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**MEETING DOCUMENT**

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From:	ERAC Secretariat
To:	ERAC (European Research Area and Innovation Committee)
Subject:	ERAC videoconference on 10 September 2020 - Item 4 - Note from the Helpdesk for the implementation of the ERAC Action Plan 2019-2020

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Dear ERAC delegates,

Please find attached the Note from the Helpdesk for the implementation of the ERAC Action Plan 2019-2020, with a view to agenda item 4 for the ERAC meeting on 10 September.

Kind regards,

ERAC Secretariat

# ERA Advisory Structure Action Plan

## NOTE FROM THE ACTION PLAN HELP DESK TO ERAC ON THE FINAL REPORT, SEPTEMBER 2020

This paper follows the presentation to the June meeting of ERAC of the Interim Report on the Action Plan. As indicated in June, a final exercise was carried out over the summer whereby the ERA-related Groups, the European Commission and upcoming Presidencies provided updates on the actions assigned to them.

There are a few actions remaining to be implemented by the end of the year (like the ERA Ministerial Conference). Given the upcoming change in Member State Co-Chair and the forthcoming Commission communication on the future of ERA, ERAC agreed in June that we would conclude substantive policy work on this dossier at the present meeting. The task remaining is to identify the messages arising from the process and capture those in a final report.

This paper asks ERAC to:

- note the summary of progress and outcomes in the draft Executive Summary in Annex A;
- approve the draft outline in Annex B as the basis for drafting the final report to be presented to the next ERAC meeting in December;
- given that this schedule will miss inputting into the planned Council Conclusions in November, consider whether it wishes to extract the Executive Summary of the report (in Annex A) as a document that can be sent as confirmation of completion of the task and timely input to the Conclusions;
- if it does so wish, provide comments on the text at the meeting, subject to a further round of comments (if necessary) after the meeting before approval by written procedure and submission to the German Presidency in early October.

## Outcomes

The request for updates was sent to actors in early July, asking for a response by mid-August. Despite the challenges of Covid-19 and the constraints of the holiday season, there was a 100% return. For the actions due to be completed by the end of 2020, our colleagues have provided the Help Desk with their best estimate of whether or not these will be achieved.

The various actors not only provided status updates on the actions assigned to them but also evaluative feedback on the impact of the changes made and their experience of implementing them. We therefore have an excellent breadth and depth of response as the basis for our report, and the Help Desk wishes to thank all participants for their enthusiastic and committed collaboration on this project.

A draft Executive Summary for the report is attached at Annex A, summarising the background to the process together with the key findings to emerge from the

updates: the most significant achievements, learning points which should be carried forward into the new advisory structure, and outstanding issues which should be addressed as part of the next phase of work.

## Nature and scope of the report

The Final Report will be the response to the Council of the ERA-related Groups setting out how they have responded to the task assigned them by the Council Conclusions of November 2018. It will be prepared by the Help Desk on behalf of the Groups.

Attached at Annex B is a draft outline of the proposed final report. Details may vary in the actual writing, but the outline indicates the scope and intentions of the report. Part of the task is to provide a thorough account of the work so those conducting the next review can see what was achieved, what worked well and what worked less well. But it is equally important to provide the Council and the Commission with a clear and impactful set of messages on what we have learnt, in order to inform the process of building the new advisory structure.

The Help Desk accordingly seeks ERAC's approval to draft a Final Report on these lines.

## Potential ERAC opinion

There is an issue, however, around timing. The German Presidency plans to have Council Conclusions on the future of ERA adopted in November. But the next ERAC meeting is not until December, and the adoption of the Final Report would therefore come too late for the Conclusions. Equally, it would not be normal for ERAC to adopt a substantial document like the planned Final Report by written procedure without at least one prior discussion in a meeting.

It would, however, be desirable if the November Conclusions were able (a) to note that the ERA-related Groups had indeed formally discharged the task assigned in the 2018 Conclusions and (b) to take account of what has been learned from the hard work by all seven Groups.

