

CESAER

VISION FOR THE EUROPEAN EDUCATION AREA (EEA)

POSITION DATED 20TH APRIL 2020

The leading universities of science and technology united within [CESAER](#) welcome the achievements to date and the progress towards the European Education Area ([EEA](#)), and support the commitment of the European institutions to make it a reality. Together with the European Research Area ([ERA](#)), the EEA is pivotal to building European knowledge societies. Indeed, knowledge - i.e. research, education and innovation - should be at the heart of the [debate on the future of Europe](#).

With this position, we contribute to the development of the EEA. In our view, to fully harness the potential and deliver on the objectives of the EEA, all future efforts must aim to (i) adopt the boldest ambitions; (ii) secure sufficient funding for education and training at all levels; (iii) enable students, learners and teachers to contribute to a sustainable future; and (iv) ensure mutual recognition of qualifications and learning outcomes from abroad becomes a reality.

ADOPT BOLDEST AMBITIONS

The EEA is composed of diverse institutions and systems at the local and national levels, where there is room for the boldest ambitions at the European level as well. Other major challenges loom behind the current pandemic, such as recovery, increasing economic inequality, climate change and biodiversity loss. Indeed, education and training are correctly expected to contribute to tackling these challenges. However, we are concerned about the rising dangers for universities from populism, nationalism and fascism in Europe and beyond.

- ⇒ We encourage the European Union (EU) to adopt the boldest ambitions when shaping the EEA, to progress the European dimension in education and training and to [“promote the development of the highest possible level of knowledge for their peoples through a wide access to education and through its continuous updating”](#).
- ⇒ We urge Europe to establish European knowledge societies as a community addressing fundamental values and enforceable ethical frameworks (such as democracy, rule of law, transparency and human rights), to safeguard academic freedom (to be promoted like freedom of speech and freedom of the press) and institutional autonomy, and to support university leadership (as defined in foundational [declarations, charters and documents](#)).
- ⇒ We urge Europe to empower universities to act as a community addressing specific values (such as equality, diversity and inclusion), transmitting European democratic citizenship, promoting openness to other cultures through multilingualism, and enabling evidence-based policymaking.
- ⇒ We call upon Europe to enable us to release unprecedented forces to contribute to ecological, economic and social sustainability and to act as autonomous agents of great transformation.
- ⇒ We advise to establish Erasmus as the key EU instrument to implement the EEA along the example of the EU Framework Programmes for Research and Innovation for the ERA, and urge to focus Erasmus more on quality in line with [article 165 TFEU](#).
- ⇒ We plea for including students, learners and teachers as bearers of knowledge when considering the [treaty obligation](#) to ensure that scientific knowledge, researchers and technology circulate freely.
- ⇒ We call for establishing favourable framework conditions and remove obstacles for mobility in areas such as social security, migration and portability of study grants.

- ⇒ We offer to engage with authorities and stakeholders to explore a European statute for universities and corresponding diploma, legal entity and direct non-competitive funding.
- ⇒ We urge to adopt a geopolitical approach with a leading role of European education and training, making genuine contributions to the world. Therefore, we call for an open and wide EEA that is not confined within the borders of the EU, but covers the signatory countries of the [European Cultural Convention](#) and provides for partnerships with neighbouring countries.
- ⇒ Recalling 'United in diversity' and the contribution that linguistic diversity and language learning make to Europe, we urge the EU institutions to adopt a benchmark for a second foreign language, to begin learning foreign languages at an early age and to include it into the [European Semester](#).

SECURE SUFFICIENT FUNDING FOR EDUCATION AND TRAINING AT ALL LEVELS

In the light of the threat of the economic consequences of the global spread of Covid-19, with potentially dire consequences for the funding available for education and training, advancing the EEA and turning it into reality will require sufficient and sustainable funding. The past negotiations for the next Multiannual Financial Framework and the imminent threat of dramatic cuts to Erasmus are of utmost concern. Moreover, data from the [Education and Training Monitor 2019](#) shows that the share of GDP which the EU member states invest in their education and training systems continuously decreased in recent years, as well as the average investment per student.

