

Magna Charta Observatory

Discussion Group 2 Report

Topic: **Developing institutional strategies to safeguard integrity**

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This Group was relatively small but highly international with participants from universities and organizations in Angola, France, Germany, Italy, and Spain. The Group was conducted in French.

The discussion was launched by the Moderator who posed a number of questions concerning the institutional nature of the university. Is it really an institution or is it more a more or less loosely coupled collection of rather independent components (faculties, institutes etc.)? The participants agreed that this was a key question in regards to the process of developing an institutional strategy or code, yet the answer varied around the world. Also, this perception was different between whether looked at from the inside of from the outside of the university.

In this regard, it was noted that a strategy could be developed at various levels and for different groups of actors within the institution – at departmental or faculty level, or a code that addresses only the students, or only the faculty members etc.

It was concluded that in this regard and given the complexity and variation within the institutions (as well as between them), it was not easy to develop any such code or policy at the institutional level.

It was underlined that the diversity of institutions and their structures even within Europe let alone around the world was such that it was difficult to consider a single approach. Though we might find some 20 or so ‘types’ of universities, even with that level of generalization, approaches may differ due to tradition, culture etc.

Furthermore, ways of considering issues of integrity or ethics can also be quite diverse within a single university. It was noted that though the underlying broad principles of ethical behavior or integrity may be highly similar, their application or operationalization can differ quite a lot, for example when applied to business studies, engineering or the humanities.

The strategy or code itself is to be considered as an instrument that can be useful internally, but also externally and thus address a diversity of audiences. The question was raised whether the same level of transparency, for example, would apply to all audiences or whether such a principle needed to be adjusted accordingly. As universities external partners are highly diverse, and can be both local and international, public and private, this may need to be kept in mind in codes and statements with regard to integrity. Finally, laws external to the university also had a major impact, and the changing personal data privacy law was cited as an example.

Indeed, when considering what could act as a catalyst in terms of spurring the institution to embark on the process to safeguard integrity or ethical behaviour, the consensus was that these could be multiple, ranging from a national law, demands by funding agencies or European regulation, among others. However, no matter what the catalyst might be, it was necessary to find means of mobilizing the

community, ways to provide incentives as well as being clear about sanctions – however soft or strong these may be for any misconduct.

The participants had diverse roles within their respective universities or organisations and were able to present different approaches, methods and experiences. It was clear that these methods and steps taken towards instilling integrity or ethical conduct measures were relatively recent and quite different. Some started with policy before moving to structures and individuals with responsibility for this policy area, while others had structures and had yet to develop policies. For the most part, such policies or codes or structures focused more on academic and research staff rather than on students, leadership or administrative staff.

Regardless of which approaches were taken though, the issue of embedding these values and principles into the institutional life was deemed both most important, and most challenging. Information sharing, communications with the whole university community were deemed necessary and a dialogue about the values that were driving policy decisions was seen as very important.

A third very important ingredient for success (in addition to embeddedness and communications and dialogue) was implementation. Turning policy into action and operationalizing the values and principles was seen as essential in order to avoid that documents and commitments remain just words on paper. Implementation could be linked to processes of quality assurance or accreditation. So making certain, very early in the process, that there were concrete actions taken to implement the code or principles of integrity was stressed by all. In this regard, a final recommendation for the Magna Charta Observatory focused on its role as a platform for disseminating information and enabling peer-sharing and learning of experiences. A mechanism to learn about good practice and case studies would be useful for all but research on what works and what does not would also be useful. Given the variety of approaches, research could also be undertaken to create a typology of ways that universities have adopted to promote and safeguard integrity and ethical conduct. Various associations of universities could be helpful in such efforts.