based on a European approach or an international one. Additionally, ENQA provided information on a potential project that aims to assess the state of implementation of QA across the EHEA, in regard to the ESG and more broadly. As the issue of fundamental values will be



tackled during this process, it will be important to maintain a link between this potential project and the NewFAV project to ensure synergies.

#### **Future work and working methods of the WG**

The members were updated on an informal coordination meeting with the Task Force on Increasing Synergies between EHEA-EEA-ERA and a few other BFUG WGs, in which cooperation among structures was agreed. The main overlap with the Task Force will be the discussion of indicators and matters related to scientific freedom within the EHEA context.

#### **4. Defining the remaining values and developing indicators for the EHEA**

It was suggested that some general definitions of the values should be decided at the next meeting, with the support of existing tools, such as the Scoreboard and AFi. It was further proposed that the WG focuses on a document prepared by the CoE and presented to the BFUG in 2016, as it already contains some definitions on institutional autonomy or public responsibility.

As the contribution of experts to the creation of definitions during the last work period was very valuable, hearings with experts should be organized again and soon. The consultations with experts can be organized prior to the outcome of the project application evaluation. This way, experts and members can gather input and provide an initial contribution to the topic of fundamental value, which can be used later by experts in case the project is approved. Experts will already be invited in the next meeting as guests.

CoE explained that the 2016 document mentioned above, was submitted to the BFUG in its meeting in Bratislava. Since then, the document has been developed a bit further in terms of academic freedom, institutional autonomy and future democracy and this can be shared with the members. As it is crucial to define what will be measured before moving on to definitions, it was emphasized that it may be challenging to work parallel on both definitions of values and indicators. The primary purpose of this WG is to find a way to measure and assess the compliance of the EHEA country members with the commitments they have undertaken, in respect of fundamental values. Thus, it was proposed to present to the BFUG an interim report about this matter, as well as to find out how a culture of fundamental values can be encouraged. A suggestion was made that the definitions should be also considered as a process, as they need to be operational and contribute to a specific purpose. In addition, the group ought to decide on the dimensions of the fundamental value that will be measured. It was suggested that a literature review of what has been accomplished to this point, including an international aspect, should be discussed in the next meeting. In addition, ESU informed the members on a potential project that aims to gather input from students' perspective on academic freedom.

An observation was made that as the definitions of values will influence the way the values are measured, the process of defining them needs to be carefully elaborated. Before the adoption of the Rome Communiqué, there was not a shared and up-to-date reference for academic



freedom within the EHEA. But the Communiqué put forward for the first time in the EHEA such a reference, which will be very effective as it will be monitored by a specific framework. The EHEA is such a particular construction in HE and thus, it needs its own reference for academic freedom. Indeed, other jurisdictions and systems will continue to be observed and maintaining a common basis for certain concepts on a national/international level will not be abandoned.

Many participants were of the opinion that work should commence with the definition of values. It was advised to have in mind that the countries in the EHEA consist of many different backgrounds (western countries have an older democratic system, whereas the eastern region consists of post-communist countries) and the understanding of fundamental values among these countries can be very different. For instance, the understanding of institutional autonomy in the HEIs in post-communist countries is partially based on what has been inherited from the old regime. Institutions in these countries have some level of autonomy, however, if a new definition is introduced that does not include certain elements of their perception of institutional autonomy, or if it includes more elements of autonomy, it might not be accepted by these countries. The increased level of autonomy is not appreciated similarly throughout Europe.

It was also underlined that the problem of deviation in definitions/conceptual references arises if the group proposes a very narrow common understanding and misses on a dimension, which could be important. In such cases (like the statement on academic freedom), where the existing definitions found in international texts may be too narrow, additional elements should be brought in. Nonetheless, this discussion was decided to be continued in the next meetings with experts.

A comment was made on the term 'definition' that it might be too constricting and limiting for the purpose of defining the fundamental value, as well as challenging for all dimensions to be included. The term *conceptual reference* would be more appropriate in this instance, as it leaves room for a thorough explanation of each value, where all dimensions and aspects can be treated. This reference can be reviewed and aspects of it can be added or removed.

## **5. Wrap up and conclusions**

As one of the tasks is to report on fundamental values and construct a monitoring framework based on each definition of values, the group should gather the existing documents/literature to have as basis for discussion on the way forward. This should be done in close cooperation with field experts and researchers. The importance of the link between the WG on Monitoring and WG on FV was emphasized. It was proposed that since the project does not begin until April 2022, the group may seek support from the DAAD with organizing processes and contract an external party (scientific organization) to help in organizing processes (hearing with experts, discussions with stakeholders).

In conclusion, the members were encouraged to provide an update on the material prepared by the CoE. The next meeting should focus on the different dimensions rather than the definitions. Experts anticipated to be involved in the NewFAV project will be invited to take part



in the next meeting. Moreover, organizations will be invited to provide support in the implementation of the main tools to monitor the fundamental values (Scorecard, AFi, other instruments to be presented within the next meeting). These organizations will be asked to concentrate on the data sources (collection process and analysis). Existing information in terms of definitions and understanding of values will be presented in the next meeting. A brief overview of how the concepts and understanding of fundamental values has evolved over time can be introduced as well.

#### 5.1. Next meeting

The Co-chairs informed that a third meeting will be organized late January/early February, just before the BFUG Board meeting on February 9, 2022. After the meeting, a document will be produced and presented in order to brief the Board members. The Secretariat will organize a doodle poll for the third meeting of the WG on FV. No other business was brought forward, thus, the second meeting of the WG on fundamental value was concluded.