

Eurodoc statement on Academic Freedom

As a representative of Doctoral candidates and other Early Career Researchers (ECRs) in Europe, Eurodoc advocates for improving the conditions for ECRs as well as for all researchers regarding Academic Freedom. While the conditions of Doctoral Candidates and ECRs vary greatly across Europe, it must be recognised that they are professionals and academia is their workplace – Academic Freedom thus concerns them as well.

In the *Rome Ministerial Communiqué*, academic freedom is defined as

The freedom of academic staff and students to engage in research, teaching, learning and communication in and with society without interference nor fear of reprisal.¹

Academic freedom is the freedom of researchers at all levels, and thus it also concerns the academic freedom of doctoral candidates and other early career researchers, just as it concerns the academic freedom of more senior researchers and students.

However, from Eurodoc's perspective, there are two aspects of academic freedom that must always be considered, institutional academic freedom and individual academic freedom. These two are not competing from our perspective but are instead closely interlinked. There can be no institutional academic freedom if there is no academic freedom for the individual, and likewise, there can be no proper academic freedom for the individual if there is not also institutional academic freedom.

An important part of institutional academic freedom is the independence of academic institutions from governments and others. Here, sufficient funding of academic institutions plays an important role. Academic freedom of individual researchers requires that the researcher does not have to fear reprisal from society, government, academic institutions, other researchers or students.

Doctoral candidates and other ECRs have the most precarious positions in academia, and thus they are extremely vulnerable when it comes to reprisals. Yet, as they carry out a significant part of the research, teaching and outreach, there can be no academic freedom if it does not include this group.

In this statement, Eurodoc provides a series of recommendations that we advocate must be implemented by governmental and academic institutions to secure academic freedom. While some of these principles concern the academic freedom of doctoral candidates and other early career researchers primarily, most concern the whole of academia. For there can be no academic freedom for any group in academia if there is not both institutional academic freedom and academic freedom for individual researchers in general.

¹ [Rome Ministerial Communiqué](#)

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Academic Freedom and Governmental institutions

Protection at a constitutional level. Academic freedom is an integral part of a democracy and must therefore be protected. For this reason, academic freedom should be protected in the constitution.

Evaluation and monitoring of the state of academic freedom. As academic freedom is a prerequisite for democracy, it is important that the conditions of academic freedom at European and national levels are measured and monitored in democracy indices or similar.

Academic governance: Academic organisations should be free to carry out their core mission. Thus, legislation should support the democratic governance of academic institutions and ensure a politically independent academic leadership.

The role of public funding: Academic freedom should be ensured by public funding, either through direct funding or competitive funding programs. Funding from other sources should be complementary, and universities should not rely on such to carry out their core mission.

Allocation of funding: The way public funding is allocated can influence the ability of academia to perform its core mission freely. Therefore, not only should the necessary funding be available, but it should also be allocated to support academia's core mission in terms of education, research and outreach in all fields.

Assessment of research: Research assessment is never a neutral process, hence an assessment system will affect different researchers and research fields differently. For this reason, it is important that any assessment system that is used for allocating public funding is transparent, supports equal opportunities, supports the openness of science, and protects academic freedom [2].

Employment of researchers: In order to carry out their core missions, academic institutions need to be able to provide reasonable working conditions for academic professionals, such as doctoral candidates, early career researchers, and other individuals who are necessary for the universities to carry out their tasks. As professionals, they should, therefore, always be employed with sustainable career paths, adequate salaries and full social rights and protection. The working conditions should be such to allow researchers to carry out their research, teaching or outreach tasks freely. To ensure this government must implement a responsible legal framework for the employment conditions of early career researchers and ensure sufficient structural funding of academia.

Openness of science: "Science should be as open as possible and only as closed as necessary". This includes the freedom for researchers to publish research results without fear of repercussion but should extend to the entire business carried out at universities and other public research institutions. To facilitate this, governments should ensure that legislation and funding of higher education and research, including both methods, data and findings, fully allow for openness of science.

Explicitness about levels. The national context and framework must be explicit on what academic freedom means at different levels of hierarchies and responsibilities. Rights and obligations should be clearly defined, and the implementation monitored accordingly.

