

## Statement on Student and Staff Participation in Higher Education Governance

The implementation of a partnership model of higher education governance is necessary to make all stakeholders in higher education accountable and responsible. Student and staff participation strengthens higher education governance. It enhances the sense of ownership and community and of common responsibility for the development of high quality, socially responsible higher education.

Student and staff participation in higher education governance encompasses their right to:

- organise autonomously without pressure or undue interference from public authorities, governing bodies or other stakeholders;
- elect and to be elected to the relevant governing bodies in open, free and fair elections and without any discrimination;
- have their views represented and taken into account;
- have the right to initiate debates and table proposals in all governing bodies and participate in the discussion of and decision on them,
- be heard and have a vote on the internal organisation and administration of higher education institutions and all issues of higher education governance, and
- through their representative organisations, be duly consulted on issues concerning the governance and further development of the relevant higher education system.

Regardless of the various governance models throughout the EHEA, student and staff participation in higher education governance should be applied to all systems and institutions within the EHEA, whether public or private, for profit or not-for-profit, and at all levels of governance – transnational, European, national, regional, institutional, and sub-institutional. Student and staff participation in higher education governance may take different forms, depending on national and institutional structures and practices.

At all levels and regardless of specific governance arrangements, higher education leaders have a responsibility to create an environment conducive to purposeful and mutually beneficial relations between stakeholders. The dialogue between all relevant stakeholders should be rooted in clear and

transparent regulations, provisions and procedures and be based on mutual trust, recognition and cooperation.

The freedom of students and staff to express their views on their institution's policies and priorities as well as the policies of public authorities for the higher education system and the institutions that constitute it, without fear of reprisal, and that both higher education institutions and systems have a responsibility to listen to the critical voices and take them into account is an inseparable element of academic freedom.

Measures to further meaningful engagement of students and staff in higher education governance should take into account the diverse socio-economic conditions of different student and staff members and in particular focus on early career academics and students coming from disadvantaged backgrounds. Student and staff participation in higher education governance is strongly connected to their material conditions, and higher education can thrive only once public authorities as well as higher education institutions provide them with stable learning and working conditions. This comprises academic staff at all stages of their career in all the varieties of the current contractual modalities within higher education systems – full time, part time, fixed term and “on demand” staff.

At the system and transnational levels, democratic higher education governance requires public authorities to commit to its principles and practice, adopt the required provisions in the pertinent laws, and otherwise respect autonomy and participation. Staff and student representatives and their organisations need to be consulted on and to be in a position to influence decisions.

While at the level of higher education systems, several kinds of decision may ultimately fall within the competence of elected public representatives in parliament or by public authorities whose mandate emanates from elected public representatives, these should consult with the democratically elected and representative student and staff organisations. In contexts where policies are developed outside of frameworks with legislative or other governance responsibilities, such as the EHEA, duly elected student and staff representatives should be part of all policy discussions, following the good practice example of the Bologna Follow-Up Group.

In all contexts, duly elected student and staff representatives should be consulted on all issues before the governing bodies, including but not limited to the freedom to learn, the organisation and content

of education, curriculum design and quality assurance, equitable access to higher education, strategic objectives and governance designs, financial matters, academic staff recruitment and retention, secure employment conditions, freedom from threats, retaliation, dismissal, or other sanctions in relation to the content of their research, teaching or stated professional views.

Successful higher education governance requires the participation of a variety of stakeholders including institutional leaders, students and academic and administrative staff as well as cooperation with external stakeholders. Such participation and cooperation are essential to fulfilling the main missions of higher education and to ensuring the long-term success of our shared goals and commitments in the EHEA. It should be taken into account when recognising higher education institutions as a part of any given national education system and be included in the quality assurance criteria.

A partnership principle of collegiality requires participation continuously at the various stages of decision-making and decision-taking processes, including setting agendas, drafting decisions, voting and veto, implementation and monitoring. The elections of student and staff representatives at all levels of higher education governance should be organised freely and autonomously, be representative and adhere to democratic principles to be legitimate. Institutions as well as student and staff organisations should seek to stimulate participation in student and staff elections as well as encourage participation of students and staff and engage in the life of the institution with a view to enhancing its democratic legitimacy and representativity.

Student and staff organisations should respect democratic principles and processes in their own elections and governance and join forces with institutions and systems in encouraging participation of students and staff. Higher education institutions and systems should provide support, including financial and other resources, for sustainable representation of students and staff and ensuring the independence of representatives and their organisations. Student and staff representatives remain accountable to their constituencies.