

Monitoring the Fundamental Values in the EHEA

WG on Fundamental Values activities - the first monitoring exercise

**Presentation to the BFUG Board,
Podgorica, 29 september 2026**
Working Group on Fundamental Values

The mandate

Why ministers asked for monitoring

- **Paris 2018** — ministers identified the fundamental values as the “backbone” of the EHEA.
- **Rome 2020** — a common definition of academic freedom adopted; BFUG asked to develop a framework for enhancing the values, including their monitoring.
- **Tirana 2024** — statements adopted on the remaining five values; commitment reaffirmed to protect the values through legislation and promote them through various means; BFUG asked to monitor implementation and report to the 2027 Ministerial Conference.
- **The six values** — academic freedom; institutional autonomy; participation of students and staff in governance; academic integrity; public responsibility for higher education; public responsibility of higher education.
- **The reasoning** — the values “cannot be automatically assumed”: the conditions ensuring their exercise must be constructed, regularly assessed, protected and promoted. Monitoring is how the EHEA sees whether that is happening.

What this exercise is — and is not

- **First full cycle** — protection, promotion and practice of all six values assessed across 49 systems with one instrument, one reference date and one set of coding rules. The result is a baseline against which the next cycle can measure movement.
- **It monitors commitments, not the values as such** — gaps identified are gaps between what members jointly committed to and what the validated record shows.
- **It is not a ranking** — scorecards are not weighted, not aggregated across values, and carry no composite score. The purpose is self-reflection, dialogue and peer learning.
- **Every answer is source-backed** — disagreements between respondents are recorded; self-reported information is tested against independent evidence.
- **It complements the BPIR** — 13 BPIR questions mapped to 20 questions of the FV instrument, so ministries were not asked the same question twice.

Methodology (1) — the framework

From ministerial statements to indicators

- **Indicators derived strictly from the statements** — each value operationalised by extracting its dimensions from the relevant statement; the exercise does not amend or reinterpret them.
- **Three structuring distinctions:**
 - **Rights & freedoms vs. duties & obligations** — for rights the de facto indicator records infringements; for duties, fulfilment.
 - **De jure vs. de facto** — law and practice assessed separately, to reveal gaps rather than hide them in a composite score.
 - **Current position vs. outlook** — documented plans recorded so the next cycle can check whether they were carried out.
- **Six indicators per value** — three de jure (protection, promotion, outlook) and three de facto (positive developments; threats; infringements or fulfilment).
- **Presentation** — de jure shown through traffic-light scorecards and narrative; de facto reported as narrative inventories, not colour-coded in this first cycle.

Methodology (2) — instruments & respondents

A sequenced triangulation model

- **Four instruments, addressed to those best placed to answer:**
 - the BPIR questionnaire and a dedicated questionnaire for public authorities;
 - a questionnaire for national stakeholder organisations (student unions, trade unions, rectors' conferences);
 - an open, anonymous public consultation for the wider academic community.
- **Pre-filling by national operators** — desk research on legislation, policy, case law and existing reports; respondents confirmed, corrected or supplemented from documented evidence rather than a blank form.
- **Operators' role was strictly technical** — they coordinated collection and checked evidence; they did not interpret the data or set the scores.
- **Integrated dataset per system** — keeps the separate positions of operator, public authority, stakeholders and consultation; disagreements retained and explained.

Methodology (3) — validation & scoring

How the record was made auditable

- **Five validation checks** — formal completeness; intra-response consistency; cross-response consistency (a divergence matrix); response-pattern review; and external validity against an inventory of independent sources (e.g. Academic Freedom Index, EUA Autonomy Scorecard, Scholars at Risk, EP Academic Freedom Monitor).
- **Five governing principles** — evidence takes precedence over opinion; disagreement is recorded, not glossed over; law and practice assessed separately; missing information is not guessed; every coding decision is documented.
- **Normalisation** — comparable answers coded consistently across systems and values.
- **Automatic scoring** — scores derived from the final coded answers per the June 2026 mapping methodology, with no discretionary judgement at the scoring stage.
- **Independent review** — successive drafts reviewed by a separate content-review team, the External Advisory Board, the Working Group and the BFUG.

