



ERASMUS+ Project LEANBODY - 2021-1-HU01-KA220-HED-000027542

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Legal requirements and international standards in anatomy teaching

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Context

In many jurisdictions, institutions that teach anatomy using human cadavers or tissue must be licensed and regulated. Institutions must often comply with various laws related to anatomy teaching. For instance, at the University of New England in Australia, the holder of the license to conduct anatomical examinations must comply with standards set out in the Anatomy Act 1977, the Human Tissue Act 1983, and the Public Health Act 2010¹⁻².

Ethical standards

There is an emphasis on treating donated bodies with utmost respect, dignity and professionalism. The use of human cadaveric material for teaching and research is generally considered a privilege, not a right³. Proper consent is crucial for the use of bodies or tissue from deceased individuals for anatomical education. Consent must typically be given in writing before death.

Some jurisdictions have specific requirements for consent forms. The HTA in the UK provides model consent forms for anatomy schools.

Body donation laws

Different countries have implemented body donation laws and anatomy acts at various times.

These laws govern the process of body donation for anatomical study.

Countries have implemented body donation laws and anatomy acts at various times throughout history, leading to differences in how these practices are regulated⁴.

Handling and disposal

Strict protocols often exist for the reception, handling, storage, use and disposal of donated cadavers. There are usually restrictions on removing anatomical specimens from designated facilities. Access to anatomy facilities is typically restricted to authorized personnel only.

Legal frameworks

It's important to note that while certain requirements are prevalent in numerous countries, the specific regulations can differ greatly from one nation to another, and some countries may not have a well-defined legal framework for teaching anatomy. A survey revealed that of the 39 countries studied, only 18 had national regulations, and two had at least federal laws, indicating a lack of uniformity across various nations.

In certain countries, there is an absence of a distinct legal framework for managing body donation or anatomy education. For instance, Malta does not have a specific legal framework for body donation and instead relies on general principles and institutional policies.

Even in countries that have legal frameworks, the scope and detail of the regulations can vary. Some countries have extensive national laws, while others may have more regional or institution-specific guidelines. Although many countries have similar ethical principles concerning the handling of donated bodies, the way these principles are incorporated into legal frameworks differs. Some countries depend more on ethical guidelines than on stringent legal regulations. There can also be variations within countries in how anatomy education is regulated. For example, in federal systems, individual states or regions may have their own specific laws or regulations. This disparity in legal frameworks for anatomy education across countries underscores the need for more uniform international guidelines or regulations to ensure consistent ethical practices and legal safeguards in anatomy education globally. As the field of anatomy education changes with new technologies and teaching methods, legal frameworks in different countries are adapting at different rates, leading to further variations. This variation in legal frameworks for anatomy teaching across countries highlights the need for more standardized international guidelines or regulations to ensure consistent ethical practices and legal protections in anatomy education worldwide ⁴⁻⁵.

International standards of anatomy teaching

While specific regulations vary by country, there is a general trend towards using multimodal teaching approaches that combine traditional cadaver-based instruction with modern technologies and imaging techniques.

There is ongoing debate about the most effective methods for teaching anatomy, with many institutions moving towards integrated or system-based curricula that may reduce time for traditional dissection ⁶⁻⁷.

Qualifications of educators

There is growing concern about inconsistencies in the educational qualifications of anatomy educators, with efforts to ensure adequate training and expertise.

These legal requirements and standards aim to ensure ethical practices, respect for donors, and effective education in anatomy while adapting to changing educational needs and technologies ⁶⁻⁸.

Legal frameworks for higher Education taking Sweden as an example

The legal framework for higher education institutions (HEIs) in Sweden consists of several key components:

Higher Education Act

The Higher Education Act (SFS 1992:1434) is the primary legislation governing higher education in Sweden. It is enacted by the Riksdag (Swedish Parliament) and provides the basic regulations for education offered by HEIs. The Act covers aspects such as:

- Characteristics of courses and programs at different levels
- Academic freedom and freedom of research
- Organization and governance of HEIs
- Duties of teachers and student influence
- Promotion of equality of opportunity and lifelong learning

Higher Education Ordinance

The Higher Education Ordinance (SFS 1993:100), issued by the Government, provides more detailed regulations, including:

- Student rights and opportunities for influence
- Entrance qualifications and selection processes
- Appointment of teachers and doctoral students
- Course and program syllabi requirements
- Grading and qualifications¹¹
- Government's annual public service agreements:
These agreements specify requirements for each HEI, such as aligning educational offerings with student demand and labor market needs and determine the size of state funding for education and research.

Other relevant legislation

HEIs must also comply with other regulations, including:

- Administrative Procedures Act
- Annual Reports and Budget Documentation Ordinance
- Environmental Management Ordinance
- Discrimination Act
- Governance structure:

Overall responsibility rests with the Riksdag and the Government

The Ministry of Education and Research is primarily responsible for HEI-related matters

Public-sector HEIs are public authorities answering directly to the Government

Independent education providers are regulated through a specific law and contracts with the Government⁹⁻¹⁰.

Institutional autonomy:

Within this legal framework, HEIs have considerable autonomy in areas such as:

- Internal organization and resource allocation
- Educational offerings and content
- Student admission numbers

- Research focus

Additional regulations:

There are several other ordinances and acts that govern specific aspects of higher education, such as:

- Ordinance on application fees and tuition fees
- Act on responsibility for good research practice
- Ordinance on Students' Unions

This legal framework aims to provide a balance between national standards and institutional autonomy, allowing HEIs to operate effectively within a regulated system while maintaining flexibility in their operations and academic pursuits.

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