# Neth er

## NETH-ER POSITION PAPER

**Towards an ambitious European Research Area – delivering on the Fifth Freedom**

May 2020

- A renewed impetus for the ERA
- Strengthen R&D across Europe
- An ERA fit for the future

# Introduction

The Dutch knowledge community, associated in Neth-ER, highly values the progress made under the current European Research Area (ERA) and would like to see further enhancement of European integration in research and innovation. Research and innovation are crucial in the efforts to tackle social, economic, health and ecological challenges we face today and in the future. The current health crisis caused by the Covid-19 outbreak shows the importance and added value of European cooperation and coordination in research. By further developing the European Research Area, we can be even more prepared for challenges ahead, ensuring that research cooperation can be deployed swiftly and effectively.

We are therefore looking forward to the Communication on the Future of the European Research Area. The Opinion on the Future of the European Research Area, put forward by the European Research Area and Innovation Committee (ERAC), is an important first step to revitalise efforts to take the ERA forward.

Since its launch in 2000, the ERA has made great strides towards a unified research area. Its objective was to boost Europe's competitiveness and jobs by creating an 'internal market' for research and boosting cooperation on research activities across Europe: a fifth Freedom. Indeed, important progress has been achieved in enabling free circulation of researchers, knowledge and technology.

Renewed and reinforced efforts at both European and national level will be needed to achieve a fully functional ERA. For the ERA to reach its full potential, we believe the future of the ERA should reflect three priorities.

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**I.   A renewed impetus for the ERA**
Both Member States and the EU need to recommit to the ERA and step up efforts to implement the ERA priorities. To achieve the ERA, we need the full support of all parties involved, ranging from Member States and the Commission to research and innovation stakeholders. This should be accompanied by stronger enforcement, enabling the Commission to ensure compliance of the Member States.

**II.  Strengthen R&D across Europe**
Member States should be held accountable for strengthening their national research systems and uphold the 3% investment norm.

**III. An ERA fit for the future**
New realities – such as structural changes in the research sector, the geopolitical context, digitalisation – should be reflected in the ERA.

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In this paper, we further outline these important issues and provide policy recommendations for the future ERA framework.

# I. A renewed impetus for the ERA

**To deliver on existing priorities, both Member States and the EU need to recommit and step up their efforts in achieving the ERA priorities.** The implementation of the ERA has been slowing down in recent years and major disparities still exist between countries[1]. There is still much to be gained in achieving and maintaining the existing ERA priorities: more effective national research systems, optimal transnational cooperation and competition, an open labour market for researchers, gender equality, open access and international cooperation.

Moreover, **a functional ERA addresses more than just research**. Research, innovation, education and human capital are not stand-alone fields but an integral part of our economic and social systems. This will require political support and commitment from both national and EU leaders to ensure close coordination and synergy between different policy fields.
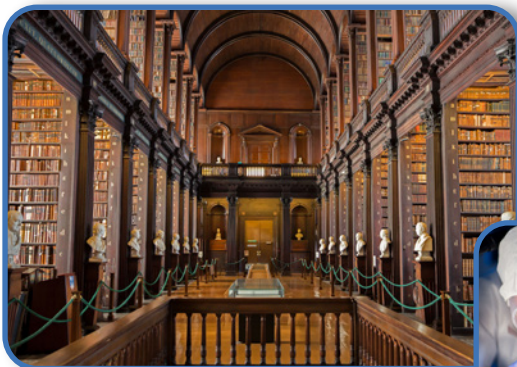




*Our recommendations:*

1. **The Commission should be able to ensure compliance of the Member States**. This includes stronger governance of the European Research Area. The Parliament should be empowered to hold the European institutions accountable for progress made. Stronger governance also requires involving the re search community at all levels of the process of policy- and priority-setting.

2. For the ERA to be successful, it needs to work in **synergy with the European Education Area**, as well as with the EU's **industrial, innovation and cohesion policies.**

3. **Stimulate research collaboration through means complementary to the European Framework Programme for Research and Innovation**, for example through component 5 in Interreg, through collaboration between European Digital Innovation Hubs and through finding complementarity with initiatives taken by the Member States.

[1] European Commission. (2019). European Research Area Progress Report 2018. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

# II. Strengthen R&D across Europe

Europe is the scientific powerhouse of the world and our future economic wellbeing will depend on our ability to innovate. **To retain our leading position in science and the wellbeing of our citizens, we need to invest in research and innovation, and we need to ensure that we use all of our talent.** Currently, Europe does not make use of its full potential. The next step towards a fully functional ERA should thus be to address this.

