

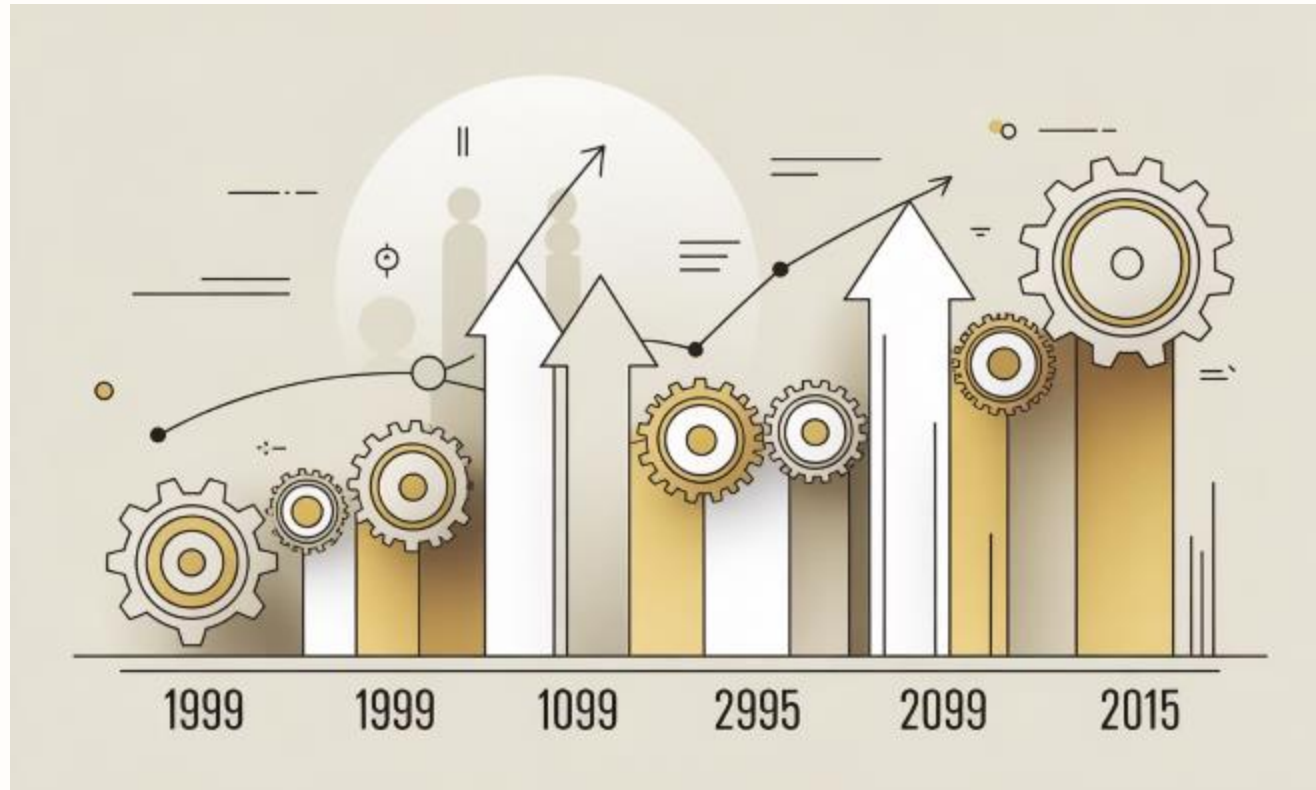


Academic freedom and academic integrity

From principle to a common understanding as values of the European higher Education Area (EHEA)

Peer learning New FAV November 19, 2025
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Before 2018



Before 2018 Paris Ministerial Communique: Intrinsic Value

Academic freedom was implied already in 1999
(Bologna), mentioned explicitly as of 2007 (London)
Academic integrity “newest” value (2018 Paris)

