

Proposal to the BFUG
from the Ad Hoc Task Force to increase synergies
between the EHEA, the higher education dimension of the EEA and
the ERA

1. Introduction

In the EHEA [Rome Communiqué](#) of 19 November 2020 it is stated that “*We commit to strengthening cooperation with the European Research Area. We call for the BFUG to work closely with the European Research Area and Innovation Committee (ERAC) to enhance synergies and alignment between education and research and innovation policies. Focus will be inter alia on developing research-based learning, guaranteeing academic and scientific freedom, and contributing to achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.*”

In the [Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond \(2021-2030\)](#) of February 2021, it was stressed that “*successful work has already been done towards creating a European Higher Education Area (EHEA), within the Bologna process. It will be important in future to continue working within the Bologna process, whilst creating further and stronger synergies with the European Research Area (ERA), avoiding parallel or double structures or instruments.*”

The [Council Conclusions on the New European Research Area](#), adopted on 1 December 2020, stresses that “*stronger synergies and interconnections between the ERA, the EHEA and the higher education related elements of the European Education Area (EEA), are to be developed*”.

In this context, within the EHEA, it was therefore decided to set up an Ad Hoc Task Force to discuss how to best increase these synergies between the EHEA, the EEA and the ERA.

The proposal formulated by the EHEA Ad Hoc Task Force is a first step in that direction. It aims at proposing topical areas for cooperation, and possible ways forward for how to address these common topics in a synergetic way in the three Areas’ cooperation structures.

It needs to be highlighted that this note represents the start of a discussion, from the perspective of the EHEA, for how to mobilise the Bologna structures in the context of the higher education dimension of the European Education Area (including with the upcoming European Strategy for Universities¹), and how to create synergies with the European Research Area.

If agreed upon by the BFUG, the proposal could serve as basis for discussions on the topic with relevant EU-level working groups or committees, such as the DGHE and ERAC, on the condition of agreement of the respective Presidencies/Chairs of these bodies.

¹ Announced as part of the “Education Package” in the [2022 Commission Working Programme](#)

2. Proposal to the BFUG

Proposed topical areas for closer cooperation

To increase synergies between the EHEA², EEA and ERA, silos should be avoided when discussing topics relevant for the three Areas.

Building on the Rome Ministerial Communiqué, increased synergies between EHEA, EEA and ERA could be envisaged in the **topical areas for cooperation**, such as:

- Fundamental academic values and freedom of science
- Academic and research careers (including recruitment)
- Transnational cooperation between and institutional transformation of higher education institutions, and research centres
- Innovative and transdisciplinary learning, teaching and research, their interconnectedness and the need for them to be mutually enriching
- Open Science / Open Education nexus
- Service to society: community engagement as the process whereby higher education and research institutions address societal needs in partnerships with their external communities
- Social dimension of higher education and research, inclusiveness and gender equality
- International cooperation with partners beyond the EU and the contribution to the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals

Recognising that higher education institutions and their stakeholders (student, academics, researchers ...) are at the heart of these synergies, and also that the topics should be developed by active participation of the relevant groups, the above list of proposed topical areas should be open for modification in order to adapt to the needs of the higher education sector, also in future.

The proposed topical areas are **open for further discussion and prioritisation**, both with the **EHEA**, as well as within the **EEA and ERA structures**.

Proposed ways for closer cooperation and mobilisation of the EHEA structures

Synergies would ultimately serve to better and more integrated policy outcomes, in the interest of students, academics, researchers and the higher education sector.

Such cooperation between EHEA- EEA - ERA should not be done by adding structures or parallel processes, but rather be done in a fit-for-purpose and flexible manner, for example in the form of **regular exchanges of information, ad-hoc invitations to attend meetings which discuss the topical areas for cooperation, joint meetings and events, and more broadly consider the whole higher education sector when developing policies, tools and instruments.**

² It needs to be noted that the involvement of the BFUG and the related working groups/coordination groups from the Bologna governance structures would be based on the existing Terms of References, as these allow for flexibility in the tasks to be executed in the topical areas of synergies, as several topics are already covered under these Terms of References.

Within the EHEA structures, both the Bologna Follow Up Group and a number of Working Groups (such as Fundamental Values, Social Dimension, Learning and Teaching, Global Policy Dialogue and the Bologna Implementation Coordination Group) could be mobilised to work on topical areas with the relevant EEA and ERA bodies.

For visibility purposes, it is proposed that a reference is put on the EHEA website to key EEA and ERA deliverables. This could be regularly updated and allow an easy access to the most relevant policy documents that relate to the whole European higher education sector.

Taking into account lessons learnt from already tested joint meetings, while important for the kick-off of the synergies work, a more focused approach could be considered for efficiency. For example, **a limited number of representatives from DGHE, ERAC and BFUG could have a dedicated joint event** (physical or virtual) once during each EU trio of Council Presidencies (once every 1.5 year) to take stock of the progress of the work on the topical areas for cooperation.

