

## **PUBLIC RESPONSIBILITY OF AND FOR HIGHER EDUCATION**

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### **Introduction**

Responsibility of and for higher education are mentioned in a single breath in the Rome Communiqué. Nevertheless, for the purpose of operationalizing and monitoring these values, they need to be treated separately.

### **Public responsibility *for* higher education**

Public responsibility *for* higher education denotes the responsibility of public authorities to the higher education itself as an important layer of education, and, through this, to broader society. It includes a responsibility to those working in higher education, i.e. the members of the higher education community: students and staff. While in most EHEA member states, the public responsibility for higher education is mainly exercised at national level, this responsibility (or parts thereof) may also be exercised at regional and local level. Increasingly, there is also a justified perception of public responsibility for higher education being exercised at supra-national level, such as the EU or the EHEA. Public authorities, at their respective levels, have the primary responsibility for putting in place regulatory frameworks that enable higher education institutions to effectively pursue their educational, research and societal outreach functions. This includes responsibility for the education system of which higher education is a part and which, in most EHEA members, is exercised at national level but in some at subnational (regional level) or shared between national and regional public authorities. Public responsibility may be exercised through legislation and other regulations but also through other means such as policies or funding. These may concern higher education specifically and directly but may also be broader in scope, such as general strategies, regulations and policies concerning social cohesion, the economy and the labor market, integrity and accountability, safety (e.g. of laboratories), international relations and development, etc.

***Through legislation and policy, public authorities should ensure that the fundamental values of higher education are respected, furthered, and implemented.***

Public authorities should consult and seek input from all relevant stakeholders regarding the configuration and substance of these frameworks. They should, however, assume *the final responsibility* for the frameworks within which higher education is conducted, including the legal framework, the qualifications framework of the higher education system, the frameworks for quality assurance, the recognition of foreign qualifications, information on higher education provision, the funding frameworks, or the frameworks for the social dimension of higher education.

Public authorities should assume *leading responsibility* for ensuring that all qualified candidates enjoy effective equal opportunities to undertake and complete higher education, irrespective of their social and economic background. They should assume a *substantial but*

*not necessarily exclusive responsibility* for financing and ensuring provision of higher education. All higher education within an education system should be provided and funded within the framework established by the public authorities responsible for that system, regardless of whether the provision and funding are public or private<sup>1</sup>.

Public authorities should further all major purposes of higher education: preparation for the labor market, preparation for life as active citizens of democratic societies, personal development, the development and maintenance of a broad and advanced knowledge base<sup>2</sup>.

### **Public responsibility of higher education**

While public authorities have final responsibility for the relevant regulatory and policy frameworks at all levels, higher education institutions should engage in the design and implementation of these frameworks as well. More directly, however, public responsibility of higher education denotes the responsibility of the higher education community to broader society. The higher education community encompasses all staff and students as well as institutional leaders, and the members of higher education organizations (e.g. university, student, and staff associations).

Through its own actions, regulations and policies, the higher education community should ensure that the fundamental values of higher education are respected, furthered, and implemented. It should pursue truth by upholding and developing the standards of teaching, learning, and research within and across academic disciplines and to inform broader society of the results of its work.

The higher education community should design and pursue its policies and activities in ways that are consistent with fairness, non-discrimination, and transparency vis-à-vis all its constituencies. It should promote the pursuit of knowledge as a public good through research, teaching, and learning knowledge. It should offer access to higher education to qualified candidates without regard to their economic, social, ethnic, or other background.

The higher education community should contribute to the development of society on the basis of scholarship and research, and teaching and learning. On this basis, and in observance of the principles of academic freedom and university autonomy, it should seek to identify solutions to the major issues facing our societies.

The higher education community should engage in and with public space to ensure that our societies be developed and governed on the basis of factual knowledge and critical and analytical thinking. It should work with the society of which it is part, including with its local community, to help improve opportunities for all members of society, in accordance with the democratic and social missions of higher education.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf Recommendation CM/Rec(2007)6 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the public responsibility for higher education and research, para. 7. Recommendations by the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers have been accepted by all EHEA member States except the three that are parties to the European Cultural Convention without being Council of Europe members. While Russia is no longer a member of the Council of Europe, it was at the time the Recommendation was adopted.

<sup>2</sup> Cf Recommendation CM/Rec(2007)6 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the public responsibility for higher education and research, para. 5

The higher education community should provide its graduates with knowledge, understanding, the ability to act, and the ethical knowledge and understanding required for graduates to decide what action to take and what action to refrain from taking. It should develop and maintain in its graduates and staff a culture of democracy based on values, attitudes, skills, and knowledge and critical understanding<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Cf the Council of Europe's Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture.