

Action 13: Empower higher education institutions to develop in line with the ERA, and in synergy with the European education area	
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1. Description	<p>The implementation of action 13 follows the Commission Communication on a European strategy for universities (18 January 2022), and should fit into the proposed Council Conclusions on empowering higher education cooperation for the future of Europe envisaged by the French Presidency. This action also contributes to implementation of the Council Conclusions on strengthening research careers (28 May 2021).</p> <p><u>BACKGROUND</u></p> <p>With the European Strategy for Universities we aim to support the entire higher education sector in taking a leading role in the pandemic recovery of Europe, and in making our society greener, more inclusive, more digital. The Commission proposes to focus on four joint key objectives by mid-2024:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - First, strengthen the European dimension in higher education and in research, boosting transnational <u>cooperation</u>. - Second, support universities as lighthouses of our European way of life, at the level of 1) quality and relevance, 2) inclusive excellence and 3) respect of democratic practices, fundamental academic values and freedom of scientific research. This includes the promotion of flexible and attractive academic <u>careers</u>. - Third, empower universities in Europe a key actors of change in the <u>twin green and digital transitions</u> of our society, digital and green skills, developing green tech solutions, knowledge transfer. - Fourth, reinforce universities as drivers of Europe's global role and leadership, through deeper international cooperation within Europe and beyond, increasing <u>competitiveness on the global scene</u>. <p>Coupled with these key priorities, the European strategy for universities proposes to implement four flagship initiatives: (i) the further roll out of the European Universities initiative and (ii) a legal statute for alliances of universities, (iii) the development of a European degree, and (iv) the full deployment of the European Student Card initiative. Action 13 will especially contribute to the first flagship.</p> <p><u>OBJECTIVES</u></p> <p>In the policy context described above, action 13 – with strong interconnections to actions 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, 15, 16 – aims to strengthen the R&I dimension of universities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - empower universities in Europe as key actors of change in the twin green and DIGITAL transitions. - implement the comprehensive framework for research CAREERS - raise EXCELLENCE in science and value creation in Europe's

