



LIVING VALUES IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

GUIDELINES FOR UNIVERSITIES

PREFACE

1. The [Prospectus](#) describes the origins of the Living Values project and its significance in the contemporary world of higher education. It articulates the uses, benefits, and expected outcomes for institutions undertaking a review of their values. Circumstances that might trigger a review, reaffirmation, or possible rethinking of institutional values are listed at paragraph 9 below.
2. This document contains guidelines for institutions which want a systematic approach to reviewing their values and how they are lived. It is based on evidence submitted by the universities that took part in the pilot project (see the list of universities [here](#)) and other global higher education initiatives. It offers practical ideas on how to initiate and manage a review of institutional values, including both technical and process elements.
3. The guidelines are not intended to be prescriptive. There are significant variables in institutional settings (e.g. external policy environment; institutional size, mix, and profile; traditions and institutional legacies; internal culture and political configurations and personalities) that may favour or exclude certain approaches. Variation in the ways reviews are undertaken and these guidelines are used is thus expected and encouraged, although certain success factors and general principles will be common for most institutions.

DEFINITIONS

4. There is no consistent and universal definition of the word *value*. Other terms often used almost interchangeably include *principles*, *ethics*, *morals*, *standards*, *codes of behaviour*, *rules of conduct*, and *standards of behaviour*. Some of the frequently used definitions of *values* are:
 - principles or standards of behaviour; one's judgement of what is important in life;
 - important and lasting beliefs or ideals shared by the members of an organisation about what is good or bad and desirable or undesirable. Values influence a person's behaviour and attitudes and serve as broad guidelines in all situations;
 - a widely held collection of stable beliefs which determine the attitudes and behaviours which condition how the university does its business;
 - fundamental norms which guide decision making; and
 - part of the DNA of an institution that provide a professional standard on which stakeholders may rely.

5. Institutions are therefore advised to consider and agree on what constitutes a value within their context.
6. Institutions are also advised to be quite clear about the conceptual and practical differences between high-level values and how they may be manifest in mission, politics, behaviours, processes, and structures. In the general discussion of values in higher education, a distinction is often made between:
 - those values which are fundamental across higher education and
 - values which may be particular to a specific situation or institutional setting and thus not necessarily consistent across the sector.

The former, for example, might include academic freedom. The latter might include service to a particular community. It is up to each university to determine which specific values, which are important for their institution, they select for the purpose of this initiative. Examples are given later in these guidelines along with suggested criteria for selecting values (see paragraph 12 – 14 below).

7. Values can be collective or essentially individual. For this initiative the emphasis is on institutional-level values. That said, the accommodation of diversity and the provision of a safe space for the critical airing of views is entirely compatible with the founding principles of the [MCO](#). Further, it is a way to strengthen the academic community and the university.
8. Challenging value preferences is essential to developing clarity and uncovering assumptions and can contribute to building and reinforcing a community of values among staff and students, strengthening values, or exposing their lack of relevance or desirability in a specific situation.

TRIGGERS WHICH MIGHT SIGNAL THAT A REVIEW OF INSTITUTIONAL VALUES AND HOW THEY MIGHT BE LIVED WOULD BE HELPFUL

9. Though these will depend in part on the mission and particular circumstances facing individual universities, some of the reasons a review might be useful include:
 - prevention of, or response to, a crisis;
 - change of university leadership;
 - the desire to foster a vision of a unified institution with shared values, rather than a number of different faculties, departments, and administrative units;
 - preparation for a strategic review or revision of the institution's strategy;
 - adverse or unsatisfactory findings from staff or student surveys or the desire or perceived need to engage more closely with staff and students;
 - internal or external challenge to performance regarding existing or proposed values;
 - the wish to engage more closely with the university's community and stakeholders;
 - the desire to assess how well the institution is doing in the delivery of its mission; and
 - opportunities arising from a forthcoming celebration.

More information about motives of the pilot universities can be seen [here](#).

DESIGN AND APPROACH

10. The philosophy behind the approach described in these guidelines views the Living Values initiative as a journey rather than a destination, with no expiry date or fixed points of arrival. Here are some key points to understand.

