

**NEW ERA ACTIONS FOR THE ERA POLICY AGENDA 2025-2027**  
**TEMPLATE FOR NATIONAL CONSULTATION PROCESS**

<b>Action title:</b> <i>(Please use as a maximum two lines.)</i>	<b><i>Unleashing the full R&amp;I potential of Europe's universities</i></b>
<b>Description of the action</b>  <i>(Please explain the proposed action in a simple, clear and communicable narrative).</i>	<p><b>Aim:</b> Supporting universities as key contributors to a deeper ERA – improving the framework conditions to unleash universities’ research and innovation potential</p> <p><b>Background:</b> Europe’s universities are drivers of transformation and need to transform themselves to continue to fulfil their missions of education, research and innovation in service of society. Member States and the EU can act as enablers of this transformation, by unleashing the potential of Europe’s universities in research, for the benefit of the sustainable and just transformation of society and Europe’s resilience. Europe and the world are facing immense challenges: finding a sustainable equilibrium between ecological, economic, and social concerns, the digital transition and major political developments will be some of the main drivers of change in the next ten years. And Europe’s universities are keen to live up to these challenges.</p> <p>The European Strategy for Universities (Council conclusions, 6 April 2022) underlines that excellent and inclusive universities are a condition and foundation for open, democratic, fair and sustainable societies as well as sustained growth, entrepreneurship and employment. Moreover, it pinpoints that the European Union and Member States have a shared interest in supporting the higher education sector by joining forces around a common vision for the sector, building on the richness of its diversity. But while the Strategy recognises that universities have taken steps to rethink and renew themselves, the focus of the Strategy is mostly on the education mission of universities. Universities need to be further empowered to develop in line with the ERA and being key contributors to realise the ERA.</p> <p><b>Work done so far (2022-2024):</b> ERA Action 13 in the 2022-2024 Policy Agenda aims at raising R&amp;I excellence in university sector, joining forces to “empower universities to develop in line with the ERA and in synergy with the EEA”. The Action thereby pursued the commitment in the Pact for R&amp;I to “programme, perform or support research of the highest possible quality, with the aim of achieving and rewarding excellence as a prerequisite for scientific, technological, economic, policy and societal impact, thus expanding Europe’s overall knowledge base”, at the level of university sector. It attempted as well to “develop, support and exploit synergies between the ERA and the EHEA” and the EEA, focussing notably on strategic institutional cooperation of universities, such as in European Universities alliances.</p> <p>A subgroup to the ERA Forum with experts from 16 MS, 3 AC, 11 university associations, and other SH groups prepared recommendations for policy actions and programme interventions, targeted to Member States, the Framework Programme, and joint actions (see recommendations paper discussed at the ERA Forum of 7 September 2023). Amongst the actions that are being pursued or considered are the optimisation of Horizon Europe instruments to support universities to develop in line with the ERA, practice exchange between MS to establish national excellence initiatives in support of university sector (for which a mapping was performed), and programme level cooperation between policy maker to join forces in empowering universities for ERA.</p> <p>Progress has been made to “empower universities to develop in line with the ERA”. Noteworthy in that respect is the assessment by the ERA Action 13 subgroup of the R&amp;I support to the European University alliances proved to accelerate implementation of ERA priority areas and induction of institutional change, notably</p>

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	<p>with regards to strengthening of research careers, mainstreaming of open science, reinforcing of academia-business cooperation and knowledge valorisation, engaging citizens, and sharing capacities and infrastructure.</p> <p>However, the work in ERA Action 13 has not been finalised, nor has it covered all relevant priorities of the ERA. Moreover, the attempt to truly join forces between Member States, Commission, and universities for ERA only just began.</p> <p><b>Objectives:</b> This new Action, co-led by Member States, the European Commission, and universities, aims to improve the framework conditions for universities in Europe to unleash their research potential. It will approach the research dimension of universities holistically and comprehensively and be instrumental in deepening the new ERA, through following specific objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Create an <b>open and structured dialogue</b> between Member States, Commission, and university sector, building on but going beyond the ERA Action 13 subgroup's focus on 'raising excellence'.</li> <li>- Achieve <b>consensus about the necessary European and national level measures to empower universities</b> to develop in line with the new ERA, articulating the capacity-building needs of universities in relation to ERA priorities, following-up as well on the recommendations of ERA Action 13.</li> <li>- Enhance <b>coordination</b> of European and national level R&amp;I policies and programme instruments, <b>taking into account all universities' missions</b> (education, research, innovation, service to society).</li> </ul>
<p><b>Actors</b></p> <p><i>(Please explain who would take part in the action and who would benefit from it).</i></p>	<p><b>Actors:</b> Member States, European Commission, European and national associations representing universities, as well as individual universities would be the drivers of this action. Other relevant stakeholders can be consulted as needed.</p> <p><b>Beneficiaries:</b> universities and other research performing higher education institutions across the ERA.</p>
<p><b>Expected impact</b></p> <p><i>(Please describe the expected impact of the action (including outside the scientific community), paying attention to the fact that it needs to focus on concrete results and reachable deliverables).</i></p>	<p>The action will allow to build a consensus among relevant actors about the necessary measures to be taken at European and national level to improve the R&amp;I framework conditions in which universities operate in ERA. Such measures could be translated into policies, funding instruments, and potentially legislative changes (such as enabling the creation of interdisciplinary institutes, fostering entrepreneurship education, supporting the civic mission of universities, etc.).</p> <p>In doing so, the principles of academic freedom and institutional autonomy should remain safeguarded. While empowering universities to contribute to, engage with, and respond to societal transformation, the Action is expected to exploit the legitimate diversity of universities and their differentiated role in MS and EU.</p> <p>The impact of this action will not only be achieved through the action itself but through synergies with other ERA actions. The proposed comprehensive approach will allow to further implement policies on research careers (4), the reform of research assessment (3), research management (17), etc in universities.</p> <p>The outcomes of the action will not only benefit universities directly through improved policies and funding provisions but also the ecosystems in which they operate, and which include students, private and public sectors and civil society. Therefore, the action will ultimately benefit European society and the economy as well as citizens through more and better research.</p>