01

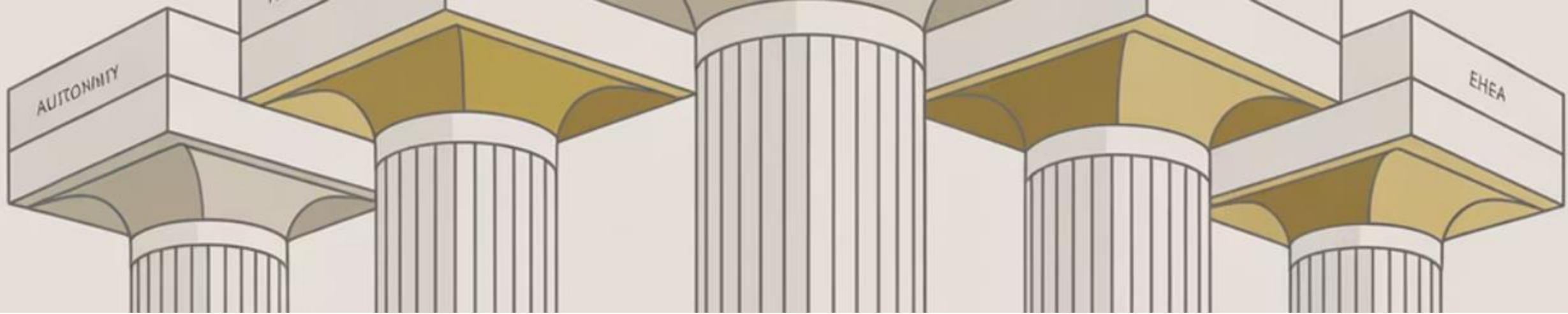
Early Policy Focus: Peripheral Role

In early policy discussions fundamental values were taken for granted, overshadowed by structural reforms (QF, recognition, QA) and mobility initiatives.

02

Evolution: Central Pillar

Amid escalating geopolitical challenges and democratic regression across Europe, academic freedom and integrity evolved into central pillars of the EHEA agenda from 2012/15 onward



Paris Ministerial Communiqué (2018)

1

Major Policy Shift

This communiqué marked the moment when the six fundamental values were explicitly identified as those of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

2

Defining Core Values

The six values are: academic freedom, academic integrity, institutional autonomy, student and staff participation in HE governance, public responsibility *for* higher education and *of* higher education.

3

Establishing the Bedrock

These values were positioned as the "bedrock" of the EHEA, prompting strong calls for their systematic monitoring and effective implementation.

Rome Ministerial Communiqué (2020)



Annexed statement adopted

Developed a common understanding of Academic Freedom through extensive BFUG consultations with experts and stakeholders.



Shared definition established

Defined academic freedom: the right to learn, teach, research, and disseminate knowledge without interference nor fear of reprisal.



Ethical & democratic framing

Positioned within ethical standards, institutional autonomy, and democratic imperatives, operationalizing core values.



Tirana Ministerial Communiqué (2024)



Expanded the Rome approach

Integrated EHEA Statements on the remaining five fundamental values,



Defined academic integrity

A set of behaviors and attitudes in the academic community internalizing and furthering compliance with ethical and professional principles and standards in learning, teaching, research, governance.



Holistic values framework

Emphasized interconnectedness; committed to protection, promotion, and monitoring of all six values.





Understanding Academic Freedom

Academic freedom is a foundational concept necessary for quality higher education and a vital element of democracy. It is considered a distinct, fundamental democratic right, rooted universally in the pursuit of knowledge and truth.

Core Protections

What does academic freedom protect?

Academic freedom comprises three core freedoms:

Freedom to learn

This value is closely linked to equitable access to higher education and to students' rights to pursue independent learning.

Freedom to teach

Academic staff must have the liberty to define the curriculum and teaching methods, an exercise that includes strong public and social responsibility.

Freedom to research

This includes the right to determine what shall (or shall not) be researched, how it shall be researched, and the methods and avenues through which the findings will be disseminated.

Each of these freedoms entails the **overarching freedom to think, to question, and to share ideas**, both inside and outside the higher education sector. This protection applies to the dissemination of research and teaching outcomes both within and outside the higher education sector.