- The process is ongoing and should be conceived of as a cycle. Values may need to be redefined or added due to changing circumstances. Similarly, the actions and desired behaviours designed to achieve full realisation may need to be modified or supplemented.
- The process of reviewing, resetting, and rethinking values is **not an audit**, but rather a series of internal and external reflections during which institutions learn from the process. A review of values should not be triggered by the orders of an external authority—it should be a decision made by the university. The accountability for the realisation of values is internal.
- The process may help demonstrate the institution's value base to new and serving staff, students, and the wider community. In that case, exerting pressure on or improving communications with external agencies, including those which might be perceived as threatening values such as institutional autonomy or academic freedom, may also be useful.
- The exercise is designed to **strengthen the academic community and institutional development and evolution** at several levels, e.g. engaging staff in a meaningful way, updating underlying institutional values that have ceased to be meaningful or relevant; and changing internal policies, processes, and behaviours to realise chosen values or change internal and external relationships. Appropriate change management approaches may assist in achieving the desired intent.
- The process benefits from being **systematic rather than ad hoc** so as to avoid confusion and frustration, suboptimal outcomes, and widespread cynicism.
- The process has to be comprehensive and inclusive; failure to engage the whole university community will limit its effectiveness.
- While the process needs to be sensitive to local situational variables, using evidence of success from elsewhere could enhance the experience in a crucial way (see paragraphs 3 and 4).

SCOPE OF THE LIVING VALUES THEMSELVES: A PROSPECTUS OF POSSIBILITIES FOR INSTITUTIONAL CHOICE

11. Employing an international perspective reveals that there is a wide range of values universities may wish to espouse and live. These values have evolved over time and continue to do so, and there is no universally agreed on canon of values. The choice of values is a matter for each university, though it is crucial that universities identify a small number of core values. Universities that have signed the [Magna Charta Universitatum](#) may wish to include the fundamental values articulated at the MCO's inception and whose importance at the global level of higher education has been

confirmed since. These are included below, along with two additional values that have evolved in recent years.

- **Institutional Autonomy and Responsibility**

This encompasses the ability of the university to set its own rules and conduct its affairs without external restriction, whether from government and public authorities or stakeholders/users of its services in the higher education marketplace.

There are several dimensions to this, including decision-making power in the domains of academic affairs, organisation, finance and physical resources, and human resources.

The focus is on the relationships between universities and external agencies in terms of legal matters (including the legal status of the university) and in turn whether the relationship and dialogue is adversarial or collaborative. This is, in effect, akin to a social contract between universities and external agencies.

The MCO also wishes to emphasise that the right to autonomy implies the obligation to act responsibly and sensitively to external stimuli. It is not a concept of the academic monastery. It also involves the right to challenge and be challenged.

The pursuit of autonomy is more akin to a journey rather than a fixed destination, and each university's journey is unique in its speed and trajectory. Autonomy is an aspect of dynamic interaction with society and evolves as society does. It cannot be controlled by individual institutions and should be considered an ever-changing element rather than a fixed benchmark to be used for evaluation.

- **Academic freedom**

This is founded on the freedom of the academic, both as an individual and a collective, to practise responsible and independent intellectual enquiry in the generation and pursuit of knowledge and its dissemination through the process of education, publishing, and knowledge transfer, all broadly defined. References to international sources on Academic Freedom can be found [here](#).

This freedom could be constrained by external forces (government interventions and economic or social stakeholders) for various reasons, using different methods and constraints, with diverse consequences.

Academic freedom may also be constrained locally, intentionally or inadvertently by university leadership style, operating policies and practices, or organisational culture.

For this reason, it is recommended that both external and internal discussions are undertaken in the analysis.

The principal elements of academic freedom are described in the [tool box](#) as is the accompanying responsibility institutions hold to exercise these freedoms.

- **Equity**

This includes equality of opportunity regardless of gender, ethnicity, age, religion, disability, gender identity or sexuality, manifested in processes to guarantee fairness, merit, and justice in all institutional activity in the academic, financial, and human relations domains.

It also includes equity of access to higher education with regard to socio-economic background and the idea that a student population should represent the diversity of society at large in terms of gender, ethnicity, age, religion, disability, gender identity, sexuality, and social backgrounds.

