

EUA position on the EC consultation document on the “ERA Framework”

Summary of EUA position

Europe’s universities are increasingly European and international in their character and activities and the European and national policy frameworks and research funding schemes and instruments need to both reflect and support this reality. Coupled with this, societal demand for new knowledge (through education, research and innovation) to tackle “grand challenges” whose nature, causes and effects do not respect national boundaries require clearly new approaches on the part of all actors. In this position statement EUA argues that to realise the full potential of Europe’s universities within the European Research Area, the “ERA Framework” conditions need to be based upon the following commitments and requirements:

- increased investment in higher education and research coupled with the granting of greater autonomy to universities in the strategic management and development of their affairs
- “European added value” as the core characteristic of ERA funding instruments - in recognition of the increasing profile and needs of universities as European institutions with global outreach in all or part of their missions
- medium to long-term commitment to open competitive funding instruments governed by excellence criteria based upon assessments and indicators of best practice in the domains of both basic research and collaborative research with external partners
- European, national and regional policy frameworks that seek to attain both a certain necessary concentration of research capacity and a flexibility to ensure a “level playing field” of opportunities for new research and innovation capacity building (in terms of both human resource development and infrastructure) - with the European Regional Development Funds playing a major role in this respect
- External funding schemes to continue to move towards full costs support of university-based research – to underpin the sustainability of university research and innovation activities as an essential element of the modernisation agenda for Europe’s universities
- promotion of best practices in doctoral education, career development and mobility mechanisms that link both research and teaching capacity building all levels in the university including intersectoral exchange and cooperation
- Europe’s universities must have their “place at the table” in the ERA Framework mechanisms preparing new ERA instruments, such “joint programming” and related

HORIZON 2020 “Tackling Societal Challenges” programmes, through a transparent procedure of European stakeholder involvement.

I. Europe’s universities as core institutions in the ERA Framework

In its “Europe 2020 Strategy”, “Innovation Union”, and “Green Paper on a Strategic Framework for EU Research and Innovation Funding” consultation documents, the European Commission has addressed the challenges posed in making Europe a competitive global region and, for its part EUA, on behalf of its university membership, has responded with position papers making key recommendations and priorities for the main elements required for future research investment. Building on these recommendations, this EUA statement focuses on the necessary framework conditions for a globally competitive ERA.

As a starting premise, it must be recognised that Europe’s universities are essential key actors for the successful building of the European Research Area. Their contribution and interests need to be fully acknowledged in the Framework conditions on ERA governance. Europe’s universities play the major role in supplying trained researchers and have demonstrated capacity to foster interdisciplinary research expertise and skills required to meet 21st century challenges. They offer diverse missions in basic and collaborative research, and education and training, which are embedded in national contexts, regions and cities as components of their social and economic development. Europe’s universities are furthermore the focal points for science-society dialogues and knowledge exchange with civil society and partners in both the public and private sectors. Their international scientific cooperation agreements (in both research and education) based upon institutional historical and cultural links offer substantial strengths and experience in exchange and cooperation that should be drawn upon in the ERA’s development of policy addressing strategic links with other global regions.

II. Main “drivers of change” in university-based research

The “ERA Framework” needs to take full account of the main drivers of university-based research in deciding its governance mechanisms and instruments. Europe’s universities need to both compete and cooperate in building their European and international research capacities and hence funding sources, regional, national and European need to offer complementary instruments to help achieve this, particularly so in the present period of the economic and financial difficulties. External competitive funding sources account for an ever higher proportion of university research budgets, hence there is also an overriding concern to avoid unnecessary fragmentation and waste of resources through too complex and varied funding scheme conditions and requirements that only serve to increase the administrative burden on Europe’s universities.

Further major “drivers of change” are the emergence of complex research issues reflecting global society challenges that require new interdisciplinary approaches and skills, the concomitant growing societal demand for more highly trained researchers and other professionals for non-academic labour markets, and the impact of the IT digital revolution on the

research process and nature of knowledge exchange and the opportunity for greater availability and access to research results/findings by the wider scholarly community and the public at large.

III. Europe's universities as "growth industries" require greater autonomy and sustainable research funding conditions

The underlying goal of the "ERA Framework" consultation seeks to define the core requirements for the ERA to operate as a successful "new Single Market" for knowledge, research and innovation. EUA wishes to re-iterate the main message of its position on the "Innovation Union" Communication (Smart People for Smart Growth) on the prime importance of the need firstly to increase investment in higher education and research (not to be regarded as "consumption" of public resources) to enable the European Union to become a competitive global region. Priority increased investment in higher education and research coupled with the granting of greater autonomy to universities in the strategic management and development of their affairs are essential core requirements to enable Europe's universities to play their full part in realising the ambitious goals of a European single market for knowledge, research and innovation.

