

ERAC 1210/20

NOTE

From: ERAC Secretariat
To: ERAC delegations

Subject: Lessons learned and issues arising from the successful implementation of the Action Plan on the ERA Advisory Structure : Supplementary ERAC Opinion on the ERA Advisory Structure

Delegations will find annexed to this Note the Supplementary ERAC Opinion on the ERA Advisory Structure "Lessons learned and issues arising from the successful implementation of the Action Plan on the ERA Advisory Structure", adopted by ERAC by written procedure on 9 October 2020.

Lessons learned and issues arising from the successful implementation of the Action Plan on the
ERA Advisory Structure

Supplementary ERAC Opinion on the ERA Advisory Structure

Adopted by written procedure on 9 October 2020

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 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 assessment of the implementation of the Action Plan, the ERA-related Groups confirm to the Council that they have worked energetically and collaboratively on the mandate assigned to them and fulfilled it successfully – 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 86 have been completed, a further 17 are on track for completion by the end of 2020 as planned, and only 13 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 GPC taskforces on aspects of its work, 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, resulting in greater 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.
- 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.

- Actions where the Council Conclusions asked the Groups to engage with specific stakeholders have been realised, namely the ERAC / SWG HRM meeting and associated document on synergies between ERA and the European Higher Education Area, and SWG OSI's regular contact with the European Open Science Cloud governance board.
- In general Groups are also involving stakeholders more systematically. SFIC, for example, had a comprehensive meeting with research and innovation stakeholders in late 2019.

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 on 17 December 2019.

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.

- 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, three 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.
- Groups should exist in the new structure 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.
- 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.

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
