

# EHEA's Interconnectedness with ERA

## Introduction

Higher education is located within a wider tertiary education system. Interconnectedness is a theme for most BFUG working structures and an idea that is percolating across the current programme of activities.

During the BFUG meeting in Copenhagen, we discussed the interconnectedness of the Bologna Process with the VET sector. Lifelong learning is a clear common objective for VET (Vocational Education and Training) and higher education systems. Across the EHEA, many countries have already made this connection through strengthening pathways between systems, for example by creating single Quality Assurance agencies for both HE and VET and bringing forward overarching/common QA guidelines.

A second topic to explore the interconnectedness with EHEA and the Bologna Process is the European Research Area. In many countries, research systems are also primarily located within higher education systems, and so higher education institutions are operating simultaneously within EHEA and ERA frameworks. EHEA countries show a diversity in how policy making for higher education and research are connected. Some are located in a single ministry, whereas in other countries multiple ministries are involved. Accordingly, there is a range of potential topics and points of intersection for the EHEA.

When discussing interconnectedness with ERA, we will focus on the closer integration of education, research, and innovation to build synergies between the EHEA, the EEA and the ERA<sup>1</sup> as interconnected pillars of Europe's knowledge ecosystem.

## Purpose of the document and BFUG discussion

The purpose of the discussion at the BFUG in Cyprus is to stimulate the identification of new ideas, potential tools and practical solutions to support discussion on (i) what actions can be taken now by groups operating in more connected ways and (ii) what priorities could be brought forward to the next phase of the Bologna Process.

During the BFUG meeting, every participant will be asked to participate in a breakout session. After these, a plenary session, to capture the results, will take place.

BFUG delegates are encouraged to prepare for these breakouts by reflecting on the questions in this document, and by consulting with their Ministries and stakeholders.

## EHEA and ERA

Both the Paris and Rome Communiqués encouraged synergies between the EHEA, the EEA and the ERA as interconnected pillars of Europe's knowledge ecosystem. The Rome Communiqué 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*

---

<sup>1</sup> [Background note](#) for the Meeting of the Ad Hoc Task Force to Increase Synergies between the EHEA, the Higher Education Dimension of the EEA and the ERA

*scientific freedom, and contributing to achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.'*

Higher education and research are inherently connected. Research is one of the principal missions of higher education institutions. HEIs' research output and scientific achievements are important to their evaluation, ranking, funding and reputation. They are also important for the quality of teaching and learning as well as the development of optimal and relevant curricula. Last but not least, academic and research activity together maximize the HE impact on society and their capacity to address contemporary challenges.

In this framework, it is crucial to find ways to accomplish effective cooperation between EHEA and ERA and achieve progress regarding common, important issues: academic and knowledge mobility, social inclusion, transparency, fundamental values, SDGs, European University Alliances etc.

In 2021 a BFUG task force brought forward two papers on this subject:

- A [background note](#) to Increase Synergies between the EHEA, the Higher Education Dimension of the EEA and the ERA
- A [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

An Ad Hoc Task Force prepared a proposal to be presented to the Bologna Follow Up Group (BFUG) and in Tirana 2024, the ministers committed to continue to support these goals towards 2030. The challenge was framed in 2021 in three questions, i.e.:

- *To increase synergies between the EHEA, EEA and ERA, which body/bodies within the EHEA are best placed to link with the EEA/ERA?*
- *Building on the respective structures within EHEA, EEA and ERA, what methods of coordination do you suggest for closer cooperation/synergies?*
- *Bearing in mind that the Rome Communiqué pays special attention to synergies linked to research-based learning, guaranteeing academic and scientific freedom, and contributing to achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals: do you have specific suggestions to operationalise strengthened cooperation in these fields?*

Since then, there has been little progress made on identifying a tangible process to address this.

#### **Questions for discussion by BFUG members:**

1. Are there examples where interconnectedness with ERA is already manifest?
2. Where do we want to be (at what state of synergies) by 2027? After 2030?
3. Why did a closer collaboration (after the TF on ERA/EHEA) not "take off"? What kind of obstacles are hampering further progress? What are the constraints?
4. How can we open dialogue to agree on common goals, and establish stable collaboration between EHEA and ERA?