The Help Desk have therefore drafted the Executive Summary to the report, as its high-level nature means it is not particularly dependent on the small number of actions still to be completed by the end of the year. The three-page Executive Summary could be agreed as a summary opinion on a quicker timescale and then sent to the Presidency in early October as an input to the Conclusions.

If ERAC and the other Groups agree with the principle of creating a timely input into the Conclusions process, we would then welcome any reactions to the proposed text in Annex A.

## Next steps

If ERAC does wish to proceed in this way, the Help Desk will revise the Executive Summary in the light of any comments and recirculate for further comments by 25

September. If we have an agreed text at that point, it will be deemed approved by written procedure and forwarded to the Presidency by the ERAC Co-Chairs on behalf of all the ERA-related Groups.

For the rest of the report (or the whole report if the suggested approach does not find favour), we will follow the procedure outlined to the June ERAC meeting, namely checking at the end of October that the items due to be completed by the end of 2020 are still on track, and on that basis submitting a full draft report to the Steering Board meeting on 10 November and to ERAC on 16 December.

## Executive Summary

Following the review of the European Research Area (ERA) advisory structure carried out in 2018, the Council in its Conclusions of 30 November 2018 (14989/18) called on the ERAC and the other ERA-related Groups to ensure swift implementation of the review's recommendations through an Action Plan in 2019. The Council asked each Group to examine ways to improve its functioning, to enhance co-operation between the groups, to improve the Groups' connection with stakeholders and the external environment, and to prepare for the work on future ERA priorities in 2020 and 2021.

In their final report on the implementation of the Action Plan, the ERA-related Groups confirm to the Council that they have worked energetically and collaboratively on the task assigned to them and brought it to a successful conclusion – despite the constraints created by the COVID-19 emergency.

The Action Plan agreed in April 2019 contained 116 actions (excluding double-counts and some deferred items). Of these 87 have been completed, a further 15 are on track for completion by the end of 2020 as planned, and only 15 will not be completed. Of the items not completed, some turned out to be impractical and others have raised issues that need to be addressed in the upcoming work on the future advisory structure for ERA.

Key achievements from the implementation of the Action Plan are set out below.

### *Making individual Groups more effective*

- All Groups have completed the process of reviewing their mandates, working methods and work programmes, to the extent reasonable ahead of potential changes to the ERA priorities.
- Actions identified for individual Groups 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 SWG OSI Task Force on open innovation).
- Strategic debates have become an established feature of ERAC meetings on a regular cycle and have improved the quality and relevance of discussion.
- With one exception where work was coming to a natural close, all Groups have adopted and implemented new communications, outreach and impact strategies, and are beginning to increase their external visibility.

### *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. SWG GRI has helped other Groups consider the gender dimension of their work, all Groups have shared experience in developing their communication strategies, and there has been bilateral collaboration, such as ESFRI and SWG OSI working on monitoring issues.

- All Groups report that their shared involvement in the ERAC Steering Board has helped this process.

*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 more systematic, though there is more to be done to integrate this into strategic debates and planning.
- Actions where the Council Conclusions asked the Groups to engage with specific stakeholders have been realised. These include the ERAC / SWG HRM meeting and associated document on synergies between ERA and the European Higher Education Area, and the SFIC meeting with innovation stakeholders.
- In general Groups are also involving stakeholders more systematically. SWG OSI, for example, regularly invites a member of the European Open Science Cloud governance board to its meetings.
- The Groups have engaged with the cycle of Mutual Learning Exercises, with positive results, though some Groups still feel there is more they could do.

*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.

The future advisory structure may differ from the present one, but there are several aspects of what has been achieved to date that should be retained and developed in the new structure.

- The **strategic perspective in debates and opinions**, addressing the issues surfaced by the Action Plan (notably securing greater engagement in strategic debates by delegations and finding ways to consider the relationship between ERA and Horizon Europe).
- The attention paid to the **communication, visibility and impact** of work done by successor advisory groups, including making sure that the websites of any groups and of the Council Secretariat are accessible and suitably cross-referenced.
- The **culture of collaboration between groups**, both formally through the Steering Board (or its successor) and informally through the cross-fertilisation of agendas and sharing of experience – broadening the experience to date into areas such as the coordination of work programmes. There is still more work to do on the practicalities of collaboration on cross-cutting issues such as gender and broader diversity.
- A good, forward-looking **relationship with up-coming Presidencies**.
- A **strong outward focus**, whether to complementary initiatives such as Mutual Learning Exercises, or to stakeholder organisations and others with

shared interests – including more active attention to the relationship with the Joint Research Centre.