	<p>universities and increase its global COMPETITIVENESS</p> <p><u>ACTIVITIES</u></p> <p>DIGITAL: A consultation platform for the digital transition in universities will be established, aiming by 2023 to have a <u>shared understanding on the relevant definitions, problem analysis and specific needs of universities in the European digital landscape, connected and additional to ongoing ERA actions, and potential future actions in the digital sphere</u>. Needs are related to i.a.:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - R&I data storage and management (beyond what is covered by action 1) in synergy with digital education needs - Legislation fit for research and education (beyond what is covered by the framework fit for research in action 2, to ensure coverage of all aspects of the activities of universities in the digital space) - New dedicated e-infrastructures that are distributed and interoperable (connected to action 8 and compatible with EOSC in action 1) - Digital transition in laggard institutions, and overall large diversity of digitisation levels across universities in the ERA (relevant to action 16) <p>The platform will suggest solutions and pathways in the first semester of 2023 to empower universities to pursue their digital transition, which are not covered by the aforementioned ongoing actions in the ERA Policy Agenda. This includes ensuring a comprehensive and consistent approach on the European level, which reflects the unique context of the academic sector in the digital landscape and protects the objectives of scientific knowledge and technology generation, sharing and preservation through a more binding policy approach. This activity will help establish targeted Horizon Europe actions in 2024 and design of the next phase of the ERA Policy Agenda, towards a comprehensive "Connected Universities" initiative.</p> <p>CAREERS: Piloting the European Framework for Research Careers with the <u>European Universities alliances and other interested institutions, in synergy with education policy</u>. 39 of the 41 pilot alliances supported by Erasmus+ receive complementary funding from Horizon 2020. These alliances are pioneering the development and implementation of joint research and innovation institutional change strategies, including strengthening human capital, notably by strengthening the attractiveness of researchers' careers, towards a pipeline of talents crucial for an effective European Research Area, including by reforming career assessment. Therefore, they act as a testbed for future developments on research careers. In the next phase of the European Universities Initiative, the Commission through Erasmus+ will support up to 60 alliances targeting around 500 individual higher education institutions. Flexible and attractive careers, valuing teaching, research, entrepreneurship, management and leadership activities will be piloted in this next phase, following the European framework for attractive and sustainable careers in higher education (European strategy for universities action for 2023). Subsequently recommendations and</p>
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	<p>lessons learnt will be derived. Through participation in acceleration services under Horizon Europe in the framework of the European Excellence Initiative (see additional information), the alliances and other universities will be supported to implement the various aspect of the Framework for Research Careers.</p> <p>EXCELLENCE INITIATIVE (for more details about the proposed activities under the European Excellence Initiative supported through Horizon Europe, please see section '8. Additional information')</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - COOPERATION: In concertation with the European Universities Initiative, a European Excellence Initiative will aim to <u>raise excellence in science and in knowledge valorisation of Europe's universities through cooperation</u>. The action will engage with universities and empower them further to be actors of change. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through the geographically inclusive cooperation and practice exchange in the European Universities alliances, universities from different capacities benefit and institutional changes towards increased attractiveness and access to excellence are accelerating (connected to action 16). • By developing closer cooperation with economic and industrial partners within local and regional innovation ecosystems, academic researchers and support staff will be provided the opportunity to be trained knowledge valorisation, entrepreneurship, access to finance, at any stage of their careers (connected to action 7 and 15), and to take into account the variety of academics' activities in their career assessment (specifying action 3). • The Initiative will support European Universities together with Member States, towards a more programmatic approach targeting alliances while not excluding other networks of higher education institutions (in synergy with Erasmus+); conditions could be introduced that will contribute to rationalisation of higher education institutions landscape in individual countries. - COMPETITIVENESS: The European Excellence Initiative is proposed, secondly, to have a thematic focus, aiming to <u>improve global competitiveness of the Europe's universities in the GREEN transition</u>. Cooperation of universities will be supported, open to alliances and other networks of higher education institutions, to create critical R&I mass and pursue specific objectives that contribute to accelerating the Green Deal and Mission areas. It will include engagement with Member States and universities to promote the role of universities in the implementation of Missions. - As part of the initiative, a programmatic approach for European Universities and the European higher education sector more broadly in a sustainable and long-term fashion from various EU and national funding sources will be explored together with Member States, taking into account the Treaties and the acquis for research and innovation (for instance a partnership approach) and the ongoing developments of a legal statute for alliances.
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<p>2. Actors</p>	<p>The targeted participating organisations are Europe's universities in general, and the existing and upcoming new European Universities alliances in particular. For all activities, close engagement with university sector is required.</p> <p>The action will be implemented by the European Commission and the Member States together.</p> <p>DIGITAL (digital consultation platform) and CAREERS (piloting the careers framework) will be supported by the European Commission and coordinated together with the sector and Member States.</p> <p>COOPERATION and COMPETITIVENESS (through European Excellence Initiative) will require joint funding efforts by EU and national/regional governments and active role of universities. The activities will be designed together with Member States and the university sector; implementation may involve international partnerships with third countries (or associated countries).</p> <p>The action 13 thereby is in line with the European strategy for universities, contributes to implementing the Council Conclusions on strengthening research careers, and contributes to the broader implementation of the ERA Policy Agenda.</p>
<p>3. Timing and milestones</p>	<p>DIGITAL: digital transition consultation platform</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Setup expert group and platform of higher education's digital communities – Q2 2022 - Deliver report on digital needs and shared understanding of challenges – Q1 2023 - Implement platform to design Connected Universities initiative as a next step <p>CAREERS: pilot elements of the Framework for Research Careers with the consolidated European University alliances, starting in 2023.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Assessment of progress in strengthening research careers and reform of assessment in the pilot alliances (mid-term project review of first generation of European Universities) – Q3 2022 - Support the development of a Framework for academic careers following the European strategy for universities, in synergy with ERA Policy Agenda action 4 – Q2 2022 – Q4 2023 - Test the concepts with the next phase of European Universities alliances, derive recommendations – 2024 <p>EXCELLENCE INITIATIVE:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Consultation stakeholders and Member States (incl. WIDERA programme committee), including exchange of practices on new actions in support of universities (e.g. under RRP) – Q1-Q2 2022 - Design actions for policy support, institutional change support, excellence initiative under widening – Q2-Q3 2022 - Launch calls under WIDERA 2023-2024 (see section 8. Additional information) – Q4 2022 - Pilot co-funding approach with MS – 2024

