



EUROPEAN COMMISSION  
IMPACT ASSESSMENT BOARD

Brussels,  
D(2012)

## Opinion

### Title

**DG RTD - Impact Assessment on: Communication on 'A unified European Research Area to foster efficiency, excellence and growth'**

**(draft version of 29 February 2012)**

### **(A) Context**

The European Research Area (ERA) is defined as a 'unified research area open to the world based on the Internal Market, in which researchers, scientific knowledge and technology circulate freely and through which the Union and its Member States shall strengthen their scientific and technological bases as well as their competitiveness'. ERA was launched with the Commission Communication 'Towards a European Research Area' in January 2000 and since then substantial efforts have been deployed for its development. However, the progress has been considered as slow and insufficient. In order to step up efforts to complete ERA, the Europe 2020 strategy flagship initiative 'Innovation Union' announced for 2012 an ERA framework and supporting measures to remove obstacles to mobility and cross-border cooperation, to be in force by the end of 2014.

### **(B) Overall assessment**

**The report in its current form does not provide an adequate evidence base for political decision-making and needs to be significantly improved in a number of important respects. Firstly, the problem definition should be improved and should more fully analyse the existing barriers preventing competition-based elements in the research systems. Secondly, the report should provide clear and sufficiently well developed policy options, clearly indicating the responsibilities of the different actors supposed to implement the proposed measures. It should discuss in greater detail the reforms that the Member States would be expected to adopt and how this process will be monitored. Thirdly, the assessment of impacts should be improved, in particular as regards more competition-based research systems and science. Finally, different stakeholder views should be better integrated throughout the report and monitoring and evaluation arrangements should be strengthened.**

**Given the nature of these recommendations, the Board asks DG RTD to submit a revised version of the report, on which it will issue a new opinion.**

### **(C) Main recommendations for improvements**

**(1) Improve the problem definition.** The report should better situate the scope of the initiative within the more general structural problems of the European research system and focus much more on the specific problems that will be concretely addressed by this initiative. It should in particular more fully analyse the existing drivers/barriers preventing the use of competition-based elements in the research systems at national level, and should provide clearer evidence on how the increased use of competitive features in national research systems can lead to improved research performance. On the basis of a focused problem definition, the report should then link the identified problems with corresponding objectives and options, to establish a clear intervention logic. A full baseline scenario against which the policy change options could be assessed should be developed. The report should also improve the assessment of the need for, and value added of, this initiative, based on a strengthened analysis of the problems and weaknesses of ERA-related initiatives and mechanisms already in place.

**(2) Clarify the policy options.** The report should provide clear and sufficiently developed policy options. It should describe the content of suggested measures (such as those related to funding allocation, the international peer review evaluation system or open recruitment procedures, etc.), and should explain on which criteria the measures were selected and clarify whether alternatives were considered (both in terms of the content of the measures and in terms of the delivery mechanism to implement them). It should show how the suggested actions differ from already existing initiatives at national and EU level. The report should also clearly indicate which actors will be responsible for implementing the proposed measures, as well as whether incentives/penalties to encourage the implementation are foreseen. The report should be clearer about the concrete reforms to national research systems that the Member States and affected stakeholders would be expected to adopt, provide a clear timeline and discuss how this process will be monitored and evaluated. Finally, it should clarify whether improved implementation of existing instruments, or a combination of the different option elements (for instance of certain legislative and non-legislative measures) could be considered as possible options.

**(3) Improve the assessment of impacts.** The assessment of impacts should be strengthened by clearly describing how the main expected impacts will occur, in particular as regards the strengthened use of competition elements in the research systems. The report should also be much clearer about when the first meaningful impacts can be expected allowing a credible evaluation of the new measures, given the rather long implementation period needed for some of them (e.g. competitive procurement, recruitment etc) and the fact that a first such review is already envisaged by the end of 2013. The robustness of the magnitude of estimated impacts on GDP and job creation needs to be discussed, and the assumptions used for this assessment transparently explained. The report should more explicitly assess potential trade-offs between the impacts resulting from more competition related system measures, such as concentration and agglomeration effects and broader EU policy objectives, for instance in regional development or trans-European research networks. Finally, the gender-related issues should be presented in a more consistent way in the report by differentiating between societal relevance of gender content research and the position of women in the research community and their impact on research excellence.

**(4) Better present the views of stakeholders and define monitoring and evaluation arrangements.** As stakeholders' involvement and commitment seem to be critical for the successful implementation of the proposed measures, the report should clearly present throughout the IA report the positions of different stakeholder groups. It should also strengthen the monitoring and evaluation arrangements, given that one of the objectives of the initiative is to improve transparency in progress towards ERA through systematic monitoring. The report should indicate when an evaluation in this respect is foreseen.

*Some more technical comments have been transmitted directly to the author DG and are expected to be incorporated in the final version of the impact assessment report.*

**(D) Procedure and presentation**

All procedural aspects appear to be respected.

**(E) IAB scrutiny process**

Reference number	2012/RTD/001
External expertise used	No
Date of Board Meeting	28 March 2012