

Ten proposals from France Universités (French rectors' conference)- based on Stéphanie Balme's report on "Academic Freedom"

1. Enact academic freedom in the French Constitution

- Enact the principle in Article 34
- Specify the scope of academic freedom by law: statutory and legal reinforcement of researchers and academics (scientific autonomy; freedom of research and choice of subjects, publication, and dissemination; protection against all forms of ideological, economic, or political coercion) and establishment of transparent mechanisms for monitoring, effective recourse, and sanctions when academic freedom is violated

2. Strengthen sanctions against SLAPP suits

- Implement dissuasive fines in cases of abusive proceedings or malicious denunciation
- Strengthen procedural guarantees for targeted academics and institutions

3. Establish an autonomous system to protect researchers' sources

- Recognize the principle of source confidentiality, as for journalists
- Incorporate a specific system into the Research Code for sensitive data
- Develop risk assessment criteria for the protection of tangible and intangible assets specific to scientific activity that are better suited to qualitative and collaborative research

4. Reaffirm the institutional protection of researchers and academics

- Coordinate actions at the national level through an independent body, and implement a multidisciplinary team in universities to support researchers and academics
- Generalize academic freedom charters in universities and research organizations
- Increase the visibility of multidisciplinary platforms for academic solidarity among peers
- Organize specific training courses via France Universités

5. Link academic freedom and the security of research

- Encourage cross-collaboration between defense security officials and researchers and academics
- Promote interministerial cooperation (Ministries of Higher Education and Research and the Interior) for monitoring authorizations and refusals: access to data, access to research fields, etc.
- Organize regular reviews of decisions to classify areas as restricted, and establish a right of appeal/mediation before an independent scientific committee when access is being denied

6. Promote academic freedom at the national level

- Make academic freedom a specific subject of research-action contractual projects
- Measure academic freedom in contractual scientific projects through dedicated criteria established by research stakeholders

7. Promote a culture of academic freedom in society

- Launch a major awareness campaign aimed at the general public
- Include the topic of academic freedom in the national “Science Festival” each year
- Actively involve students: citizen conferences, awards, etc.

8. Strengthen freedom at the European level

- Support the creation of a European Research Freedom Act for data protection
- Formalize clear research security conditions for sensitive collaborations
- Create a European observatory on academic freedom, incorporating platforms for reporting interference in research activities
- Implement the recommendations of the European University Association

9. Integrate academic freedom into French and European science diplomacy

- Create a dedicated European research programme
- Create a European academic freedom index to be included in international rankings

10. Support researchers and academics under threat around the world

- Strengthen support programmes for refugee researchers and academics, in particular by protecting budgets (PAUSE Programme - Programme Safeguarding Knowledge and Research)
- Facilitate cross-partnerships between institutions via France Universités
- Encourage and support self-managed scientific solidarity initiatives
- Create a “European refugee scientist talent passport” within the European Research Area