

Statement on institutional autonomy

Higher education institutions play a central role in democratic societies. Institutional autonomy is a precondition for academic freedom and a prerequisite for higher education institutions to fulfil both their democratic mission and to provide high quality learning, teaching and research for the benefit of society.

Institutional autonomy must be furthered by public authorities as well as the academic community itself. While broader society has legitimate expectations of higher education and the role it can and should play in addressing pressing societal concerns, higher education can fulfill this role only if it enjoys the autonomy to identify longer term developments and challenge established doctrines.

Public authorities should ensure the conditions required to make institutional autonomy a reality. It is incumbent on them to enable higher education institutions to fulfill their missions without undue interference. Governance frameworks and arrangements should safeguard institutional autonomy and the self-governance of academic institutions. Public authorities should ensure quality learning, teaching, research and dissemination.

The different dimensions of autonomy – organisational, financial, staffing and academic autonomy – co-exist with and need to be balanced against the public responsibility *for* higher education and the public responsibility *of* higher education towards society.

Higher education institutions need to be able and willing to define their leadership and governance models. This organisational autonomy also entails the autonomy to set an institution's priorities and strategic direction. It should ensure participatory rights for the different members of the academic community. Bodies representing the interests of staff and students should be able to function freely, contribute to institutional policies, further the interests of their constituents and help protect them against discrimination, harassment or intimidation. Public as well as institutional regulations and policy must ensure campus integrity and prevent the use of force and reprisals against academic staff and students, which would constitute a violation of the fundamental values of the European Higher Education Area.

Higher education institutions should decide freely on their internal financial affairs and allocate their funding according to their needs and priorities. They should be able to exercise their financial autonomy independently from external actors – in compliance with general rules for transparency and financial accountability. Regardless of their role in funding an institution, public authorities as well as private funders and donors should provide such funding within a framework that ensures that institutions are able to establish and implement institutional priorities and policies. In such a setting, neither additional funds granted on a competitive basis and/or earmarked for pre-defined purposes nor legal regulation of tuition fees shall be considered an infringement of an institution's financial autonomy. Within a framework of public responsibility, adequate and sustainable public funding remains the main precondition to guarantee institutional autonomy.

Higher education institutions should be able to hire, promote and retain staff for academic, technical and administrative positions. In exercising their staffing autonomy, higher education institutions should ensure fairness, transparency and non-discrimination. The policies and

practice of higher education institutions as well as public authorities should respect and uphold the legal rights and academic freedom of their staff.

Higher education institutions must enjoy academic autonomy in order to ensure that the individual members of the academic community can exercise their academic freedom. As part of their academic autonomy, higher education institutions must be able to decide e.g. on admissions, curriculum design and the introduction and termination of programmes. Academic autonomy also includes the capacity to decide on areas, scope, aims and methods of research in accordance with the law, academic standards and good research practice, as well as the values of academic integrity.

Arrangements for ensuring and assessing public responsibility and accountability should be consistent with institutional autonomy. This applies especially to funding provided by public authorities, but also to fundamental values as well as human rights in general. Irrespective of enjoying a high degree of autonomy, higher education institutions are accountable for their decisions. At the same time, accountability and responsibility should not serve as a pretext for undue or excessive interventions by public authorities or other actors.