- **Integrity**

This value has specific meaning related to science and research but also applies to more general conduct, behaviour, and processes where it signifies openness and transparency, wholeness, honesty, absence of corruption, dignity, acceptance of personal responsibility, generosity of spirit and action, ethical behaviour, and shared purpose and vision.

12. It is apparent that universities in specific settings and situations may well adopt **missions and qualities that are underpinned by other values**. From experience these may include:

- **Global Outlook**

This value may be demonstrated by strong international faculty and student profiles, encouraging and supporting two-way student mobility, student global employability, commitment to the study and research of global themes, responsibility to assist in capacity development in higher education systems, developing mutually advantageous partnerships, borderless education, and sustainability in all its forms. Values in this area could encompass both philosophical and instrumental elements.

- **Creativity and Innovativeness**

This value is demonstrated by the commitment of the university not only to excellence in all areas but also to experimental, “outside the box” approaches in education and research.

- **Excellence**

This value represents an active commitment to the principles and practices of a learning organisation and prioritising quality as a way of life.

- **Societal Responsibility**

While this is the counterpart to the values of academic freedom and institutional autonomy described above, it is also a value in its own right and may encompass stakeholder/user engagement in programme design, delivery, evaluation, research and development; Mode 2 approaches to education and research (i.e. stakeholders and user engagement for their

design and delivery as well as multi-disciplinary problem orientation); incorporation of major social issues in thematic teaching and research; incorporation of external social values; and an outward-looking, entrepreneurial culture that is relevant to local communities and committed to sustainability.

- **Diversity, Pluralism, and Inclusiveness**

Connected to equity and equality of treatment, the commitment to these values would specifically manifest itself in the celebration and active pursuit of diverse student and staff bodies as indicated earlier; the promotion, and openness to the discussion and challenge of different political, social, cultural, religious, or economic views as well as dissent on campus; and the engagement with partner institutions and organisations from diverse sectors and parts of the world.

- **Health, Well-being, and a Caring Community**

A number of elements could figure in this, including personal support mechanisms for staff and students (people-centeredness); friendly culture; expectation of service; partnership and help-giving; openness to advice; looking after weaker contributors; encouraging and celebratory ethos; pervasive sense of pride; and courtesy and confidence.

13. There are other missions and qualities that universities may wish to identify and promote, but it should be emphasised that this initiative focuses on the main institutional values. Selecting a few—ideally 5 or fewer—meaningful, key values is optimal but may prove to be challenging for university communities. An effective way to achieve this small number is to test the appropriateness of proposed values against the following criteria:

- are the values clear and understandable to all stakeholders (i.e. are they easy to grasp)?
- are they important to the university (possibly as a means of differentiation) and do they describe it at its best?
- do they align with the university's mission and vision?
- are they the minimum necessary to communicate?
- are they convertible into tangible behaviours, actions, and practices?
- do they support self-reflection, review, and goal setting?
- will people understand, appreciate, and incorporate them?
- is it possible to assess their realisation and impact?
- are they free of jargon and written in a manner that fits the university?
- can they be easily memorised and repeated?
- are they narrow enough to help guide key stakeholders and will they help avoid distractions or unintended consequences?

14. The tool box contains a section on values (click [here](#)). The values adopted by the pilot universities can be found [here](#). An example of a format that universities could use to develop each value and its accompanying behaviours and actions, analyse where the institution stands at present, and what it proposes to do about any problem areas identified can be found [here](#).

THE PROCESS OF REVIEWING AND FORMULATING VALUES

15. Previous paragraphs have indicated that a variety of conditions may trigger a review of institutional values. The aim is to establish the use of values as a permanent and ongoing feature of university life, engaging staff and students and embedded across the institution and its functions. This is discussed in the following section of the guidelines. The successful embedding of values rests in large measure on the success of the processes adopted to initiate and develop the values in the first place. The effectiveness of these processes inevitably conditions subsequent successful embedding. Universities are, of course, free to develop their own processes, but the following guidance, which is based on evidence from the pilot universities, is included to assist.

