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| From: | General Secretariat of the Council |
| To: | ERAC (European Research Area and Innovation Committee) |
| Subject: | ERA Policy Action 3 : Advance towards the reform of the Assessment System for research, researchers and institutions to improve their quality, performance and impact |

Delegations will find attached document on the above mentioned subject with the view to the meeting of the European Research Area and Innovation Committee (ERAC) on 12-13 April 2022.

ERA Policy Action 3

- Advance towards the reform of the Assessment System for research, researchers and institutions to improve their quality, performance and impact -

Scoping paper for the ERAC Plenary

12-13 April 2022

State of play and next steps

The way research projects, researchers, research units, and research institutions are assessed is fundamental for a well-functioning research and innovation system. The Council Recommendation on a **Pact for Research and Innovation** in Europe enshrines under the principle ‘Pursuit of excellence’ that the assessment system for research, researchers, teams and institutions should reward research that is world-class, produces verifiable and reproducible results, uses transparent methodologies, and allows for systematic reuse of results. The **ERA Policy Agenda 2022-24** includes a priority action for reforming the research assessment system to improve their quality, performance and impact.

Throughout 2021, the Commission has carried out a broad **stakeholder consultation** to identify key elements of research assessment that need to be reformed. Based on this consultation, the Commission published a [scoping report](#) at the end of November 2021. The report identifies objectives, principles and actions for changes in research assessment on which stakeholders can converge, as well as a way forward consisting in creating a coalition around an agreement that would be signed by research funders and research performers and other relevant organisations willing to implement changes.

On 16 December 2021, the Commission launched a [call for expressions of interest](#) for research organizations wishing to engage in a coalition. The call was met with great interest. As of end of February 2022, more than 250 organisations from across 33 countries have already signed up. These include research funding organisations, research performing organisations, national/regional assessment authorities or agencies, associations of research funders, of research performers, of researchers, as well as, learned societies and other relevant organisations. As the call will remain open, this number is expected to continue to grow.

Since the beginning of January 2022, a group consisting of the European University Association (EUA), Science Europe and a representative of researchers with expertise on research on research, Dr Karen Stroobants, and supported by the Commission, has started the **co-creation process of drafting an agreement**. A larger group, comprising 20 representatives¹ of major research organizations across Europe as well as individual researchers, is contributing to this co-creation. Organisations having expressed interest through the open call are also involved in the agreement drafting. A first meeting with this large assembly of stakeholders was held on 3 March.

¹ More information about the drafting process, members of the core group and list of organisations having signed the call for expression of interest is available at this link: https://ec.europa.eu/info/news/process-towards-agreement-reforming-research-assessment-2022-jan-18_en

Throughout March to May, further meetings with the core group and with the larger assembly of stakeholders will take place to advance on the agreement drafting. The proposed agreement would include commitments for changes that can be agreed upon by the signatories, steps in the reform journey, and possible tools to support the reform journey and implementation. The agreement will also include mechanisms for monitoring and mutual learning and the proposed organisational structure of the coalition. The signature of such an agreement would indicatively take place in late Spring 2022.

Involvement of Member States in ERAC and ERA Forum

Throughout this process, stakeholders have clearly expressed the need for this **initiative to remain stakeholder-driven**, with the Commission facilitating this process, contributing also in its capacity as research funding organisation.

At the same time, stakeholders have also underlined the **importance of engaging Member States** in ERAC and in the ERA Forum. **National framework conditions** and support to coalition members at national level, while respecting their autonomy, are key to enable research organisations to implement changes according to the commitments that are outlined in the agreement. During consultations, barriers to implementation have been highlighted by stakeholders including the existence in some countries of institutional performance-based funding based on position in rankings and/or on inappropriate and narrow bibliometric indicators such as the Journal Impact Factor and the number of publications.

As part of the ERA Policy Action 3 on reforming research assessment, in addition to the creation of the coalition and rolling-out its implementation plan, the Commission aims at working in close collaboration with ERA Forum members in order to analyse and deepen the understanding of these national and transnational administrative and legal barriers to reforms and foster mutual learning on possible ways to overcome them.

At the same time, ERAC and ERA Forum members will also be consulted on the draft agreement text, in line with the interest expressed by delegations at the ERAC meeting of 30 September 2021 to be involved in the process of preparing the agreement.

The draft agreement is progressing, with intense consultations taking place within the drafting team and the larger group of stakeholders. Comments were received during initial consultations with the core group in February, and feedback from the large assembly of stakeholders on 3 March was also very positive: over 180 organisations attended this meeting, testifying the commitment and interest of stakeholders in this process.

Attached to this note is the draft agreement, which reflects these consultations. It will continue to evolve as the drafting team discusses further inputs from the core group and the assembly of stakeholders, and from ERAC.

The current draft of the agreement encompasses the following main sections: 1) Preamble, providing the rationale and the motivation for reform; 2) Commitments for change as well as proposed timeframe for implementation; 3) Steps in the reform journey, to support organisations in achieving the commitments. It also includes as Annexes the Principles for research assessment reform, as formulated in the Commission scoping report published in November; and a toolbox providing examples of tools and options to consider for each commitment, as well as for each step in the suggested reform journey. Other sections of the agreement, the organisational structure for the coalition and monitoring and mutual learning mechanisms, are under preparation by the drafting team and will be discussed with the core group and the larger stakeholder assembly in the coming months.

In addition to overall strategic guidance and views of ERAC, the Commission would particularly be interested to understand whether national framework conditions might prevent organisations from implementing the commitments in the agreement. And, in case such barriers exist, whether any measures are in place or are planned at national level to overcome them and to support reform.

Feedback from stakeholders highlighted the importance of national framework conditions that are conducive to reform, and the role of Member States in enabling change, so that organisations can safely commit to and effectively implement the commitments in the agreement. Stakeholders also highlighted the need for support by policy-makers and funding agencies in providing the space and resources for experimentation that organisations need in order to improve research assessment along the commitments and timelines in the agreement.

Questions for discussion:

1. What are your overall views and guidance on the draft agreement?
2. Did you already identify existing barriers in your country in terms of national policies or legislations that might prevent implementing the commitments in the draft agreement or are you planning an assessment in that respect?
3. Are you planning, or in the process of tackling some of these barriers, and of providing support to the agreement signatories?