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Ministry of
Education
and Culture



Update and possible next steps for EHEA-ERA interaction

Introduction

In the Paris Communiqué the Ministers made a commitment to enhance cooperation between education, research and innovation and to develop interaction between European Higher Education Area and European Research Area.

“We will foster and extend integrated transnational cooperation in higher education, research and innovation, for increased mobility of staff, students and researchers, and for more joint study programmes throughout the whole EHEA. We take note with interest of the recent EU initiative on ‘European Universities’ and we will encourage all our higher education institutions to work in such new settings. We call on the BFUG to establish interaction with the European Research Area and Innovation Committee (ERAC) by 2020 in order to develop synergies between the EHEA and the European Research Area (ERA).”

ERA and EHEA have different rationale, scopes, governing structures and working methods. There are also differences in the member countries and participating organisations. The ERA integrates research and innovation programmes and policies of the European Union and aims to align these policies with national activities. Its aim is to increase the competitiveness of European research by enhancing cooperation. ERAC is a strategic policy advisory committee that advises the Commission, the Council, and member countries on the full spectrum of research and innovation issues in the framework of the governance of ERA. The Committee is co-chaired by the Commission and an elected representative from a member state. The Council provides its secretariat. Members of ERAC and its configurations include all the member states and the Commission. Those non-EU countries, which are associated to EU research and innovation programmes, may participate as observers in ERAC activities.

On the education side, ERA's governing structure and membership is comparable with the governance of the ET2020 Strategic Framework for European Cooperation in Education and Training. The members of the ET2020 Working Group on Higher Education are nominated by the Member States and other participating countries. The ET2020 Working Group supports their reforms through structured exchanges of information and experiences on issues common to the higher education systems of the members. The Working Group reports to the Directors General for Higher Education who meet during each six-monthly rotating EU Presidency.

Update on activities

In order to develop more synergies between the EHEA and ERA and to establish more systematic interaction between BFUG and ERAC two initial steps have been taken this fall.

During Finland's Presidency of the Council of European Union the meeting of Directors-Generals for Higher Education was organised back to back with the very first joint meeting of the EU Directors-General for Higher Education and the European Research Area and Innovation Committee (ERAC). The joint conference was organized in cooperation with European Commission on 1 of October 2019. There were approx. 120 participants. The aim of this conference was to start a dialogue between these two sectors, education and



research, by bringing together policy makers to discuss three major game-changers and find common ground and enhance cooperation around these and other relevant topics:

- openness,
- digitalization,
- artificial intelligence.

The joint meeting was regarded as a welcome initiative by participants to advance the understanding and awareness of common challenges and opportunities for cooperation between the two sectors.

ERAC co-chairs and BFUG Finnish co-chairs as well as representatives of the European Commission (DG EAC and DG RTD) met informally on the 20th of September in Brussels. The purpose of the meeting was to examine how BFUG and ERAC could deepen cooperation and improve the flow of information in the future. The focus was on finding practical solutions and ways to initiate dialogue between the two areas. The conclusion of the meeting was that there is a momentum for increased interaction. Both the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area are currently considering the vision and priorities for the future. Importantly, President-elect Ursula von der Leyen has presented the new structure of the next European Commission that combines education, research and innovation in the same portfolio. This will give new opportunities for developing synergies at EU level between education, research and innovation policies. At EU level, the ET2020 Working Group on Higher Education and ERAC will establish regular ways of collaboration.

The BFUG and ERAC co-chairs also considered it important to start enhancing interaction in a practical way without introducing burdensome new structures. It was felt that in spite of the differences in governance and working methods much can be done to increase collaboration and interaction between EHEA and ERA.

Based on these two initial steps towards better interaction it was agreed that the topic will be discussed at the next BFUG meeting in Helsinki and at future ERAC meetings.

Possible next steps for discussion in the BFUG

The following sets out possible ways and themes to promote better interaction between the ERAC and the BFUG. The BFUG should outline in the discussion the best ways forward.

Future vision for the EHEA and the ERA and possible themes of cooperation

The BFUG is currently discussing the future vision and priorities of the EHEA for the Rome Ministerial Conference 2020. At the same time, ERAC is preparing a communication on ERA in December 2019, ahead of the Commission's communication, which is expected next Autumn. We should ensure that future-oriented work of both processes builds better synergies between education and research.

Better synergies can be achieved by working together with the themes and priorities set for the next decade that are important for both higher education and research policies. Possible collaboration themes could include:

- Sustainable development
- Digitalisation
- Mobility
- Openness
- Protecting and promoting fundamental values and academic freedom
- Development of 3. cycle education

- Promoting teaching
- Research-based learning

Better flow of information

The dialogue and interaction between the ERAC and the BFUG should continue. It is not feasible to organise meetings of the BFUG and ERAC together. Other platforms for an exchange of views and for systematic flow of information can be found, for example:

- The BFUG and the ERAC co-chairs meet and exchange information regularly
- Participation of the representatives of the ERAC in the BFUG meetings when relevant and/or in the working groups for thematic discussions
- participation when relevant of BFUG representatives in ERAC meetings