**Europe lags behind in terms of investment in R&D**, compared to countries like the US and China. Nearly twenty years ago **Europe committed to spending 3% of its GDP on research and development (R&D).**[2] In a changing world, with truly global challenges, it is more pressing than ever that European governments and companies deliver on this promise and increase their investment in Europe's main competitive advantage: knowledge. At the European level,

this starts with an ambitious Multiannual Financial Framework with at least €120 billion for Horizon Europe.

The **EU has a role to play in facilitating national efforts to strengthen R&I systems.** Across Europe, national governments have made efforts to improve national research systems over the past years to meet the goals in the ERA framework, but not enough progress has been made. Looking at the innovation divide in Europe, it is clear that we are currently not employing all talent and knowledge available across the continent. This is a European issue which cannot be solved solely at the national level or through the Framework Programme. Functional and effective national research systems are beneficial for all Member States, thus national governments need to support each other, facilitated by European Programmes and the European Commission.

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## Our recommendations:

**4.** The **EU, Member States and industry should uphold their pledge to invest 3% of GDP in R&D.** This norm should be sustained in the European Semester, and Member States and industry need to be held accountable for their progress towards this objective.

**5.** The **framework of the future ERA should encourage the Member States to accelerate structural reforms of their national research systems,** to effectively foster research, innovation and technological development.

**6. The European Commission should facilitate and encourage collaboration between the Member States** through the Structural Funds, the Digital Europe Programme and through cooperation with other networks, such as COST to help national research systems to build on each other's success.

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[2] As set out in the Barcelona European Council Conclusions of 2002, building on the Lisbon Strategy of 2000.

# III. A European Research Area fit for the future

The **ERA can only step up integration if it is aligned with recent developments and new realities.** The future ERA needs to take into account the challenges and opportunities of emerging fields like digitalisation and the new geopolitical context. To ensure a well-functioning ERA in line with European values, Europe also needs to ensure academic freedom in all its Member States. Furthermore, how researchers work has changed over the past decades, through the developments in areas like Open Access and Open Science, as well as how researchers are recognised and rewarded. Moreover, a multidisciplinary approach to research will be more important than ever.

We believe that **free circulation of knowledge is best facilitated by making Open Access a reality** in Europe, following the principle 'as open as possible, as close as necessary'. In this respect, we need to create a forward-looking Open Science and Innovation space and promote accessible, world-class research and technology infra-structures. We can build on the European Open Science Cloud and the Digital Innovation Hubs set up under Horizon 2020. The European Data Space as announced by Commission President von der Leyen should support knowledge exchange by creating a single market for data.

To ensure smooth research cooperation across Europe, we need to **ensure a truly open labour market for researchers leading to a sound and balanced brain circulation.** We should, at last, identify and break down the barriers faced by researchers when considering moving to other European countries and regions. This includes barriers in policy areas that are not strictly research-related, such as social security, pensions and human resources policies like recognition and reward systems, as well as particular issues faced by dual-academic couples.

Furthermore, we need to address the structure of the research sector. Europe should strive to strike a **better balance in how we recognize and reward researchers.** Excellence in research remains at the heart of our sector. However, we should give more credence to outstanding education, patient care, support to our companies and crucial contributions to public life that our researchers deliver based on their research. Another structural challenge that remains is to break down the barriers for underrepresented groups in the research profession, ensuring gender equality and access to opportunities for all.

**Our recommendations:**

7.  The priorities under the new **ERA should reflect recent developments and new realities** – particularly digitalisation and geopolitical developments.

8.  **All scientific publications resulting from publicly funded research should, by default, be published in Open Access journals**. Research data should be made available according to the FAIR (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Reusable) principles. Europe needs to be very ambitious in furthering Open Access, while maintaining the principle 'as open as possible, as closed as necessary'.

9.  The Commission should **identify and help tackle the particular barriers researchers face.** To this end, interaction with the research community is indispensable. Researchers should have effective and efficient access to tools and solutions aimed at lowering these barriers.

10. There needs to be more **collaboration between social sciences and humanities and STEM** (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) disciplines.

11. A modernised system of recognition and rewards should appreciate both (multidisciplinary) cooperation and the unique talent of individual academics. Further steps towards international coordination and harmonisation should be explored, taking account of the international context in which academics operate. The **evolution of career assessment of researchers should be encouraged and facilitated in the new ERA** and could be made more explicit by referring to the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA) and developments on recognition and rewards.