Coverage

49 higher education systems in 47 EHEA member States

49

systems covered
(desk research + BPIR)

47

systems with public-authority
validation

2

members not covered
(suspended since April 2022)

- **Belgium and the United Kingdom** are each covered through two systems; “system” is the unit of analysis throughout.
- **National operators appointed in 44 systems;** in five, the project team pre-filled directly.
- **Reference date 30 June 2026** for the legal and policy situation; the outlook indicator also admits documented plans evidenced after that date.

Who was heard

Number of respondents

93

validated stakeholder
responses (40 systems)

1,563

completed public-
consultation responses

38

systems in the
consultation

- **Organised stakeholders** — student unions 25 responses (23 systems); trade unions 34 (30 systems); rectors' conferences 34 (28 systems). All three categories responded in only 13 systems; nine systems returned no organised response.
- **Public consultation** — a signalling and corroboration channel, not a representative survey; unweighted, and no indicator is scored on it alone. One system accounted for 59% of responses; 11 systems returned none.
- **Convergence** — across ~10,100 comparison points, all streams match the final answer in 61% of cases; open confrontation is rare. The main limitation is absence, not disagreement.

The public consultation (1) — who spoke

An open, anonymous channel for the academic community

1,563

completed responses
(38 systems)

440

respondents wrote
open-text answers (28%)

32%

not (very) familiar
with the six values

- **The voice of the community, not the institutions** — academic staff at all career stages 755 (48%) and students 485 (31%); 79% in public institutions; about a third sit on a decision-making body. Ministries, QA agencies and civil society together contributed 22 responses.
- **Hidden constituencies** — administrative and professional staff, doctoral candidates and early-career academics gave some of the most concrete testimony, yet none has a dedicated channel in the four-respondent structure.
- **Concentrated and uneven** — one system supplied 59% of responses and seven systems 87%; 22 systems returned fewer than ten and 11 none. Reported as an inventory of issues, counted by respondent and by system, with the effect of the largest group shown separately throughout.
- **Engagement & consent** — opt-in fell ~40% across the six value blocks (777 → 463); 83% consented to anonymised quotation.

The public consultation (2) — what it heard

The community divides inside systems, not between them

- **Concern is close to universal geographically** — counting by system, threats to institutional autonomy were raised in 29 of 32 answering systems and to academic freedom in 27 of 32 — even where a minority view inside each system. Funding was raised in 28 of 32 systems with open text.
- **Least positive on institutional autonomy** — the only value where fewer than half report positive developments once the largest respondent group is set aside; the mechanism described is financial and appointment leverage, not legal restriction.
- **“Participation as façade” is the single most recurrent theme** — the gap is not between systems with rights and systems without, but between the rights and their exercise.
- **Role, not just system, drives the answer** — leadership describes structures, staff describe experience: on integrity fulfilment, leadership answers yes at 76% against 54% of students; early-career staff are the most critical group (integrity threats 41% vs 28% among senior staff).
- **What it adds** — generative AI dominates integrity threats (~46% of substantive answers); and testimony no organised channel supplied — managerial silencing, decorative ethics bodies, precarity limiting participation. Read as signals to investigate, not measurements.

“We do participate theoretically, but our input is mostly ignored by the leadership, so it’s just a show.”

— early-career academic staff (public consultation)

Main findings (1) — the values in law

Broad recognition, uneven content

- **Recognition is near-universal** for every value. What separates systems is definition, the coverage of dimensions, and whom the guarantee protects.
- **The EHEA legislates its responsibilities more completely than its freedoms.** Systems meeting every protection aspect:
 - **Public responsibility for HE: 39 of 49** • **Public responsibility of HE: 40 of 49**
 - **Academic freedom: 16** • **Institutional autonomy: 12** • **Participation: 17** • **Academic integrity: 1**
- **“Recognition without content” on the freedoms side** — e.g. academic freedom named in 48 systems but its full five-dimension definition met in 17, and protection extended explicitly to students in 30; institutional autonomy guaranteed widely but defined in law in 20.
- **The weakest-legislated elements** are those the statements are most emphatic about — the freedom of learning, decision-making participation rights, and integrity in digital technologies and international cooperation.