Related to but distinct from freedom of expression.

Freedom to Research

Academic staff should be **free to determine their research programs and methodologies** within the recognized research standards of their disciplines. This freedom extends to choosing research topics, designing studies, forming collaborations, and disseminating findings without undue interference, ensuring the integrity and advancement of knowledge.



Research topics

Academics are free to select and define their areas of inquiry, exploring subjects they deem significant and relevant to their field.



Methodology

Researchers have the liberty to choose and apply appropriate methods and designs for their studies, adhering to disciplinary standards.



Collaboration

The freedom to form partnerships with other researchers, institutions, and organizations to enhance research quality and impact.



Dissemination

The right to publish, present, and communicate research findings without censorship or external pressure, ensuring public access to knowledge.

Freedom to Teach

This pillar balances public responsibility with institutional autonomy, recognizing teaching as a professional practice depending on and creating public trust.



Institutional responsibility: Autonomous higher education institutions are responsible for the research underpinning programs and their delivery to students.



Faculty authority: Academic staff have substantial responsibility for curriculum content, program development, and teaching methods to optimize student learning.



Governance structure: Higher education governance models should respect and protect academic freedom as a foundational principle.



Participatory decision-making: Academic staff and students must participate meaningfully in institutional decisions, with the protected right to express views without fear of reprisal.

Freedom to Learn

Linked to the freedom to teach, forming a reciprocal relationship that benefits both educators and learners.

Ensures that **students can pursue knowledge**, ask challenging questions, and develop critical thinking skills in an environment that encourages intellectual exploration.

These interconnected values relate directly to equitable access to higher education. **Ensuring freedom to learn requires ongoing societal dialogue and carefully designed administrative procedures** to address the criteria and conditions for accessing higher education opportunities.

When students enjoy genuine freedom to learn, they can engage with diverse perspectives, challenge conventional wisdom, and contribute meaningfully to academic discourse.



Access

Equitable pathways to higher education



Inquiry

Freedom to question and explore



Expression

Protected student voice in learning

Why is academic freedom **essential**?

Public good and quality

Academic freedom is an indispensable aspect of **quality** learning, teaching, and research. It is a necessary **condition** for higher education institutions to produce and transmit knowledge for the benefit of society as a public good.

Advancing knowledge

It **guarantees** academics and students the **freedom of thought and inquiry** to advance knowledge.

It provides the **condition for challenging existing academic standards** based on new research findings and is crucial for advancing the standards of academic disciplines.

Democracy

Societies cannot be genuinely democratic without honoring academic freedom and institutional autonomy. As a democratic right, it shares elements with freedom of thought, opinion, and expression.

Conditions and responsibilities

While academic freedom is essential, it is not an absolute value. Its exercise is complex and must be framed by specific standards and considerations:

Professional standards

It must **adhere to rigorous scientific and professional standards** of the respective discipline.

Ethical Conduct

Exercise of AF **requires respect for the rights of others and adherence to ethical conduct.**

Researchers must also be aware of the impact of their work on humans and their environment.



Protecting academic freedom through **institutional support**



Secure environment

Academic staff must benefit from **sufficiently secure employment conditions** so that they do not suffer threats, dismissal, or sanctions related to the content of their research, teaching, or professional views.



Institutional Autonomy

Academic freedom protects individual scholarship and the free functioning of academic institutions. **Institutional autonomy (self-governance) is crucial and constitutive for academic freedom.**



Governance

Governance structures must consciously respect academic freedom, ensuring that academic staff and students participate meaningfully in decision-making processes and can express their views on institutional policies without fear of reprisals.

Understanding Academic Integrity

Academic Integrity (AI) refers to a set of behaviors and attitudes within the academic community. It involves internalizing and furthering compliance with ethical and professional principles and standards.



The scope of academic integrity

Academic integrity applies to all key missions and activities related to higher education.

