

Indicators on Fundamental Values in Higher Education: state of play following WG FV meeting in Malta, 11-12 July 2022

Background

The 2024 Bologna Process Implementation Report (BPIR) should cover all policy areas/issues highlighted in the Rome Communiqué. With regard to Fundamental Values, this means following up on the paragraph below by developing indicators to assess the implementation of the values:

We commit to upholding institutional autonomy, academic freedom and integrity, participation of students and staff in higher education governance, and public responsibility for and of higher education.

While the list appears to consist of four fundamental values, in fact the Fundamental Values Working Group (FVWG) has concluded that there are six values to be considered. This is because academic freedom and academic integrity are separate values, as are the public responsibility for higher education and the public responsibility of higher education.

While the BPIR is indicator-driven, a system of values depends upon the relationship between concepts – and hence between indicators. Thus while identifying indicators for each of the fundamental values is necessary, the text of the report should highlight the links and relationships between the indicators.

Not a minor point is that the chapter should be (max) 30 pages, with about 10 - 15 indicators.

Defining concepts and developing indicators

For each of the values, ideally there should be a framework statement defining and outlining the EHEA understanding of the value in question. For Academic Freedom, such a statement was adopted in the 2020 Rome Communiqué. For the other values, statements are in the process of being developed, under the auspices of the FVWG.

In formulating its recommendations for indicators for the BPIR, the FVWG has also considered international indicator sources that may be relevant. It is important to emphasize that the need for multiple sources of information is an accepted practice for the Implementation Report, and that it is particularly important in the case of fundamental values where both the legal situation (de jure) and the lived experience (de facto) are important to assess. Where such sources exist, there is the possibility to adopt the indicators that are used.

In some cases, existing indicators for some values may not include information from all EHEA countries. While data collectors should make every effort to include existing information from all countries, primarily it is a national responsibility to ensure that information is publically available and can be used in international studies.

The challenge for the 2024 report is to identify the best available indicators in the knowledge that much work is at a developmental stage.

A Academic Freedom

1 Framework statement

A framework statement is in place, adopted by the Rome Ministerial Conference, 2020

2 Relevant sources from which indicators could be adopted:

Academic Freedom Index (AFi):

[Katrin Kinzelbach, Ilyas Saliba, Janika Spannagel, Robert Quinn \(2021\): *Free Universities: Putting the Academic Freedom Index Into Action.*](#)

The Academic Freedom Index (AFi) is a dataset first published in March 2020 (and updated annually) that looks at different dimensions of academic freedom in a time series from 1900 to 2019. The AFi was developed by researchers at FAU Erlangen-Nuremberg, the Varieties of Democracy Institute (V-Dem) at the University of Gothenburg and the Global Public Policy Institute (GPPI) in Berlin. The aim of the AFi is to gain a better understanding of academic freedom worldwide and the factors that support or threaten it. The index is aimed at decision-makers in academia and politics, and its developers provide various recommendations for action to use and thus protect and promote academic freedom.

The data used in the AFi (and other indices published by V-Dem) are based on assessments by 3,200 scientists worldwide, so-called Country Experts (CE). These CEs are recruited by the V-Dem Institute through an open call. Once a year, the CEs are then asked by the V-Dem Institute to rate different indicators on the country for which they are responsible.

The AFi is based on the scores for 5 indicators that focus on the following topics:

- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)
- Campuses free from politically motivated surveillance or security infringements
- **Constitutional provisions to protect academic freedom**
- Scholars and university students able to publicly criticize government policies
- **Universities exercise institutional autonomy in practice**

3 Information to be gathered from the BFUG

Specific information can be collected from the BFUG at the level of national legislation and policy (de jure rather than de facto implementation).

A first indicator would be based on information on the different ways in which academic freedom is protected by legislation. In this respect, results should be cross-checked with relevant research undertaken on this topic (eg Terrence Karran study at the level of European Union countries).

A second indicator could examine requirements of external quality assurance to consider whether academic freedom is exercised in higher education institutions.

ESU is also working on academic freedom from the student perspective, and the outcomes of this work can potentially be included in the BPIR.

Opinion of the FVWG

The FVWG agreed that the AFi is currently the best available source of comparative information on academic freedom. Nevertheless the indicators are not completely aligned with the key elements of the 2020 statement on academic freedom adopted by the EHEA. For example, the fourth indicator (Scholars and university students able to publicly criticize government policies) focuses more on a notion of freedom of expression rather than academic freedom as understood in the Rome statement, and the third element (Constitutional provisions to protect academic freedom) focuses on only one way in which legislation may protect academic freedom.