16. Experience in a wide range of institutional settings shows that incorporating a few specific approaches to a Living Values project can promote maximum effectiveness. These include *inter alia*:

- Agreement at the outset from relevant internal and external stakeholders on the need for the process, as well as their input on design and execution; this engagement creates clear and legitimised ownership and commitment;
- leadership from the top of the university and buy-in of leaders at various levels;
- a bottom-up focus within a clear and agreed overall framework and two-way honest and frank communication between those leading and those contributing;
- a well-managed process with a competent leader, a limited number of critical values, a robust but achievable timescale, and a well-informed process supported by accurate and relevant data;
- a goal of achieving maximum impact, with the understanding that developing and living values is a continuous, iterative, and interactive process.

17. The process should naturally **engage all relevant constituencies** including:

- a. academic, administrative, and technical staff at all levels across all units/departments of the university;
- b. students at all programme levels and across all, campuses, departments and schools, including student organisations and those involved in the students' consultative structures;
- c. relevant external stakeholders, including those from the business, political, and social communities and governing agencies;
- d. senior university leaders and members of governing boards.

Each constituency will have different preferred means of engaging with the process; hence it is recommended to be flexible rather than to force dialogue into a specific format or too limited a timeframe.

18. The project needs an effective **project leader**, normally an academic member of staff at a senior level to ensure academic credibility, enhance trust, and endow the process with appropriate authority. The characteristics needed in such a leader include inspirational qualities, excellent process and project management skills, and

good communication skills. Experience reveals that his/her effectiveness also depends on:

- the full backing and support of the head of the institution in terms of process and contributions to discussions on strategy, content, and direction;
- a sufficiently long period of assignment to ensure the process is not only developed but embedded;
- a supporting project team to steer the process and provide expert guidance, supporting data, and logistical assistance; and
- the full cooperation of heads of academic and administrative units in design and implementation stages.

19. There are a whole range of **mechanisms** that can be deployed **to ensure the involvement and commitment** of the various institutional and stakeholder constituencies. These include:

- the use of the guidelines;
- the use of Delphi techniques (successive questionnaires to sample constituents) to refine drafts;
- initial staff induction conference briefings;
- an institutional Living Values webpage with scope for interactive dialogue;
- briefing sessions for managers and department heads and subsequent progress workshops;
- open meetings and fora;
- focus groups.

Again, it is emphasised that some of these methods will be more appropriate to some constituency groups than others, implying a pragmatic but also systematic approach.

The precise configuration and timing of these events needs careful consideration. Experience demonstrates that holding various exhibitions to visually demonstrate how values are already manifested across the university (in education, research and development, community engagement, etc.) and encourage further action can have a positive impact on the process and its constituents.

These mechanisms are helpful in demonstrating impact, emphasising the positive benefits of Living Values, and fostering cohesion.

20. It is recommended that the process be undertaken over a reasonable period of time to enable full involvement and one or more iterations between different levels and sections of the university. This implies several stages in the evolution of the project, corresponding with its life cycle. The following sequence has proved to be effective.

- Phase I: Initiation and Plan
 - agreement that the project is needed at the university for explicit reasons and for particular outcomes;
 - backing and legitimisation by university leadership;
 - mandate given to an individual/committee to carry out the project;
 - clarification of its relationship to any related initiatives;
 - articulation of the processes related to designing and implementing the process as well as definition of the expected final outcome; and
 - agreement of project timetable in outline.

- Phase II: Identification of a Map of Values
 - consideration of each of the MCO fundamental values and their operating characteristics and addition of any items of particular interest to your university;
 - determination of whether there are any values besides the MCO's fundamental values that the university regards as important;
 - testing of selected provisional values with constituencies (para.15) through appropriate methods (selected from para. 19);
 - synthesis and agreement of values to proceed with; and
 - developing and disseminating a shared definition of selected values.
- Phase III: Definition of operational manifestations of selected values
 - conversion of each value into a set of overarching policy statements, behaviours, and actions;
 - testing out operational manifestations in steering support group or constituencies followed by ratification by said constituencies; and
 - synthesis and agreement of policy statements, behaviours, and actions to proceed with.
- Phase IV: Conversion of behaviours/manifestations into university functions/domains of university activity

These could include:

- Governance and management/leadership
- Education (programme design and validation, evaluative criteria; Quality Assurance (QA); learning experience; internationalisation)
- Research (themes; approaches, QA; doctorate, internationalisation)
- Students
- Outreach (Continuing Professional Development; Knowledge Exchange)
- Human Resources (profile; appointment; staff appraisal; development)
- Finance
- Marketing, brand and identity

and indicating sought after behaviours as a result of consultation with relevant constituencies.