In order **to make the approach operational, it is proposed that for each topic, a brief overview of relevant milestones (events, deliverables and similar) would be developed**, together with the relevant EEA and ERA entities, reflecting real needs and building on realistic estimates of availability and capacity of the respective bodies.

Guiding questions to the BFUG

- 1) Are the proposed **topical areas** relevant or should they be adapted in some way?
- 2) Is the proposed **way forward** – building on the topical areas and setting milestones for concrete next steps – a realistic and good way for making progress on synergies?
- 3) Do you agree to **ask the co-chairs of the relevant Bologna Working Groups to take forward work on synergies** and to regularly report back to the BFUG?
- 4) Do you agree to **ask the European Commission and the current Presidency of the Council of the EU (Slovenia) to take forward this proposal for discussion within the respective entities under EEA and ERA**, in order to have a broad agreement of the way forward?

Annex 1 provides possible ways to mobilise the EHEA structures for closer cooperation.

Annex 2 provides an overview of the various entities of the three Areas.

Annex 1: Possible ways for mobilising the EHEA structures for cooperation

Regular exchange of information

Regular updates of EEA – ERA developments in Bologna structures to inform, when relevant, of progress within the EHEA structures, both the Bologna Follow Up Group and a number of Working Groups (such as Fundamental Values, Social Dimension, Learning and Teaching, Global Policy Dialogue and the Bologna Implementation Coordination Group)

Ad-Hoc attendance

Invite representatives(s) from the EEA / ERA structures as external experts, when relevant, within the EHEA structures, both the Bologna Follow Up Group and a number of Working Groups (such as Fundamental Values, Social Dimension, Learning and Teaching, Global Policy Dialogue and the Bologna Implementation Coordination Group)

Ad-Hoc Joint meetings

Organise joint physical or virtual meetings between the three Areas, either in full format or inviting a limited number of representatives. For example, a limited number of representatives from DGHE, ERAC and BFUG could have a dedicated joint event (physical or virtual) once during each EU trio of Council Presidencies (once every 1.5 year) to take stock of the progress of the work on the topical areas for cooperation.

Dedicated joint events

Organisation of dedicated events (e.g. seminars), organised by the EHEA (e.g. through the Bologna Members - e.g. Presidency - or the Task Force on Enhancing Knowledge Sharing in the EHEA community) on topical areas for synergies, in close cooperation with the EEA – ERA representatives. This would allow going beyond the traditional Bologna Working Groups structures, create a larger critical mass of involved experts and stakeholders, whilst disseminating to a wider audience.

Annex 2: Most relevant EHEA – EEA – ERA governance structures

The table below provides an overview of the relevant EHEA – EEA – ERA structures. In red, an overview is given of links to the identified topical areas for synergies.

EHEA	EEA	ERA
Ministerial Conferences	Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council	Competitiveness Council
/	Education (EDUC) Committee (Working Party in Council)	Research Working Party (Council)
Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG)	/	/
Bologna Follow-Up Group Board (BFUG Board)		/
/	High Level Group on Education and Training	/
/	High Level Group Coordination Board	/
	Directors-General for Higher Education (DG HE) (link to all topical areas for synergies)	European Research Area and Innovation Committee (ERAC) The European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures (ESFRI) (link to Transnational cooperation in education and research)
Bologna Implementation Coordination Group Bologna Working Groups <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitoring the Implementation of the Bologna Process (link to Transnational cooperation between and institutional transformation) Fundamental Values (link to Fundamental academic and scientific values and freedoms) Social Dimension (link to Community engagement, social cohesion, inclusiveness and gender equality) Learning and Teaching (link to Innovative and transdisciplinary learning, teaching and research; academic and research careers; open science and open education nexus) 	Working Groups (WG) under the EEA strategic framework (Commission Expert Group): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> WG on early childhood education and care, WG on schools with two subgroups - Pathways to school success and Education for environmental sustainability, WG on vocational education and training and the green transition, WG on higher education (link to all topical areas for synergies), WG on adult learning – opening up opportunities for all, WG on digital education , WG on equality and values in education and training. 	ERA Forum (Commission Expert Group) and related existing and future subgroups (link to all topical areas for synergies)

<p>Coordination Group on Global Policy Dialogue (GPD) (link to International cooperation and contribution to the SDGs)</p> <p>Task Forces</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ad Hoc Task Force to Increase Synergies Between the European Higher Education Area, the Higher Education Dimension of the European Education Area and the European Research Area • Task Force on Enhancing Knowledge Sharing in the EHEA community 	<p>Ad Hoc Expert Group on higher education transformation and the European Universities initiative (link to all topical areas for synergies)</p>	
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