

TOWARDS A DYNAMIC EUROPEAN EDUCATION AREA DRIVEN BY EXCELLENCE

POSITION DATED 8 OCTOBER 2020

The leading research-intensive universities of Science and Technology (S&T) united within [CESAER](#) warmly welcome the continuous efforts to achieve the European Education Area (EEA) by 2025. We warmly welcome the European Commission's (EC) [communication on Achieving the EEA by 2025](#) as the third package of initiatives outlining more concrete steps to deliver on this goal along six dimensions. The Covid-19 pandemic has brought unprecedented challenges and opportunities to European education and training and demonstrated their importance. We share the ambition to advance education and training that are future-oriented, attuned to the ongoing transformations of the world we live in and equip students, learners and teachers with the knowledge, skills and competences necessary to contribute to tackling the grand global challenges of our times.

We congratulate Commissioner Mariya Gabriel and her team with their proposals to effectively link the EEA with the European Research Area (ERA) (see [our ERA position](#)); boost Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) in education and training; promote green and virtual mobility; foster transversal skills and digital skills in particular; develop a European approach to micro-credentials; support higher education institutions in their institutional development and further develop the European recognition and quality assurance system.

With this position, we offer concrete recommendations to achieve an even more dynamic EEA driven by excellence along three lines, i.e. (i) advance research-based education and training and boost Mathematics, Informatics, Natural Science and Technology (MINT), and Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM), (ii) enable universities to deploy diverse roles in knowledge societies and (iii) adopt an open, inclusive and outward-looking approach.

[ADVANCE RESEARCH-BASED EDUCATION AND TRAINING AND BOOST MINT AND STEM](#)

We acknowledge the ample attention in the communication for the quality of education and training and welcome the proposed focus on inter- and transdisciplinary and challenge-based approaches and models and on language competences. We feel that the following concrete recommendations will further strengthen the quality dimension.

- We encourage the European Union (EU) institutions to put more emphasis on research-based education and training and scientific and technological excellence when selecting and funding projects under the Erasmus programme and when funding European University alliances.
- We invite the EU institutions to further incentivise and support the role of universities in lifelong learning, not least through smoother validation of non-formal and informal learning, flexible learning pathways and micro-credentials.
- We urge the EU institutions to put much more effort into improving MINT-skills of pupils and teachers at secondary education level and to better address the gap in STEM graduates.

ENABLE UNIVERSITIES TO DEPLOY DIVERSE ROLES IN KNOWLEDGE SOCIETIES

It is commendable that universities have been put at the heart of both the EEA and the ERA so they can assume their vital leadership role in contributing to recovery, resilience, sustainable development and digitalisation. Rather than imposing a 'transformation agenda' driven by a predefined one-size-fits-all model, we advise to empower universities to choose diverse institutional development paths.

- We encourage the EU institutions to enable universities to release unprecedented forces to contribute to ecological, economic and social sustainability and to act as autonomous agents of great transformation.
- With great interest we have taken notice of the elaborations around an 'excellence initiative' at the European level during the European Research and Innovation Days 2020 and underline the importance of co-creating it together with universities and safeguarding a level-playing field within the entire European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

ADOPT OPEN, INCLUSIVE AND OUTWARD-LOOKING APPROACH

We welcome the focus on collaboration between education institutions both within and outside the EU and to widen the cooperation with non-EU member states, notably neighbourhood countries, Western Balkans, Africa and other strategic global partners such as China, Japan and US.

- We reiterate our plea to adopt a geopolitical approach with a leading role of European education and training, making genuine contributions to the world. Therefore, the EEA should cover the signatory countries of the European Cultural Convention and provide for partnerships with neighbouring countries.
- Although the European University alliances are testbeds for different models of cooperation in higher education as well as a useful platform to implement new initiatives (e.g. a European degree), they should not be perceived as the only way forward to achieve deeper collaboration and to implement the goals of the EEA.
- We urge the EU institutions to shape the EEA to allow for seamless continuation of our long-standing cooperation with universities across wider Europe, particularly in Israel, Norway, Serbia, Switzerland, Turkey, Russia and the United Kingdom.

In order to fully enable us to deploy our roles in knowledge societies, we point out that achieving the EEA by 2025 will require sufficient and sustainable funding at the institutional, regional, national and European levels. We reiterate our [call to provide sustainable funding for universities](#) and our [call to provide sustainable funding for European University alliances](#). We greatly regret the proposed cuts to the Erasmus programme as the main financial instrument to implement the EEA in this respect. We particularly call on the German Presidency of the Council of the EU to assure the quick introduction of own income sources for the EU and to award revenues to future-oriented programmes such as Erasmus. We urge the member states to use the funding available through the Recovery and Resilience Facility to support research, innovation and education. Importantly, we [reiterate our call](#) 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.

Last but not least, we point out the need to establish a simple and clear governance structure for the EEA effectively linked to the ones of the EHEA and ERA, allowing for the smoothest possible realisation of the vision.

The universities of S&T united within CESAER are committed and ready to contribute to achieving the EEA by 2025 and offer our excellence, expertise and cooperation as a key stakeholder for research-based S&T education and training at European level for the upcoming consultations, actions and other endeavours.

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