- Phase V: Conversion of behaviours/manifestations into desired behaviour patterns of actors in the university – how to live out the values e.g. for
 - Governing Boards and Academic Committees
 - Senior Leadership
 - Middle level leadership
 - Staff as individuals
 - Students

in consultation with the respective constituent groups.

- Phase VI: Conversion of outcomes into the university's Strategic Plan and other policy and strategic documents and continuous iteration at unit levels in consultation with respective constituent groups.

- Phase VII: Reflection on the process and its effectiveness, and, at an appropriate time, commencement of the next cycle and iteration.

21. Universities may, of course, prefer to vary the configuration suggested above according to local traditions, cultures, circumstances, and desired timescales. However, if insufficient time is spent on Phases I, II, and III it is likely to have negative consequences for the subsequent Phases IV, V, and VI.

It is also likely that backwards iteration in the sequence will further clarifications and challenges; time should be allowed for this process and built into the provisional timetable.

22. Having completed the above phases (or whichever phases have been deemed appropriate), the university will then need to ensure that the values and their operational manifestations become progressively embedded in university life. If the above processes have been properly conducted, there should already be widespread commitment; discussing values and determining which to adopt is in itself likely to raise awareness of values and adherence to them across the university. However, ongoing sustainability is clearly vital if the values are indeed to be lived effectively.

23. If the foregoing phases are **genuinely diagnostic** in nature, the institution may wish to establish:

- whether the institution is satisfied with the present situation;
- what difficulties, if any, there are in the implementation of values;
- what the origins of the difficulties are (e.g. statutory, political, behavioural);
- what the sources of the difficulties are (e.g. internal to the university, agency, political, clients and stakeholders);
- what the impact of those difficulties are; and
- what action should be taken to alleviate or remove these difficulties.

This will ensure that the project can contribute to the evolution of the institution's academic progress and strategic plan.

24. Finally, it is important to consider the **role the university head** plays in the process. Experience shows that this is likely to be a critical factor, both in terms of existing incumbents and those newly starting in the role. The following observations may be helpful.

- Heads of institutions may wish to use the Living Values project to develop the academic or research performance of the university, change culture and climate, update or reposition the mission, and use its outcomes to provide major inputs to the strategic plan, institutional reform and development, and stakeholder engagement processes.
- An incoming rector at a university where values are already explicit might:
 - accept and work with them;
 - query whether the existing values are appropriate for new circumstances or challenges;

- suggest from a personal point of view refinements or additions to existing values and their manifestations as well as defining the process of examining and revising values.
- Support of the university head is critical in providing backing for the project leader in terms of processes and content, opening doors, and facilitating commitment.

All the above is important to successfully embedding the institution's values in its day to day processes and operations and its continuing evolution, to which we now turn.

THE EMBEDDING OF VALUES IN INSTITUTIONAL LIFE: IMPLEMENTATION OF LIVING VALUES

25. The formulation of institutional values is one thing. Ensuring that there is a collective sense of engagement and that values are lived and thoroughly embedded in institutional life is quite another. Evidence indicates that:

- universities rarely behave as single entities but tend to operate through decentralised units – the faculties, schools, and departments – with their own culture and ways of doing business. The challenge of facilitating shared beliefs and behaviour is thus not easy;
- academics operate according to the principle of academic freedom (see para. 11) which could be antithetical to the establishment of common belief and behaviour patterns;
- change in some universities and cultures is brought about through a combination of respect, incentives, bargaining and cajoling, and strenuous attempts to forge operating consensus. In some university cultures the approach to bring about change may be more authoritarian in nature;
- within most universities, there is an interplay between the respective operating characteristics of collegial, bureaucratic, corporate, and entrepreneurial cultures.

The processes universities use to move from general value statements to action and widespread behaviour change is therefore deserving of further consideration.

26. If at the outset, the **process of arriving at the formulation of values** was genuinely a combination of consensus-driven bottom-up and top-down conversation, the ownership created should go a long way to facilitate the long-term [embedding of these values](#).