- ⇒ We encourage the EU institutions to invest strategically in the future of our peoples through education and training, helping to build a more modern, sustainable and resilient Europe.
- ⇒ We urge the EU institutions to provide for at least €46 billion for the Erasmus programme from 2021 to 2027, in line with the proposal by the European Parliament.
- ⇒ Synergies with other funding instruments, notably Horizon Europe, must be sought to effectively bridge research, education and innovation.
- ⇒ We urge the EU to adopt an enforceable percentage of GDP target for funding for higher education in line with the best-performing regions in the world and to include it into the European Semester.
- ⇒ We urge to evaluate the real costs of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) degrees and to ensure that these costs are fully covered.

ENABLE STUDENTS, LEARNERS AND TEACHERS TO CONTRIBUTE TO A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

We recognise the contribution of the EEA to creating jobs and boosting economic growth. However, the priorities of the EEA must shift from merely ensuring the employability of students and learners to (i) equipping students, learners and teachers with the knowledge, skills and competences necessary to tackle the grand global challenges; (ii) enabling them to meet the demands of changing European knowledge societies; and (iii) empowering them to contribute to ecological, social and economic sustainability. In short, the EEA must ensure wide access to excellent, relevant and research-based education and training.

- ⇒ When shaping the EEA, we urge to add as key areas of action: (i) the linking of Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH) with STEM, and (ii) ensuring a close connection between education and training and [key technologies](#) of the 21st century.

- ⇒ We call for financial incentives to develop more courses and programmes at universities to facilitate lifelong learning, and ensure the continuous access to reskilling and up-skilling at any stage of life, including people who are neither in employment, nor in education or training. Such instruments should include micro-credentials, help address the shortage of STEM graduates, as well as ensure better entrepreneurial knowledge and skills.
- ⇒ The aim to enhance mobility of students, learners and teachers should be complemented by the aim to make mobility greener and contribute to making the EU climate-neutral by 2050. Thus, diverse forms of environment-friendly mobility must be explored and promoted.

ENSURE MUTUAL RECOGNITION OF QUALIFICATIONS AND LEARNING OUTCOMES FROM ABROAD

We take note that the European Commission sees improving procedures for the mutual recognition of qualifications as a cornerstone of establishing the EEA. Although considerable progress has been made through UNESCO, the Council of Europe, the inter-ministerial Bologna process and Erasmus, the mutual recognition of qualifications and learning outcomes abroad remains a lingering problem for students and universities across Europe and beyond. Even though the legal framework and tools to facilitate equal treatment of national and foreign educational qualifications are largely available, there is insufficient consistency in using and implementing them at national and institutional levels.

- ⇒ We caution against expectations that European Universities as such will solve the problems of recognition of qualifications and learning outcomes.
- ⇒ Instead, we suggest (i) to implement a European Student Card allowing automatic recognition of ECTS credits for the open and wide EEA, and not only the EU; (ii) to improve the application and working of the Lisbon Recognition Convention; and (iii) to collect and share experiences and best practices.
- ⇒ Recalling our statement on 'Scientific engineering education and common training framework (CTF)', we underline the difference between academic and professional qualifications in STEM.
- ⇒ We urge to boost the standing of STEM-education and training and to improve the quality of the academic STEM degrees at all levels.
- ⇒ We highlight the need to boost literacy and numeracy at an early stage and urge the EU to adopt corresponding benchmarks and to include them in the European Semester.
- ⇒ We urge the EU to promote Mathematics, Informatics, Natural Science, and Technology (MINT) at the primary and secondary school levels with special attention to girls, to adopt corresponding benchmarks and to include them in the European Semester.

The leading research-intensive universities of science and technology united within CESAER are committed and ready to contribute to shaping and implementing the EEA by 2025. We offer our excellence, expertise and cooperation as a key stakeholder for research-based science and technology education and training at European level for the upcoming debates, actions and other endeavours.

For more information, please contact our Advisor for Higher Education [Indrė Antanavičiūtė](#).

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[CESAER](#) is the European association of leading specialised and comprehensive universities of science and technology that: champion excellence in higher education, training, research and innovation; influence debate; contribute to the realisation of open knowledge societies; and, deliver significant scientific, social, economic, and societal impact.