



A BRIEF HISTORY AND THE CONTEXT OF THE LIVING VALUES PROJECT

1. The purpose of this section is to put the Living Values Project in the context of the Magna Charta Observatory (MCO)'s work and development.
2. The MCO exists to be the guardian for fundamental university values and to assist universities and higher education systems to operate effectively in accordance with them. It does this for the benefit of students, staff, society and universities themselves. Over 800 universities from 86 countries have signed its statement of fundamental values since 1988.
3. The Observatory gathers information, expresses opinions and prepares documents relating to the respect for, and protection of, the fundamental university values and rights laid down in its statement of fundamental values - the [Magna Charta Universitatum](#).
4. Universities across the globe are coming under greater pressure from a variety of sources for different reasons. Economic and political circumstances can lead to pressure for the fundamental values of academic freedom and institutional autonomy to be compromised in a way which is not sustainable for the long-term health of the of universities nor of long term benefit to their societies as broadly defined. A faster pace of change and greater unpredictability are making attention to values more important for universities as a basis for decision making.
5. In 2015 the MCO adopted a strategic plan. The headline elements are: by 2020 the Observatory plans to be the leading global organisation in support of fundamental values for higher education. This will be evidenced through the achievement of:
 - a. 1000 or more signatories of the Universitatum;
 - b. an annual conference and 3 workshops each year in different regions of the world, particularly in situations where there is a will to promote fundamental values;
 - c. participation in a further 4 significant international conferences (or similar);
 - d. a vibrant website that is regarded as the leading international resource on fundamental university values;
 - e. publications on specific aspects of the fundamental principles and the means of adhering to them;

- f. a supporting group of 25 'ambassadors' in addition to Council Members who contribute to achieving the Observatory's objectives and
 - g. a sound financial base.
6. Delivery is going well. Arising from the regional workshops it was becoming apparent that in addition to the fundamental values which were set out in the MCU, universities in different national settings were adopting additional values in pursuit of their missions. Although it has served well, the MCU was 30 years old. Also, in terms of the receptiveness of values, a more compelling narrative was that values were seen as more important if they had mission impact, rather than just intrinsic virtue.
 7. There was also a notion that while some universities espoused values, it was not clear whether these were currently the most appropriate values to support their mission, nor how well they were being lived in practice.
 8. Hence, following a workshop at Glasgow Caledonian University a decision was taken to develop a 'self-assessment instrument' (now termed 'guidelines') to enable universities to review their current values, the extent to which they were being lived in practice and to engage with stakeholders in reviewing, revising as necessary and living the values effectively so as to gain mission advantage.
 9. This was developed in two workshops which included members of the MCO Council and 'Ambassadors', experienced practitioners identified after international advertisement and selection.
 10. An invitation was issued for universities willing to pilot the instrument. Ten were selected with differing missions from 9 different countries. Each worked with an Ambassador or member of the MCO Council from September 2017 until June 2018. The whole group met in Bologna in March 2018 to review progress. Reports were submitted in the summer of 2018.
 11. The combined input to the process has resulted in the prospectus, guidelines and the tool box which are now freely available at the [MCO's website](#).
 12. It is intended that this will be a living resource, updated with the product of workshops and the reports of new users and thereby help universities to use the guidance and enable the MCO to achieve significant parts of its strategic plan.
 13. Finally, the learning from the Living Values Project will aid the group which has been appointed to review and revise the MCU. The output from this group will be published for consultation and a final version is anticipated in September 2020.

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