EUA's current work on monitoring the impact of the financial and economic crisis on higher education and its new state-of-play report on the degree of autonomy granted to universities in EU Member States raise serious concerns on whether Europe's universities will be well-placed to match those in competitive global regions who are investing heavily in universities and the next generation of young people equipped with skills to meet the economic, technological and societal demands and challenges of the 21st century and beyond.

European universities as research institutions require greater autonomy in their leadership and financial/administrative structures (freed from inhibitive national legal frameworks), for example, through being able to offer competitive salaries, and recruit on the European and International level. University funding systems and their rules and conditions should provide more incentives towards full cost accounting of university research activities – to move away from a still prevalent "low cost culture".

Sustainable funding conditions are a "*sine qua non*" for university-based research, particularly from external funding sources in covering indirect research costs. Specific incentive public funding mechanisms that seek to foster partnerships between universities and business partners and other external agencies need further development across EU Member States. For its part, EUA has been working towards these goals through the promotion of best practices on university full costing systems and collaborative research partnerships at institutional, project and doctoral level (through a coordination action supported by EC DG Research and Innovation – EUIMA project, European Universities Implementing their Modernisation Agenda), and on sustainable university funding/diversifying income streams and measurement of degrees of university autonomy (through support from Lifelong Learning Programmes of EC DG Education and Culture).

IV. Comments on main "barriers and bottlenecks" identified in the ERA Framework Consultation Document

Most of the barriers and bottlenecks cited are already well-known and documented and require policy and funding action/ initiatives that should be taken at the level of the EU, Member State national and regional level governments, and national funding agencies. EUA comments below on those identified topics where university's own initiatives are helping to overcome the identified "barriers and bottlenecks".

(a) Quality of doctoral training, attractive employment conditions and research careers

Evidence from the work of the EUA Council for Doctoral Education and the findings of the DOC-CAREERS projects point to the substantial progress being made in overcoming "bottlenecks" identified in the consultation paper (i.e. one-to-one doctoral candidate-supervisor relationship and the weak emphasis on the role of mentorship; lack of open recruitment procedures and incentives to move between academic and the private sector). The CDE "Salzburg II Recommendations" and "DOC-CAREERS Collaborative University-Industry Doctoral Education recommendations" built on best practices in doctoral education (which have been endorsed by the European Commission) will continue to be widely disseminated and taken-up in Europe's universities.

The obstacles to be cleared in advancing in these areas are spelt out clearly in the above-mentioned EUA recommendations and they relate to: more and adequate funding for grants and salaries for doctoral candidates and research equipment; resources to support university strategic leadership innovative approaches in improving the research environment and career development of young researchers; universities' freedom of movement to develop doctoral programmes through open and flexible recruitment processes to attract and recruit best candidates nationally and internationally; reform of national legislation and legal frameworks that inhibit universities from developing independently indicators of quality assurance that correspond with standards of disciplines and their institutional strategies; need for mechanisms that build on trust established in intersectoral collaboration between universities and external partners in businesses and public agencies etc.

(b) Mobility of researchers, comparable career structures, supplementary pension funds

The creation of the European Research Area (ERA) as the "horizontal" policy framework to achieve an internal market for researchers, more freedom of career movement for researchers, greater portability of grants and the creation of supplementary pension funds are welcomed and supported by EUA who is actively engaged as a European stakeholder in the current EC level expert groups and policy learning activities in these domains. EUA believes that a deeper perspective on the issue of mobility in the university environment is also required and should consider the crucial link between capacity building in both research and teaching in relation to the European and international recruitment of research and teaching staff, human resource development and career-related mobility needs of all university staff.

(c) Dissemination, transfer and use of research results, including through open access to publications and data from publicly-funded sources

EUA commits to follow-up with its membership on the extent to which its recommendations on Open Access had been acted upon in Europe's Universities. The EUA's recommendations adopted by EUA Council in Spring 2008 focussed on the adoption of a policy of establishing university-based institutional depositories (or shared repositories) in which accepted peer-reviewed scientific articles (in their original manuscript form) could be deposited by researchers and made available on open access conditions ("green" open access) to the wider research community. An EUA follow-up on the state of play on the development and use of institutional repositories in Europe's universities would consider the important added dimensions of the take-up of open access journals by university-based researchers and the need to reduce the mounting costs of scientific publication journals subscriptions for university budgets which could be directed more to the further development of research and training capacities.