Area of Application	Description
Academic Missions	Learning, teaching, research, governance, outreach, and any other related tasks.
Location	Activities conducted both inside or outside the higher education institution.
Coverage	The duties and rights associated with fulfilling and protecting academic integrity apply to all members of the academic community.

Core Values Underpinning Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is built upon a foundation of key ethical and professional qualities. These qualities underpin an ethical and professional approach in all academic activities.

Academic integrity includes, but is not limited to, the following principles:



Honesty



Transparency



Fairness



Trust



Responsibility



Respect



Courage

Why Academic Integrity **matters**

Academic integrity serves several vital functions, both for the institutions and for society at large:



Societal trust

It underpins societal trust in higher education and research.



Quality Assurance

It plays a major role in ensuring the quality of all types of activity in higher education.



Legitimation and guarantees

It is essential to the legitimation and reputation of higher education.



Public debate

It enables the academic community to inform public debate on the results, standards, and methods of academic research with authenticity and intellectual rigour.



International cooperation

It is central in building trust between higher education systems, which is crucial for all forms of international cooperation and mobility.

Promoting a culture of integrity

Academic integrity must be actively promoted within and across higher education. This effort should lead to the development of a culture of integrity, ethics, and transparency starting from the earliest stages of education and research training.

Shared Responsibility

Fostering academic integrity is a shared responsibility among three primary groups:

Public authorities

Higher education institutions

The academic community

Roles and duties

Group	Responsibility/Duty
Academic staff	Have a special responsibility in adhering to and promoting academic integrity, setting an example from which students can learn. Teachers must create a safe learning environment where a healthy error and quality culture is developed, recognizing that identifying shortcomings and errors is an integral part of quality learning, teaching, and research.
Students	Although they are members still in training, students nonetheless have the same obligation to promote and respect academic integrity as other members of the community.
Administrative staff & leaders	Should ensure fairness and transparency in their work.
HEIs	Should empower the academic community through proper training, adequate guidance, and support to develop the understanding, skills, and competences required to apply AI. They should establish transparent regulations, standards, and guidelines.

Frameworks and prevention

For academic integrity to be successfully fostered, it is important to create an environment that prevents misconduct and nourishes integrity, rather than only pursuing and redressing academic misconduct.

HEI Requirements

Institutions should consider developing codes of ethics that describe issues of integrity and transparency in easily understandable language. These codes should be co-created with students, academic, and administrative staff. They must outline ethical principles, types of individual and organized misconduct, appropriate differentiated measures, and sanctions.

IAU/MCO Guidelines for an Institutional Code of Ethics in Higher Education



Quality Assurance and public authority requirements

Quality Assurance

References to academic integrity policies in learning, teaching, research, administration, and institutional governance should be included in quality assurance procedures. These should be reviewed by appropriate internal and external bodies in line with European and national frameworks.

Public authority requirements

Public authorities should establish adequate frameworks, including ensuring adequate and sustainable funding for higher education and creating administrative frameworks that promote collaboration over competition and quality over quantity in academic outputs.

Addressing modern challenges

Special attention is required to ensure academic integrity in contexts influenced by technology.

Digital technologies

This includes the context of emerging digital technologies, such as the use of artificial intelligence.

Data handling

Academic integrity concerns also extend to the handling of data.

Organized misconduct

Public authorities must cooperate at the international level to counter and eliminate practices such as diploma mills, contract cheating, and other forms of organized misconduct and corruption within administrative processes and institutional governance.

Public authorities and the academic community should adopt and periodically review recommendations and guidelines on good educational practice related to digital technologies to set standards and limits for their use.

Key Takeaways

Academic freedom & academic integrity: Part of the foundation of higher education

Academic freedom

- Essential for democracy and quality education
- Protects freedom to learn, teach, and research
- Requires secure employment and institutional autonomy

Academic integrity

- Built on honesty, transparency, and trust
- Shared responsibility across all stakeholders
- Requires proactive frameworks and prevention

Together, these values ensure higher education serves the public good and advances knowledge for the benefit of society.

If fundamental values are essential to quality, how can they be reflected in QA?