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Development of programmatic approach towards next MFF – post 2024
4. Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Member States, including new actions via RRP - Erasmus+: €18 billion for higher education initiatives - Horizon Europe: 40% of framework programme budget (projection based on participation of academic sector in Horizon 2020); indicative funding for European Excellence Initiative: €375 million (WIDERA), in synergy with national/regional initiatives
5. Expected impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - General: Successful institutional reform and upgrade of higher education institutions in the R&I dimension (empowerment to be actors of change), through integrated collaboration between institutions and with other actors in local ecosystems, including - DIGITAL: Shared understanding across the academic sector on the needs and challenges ahead. Recommendations to a future Connected Universities initiative. Overall, accelerated digital transition of higher education sector across the entire ERA. - CAREERS: Recommendations for future actions to strengthen research careers in academia, and fine-tuning of Framework for Research Careers. Modernised research careers in higher education sector, interoperable with other sectors. - EXCELLENCE INITIATIVE: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Mainstreamed culture of excellence in science and value creation amongst higher education institutions, and particularly in laggard countries and institutions. o Accelerated institutional reform in R&I dimension and strengthened R&I capacities in higher education institutions through integrated cooperation; contribution to rationalisation of higher education institutions landscape in Member States. o Increased global competitiveness and attractiveness via inclusive cooperation in the green transition.
6. Monitoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - DIGITAL: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Development of solutions to accelerate the digital transition, e.g. presence of a knowledge act for higher education sector, design study for possible pan-European e-infrastructures. Availability of a plan to develop a Connected Universities initiative in the next ERA policy agenda. - CAREERS: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Assessment of implementation of the research careers models (pilot). Availability of Framework for attractive academic careers, and fine-tuning. Participation of European Universities in the implementation of action 4, in synergy with the framework for academic careers. - EXCELLENCE INITIATIVE: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Monitoring progress in institutional change in the R&I

	<p>dimension (preparatory work for methodology being finalised), as specific dashboard in the ERA monitoring mechanism (or alternatively or additionally, as part of the higher education sector observatory announced in the European strategy for universities, covering education, research, innovation aspects)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Participation to the European Excellence Initiative of Member States and alliances (or other targeted and integrated networks) of higher education institutions, in variable geometries. Cooperation with top class institutions outside EU. Raised profiles of Europe's universities in global university rankings.
7. Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Awareness creation via European R&I Days, workshops with university associations' experts and with European Universities alliances. - Conference to launch European Excellence Initiative, European R&I Days, Horizon Europe NCPs and infodays.
8. Additional information	<p>Action 13 is strongly connected to other actions in the ERA Policy Agenda, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - action 4 for the aspects of strengthening research careers together with and within academic sector (for elements in specific university context: addressing challenges linked to research careers in academia and promoting an interoperable careers with non-academic sector). - regarding digital transition with action 1 (EOSC), action 2 (data framework fit for research), and action 3 (reform of research assessment); - with action 8 on research infrastructures (esp. e-infrastructures), - with action 7 on implementing guidelines for knowledge valorisation; - with action 9 as regards the role of universities in international cooperation, notably around the Green Deal - with action 15 with respect to strengthening the role of universities in local R&I ecosystems - with action 16 as regards to raising excellence in science and access to excellence through integrated cooperation of universities of different strengths <p>More details on the aims and proposed activities covered by the European Excellence Initiative under Horizon Europe (2023-2024):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Empowering higher education institutions in the R&I dimension as actors of change and for successful institutional reform, through integrated and inclusive collaboration between institutions and with other actors in local ecosystems - Mainstreaming a culture of excellence in science and value creation amongst higher education institutions, and increasing global competitiveness and attractiveness

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- <i>Policy support</i> for Member States to setup national excellence initiatives<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Mutual learning on the basis of models of national initiatives (an analysis is underway that will map best practices on national/regional excellence initiatives in EU and beyond)▪ EU-supported peer-review system (e.g. with high level panel of experts appointed by ERC's Scientific Council) for national (or regional) initiatives- <i>Acceleration services</i> for universities, supporting institutional reform through counselling<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Services in focussed areas: strengthening research careers (incl. gender aspects), reform of research assessment, greening▪ Aligned with EIT's HEI initiative to reinforce entrepreneurship and innovation- <i>Support for European Universities alliances</i>, aiming to increase global competitiveness and attractiveness via inclusive cooperation in key thematic areas<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Pilot towards programmatic approach for European Universities Initiative (<i>though remaining open to other networks of universities allowing for variable geometries</i>), co-funding mechanism in support of alliances with national/regional funds under Widening, focussing on the green transition (synergies with national or regional excellence initiatives will be build)- Analysis to explore and pilot a programmatic approach for the European Universities and the European higher education sector more broadly with EU and national funding from various sources, towards the next MFF.
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