(d) Cross border operation of research performing organisations, funding agencies and foundations, including by ensuring simplicity and mutual coherence of funding rules and procedures building on the work of stakeholders and their representative organisations

In its positions on "Innovation Union" and the "Green Paper" on the future HORIZON 2020, EUA has argued for greater simplification and common rules for external competitive funding instruments in order to reduce the administrative burden on universities and this is well documented by EUA with supporting empirical evidence. EUA has stated also strongly the need for the movement towards the re-imburement of the full costs of research to be strengthened as a core requirement in the "modernisation process" of Europe's universities for their future sustainability and competitiveness. EUA asserts that the commitment to the continued move towards full costs support should be central to the ERA Framework conditions and greatly regrets that a commitment to this essential need is absent in the EC consultation document and the EC proposals for HORIZON 2020 .

Progress on cross border operations (from linking nationally funded research programmes to creating "common pots" for transnational research programmes) is central to future "joint programming efforts" and future HORIZON 2020 programmes to be designed to "Tackle Societal Challenges". EUA should play the European Stakeholder role as the "representative organisation" for Europe's universities in the European Research Area Committee (ERAC) processes preparing the new instruments of joint programming and in the future procedures to be established for "Tackling Societal Challenge" programmes. EUA experience within the European Energy Research Alliance of the SET-PLAN was demonstrating that this is a demanding task which requires Europe's universities to work in new ways – in this case the building of a European Platform of Universities in a multi-disciplinary research and training field. Europe's universities must play their part and have their "place at the table" in the ERAC committees preparing these new instruments of joint programming and related HORIZON 2020 programmes through a transparent procedure of stakeholder involvement.

(e) Consistency of EU and national strategies and actions for cooperation in science and technology,

EUA re-emphasises as stated as a main element in its position on the “Green Paper” that EU initiatives established so far have not chosen to draw sufficiently on European universities’ experience in establishing international partnership and exchange agreements. Expertise from universities should be considered for new ERA initiatives addressing this issue such as the Strategic Forum for International Science and Technology Cooperation set-up by the EU Member States and the European Commission. National priorities and strategies for international science and technology cooperation can have inhibiting effects on the freedom of manoeuvre for Europe’s universities in developing their international roles and missions and these considerations should be addressed in EU policy-making in this domain.

(f) Opening of Member State and Associated Countries operated research infrastructures to the full European User community, and completion or launch of 60% of ESFRI priority European Research Infrastructures by 2015

University-based researchers should continue to benefit from the access granted to large scale infrastructures through European Community actions. Also, the challenge must be met of achieving the maximum available use of research infrastructure for education and training purposes. EUA considers that the current European debate on developing new large-scale research infrastructures and their upgrading is not sufficiently linked to other components in building the ERA such as research career development and sustainability of university-based research and infrastructure.

Discussions have tended to focus on the physical research infrastructure themselves (mainly new and large scale machines/equipment) with much less emphasis on the necessary related human resource needs and the implications of digital technology for future development and use of research infrastructures and their research data/resources.

Europe’s universities offer many types of research infrastructures and operate inter-institutional exchange for usage agreements across national borders in all fields. Their collective capacities and needs should be assessed within the overall framework of developing a European strategy for research infrastructures. EU research funding schemes should include more provision for the use and maintenance of university research infrastructure which is historically under-funded in many parts of Europe. In this respect EUA believes that the policy linkage between HORIZON 2020 research and innovation funding and the EU Regional Development Fund investments holds crucial importance for research infrastructure renewal and upgrading in Europe’s universities, particularly in EU New Member States.

References and Web Links

[Smart People for Smart Growth - Statement by the EUA on the EU Flagship Initiative “Innovation Union” of the Europe 2020 European Strategy for Smart, Sustainable and Inclusive Growth \(February 2011\)](#)

[EUA Position on the “Green Paper” on a Common Strategic Framework for EU Research and Innovation Funding](#)

[University Autonomy in Europe II – The Scorecard](#)

[Financially Sustainable Universities II - European universities diversifying income streams \(EUA, 2011\)](#)

[Impact of the Economic Crisis on Public Funding of Higher Education in Europe](#)

[Collaborative Doctoral Education: University-Industry Partnerships for Enhancing Knowledge Exchange \(EUA, 2009\)](#)

[Salzburg II Recommendations – European Universities’ Achievements since 2005 in Implementing the Salzburg Principles \(2010\)](#)

[Responsible Partnering Guidelines: Joining Forces in a World of Open Innovation: Guidelines for Collaborative Research and Knowledge Transfer between Science and Industry](#)

[Statement by the European University Association in response to the European Commission Consultation on Modernisation of Higher Education in Europe](#)

[Recommendations from the EUA Working Group on Open Access](#)

The European University Association (EUA) represents and supports higher education institutions with approximately 850 members in 46 countries. Members of EUA are European universities involved in teaching and research, national associations of rectors and other associations and networks active in higher education and research

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