Despite these limitations, at this stage, the WG agrees that it would be useful to include the AFi indicators in the BPIR report. Discussion with the AFi researchers would be needed to determine whether elements can be separated or whether the composite index should be published.

B Institutional autonomy

1 Framework statement

A framework statement is being prepared.

2 Relevant sources from which indicators could be adopted

[EUA University Autonomy in Europe \(university-autonomy.eu\)](http://university-autonomy.eu)

The **EUA's Autonomy Scoreboard** measures how flexibly universities can take decisions in the context of the rules and regulations that shape their higher education system. The tool provides detailed information on organisational, financial, staffing and academic autonomy and ranks countries according to their level of autonomy in each of these dimensions. The data is provided by national rectors' conferences. The Scoreboard uses 38 indicators, which are categorised into four autonomy dimensions: organisational, financial, staffing and academic autonomy. The scoring system used by the tool is based on deductions. Each restriction on university autonomy is assigned a deduction value based on how restrictive a particular rule or regulation is seen to be.

A new edition of the Autonomy Scoreboard will be published in 2023 and will cover 35 EHEA countries.

Academic Freedom Index (AFi):

As mentioned in the section on academic freedom, the AFi includes an indicator on institutional autonomy that is based on the question, *To what extent do universities exercise institutional autonomy in practice?*

3 Information to be gathered from the BFUG

Specific information can be collected from the BFUG at the level of national legislation and policy (rather than assessing de facto implementation).

A first indicator could examine legislation (constitution/and higher education legislation protecting autonomy);

A second indicator could gather information on the powers & composition of governing bodies. In particular the power to appoint and dismiss higher education executive heads (rectors) should be examined, as well as the power to appoint and dismiss deans (faculty leaders).

A follow-up indicator could consider whether rectors and deans are elected or appointed, and by whom.

A further indicator could examine requirements of external quality assurance to consider whether institutional autonomy is sufficient and well exercised.

Opinion of the FV WG

The FVWG welcomes the idea of including information from the Autonomy Scoreboard in the BPIR. Decisions on specific information to include can be made at a later stage.

The FVWG also welcomes the idea of including information from the AFi in the BPIR if the indicator on institutional autonomy can be isolated from the overall index on academic freedom. The FVWG considers that, while there are many aspects to institutional autonomy, the notion of institutional autonomy as the institutional level equivalent of academic freedom – as expressed in the UNESCO recommendation from 1997 – is important to retain.

C Academic integrity

1 Framework statement

A framework statement will be prepared.

2 Relevant sources from which indicators could be adopted

None identified

3 Information to be gathered from the BFUG

Provision of guidance to HEIs on how to handle issues such as plagiarism, contract cheating, fraud

External QA requirements to assess robustness of HEI measures to ensure academic integrity

Opinion of the FV WG

FVWG confirmed that work to develop a defining framework statement would be undertaken. The group also suggested that in addition to asking about the guidance to HEIs on academic integrity issued by public authorities, it would be interesting to find out about the guidance provided by HEIs for their staff and students. However, a source for such information would need to be identified (as the BFUG members would not be in a position to provide information directly on this issue).

D Participation of students and staff in higher education governance

1 Framework statement

Framework statement under preparation

2 Relevant sources from which indicators could be adopted

None identified

3 Information to be gathered from the BFUG

The following indicators have so far been identified:

Requirements for student and staff representatives to be involved in higher education governing bodies (other categories of external representative can also be collected).

Minimum and maximum percentages of student and staff representatives specified in legislation.

Full involvement of staff and students in both decision-making & decision-taking. NB The notion of full involvement includes the question of whether staff and students are able to speak and vote on all issues.

Requirements for students and staff to be fully involved in QA governance structures

Opinion of the FV WG

The group felt that it would be important to clarify what aspects of decision-making and decision-taking the proposed indicators may cover. Further discussion with EI and ESU would also be important in developing these indicators.

E Public responsibility for and of higher education

1 Framework statement

Framework statement under preparation

2 Relevant sources from which indicators could be adopted

No existing indicators outside Bologna to adopt

3 Information from BFUG:

Five areas for potential indicator development have been identified:

Clear legal framework to regulate higher education and research, including equal opportunities/inclusion policies for staff and students

Involvement of stakeholders in developing legal framework

Legal framework reflects all major purposes of higher education (preparation for the labour market, preparation for life as active citizens of democratic societies, personal development, the development and maintenance of a broad knowledge base).

Public financing, and other sources of financing set in accordance with a framework established by public authorities

Quality assurance system in line with ESG

Opinion of the FV WG

The indicators would be developed in line with the framework statement.

A final proposal of indicators may distinguish between those indicators related to the public responsibility for higher education, and those related to the responsibility of higher education.