It is important that the process of constructing the new advisory structure addresses a number of issues, some of which are long-standing and some of which became apparent through the process of implementing the Action Plan.

- Groups should exist in the new structure only where they **map sensibly and sustainably onto any new ERA priorities**, and where Member States and Associated Countries are prepared to ensure **active and properly-resourced representation**. It would also be sensible to pick up the issue of establishing a model profile for members of advisory groups. In the future, more flexible structures, both in terms of duration and mandate, should be considered for implementing actions under the new ERA governance structure.
- Much of the current framework for human resources work in ERA was set at the time of the creation of the European Charter for Researchers in 2005. It would be sensible to **consider the impact of subsequent social and technological change on the human resources agenda** as part of the process of establishing a new advisory structure. This issue emerged clearly from the joint Action Plan work between ERAC and the European Higher Education Area.
- All groups in the new structure need a **sound administrative basis with proper meeting facilities and support** from the Council Secretariat, clear and agreed in advance. At present, two ERA-related Groups depend on the willingness of one Member State to support them informally with meeting facilities.
- The **rules of procedure for advisory groups need to be updated and allow for continuing evolution**. Despite the emphasis on stakeholder outreach in the Council Conclusions, it is still not possible to issue a standing invitation to a member of a relevant stakeholder group. Inflexibilities in rules have also prevented some ERA-related Groups from dropping partial interpretation, despite a clear policy intention to do so.

#### [The ERA-related Groups

ERAC	European Research Area & Innovation Committee
ESFRI	European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures
GPC	High Level Group on Joint Programming
SFIC	Strategic Forum for International S&T Cooperation
SWG GRI	ERAC Standing Working Group on Gender in Research & Innovation
SWG HRM	ERAC Standing Working Group on Human Resources and Mobility
SWG OSI	ERAC Standing Working Group on Open Science and Innovation]

## Final Report - outline

### Executive summary

[As Annex A]

### Introduction / background

Brief reminder on ERA, ERA priorities, Roadmap, National Action Plans

Overview of the ERA-related groups.

The governance review processes in 2015 and 2018

Future of ERA – plans for EC communication, plans for ERA Ministerial Conference

### The Action Plan implementation process

Outcomes of the 2018 review – key points from ERAC opinion and Council Conclusions

- Emphasise strategic perspective – what we are trying to achieve and why, plus expected benefits

How we have gone about the process

- Action Plan April 2019
- Reporting by semester
- Help Desk
- Interim report

Any considerations we want to flag

### Report on outcomes

Things achieved, and where the things achieved leave us:

- Generic issues across groups, using the four categories
- Any group-specific issues

Things not achieved, plus reflections

- Cross-cutting issues
- Group-specific issues

Any additional points that emerged from trying to implement, including:

- Proper working conditions for all groups
- 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 [important point flagged in Interim Report]
- Involving members of other groups on a permanent rather than ad-hoc basis, especially from the HE side [from the SB]
- GPC point about the evolution of the partnership landscape

Overall conclusions

## Next steps

For the future of ERA discussions:

- Benefits achieved by implementing the Action Plan that should be carried forward into any new advisory structure
- Any pitfalls to avoid
- Any outstanding issues that need to be resolved

[Potentially] For the next full governance review (currently set for 2021 at latest):

- Any experience from the 2018 review we should bear in mind for the next governance review

## Annexes (possible items – refine nearer time)

Abbreviations and glossary

Bibliography

Additional data or supporting analysis [if required]

2018 Council Conclusions [or key extracts]

List of all actions in the Action Plan [from cockpit file]

Factual information on the ERA-related groups

[Anything else?]