27. If values are meaningful, they should be an **integral part of the university's teaching, learning, research, operations, and processes of institutional development and advancement**. There is, of course, a wide spectrum of approaches to this and to strategic planning, from the very loose to the more structured. However, it is evident from experience that values should significantly inform and underpin issues such as:

- the mission, vision, and positioning of the university;
- the teaching and learning strategy, overall academic profile, programme plans and design, and student profile;
- the research and development strategy;
- engagement and alignment with the expectations of external stakeholders;
- internationalisation, widening access and other strategies;
- the selection and use of Key Performance Indicators (KPI) to monitor, refine, and adjust values as necessary (see [here](#)).

28. **Academic processes** are expected to incorporate values. Experience demonstrates that this would be apparent in:

- principles of programme development and design;
- course approvals;
- course reviews and other Quality Assurance functions;
- student learning and assessment approaches; and
- research policy and paradigms.

29. Staff may have adopted values for a range of reasons and through different interactions or processes. However, experience suggests that **refinement and development of values** is often needed in terms of systematic translation:

- into the plans and behaviour of academic and administrative/support service units;
- into key organisational functions such as education, research, human resources, marketing, finance, etc.
- into the job and role specifications of governing body members; senior leadership; middle management; and individual staff and students.

The implementation of the above is likely to be most effective if considered as a developmental phase in the project (see para. 20) and supported by organisational link pins at appropriate points that can liaise with the manager of the Living Values project and the steering group that may be established to coordinate the initiative (see para. 18).

30. If values are embedded, **their resourcing** tends to be apparent in normal budgeting processes and allocations. However, in some cases, specific support and incentives may need to be provided.

31. The reinforcement of values through **processes of external and internal public relations and communication** is often necessary and can be accomplished by publicising achievements associated with the application of particular values e.g. achievement of access goals; communication of partnerships, etc. Options for this communication include:

- governor and staff induction and training;
- Living Values webpage, interactive chat site, and newsletter;
- achievement awards;
- reports and speeches by the head of the university;
- press releases; and
- celebratory exhibitions.

Examples of public relations efforts by pilot universities can be found [here](#).

32. The overarching message from the above is **sustainability** of the effort to achieve Living Values. This may be guaranteed if the values are deeply and intrinsically embedded as part of university traditions and culture. However, changing and refining values—and bringing existing intrinsic ones to explicit realisation—is likely to require more systematic and ongoing attention.
33. To support these guidelines and the overall implementation process, the tool box contains reports from the universities which piloted the project (see the list of universities [here](#)), a [bibliography](#), reports from workshops, and other resources. The contents of the tool box can be found [here](#) and are listed below for ease of reference.

List of web-linked guidelines and tools

[Values definition and selection criteria](#)

[Values of Pilot sites](#)

[List and details of pilot sites](#)

1. [The Arab Academy for Science, Technology and Maritime Transport \(Egypt\)](#)
2. [The University of Bologna \(Italy\)](#)
3. [The University Politehnica of Bucharest \(Romania\)](#)
4. [The University of Campinas \(UNICAMP\) \(Brazil\)](#)
5. Cardiff Metropolitan University (UK)
6. [Glasgow Caledonian University \(UK\)](#)
7. [The University of Mauritius](#)
8. [The Peoples' Friendship University of Russia](#)
9. [Stockholm University \(Sweden\)](#)
10. [The University of Tasmania \(Australia\)](#)

[Motives of pilot universities](#)

[Introductory Video](#)

[Changes and benefits reported by pilot universities](#)

[Reviewing Values](#)

[How the pilot universities undertook their reviews](#)

[Designing and operating the process](#)

[Proforma for reviewing values](#)

[Challenges encountered by institution](#)

[Challenges encountered by theme](#)

[Links with the strategic plan](#)

[MCO Follow-up](#)

[Reports from conferences and workshops](#)

Contributions from universities using the Guidelines

[Acknowledgements](#)

[Contents of Tool Box](#)

[History and context of the Living Values Project](#)

[Sources of Reference](#)

[Frequently Asked Questions](#)

More reports and tools will be added as the project develops. Please see [here](#) for a current list.