



Joint meeting of the European Research Area and Innovation Committee (ERAC) and the Directors General for Higher Education, Ljubljana, 30 September 2021

EUROPEAN STRATEGY FOR UNIVERSITIES – BUILDING SYNERGIES BETWEEN HIGHER EDUCATION, RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

Presidency Summary on the State of Play and Possible Way Forward

Ahead of the Trio Presidency, Germany, Portugal and Slovenia published a roadmap¹ in which the Trio expressed the need to seek synergies between education and research systems. The Trio discussed enhancing synergies between education, research and innovation wherever possible to increase their effectiveness and added value. This work is carried out in relation to the requests for more synergies between education and research and innovation (R&I), as laid down in key reference documents on the European Research Area (ERA), European Education Area (EEA) and the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

The Commission is currently preparing, in close cooperation with Member States and stakeholders, a European Strategy for Universities. The European Strategy for Universities will address the main challenges and propose support measures to the benefit of the sector. The Strategy will aim to bring closer together the four missions of higher education institutions - education, research, innovation and service to society - into a true knowledge ecosystem approach.

The Slovenian Presidency supports the advanced discussions on the European Strategy for Universities, currently being co-created with stakeholders in the fields of research and higher education (HE). In order to guarantee an efficient co-creation process and implementation of this Strategy, the Slovenian Presidency considers that an open discussion about a more systemic approach and sustainable links between education and research and innovation, including a discussion on future working methods and structures at all levels of decision-making, is necessary.

The participants of the joint meeting of the European Research Area and Innovation Committee (ERAC) and Directors General of Higher Education (DG HE), which was held on September 30th 2021 in Ljubljana and virtually were invited to share views on the European Strategy for Universities and measures that can enhance synergistic links between R&I and HE.

As the result of the discussion, the following general considerations emerged:

- For excellence, strengthened synergies between education, research and industry are necessary. The link must be more concrete, more balanced and continuous;
- Implementation of synergies should occur at all governance levels;

¹ [Trio Roadmap for Research and Innovation” – building a resilient, sovereign and sustainable Europe](#)



- There is opportunity to leverage what has already been achieved in different groups (e.g. BFUG);
- Further action is needed on both national and EU level;
- There is a need for sustainable funding, through strengthened and interlinked funding schemes;
- Synergies should go beyond HE and R&I, with cooperation of different sectors and providing impact for other policies;
- Interdisciplinarity and diversity should be a focus; and
- Specific focus areas should be strengthened such as: digitalisation, environmental sustainability, academic careers/ career reform, open education and science, teaching and learning outside academia, academic freedom, service to society, equality and equity.

The participants of the joint meeting of ERAC and DG HE, which was held on September 30th 2021 in Ljubljana and virtually were invited to share views on the future working methods and structures that would support stronger links between R&I and HE.

As the result of the discussion, the following general considerations emerged:

- Coordination must be improved;
- There is significant added value in joint meetings between DG HE and ERAC;
- Administrative burden should be limited, with the efficient use of time and resources;
- Existing structures should be leveraged;
- A simplification of the coordination structure is welcome;
- The new ERA Governance's principle of "form follows function" should be followed; and
- Coordination should be supported by ad-hoc working groups related to concrete topics in the EEA, EHEA, and ERA, with a focus on outcomes.

The Presidency presented the following proposal on the way forward in order to enable structured and regular discussions on synergies between R&I and HE:

- a) set-up an Ad hoc Joint European Knowledge Area Working Party (or a Commission Joint expert group), where synergies between R&I and HE are discussed at policy expert level and with relevant stakeholders;
- b) regular meetings of ERAC DGs and DG HE to be organized on a regular basis (at least once per year), where the work performed by the expert group is discussed at senior policy level and where the key political orientations are drafted;
- c) joint meetings of the Competitiveness Council (Research) and the Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council (Education) once per Presidency Trio are organized (once each 18 months) in order to discuss and approve the key political orientations and provide further political guidance on future steps necessary in fostering further synergies.



The Presidency concluded the meeting with the following observations and recommendations:

Largely, participants supported the Presidency proposal on future coordination, however delegates emphasised the need for form follows function governance, ensuring efficiency and simplicity.

The Slovenian Presidency welcomes France's intention to continue focusing on the subject during its Presidency and will support these efforts.

The Presidency calls on the Council Secretariat and the European Commission to prepare a clear overview of the existing structures in the areas of higher education and research, to enable future coordination synergies.

The Presidency views it necessary to hold regular joint meetings between the ERA Forum for Transition – Higher Education sector sub-group and the Ad-hoc expert group on higher education transformation and the European Universities Initiative.

The Presidency also calls for regular closer cooperation between the ERA Forum for Transition – Higher Education sector sub-group, the BFUG Task force to increase synergies between the EHEA, ERA and EEA and the Ad-hoc expert group on higher education transformation and the European Universities Initiative, which have been all tasked to identify possible ways forward in delivering impactful synergies between research and higher education.