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Governance structure within the universities: Academic freedom and democracy are closely tied together. You cannot truly have one without the other. Therefore, the academic institutions themselves should be governed democratically and transparently.

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Representative rights: Democratic governance of academic institutions means that all groups affiliated with the institutions should be guaranteed representational rights where decisions are made about them and their conditions. Representational rights must extend to those in precarious positions, such as doctoral candidates and postdoctoral researchers.

Assessment of the quality of research: As the universities and other academic organisations should be responsible for how the quality of research is assessed, they should also be responsible for how this assessment process is done. As with other assessment processes, such a process is never neutral, but it must be open and transparent, support equal opportunities, enable interdisciplinary research and allow for differences within research fields.

Enhancement of the understanding of academic freedom: Academic institutions should work towards enhancing the understanding of the importance and scope of academic freedom within their own body of researchers.

Work environment conditions: Like all employees, researchers have the right to be treated with respect and dignity as professionals and people. It is the university's and other academic institutions' responsibility to provide a work environment that ensures this. This should include mechanisms and tools to protect and improve the well-being of individual researchers and ensure that underrepresented groups in research are not met by a biased or discriminatory structure.

Researchers' role in the public debate: Academic institutions should encourage researchers to partake in the public debate and bring their expert knowledge to society. This includes training and supporting researchers to effectively participate in the public debate and supporting those researchers who face hate and threats due to their roles as researchers. In particular, threats towards researchers should be monitored.

Standards for collaborations: External collaborations, whether financial or not, should live up to the standards described in this document.

Researchers abroad: Research is an international profession, and for that reason, many researchers conduct research abroad for shorter or longer periods. Academic institutions are responsible for preparing researchers before travelling and offering continuous support while conducting research abroad, especially in cases where research must be carried out in authoritarian context.

Open science and freedom to publish: Both the freedom of speech and academic freedom include a right for the individual researcher to freely choose where and in which form to publish their scientific work, regardless of their results. It is the responsibility of academic institutions to ensure the researchers are empowered to do so while making sure the researchers observe the obligation to make scientific research accessible, as open as possible - and only as close as necessary, in a transparent manner such that it can be reproduced - while also observing the lawful handling of intellectual property rights.

Explicitness about positions. The academic institutions should clearly and explicitly state the meaning of academic freedom, including the entitlements and obligations academic freedom entails, for all roles and positions individual academics are involved in at the particular institution.

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Closing remarks

Academic freedom is a question about democracy. Academic Freedom ensures the free exchange of ideas, creates innovation and furthers the development of all scientific fields and related and crucial socio-economic progress.

Failures to protect, limitations or lack of due diligence in support of Academic Freedom may reduce the potential of research and higher education and thus limit its positive impact on society.

As representatives of doctoral candidates and other early career researchers, we stand for the full, conscious and adequate support of Academic Freedom by all means. We, therefore, encourage governments and academic institutions to implement the necessary measures to do so.

Key recommendations for governmental institutions

- **Protect academic freedom at the constitutional level.** Academic freedom is crucial to the foundations of democracy and should hence be ensured within the constitution or an equivalent level.
- **Evaluation and monitoring of the state of academic freedom.** Ensuring academic freedom can only be successful if it is properly and sufficiently monitored and evaluated at EU, national and institutional levels, which is the duty of governmental institutions to arrange.
- **Public funding.** It must be ensured that the public funding of research is sufficient to cover the core of the academic institution's missions.
- **Research assessment.** The assessment of research, of researchers and of research-performing organisations provides the framework conditions for all researchers and should hence explicitly foster academic freedom at all levels.

Key recommendations for academic institutions

- **Safeguards.** Academic institutions must provide enforceable protection of academic freedoms of all the individual researchers affiliated with the institution, regardless of their seniority and employment status.
- **Code of conduct.** This is common now in most academic institutions in Europe. It is mandatory to include something about gender inequality but not academic freedom. It should be included.
- **Harassment.** Researchers are prone to harassment from society, peers and management. It's the academic institution's responsibility to provide support and protection, ideally using a common minimum framework.

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A note about this statement

The drafting of this statement was begun in the fall of 2021 and was first sent to consultation in the spring of 2022. It was discussed during the AGM 2022, and the writing process continued throughout the fall of 2022 before being sent for consultation at the beginning of 2023 for approval.

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