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EUA launches “Autonomy Scorecard”: new report compares and benchmarks levels of university autonomy in 26 European countries

The European University Association has today (15 November) launched a major new report which compares university autonomy across 26 European countries. In addition to an in-depth analysis of the current state of institutional autonomy in Europe, the study includes four scorecards which rank and rate higher education systems in four autonomy areas: organisational, financial, staffing and academic autonomy.

The new EUA “Autonomy Scorecard” will be launched today (15 November) at a stakeholder event in Brussels.

In each scorecard (published as a table), national or federal state systems are ranked according to a percentage score, with 0% being the lowest and 100% the highest possible level of autonomy in a given area. The system with the highest percentage is considered to grant the most autonomy to universities in a specific dimension. In each scorecard, each system has also been assigned to one of four groups – high, medium high, medium low and low – depending on their score.

“This report and the publication of the autonomy scorecards are designed to engage all higher education stakeholders in a more in-depth debate on autonomy and ultimately help improve national higher education systems,” says report author Thomas Estermann. The scorecard concept is intended as a tool to compare and benchmark legislative frameworks in national higher education systems.

“Autonomy does not mean the absence of regulations”, Thomas Estermann explains. “Universities accept the challenges of working in a competitive global environment, but to do so they need the necessary managerial freedom, light and supportive regulatory frameworks and sufficient financing, otherwise they will be placed at a disadvantage”, he adds.

Since EUA published its first report on autonomy in 2009, there have been encouraging signs that recent reforms in a number of countries have indeed given universities more autonomy. However, EUA believes there are still many constraints which limit institutional performance.

With regard to financial autonomy, a number of countries still do not allow universities to freely allocate funds internally or to retain surpluses, thus limiting their capacity for effective long-term planning and strategic development. For the same reason, EUA also believes that governments should extend the length of funding periods. The study has also found some worrying signs that the economic crisis and austerity measures have, in some cases, led to tighter controls of university budgets, thereby creating unnecessary administrative burdens and reducing financial autonomy.

In terms of staffing autonomy, while a number of countries enable universities to recruit staff freely, many institutions are still unable to set their employees’ salaries. This can act as a considerable obstacle when seeking to attract talented academic and administrative staff in a competitive international environment.

Finally, EUA’s work has shown that national reforms in the field of autonomy have often been introduced without providing institutions with the human resources and management support needed to make use of their new independence. The Association therefore calls on public authorities and the European Commission to support universities in this area.

The two-year project, supported by the European Commission’s Lifelong Learning Programme, has been carried out in conjunction with EUA’s project partners, which include the German Rectors’ Conference, Universities Denmark, the Conference of Rectors of Academic Schools in Poland and the University of

Jyväskylä, Finland. The national rectors' conferences, EUA's collective members, have collaborated on the project.

The report, "University Autonomy in Europe II - The Scorecard", will be available (from 15 November) on the EUA website: www.eua.be

Ends

An embargoed copy of the report is available from Andrew Miller or Stephanie Friedrich at the EUA.

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The European University Association, as the representative organisation of both the European universities and the national rectors' conferences, is the main voice of the higher education community in Europe. EUA's mission is to promote the development of a coherent system of European higher education and research.

Notes to editors:

- The launch of the "Autonomy Scorecard" report builds on EUA's previous policy and project work on the issue of autonomy, in particular its 2009 report "[University Autonomy in Europe I](#)". The "Autonomy Scorecard" report seeks to provide a more detailed picture of university autonomy in 26 countries than provided in EUA's initial study.
- Methodology: The "Autonomy Scorecard" project investigated 28 higher education systems in 26 countries. Due to the federal structure of the German higher education system, three German federal states were included in the study. A detailed methodology for the study and, specifically, the development of the scorecards is provided in section 1.2 of the report, which explains how the indicators were chosen and weighted. On the whole, the scorecards use a total of more than 30 indicators across the four categories of autonomy. A full list of indicators is provided in the annex of the report.
- The scorecards (please see attached), which can be found in section 3 of the report, are each accompanied by an analysis of the results to help explain the context.