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	<p>The anticipated <b>deliverables</b> are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A meeting place (such as a subgroup of the ERA Forum) for an open and structured dialogue on research and innovation policy between Member States, European Commission, and university sector.</li> <li>- Recommendations about the necessary European and national level measures to empower universities to develop in line with the new ERA, and initiated roadmap for implementation.</li> <li>- Better coordinated European and national level R&amp;I policies and programme instruments, taking into account all universities' missions (education, research, innovation, service to society).</li> </ul>
<p><b>Why do we need this action?</b></p> <p><i>(Please indicate the need for this action in view of implementing the <u>Pact for R&amp;I and achieving the ERA objectives</u> and explain why its objective cannot be reached through existing programmes/activities. What is the action's <u>added value</u> at national and European level as well as for stakeholders? How does it <u>make a change</u> and how is <u>co-creation</u> ensured?)</i></p>	<p><i>There is a need for a structured exchange platform between EU and national level policymakers and universities.</i> The Action will contribute to implementing the Council Recommendation on a Pact for R&amp;I in Europe (16 July 2021) by deepening the ERA through a more thorough integration of European and national policies for the higher education sector. The action would aim to ensure that R&amp;I policies for higher education work in close synergy across all levels of government (local, regional, national and global) and introduce initiatives providing most of the EU added value. Similarly, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, the action will respect Member States' practices and accommodate a differentiated approach reflecting national diversity of higher education systems and their respective institutions. Different national, regional or local conditions could lead to differences on how proposed recommendations are implemented.</p> <p><i>Taking a holistic view on needs and support for universities is required.</i> Building on the work done under the current ERA Action 13, this new Action will take a more holistic view on universities as contributors to Europe's R&amp;I capacity. It will ensure the coordination of EU and national investments and reforms with the aim to strengthen national higher education systems and R&amp;I systems more broadly. This will help increase their impact at all levels: driving the development of national R&amp;I systems towards national objectives and contributing to ERA objectives and other shared priorities in strategic areas of common interest.</p> <p><i>Continued support for university sector is needed to develop in line with the ERA.</i> Referring to the Council Recommendations' priority areas for joint action, universities are already strong drivers if not sometimes champions at 'deepening a truly functioning internal market for knowledge' (open science; research infrastructures; gender equality, equal opportunities and inclusiveness; careers and mobility of researchers and research assessment and reward system; knowledge valorisation; global engagement).</p> <p>In line again with their missions, universities are places to 'take up together the challenges posed by the twin green and digital transition, and increasing society's participation in the ERA' (challenge-based ERA actions; synergies between research and innovation policy, education and the EU Skills Agenda; synergies between research and innovation policy and industrial policy, in order to boost innovation ecosystems; a more active citizen and societal engagement in research and innovation in all its dimensions). Universities are also natural partners for 'amplifying access to research and innovation excellence across the Union' and they should therefore be the perfect targets for 'advancing concerted research and innovation investments and reforms' as proposed in this action.</p>

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	<p>More specifically and referring to the values and principles for R&amp;I as defined in the Pact for R&amp;I, this action is highly relevant as universities are central places for 'upholding values' (ethics and integrity of research and innovation; freedom of scientific research; gender equality and equal opportunities for all). In addition, the action will support universities within ERA at 'working better' (free circulation; pursuit of excellence; value creation) and at 'working together' (coordination, coherence and commitment; global outreach; inclusiveness; societal responsibility) as these are intrinsically linked with their core missions.</p> <p><i>Exploitation of synergies of the ERA with EHEA, EEA and Industry policies is not reached yet.</i> Progress was made under ERA Action 13 to concretise synergies with education, notably by feeding back the results of the subgroup discussions and recommendations for R&amp;I policy and programme instruments to the development of the investment pathway for the European Universities initiative at education side. However, the work has only been initiated, and will require further follow-up, to ensure that within the European Universities initiative also the R&amp;I dimension is sufficiently strengthened. In addition, there is a need to also consider synergies related to the innovation mission of research-intensive universities, notably with Industry policies.</p> <p><i>Need to move from focus on strategic institutional cooperation to university sector as a whole.</i> The ERA Action 13 subgroup decided to focus primarily at the European dimension of universities, targeting strategic institutional cooperation, such as in alliances of European Universities. However, the sector's needs to develop in line go beyond cooperation. Hence, the objective of the open and structured dialogues is to target the university sector as a whole.</p>
<p><b>Additional information</b></p> <p><i>(For example, timing and milestones, which already could be envisaged, can be indicated.)</i></p>	<p>Following structured process will be pursued:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Needs mapping by MS (year 1), incl. following-up on the ERA Action 13 subgroup's work and taking into account recent studies.</li> <li>2. Co-creation of policy and funding recommendations (years 1-2), including following-up on remaining gaps from ERA Action 13.</li> <li>3. Preparation and implementation of a roadmap for action at MS and EU level and a monitoring methodology (year 2-3).</li> </ol>