

The European Research Area: New Perspectives

This statement presents the views of the IDEA League partner universities with regard to the development of the European Research Area, and presents, together with the individual responses to the public consultation by Imperial College, TU Delft, ETH, RWTH Aachen and ParisTech, the IDEA League's contribution to the debate in preparation for a White Paper.

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In the first cycle of the renewed Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Jobs, the development of the European Research Area (ERA) constitutes a fundamental cornerstone for a European knowledge society. Numerous programmes have been implemented towards the goal of enhancing the quality of research in Europe, most notably the framework programmes, which address the private and public sector - from universities, through public organisations, to private companies and individual researchers - by stimulating cooperation as well as innovation and transfer.

In light of the fast globalisation of technology, the goal of enhancing research in Europe presents a major and urgent challenge to the EU and can only be reached by further coordination of the research strategies of the private and public sectors in Europe and by increasing Europe's attractiveness for researchers. In this regard the IDEA League welcomes the consultation on the future development of the ERA. We believe that in order to achieve the goals of the Lisbon agenda, especially to overcome the fragmentation of research in Europe, it is crucial to bundle the initiatives and programmes available and modify them to work as interlinked measures of a coherent research strategy for Europe.

The IDEA League would like to contribute the following issues to the consultation on the future development of the ERA:

1. Identification of six strategic areas for action

Currently, the full potential of the ERA is still unfulfilled and needs to be enhanced for Europe's development as a knowledge society. To this end, six areas for action have been identified, namely an adequate flow of competent researchers, world-class research infrastructure, excellent research institutions, effective knowledge sharing, well-coordinated research programmes and priorities and a wide opening of the ERA to the world. However, the IDEA League would like to add the closer inter-linkage of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) with the ERA to this list. For universities, educating students is one aspect of their mission, while research and technology transfer is another. The development of the ERA should address the three sides of the knowledge triangle in a fully integrated and mutually-reinforcing manner.

2. Excellence as the guiding principle

The underlying mission of a successful ERA is to undertake and promote strategic research, including trans- and interdisciplinary approaches, in areas of key economic or societal interest. The IDEA League wishes to stress that excellence needs to be the guiding principle here. At a time of accelerating globalisation in research and technology, only excellence-driven research and education activities at the highest international standard will be able to compete world-wide.

3. Mobility of researchers

Attracting the best researchers worldwide by offering excellent working conditions and career prospects is an elementary task in the development of the ERA. However, the mobility of researchers and their families is still hindered by visa and immigration policies, work permits and tax procedures, pension and social security regulations. Movement of staff between academia and industry also needs encouragement. The IDEA League recommends that these problems, together with migration policies for students and researchers should be addressed at both the national and the EU-level. However, we do not believe that a mandatory European Charter for Researchers and a Code of Recruitment is desirable.

4. World-class research infrastructures

First-class research in Europe is only possible with state-of-the-art infrastructure, which in most cases exceeds the financial capacities of single institutions or states. The IDEA League endorses the ESFRI roadmap as the necessary coordinated approach and recommends its implementation, including guidelines for its creation and operation.

5. Excellent research institutions

Strong universities and public research institutions contribute substantially to fundamental and applied research, while at the same time stimulating business R&D investment in Europe. The IDEA League believes that competition for funding and talent should be the underlying principle for any public research institution thus making it necessary for institutions to position themselves by concentration and specialisation in research.

6. Effective knowledge-sharing

The issue of IPR lies at the heart of effective knowledge transfer. The IDEA League regards this an area where researchers should be effectively supported. The correct handling of IPR and the establishment of efficient guidelines is another stepping stone towards a successful ERA.

7. Well-coordinated research programmes.

In order to fulfil the potential of the ERA to a greater extent, the various instruments of research policies need to be well-coordinated on a voluntary basis, including a linkage of the programmes at the various national levels and the EU level. The IDEA League is convinced that this coordinated approach will strengthen synergies.

8. A wide opening of the European Research Area to the world

State-of-the-art research takes the globalisation of research and technology into account, by competing for the best ideas and by engaging the best researchers worldwide. The IDEA League welcomes new initiatives like the EIT which we have supported from the outset. The EIT will serve as a cornerstone of the ERA and will attract the very best minds, ideas and companies around the world.

The IDEA League is a focused network of leading European universities of science and technology. Founded in 1999, IDEA League has a 7-year track-record of collaboration between its five university partners, each of which is the leading institution for engineering and technology within its respective country (THES¹ World University Rankings, 2005 and 2006), and prominent in global scientific and industrial networks. These IDEA partners share a common culture of first-class research that is science led and technology driven. The agenda of the IDEA League network is shaped by the needs and demands of society and industry in a changing world characterised by the accelerating globalisation of research, technology and innovation.

Collectively, the IDEA League has more than 85,000 of the best students of whom well over 12,000 are registered in doctoral programmes. The IDEA League's educational portfolio is focused on its science and technology strengths with education at bachelor's, master's and doctoral levels, and continuing professional development thereafter. Its graduates are highly sought after in academic, industrial, commercial and public sectors.

*The IDEA League
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¹ The Times Higher Education Supplement.