12. The success of ESFRI should remain a crucial pillar of the ERA. The Commission should develop and implement a **European strategy for technology infrastructures** to supplement research and innovation infrastructures.

# Colophon

Neth-ER is the Brussels-based association of eleven Dutch organisations working in the field of education, research and innovation. Neth-ER looks forward to help shaping the future of EU research and innovation together with European institutions, national governments and stakeholder organisations.

**Neth-ER members:**

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| KNAW - Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences | www.knaw.nl |
| MBO Raad - Netherlands Association of Vocational Education Colleges | www.mboraad.nl |
| NFU - Netherlands Federation of University Medical Centres | www.nfu.nl |
| Nuffic - Netherlands Organisation for the internationalisation of education | www.nuffic.nl |
| NWO - Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research | www.nwo.nl |
| TNO - Netherlands Organisation for Applied Scientific Research | www.tno.nl |
| VH - Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences | www.vereniginghogescholen.nl |
| VSNU - Association of Universities in the Netherlands | www.vsnu.nl |

**Neth-ER associated members:**

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| ISO - Dutch National Student Association | www.iso.nl |
| JOB - Union of Vocational Students | www.jobmbo.nl |
| LSVb - Dutch National Student Union | www.lsvb.nl |
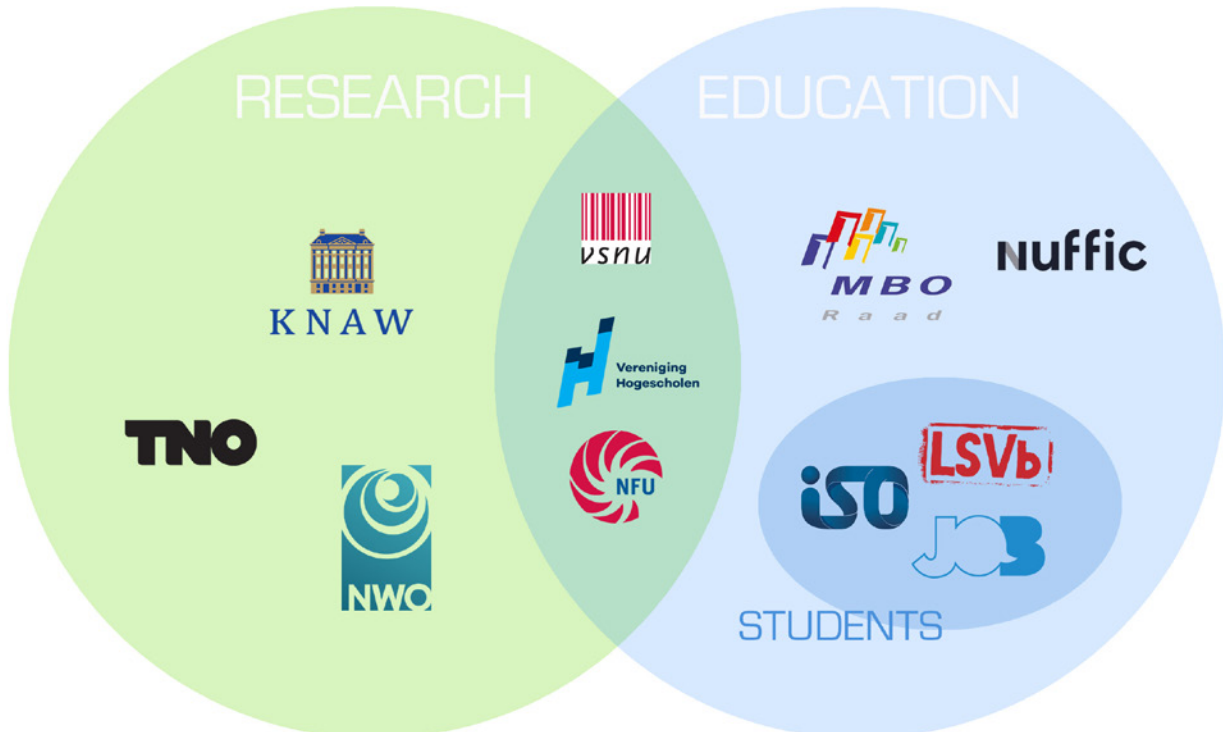
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