Main findings (2) — promotion & outlook

- **Promotion is weakest where the values most need active support.** Nearly half of systems have no promotion measure for academic freedom; more than half none for institutional autonomy.
- **Promotion is strong where an infrastructure exists** — overwhelmingly quality assurance — and weak where a new one must be built. Where external evaluation exists, it is embedded in QA, not assigned to a dedicated body.
- **Many promotion instruments are by-products** of policies pursued for other reasons, and the same instruments (performance agreements, funding formulas, accreditation) can both promote and constrain a value.
- **The outlook splits the framework in two** — static on the freedoms side (most systems report no documented plans), expansionary on the responsibilities side.
- **Explicitly weakening plans are rare and concentrated;** because the coding records the positive element where a reform runs both ways, the absence of weakening is not evidence that nothing is being weakened.

Main findings (3) — law versus practice

The gap between law and practice: the defining finding of the cycle

44 / 45

practice shortfalls fall on
duties the system legislates

43

systems report threats
on 5+ of the 6 values

47

systems name funding
as a threat on ≥ 1 value

- **The gap runs inside systems that legislate**, not between them and those that do not: for public responsibility of higher education, 44 of 45 reported practice shortfalls fall on dimensions the same system legislates.
- **Threat reporting is the EHEA's normal condition.** A short common list recurs across all six values: constrained funding, contested governance and political interference, employment precarity, self-censorship, generative AI, demographic decline — with funding the medium transmitting most other pressures.
- **Positive developments coexist with the threats** — for most difficulties, a solution has already been found somewhere in the EHEA. These are the exercise's main resource for peer learning.

Main findings (4) — interdependence

The values stand or strain together

- **The pressures travel along shared channels** — conditions on funding and appointments reach institutional autonomy first and academic freedom through it; precarious employment undermines both participation in governance and free expression; pressure on the freedoms surfaces as a threat to higher education's public responsibility.
- **The same constituencies are covered last on every value:**
 - **students** — protected less consistently than staff wherever the distinction can be drawn, and least present in the monitoring itself;
 - **the society-facing and internal duties** — extramural dissemination, co-decision, consultation of internal constituencies, public engagement — the weakest scorecard elements;
 - **private provision** — at the edge of the guarantee for autonomy and participation alike.
- **One asymmetry, not six** — the values are legislated most completely in their institutional core and least completely at their edges. These are not six separate weaknesses but one, seen from six angles.

What the exercise learned about its instrument

- **The framework held** — the de jure / de facto separation revealed the gap it was designed to reveal; the source requirement made the record auditable; the outlook indicator produced concrete plans to check next cycle; the asymmetric evidence check corrected national records where independent evidence documented what a return did not. These choices should be kept.
- **Known limits, recorded rather than smoothed over:**
 - **some negative bands are untested** — no question asks whether authorities established measures restricting a value, so empty weakening bands describe the instrument, not the EHEA;
 - **some aspects do not discriminate** — e.g. the guarantee of stable conditions is near-universal, while precarious employment is the most-reported threat;
 - **tests differ in strictness across values**, so bands can be set side by side but not read as a common scale.
- **None of these changes the shape of the findings** — each changes what a single system's score can safely be taken to mean.

Conclusions — overall assessment

Measured against the commitments ministers made

- **Protect through legislation** — met in form almost everywhere; met in full content in a minority of systems for the freedoms and in most systems for the responsibilities.
- **Promote through policy** — met where an existing infrastructure could carry it; largely not met where one would have to be built, above all for academic freedom and institutional autonomy.
- **Put into practice** — where the EHEA is furthest from its own standard: not because systems declined to legislate, but because the conditions of exercise — funding, employment security, governance — are under pressure almost everywhere.
- **One commitment** — the values stand or strain together, as the statements say.
- **A baseline delivered** — validated and source-backed for 49 systems on one reference date; the next cycle can measure movement and check whether the documented plans were carried out.

