

ERA Advisory Structure Action Plan

Interim report on progress in 2019

Introduction

This is an interim report on the implementation of the Action Plan on the ERA advisory structure agreed in April 2019. It summarises the action taken in 2019 by all of the standing and ad-hoc ERA-related groups ('the Groups'), the Council Secretariat, the European Commission and recent and up-coming Council Presidencies. The interim report also identifies the key issues to be addressed in the remainder of the implementation period.

The report is intentionally summary in nature, without detailed annexes, as work on a comprehensive final report will follow quite closely in September. There will be a new European Commission Communication on the future of ERA in the middle of 2020, a new Member-State Co-Chair in September and Council Conclusions on the Future of ERA in December; and it therefore makes sense to wrap up substantive work on the present project by September to allow the new co-Chair team to focus its attention on the future-orientated work.

The Groups are asked to note the positive story in the interim report and to indicate if there are any issues they would like to be addressed in the final report.

Summary of progress in 2019

Based on the responses of the Groups and other actors, the key messages on progress during 2019 in implementing the Action Plan are set out in the bullets below. The bullets are grouped according to the four broad headings into which the detailed actions fall (making individual Groups more effective; improving co-ordination between Groups; improving linkages with the wider context; and preparation for the future of ERA). As this is a summary report, the descriptions of some actions may require reference to the Action Plan for full comprehensibility, and familiar abbreviations are not systematically spelled out (though will be in the final report).

The overall picture is that action has been initiated, and in many cases completed, on the most important and challenging elements of the Action Plan – there are only three substantive pieces of new work that need to be initiated in 2020. As expected, some challenges became apparent as the ERA-related Groups worked on the Action Plan during 2019, and the Groups will need to consider how to respond to these during the remainder of the implementation period.

- Making individual Groups more effective
 - All Groups have substantially completed the process of reviewing their mandates, working methods and work programmes, with only a few loose ends left to tie up.

- Actions identified for individual Groups for 2019 in respect of key parts of their effectiveness have been completed (notably the GPC taskforce, the ERAC stocktake of National Action Plans, the SFIC Task Forces on aspects of international focus, and the OSI Task Force on open innovation).
- Strategic debates have become an established feature of ERAC meetings on a regular cycle, though there is still work to be done to find the most practical way of basing these debates on mutual information
- Some specific actions for 2019 have taken longer than expected, but should be completed in 2020.
- The agreed actions on potential rule changes for GPC and SFIC have, however, run into serious procedural obstacles.
- Improving coordination between groups
 - There is now much more systematic communication between the Groups through input into each other's work and through specific agenda items (items on gender, for example, being discussed at other Groups' meetings).
 - All Groups report that their shared involvement in the ERAC Steering Board is helping this process.
 - There is not yet much progress on coordinating the Groups' work programmes.
 - Whilst all Groups have engaged with the gender actions in the Action Plan, most do not feel they have yet found the most effective way of integrating this dimension into their ongoing work.
- Improving linkages with the wider context
 - Upcoming Presidencies are now more systematically linked into the Groups via the ERAC Steering Board and there is more consistent linkage of Presidency agendas to the work of the Groups.
 - Information from the European Commission to the Groups on other work of interest is already more systematic, though there is more to be done to integrate this into strategic debates and planning.
 - Specific stakeholder opportunities for 2019 identified in the Action Plan have been realised, notably: the ERAC / HRM meeting and associated document on ERA / European Higher Education Area synergies, and the SFIC meeting with innovation stakeholders.
 - Groups are involving stakeholders more systematically, for example OSI regularly inviting a member of the European Open Science Cloud governance board.
 - The Groups have engaged with the cycle of Mutual Learning Exercises, though most are not satisfied that they have yet found the right way of interacting.
- Future of ERA – preparation for the next phase
 - Based on the work of an Ad-hoc Working Group in 2019, ERAC agreed an opinion on the Future of ERA in January 2020.

Issues for the remainder of the process

Based on progress to date and items already foreseen for 2020, the following bullets set out the priorities for the remainder of the implementation period. Much of this agenda involves completing or embedding work already initiated – as noted, there are only three substantive pieces of new work.

- Making the Groups more effective
 - Individual Groups completing the outstanding actions from 2019 on mandates, working methods and work programmes.
 - Seeing if there is a way of solving the problems with the potential rule changes for GPC and SFIC.
 - The specific work for 2020 in all Groups on a communications, outreach and impact strategy. [*New item for 2020*]
 - ERAC preparing for the 2021 task to establish an ad-hoc working group on monitoring. [*New item for 2020-21*]
- Improving coordination between groups
 - Continuing to find ways to improve communication and coordination between the Groups, with an emphasis less on specific actions and more on embedding the positive culture and reflexes created by the work so far.
 - Continuing to develop the specific role of the Steering Board as a vehicle for improved transparency and co-ordination between the Groups, particularly in the area of work programmes.
 - Exchanging ideas and mutual support amongst the Groups to identify ways of addressing concerns on how to interact with the gender dimension (perhaps as part of a wider reflection on adapting the HR element of ERA to social and technological changes since the creation of the European Charter for Researchers in 2005 – also a theme in the joint ERA / EHEA work).
 - The Groups through the Steering Board considering the possibility of a cross-Group ad-hoc working group on visibility. [*New item for 2020*]
- Improving linkages with the wider context
 - Continuing work to embed the culture of engagement with stakeholders.
 - Exchanging ideas and mutual support amongst the Groups to identify ways of addressing concerns on how to interact with Mutual Learning Exercises.
- Future of ERA – preparation for the next phase
 - ERAC, the European Commission and upcoming Presidencies following up the ERAC opinion of January 2020.

Background

As required by the Council, a review of the ERA advisory structure was carried out in 2018, resulting in a detailed report (Phillippe Langer, Lisa Müller and Kari Balke Øiseth acting as rapporteurs), an ERA opinion (adopted 18 September 2018), Council Conclusions (30 November 2018) and an Action Plan (30 April 2019).

The work has been overseen by all of the Groups and other actors through the vehicle of the ERAC Steering Board, in a spirit of transparency and mutual support. Additionally, a Help Desk was established to drive and support the process, led by Fulvio Esposito, Lisa Müller (to autumn 2019) and Gunhild Kiesenhofer-Widhalm, latterly with support from David Wilson (from late 2019). Upcoming Presidencies have been notable for their positive engagement in the process, which is gratifying in view of the emphasis in the Council Conclusions on building better links between the Groups and Presidencies.

Most of the actions in the Action Plan fall into 2019 and 2020, with each year divided into two semesters.¹ All actors were asked to provide detailed updates on progress at the end of each semester period, and the updates for the 109 actions falling within the two semesters of 2019 are the source material for the summary points above.

Based on the updates on progress for the first semester of 2020, a paper will be presented to the September ERAC meeting in order to bring a formal end to substantive work on the Action Plan and to seek agreement to the scope of the final report. A final report will then be prepared and presented to ERAC in December.

David Wilson (on behalf of the Help Desk)
26 May 2020

¹ There is a small number of actions identified for 2021 that will fall outside the scope of the final report – these relate to the formal processes that will follow on from the present implementation work and the way in which its outcomes will be fed into the Future of ERA work