

**SLOVENIAN PRESIDENCY
WORKSHOP ON HIGHER
EDUCATION AND RESEARCH
SYNERGIES**

14 DECEMBER 2021

**How to empower Higher
Education Institutions to
develop in line with ERA and in
synergy with EHEA**

FINAL REPORT



HOW TO EMPOWER HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS TO DEVELOP IN LINE WITH ERA AND IN SYNERGY WITH EHEA

SUMMARY

This informal ERAC workshop was jointly organized by the Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the EU and the incoming French Presidency. The workshop, titled “*How to empower Higher Education Institutions to develop in line with the ERA and in synergy with the EHEA*”, acted as a platform to share views and provide inspiration towards the focus of the incoming French Presidency on European Universities, and to assist in the delivery of Action 13 of the ERA Policy Agenda. The Workshop was attended by more than 100 education and research experts representing Member States, Associated Countries, European Research Area (ERA) Groups, ERA Stakeholders and, of course, the EU Commission.

The workshop (background paper and agenda in Annex A) was delivered through panels focussing on three main issues:

1. **Towards a European Strategy for Universities** – a panel consisting of the Commission and Member State ERAC co-Chairs, and stakeholders (including from the upcoming Trio Presidency), discussed the research dimension of the European Strategy for Universities, considering the broad Europe perspective;
2. **How to increase synergies between EHEA, EEA and ERA** – a panel consisting of the Commission Task Force on synergies chair, an upcoming Trio Presidency stakeholder representative and the co-chair of the Bologna Follow-up Group (BFUG) discussed the recent proposal adopted by BFUG, which considered how to effectively leverage synergies; and
3. **European Universities Alliances as pioneers for the Universities of the Future** – a panel consisting of the Commission, and two stakeholder representatives from the upcoming Trio Presidency considered the research dimension of the European Universities Alliances and their potential in the future.

The workshop began with keynote speaker contributions on the convergence of education and research missions. See Annex for the full presentations.

Panel Summaries

1. Towards a European Strategy for Universities

The panel considered the following questions:

- Which priority areas will be/should be included in the Roadmap of actions for creating synergies between higher education and research?

- Which measures and instruments will be/should be included in the Roadmap of actions for creating synergies between higher education and research?
- Which future working methods and structures do you find most useful for the effective implementation of a Roadmap?

The panellists highlighted the opportunity presented through the European Strategy for Universities, and how it must work at all levels but must not overburden with additional administrative requirements. The panel highlighted that a bottom-up process, shaping the Strategy at national and regional levels, is key in achieving the goal of aligning Higher Education Institutions development with the ERA and European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

It was noted that the Strategy must streamline and align governance and clarify to Higher Education Institutions the roles and relevant structures of ERA and EHEA. Furthermore, the Strategy must go beyond the focus on Universities – it must look at the whole ecosystem. The panel welcomed the prospect of further detail from the Commission and future workshops on the area and was in agreement that concrete actions are now required, especially in light of the need to develop and consider the potential improvement of the legal basis.

During the panel, the context and background of the ERA was presented. See Annex B for the presentation.

2. How to increase synergies between EHEA, European Education Area (EEA) and ERA

The panel began with the presentation of the proposal from the Ad hoc Task Force to increase synergies between the EHEA, the higher education dimension of EEA and the ERA, which has been adopted by the BFUG. See Annex B for the presentation. Closer cooperation is proposed through regular exchanges of information in a flexible manner, which considers the higher education sector, and is driven by concrete milestones per identified cooperation topic. The method of cooperation is via ad-hoc invitations to attend topical meetings, discussions inside Working groups, joint meetings and events, and high level DGHE, ERAC, and BFUG joint events. The proposal presented the following topics for closer cooperation between 2021 and 2024:

- Fundamental academic values and freedom of science
- Academic and research careers (including recruitment)
- Transnational cooperation between and institutional transformation of higher education institutions, and research centres
- Innovative and transdisciplinary learning, teaching and research, their interconnectedness, and the need for them to be mutually enriching
- Open Science / Open Education nexus
- Service to society: community engagement as the process whereby higher education and research institutions address societal needs in partnerships with their external communities
- Social dimension of higher education and research, inclusiveness, and gender equality

- International cooperation with partners beyond the EU and the contribution to the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals

Two questions were posed to the workshop participants, with a focus on operationalisation (making the synergies a reality):

- Are the proposed topical areas relevant or should they be adapted in some way?
- How can we deal with cross-cutting items?
- Is the proposed way forward – building on the topical areas and setting milestones for concrete next steps – a realistic and good way for making progress on synergies?

The panellists highlighted that the workshop was an example of operationalising synergies, as it enabled the regular exchange of information. The panel highlighted the ongoing alignment with Higher Education colleagues' processes, with DG HE receiving a report on the BFUG adopted proposal the following day of the workshop (15 December). Similarly, it was suggested that the EEA and ERA structures should be able to inform the BFUG on cross-cutting issues.

ERAC members and representatives were invited to further consider the presented common topics and what milestones could be concretely introduced within the frameworks of EHEA and/or ERA, with feedback welcomed in future meetings.

The workshop participants welcomed future topic specific meetings. It was noted that this approach supported the first panel's discussion on ensuring streamlined governance and Slovenian Presidency recommendation, presented at the September 2021 informal DG HE and ERAC meeting, to have joint meetings between BFUG and the ERA Forum. See Annex C for the Presidency Summary Statement, which includes this recommendation.

3. European Universities Alliances as Universities of the Future:

The third panel highlighted how European University Alliances have shown a lot of promise for the future alignment and strengthening of the synergies between research and higher education. The panel noted that European Universities Alliances could address both transversal and disciplinary-specific considerations of the EHEA and the ERA. It was recalled that European university alliances should be pioneers of transformation, and that their practices should be able to benefit the whole higher education sector.

Two presentations from stakeholders involved in European Universities Alliances were provided as case studies. The presentations highlighted lessons learnt, reflecting on the current experiences to bolster Universities for the Future, such as how to attract excellent researchers to deliver excellent research and teaching – and ultimately an excellent ERA and EHEA. They also pointed out which obstacles to synergies remain (obstacles to a European approach to quality assurance for PhD's and integrating interdisciplinarity, administrative obstacles to the creation of joint programmes, lack of flexibility in national legislation, lack of visibility and sustainability of alliance funding). See Annex B for the full presentations.

It was noted that the France will progress this matter in their upcoming Presidency of the Council of the EU.

4. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Slovenian Presidency gives special thanks to all the speakers, moderators, and participants for their contributions, as well as to our co-organisers the incoming Presidency (France), and the EU Commission and the Council Secretariat for contributing to the success of this workshop and providing valuable input for strengthening the European Research Area and European Higher Education Area synergies.

Peter Volasko (SI ERAC Delegate)

January 2022

ANNEX A

Agenda and background paper are enclosed to the final report in separate pdf versions.

ANNEX B

The presentations of speakers are enclosed to the final report in separate pdf versions.

ANNEX C

Presidency Summary Statement of the September 2021 informal DG HE and ERAC meeting is enclosed to the final report in separate pdf version.



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