Recommendations

Addressed to the three groups the statements name — adding no new obligation

- **For public authorities** — complete the content of legal protection where recognition exists (definitions, dimensions, coverage of students and staff); build promotion where no infrastructure yet carries it; and act on the conditions the threat inventories identify — funding stability, employment security, governance — since these, not the legal text, are where the values are under most pressure.
- **For institutions, the academic community & their organisations** — turn formal rights into practised ones (fill and resource representative seats, protect early-career and non-tenured staff, translate integrity and AI guidance into practice); and strengthen participation in the monitoring itself so the record reflects experience as well as structures.
- **For the BFUG & the next cycle** — keep the design choices that worked and report on whether documented plans were carried out; close the coverage gaps (a minimum-participation protocol; channels for currently unheard constituencies); address the instrument's known limits and publish the normalisation rules with the instrument.

Milestones delivered in this cycle

From ministerial mandate to a validated baseline

- **2023–2025** — framework and instrument developed through EHEA-wide stakeholder consultation; piloted in four systems; endorsed by the BFUG (2025).
- **2025–early 2026** — national operators appointed and trained; technical implementation methodology finalised; data-validation procedures agreed with the External Advisory Board, the Working Group, Eurydice and the BFUG (March–April 2026).
- **2026** — data collected through four instruments; desk research and pre-filling across all 49 systems; open public consultation run on the project platform (closed 31 July 2026).
- **June–septemeber 2026** - validation, normalisation, manual scoring and cross check completed.
- **september 2026** — draft report, review by first contentent-review team member, first consultations

Events organised in this cycle

From ministerial mandate to a validated baseline

- **6th December 2024** First meeting of the Working Group on Fundamental Values (online)
 - **16th – 17th June 2025** Second meeting of the WG on Fundamental Values in Malta
 - **19th – 21st November 2025** Third Meeting of the WG on Fundamental Values and PLA on **Academic Integrity & Academic Freedom** in Romania
 - **24th – 25th February 2026** Fourth meeting of the WG on Fundamental Values and PLA on **Public Responsibility of Higher Education** in Romania
 - **18th September 2026** PLA on FV Monitoring, in Romania
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- **13th -14th October 2026** Fifth meeting of the WG on Fundamental Values and PLA on **Institutional Autonomy** in Malta
 - **10th of November 2026** PLA on **Student & Staff Participation in HE Governance** (Brussels, organised by ESU)
 - **26th-27th January 2027** Sixth meeting of the WG on Fundamental Values (tbc) and PLA on **Public Responsibility for Higher Education** (Brussels, organised by ESU)
 - **15th-16th March 2027** Seventh meeting of the Working Group on Fundamental Values and workshop on final monitoring results (Norway)
 - **25th of May 2027** Side event to the Ministerial Conference on Fundamental Values, Iasi, Romania

The road to 2027 and beyond

Feedback, finalisation, dissemination — and the next cycle

- **1st of October 2026** — Draft report to be sent to the WG on Fundamental Values for feedback.
- **after 1st of October 2026** — Coordination with the WG on Monitoring and Eurydice.
- **15th of October 2026** — Draft report to be sent to the BFUG for feedback (updated after the WG feedback).
- **Early 2027** — report finalised in light of the feedback received; BFUG to validate or acknowledge it.
- **2027** — results feed the EHEA Ministerial Conference, as ministers requested in Tirana.
- **Ongoing** — dissemination and peer learning via fundamentalvalues.info (open educational resources, videos, blog, AI-assisted guidance) and EHEA research and policy events, including the Bologna Process Researchers' Conference 2026.
- **Next cycle** — report back on whether the documented outlook plans were carried out; close coverage gaps (minimum-participation protocol; channels for early-career, doctoral and administrative voices); refine the instrument and publish the normalisation rules with it.

Discussion & next steps