

European research area: new perspectives

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The purpose of this report is to offer a synthesis of the replies the Commission received in response to its Green Paper on the European Research Area (ERA). Responses were received from individuals, universities, research organisations, public authorities, NGO's, industry, commercial and non-commercial associations, Chamber of Commerce, European technology platforms and trade unions. 685 replies were received for the on-line questionnaire and 145 free format contributions were also forwarded to the Commission.

The structure of the report mirrors that of the Green Paper as well as offering three summaries of the contributions received by firstly, the EU Member States, secondly, the Associated Countries and thirdly, other EU bodies including that of the European Parliament.

The ERA Vision: Stakeholders expressed strong support for the ERA as set out in the Green Paper and support for all of the six actions proposes. Universities, research organisations and NGO's considered "knowledge sharing" to be the most important aspect of the ERA. Industry and government bodies, on the other hand, accorded the development of "infrastructures" the most important status within the ERA. Although many agreed that mechanisms to endorse and promote the ERA (such as financial incentives, increased EU budget etc) should be encouraged there was little appetite for more binding legislative actions at a European level.

1) A single labour market for researchers: Most replies point out that there is firstly, a lack of information regarding the status of mobile research and that secondly, to achieve a seamless mobility of researchers further progress needs to be made on the transferability of supplementary pension rights across the Member States. Indeed, 65% of respondents favour the setting up of a "European Researchers' pension fund". It is worth noting, however, that large commercial organisations and associations representing commercial interests are mostly opposed to this concept. The majority of respondents favour European and transnational fellowship programmes and an EU-wide dissemination of best national practices in order to attract the European "scientific Diaspora" as well as the brightest non-EU talent.

2) Developing world-class infrastructures: Two-thirds of the on-line respondents concurred that actions relating to research infrastructures should be taken at an EU level. Over four fifths agreed that there is a need for a common approach to the infrastructures identified in the 2006 "European Strategy Forum for Research Infrastructures" (ESFRI) Roadmap. Many felt that the current situation did not facilitate the creation and operation of new infrastructures and that a new legal framework or guidelines should be developed to cover issues such as access, conditions of use and intellectual property rights. As regards long term improvements to research infrastructures, almost 60% of on-line respondents preferred the use of EC Treaty Article 169 over the Framework Programmes or Member State research programmes.

3) Strengthening research institutions: Many believed that a diverse system of strong, complementary and autonomous universities and research organisation (RPOs) could offer Europe a competitive advantage. Emphasis should be given to strong "bottom-up partnerships" of appropriate critical mass and based on scientific excellence. The need for increased funding is stressed by both RPOs and higher education stakeholders.

4) Knowledge sharing: The development of knowledge communities is considered essential for a well-articulated European Research Area. However, cultural differences between business and scientific communities and a lack of incentives for inventories or users remain major obstacles to the efficient transfer of knowledge. Over 70% of the respondents call for open access to scientific raw data from

publicly funded research and 84% call for immediate and improved access and dissemination of publicly funded paper reviewed scientific publication. Industrial respondents did, however, stress the need for limitations due to legal conformity and commercial sensitivity.

5) Optimising research programmes and priorities: Most stakeholders recognise the need for better coordination of Member States' research programmes. 80% of respondents agreed that addressing resource-intensive and complex scientific challenges require cross-border cooperation between public authorities. The preferred ways for public authorities to organise transnational cooperation include: concentrating efforts in European-level programmes (74%); joint public programmes with variable geometry (72%); and "ERA_NET loose and bottom-up coordination (70%).

6) International cooperation: More than four fifths of respondents support the idea of the EC and Member States working together to define common European priorities. Also supported are policies to coordinate the efficient use of instruments and resources; to make programmes more coherent; and to promote exchange programmes. Although 65% of respondents found that the S&T agreements between the Community and third countries provide a useful framework for international cooperation, 52% also felt that these agreements could be made more effective. A more strategic approach could differentiate according to regions and topics. A large majority of respondents favour Europe taking a more active approach to define the global S&T agenda in multilateral for a, with 75% expressing a desire that Europe should "speak with one voice" and 69% being of the view that this could be achieved by prioritising a small number of high-priority global-research-related themes.