



Directorate of school, out-of-school and higher education
Higher Education and Research Division

*Higher Education Governance between democratic culture,
academic aspirations and
market forces*

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Learning and living
democracy

Considerations and recommendations

Higher Education Governance, between democratic culture, academic aspirations and market forces

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In contributing to the European Year of Citizenship through Education and celebrating the 50th anniversary of the European Cultural Convention, we, the participants in the Council of Europe Forum on Higher Education Governance, confirm the key role of higher education in the development of modern society based on democracy, human rights and the rule of law. The issue of good governance in higher education is crucial not only in the promotion of democratic culture within the higher education community but also in society at large; it is also indispensable to undertaking the profound reforms needed for creating the European Higher Education Area by 2010.

CONSIDERATIONS

1. We see higher education governance as fundamental to achieving the full range of purposes of higher education:
 - preparation for the labour market;
 - preparation for life as active citizens in a democratic society;
 - personal development;
 - maintenance and development of a broad, advanced knowledge base.

The range of relevant actors in higher education governance should reflect the multiplicity of purposes of higher education.
2. It is important to ensure quality in higher education and research. We consider governance to be a crucial element of the quality culture of both systems and institutions of higher education. It would not be possible to achieve quality higher education without good governance.
3. We underline the importance of good governance in promoting social cohesion and in affording equal opportunity to higher education for all those qualified.
4. We further understand good governance to imply, on the one hand, steering the process towards the development of valid objectives and, on the other hand, the development of the instruments needed to achieve these objectives – the “fitness of purpose” as well as the “fitness for purpose”.
5. We consider legitimacy to be one of the basic principles of good governance – it should be understood as the heart of the efficiency of governance, and not as its opposite.
6. Within the basic principles of good governance in higher education it is important to allow sufficient flexibility to take account of the specific contexts and traditions of given higher education institutions or given systems.
7. Good governance is not guaranteed by established structures and procedures alone. It is necessary for the actors in governance of higher education to promote democratic culture as another building block of governance and as a basic principle of good governance.
8. Given the role higher education has for the overall societal and economic development, we see the necessity to ensure the responsiveness of higher education to the changing needs and expectations of society. In this respect, it is important to ensure participation of external actors in the governance of higher education and to allow for flexibility to accommodate the continuous change of the aforementioned needs and expectations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The governance of systems and institutions of higher education should be based on the adequate inclusion of all relevant stakeholders. To ensure successful attainment of the agreed set of goals, it should be founded on the principles of:
 - transparency in procedures and tasks;
 - effective mechanisms of accountability of those involved in governance;
 - the ability to reach, win acceptance for and implement decisions;
 - participation and the rule of law.
- Higher education serves to accommodate the expectations and needs of different groups within society. Those serving on higher education governance bodies, regardless of the capacity in which they serve, should seek to act in accordance with their understanding of the best interest of the higher education system and institutions for which they are responsible, while also paying appropriate attention to the concerns of the constituency from which they originate.
- Institutional autonomy is essential for ensuring academic freedom, which constitutes one of the core values of higher education. Public authorities should establish and maintain an appropriate legislative framework that ensures institutional autonomy and provides for adaptability of structures and flexibility of methods within the basic principles of good higher education governance. The legal framework concerning governance should apply equally to both public and private institutions.
- It is important to make a distinction between the process of setting long term goals and developing appropriate strategies for achieving them, and implementing these strategies on a day-to-day basis. The legitimacy and competence of the governing bodies should be complemented with the professionalism of the administration.
- While avoiding undue micromanagement and leaving reasonable scope for innovation and flexibility, higher education governance systems and practices should facilitate the elaboration and implementation of coherent institutional policies.
- International organizations and networks active in higher education should consider promoting good higher education governance by disseminating examples of good governance and fostering dialogue between different systems and institutions on the further elaboration of the basic principles of good governance.
- The Bologna Follow Up Group should give explicit consideration to the role of governance in reaching the goal of providing high quality education and mobility of students and staff throughout Europe.

ISSUES FOR FURTHER CONSIDERATION

We suggest that it is necessary to elaborate on what the autonomy of higher education institutions in the modern society includes, in terms of content (legal, financial etc) as well as in terms of bodies and actors. Furthermore, it would be necessary to determine, at both national and institutional level, the sectors of governance of higher education where changes are most needed.