

HERA Statement on the public consultation questionnaire concerning the European Research Area Act (ERA Act)

HERA (Humanities in the European Research Area) – a network of 21 national funding agencies – supports the ERA Act’s ambition to make Europe the world’s most attractive destination for researchers. This ambition aligns with our shared commitment to a European research ecosystem in which the Humanities are recognised, resourced, and fully integrated.

We advocate for an open interpretation of the ERA Act’s aim of closing the innovation gap and we wish to stress the Humanities’ essential role in shaping – and scrutinising – large-scale societal, cultural, economic, technological, and ecological transformations. The Humanities generate paradigm shifts that strengthen Europe’s dynamism, well-being, and resilience.

While we welcome most analyses and proposals of the ERA Act questionnaire, we wish to make a few recommendations, raise some general concerns, highlight structural barriers to research mobility, and stress the societal importance of the Humanities.

HERA recommends that the ERA Act should:



Embed the Humanities across ERA priorities, including challenge-led and mission-oriented activity.



Protect space for curiosity-driven fundamental research as a foundation for long-term European capability.



Reduce administrative burden and compliance overhead, especially where it disadvantages smaller institutions and less grant-dense disciplines.



Enable Open Science without exclusionary cost models, particularly for book-based and long-form Humanities publishing.



Remove structural barriers to research mobility, including teaching-load rigidity, seniority/pension penalties, and age-related hiring constraints.



Ensure that geopolitical and defence-driven priorities do not crowd out disciplines essential to Europe's resilience, including cultural resilience, democratic legitimacy, and long-term societal capability.

II. General Concerns

- ERA Act should avoid overregulation and disproportionate reporting requirements that risk obstructing research capacity and reducing time for research.
- The ERA Act risks being interpreted through a predominantly STEM and technology-led lens, particularly in funding priorities and instruments. A sole emphasis on STEM will not make Europe the most attractive destination for researchers, nor will it deliver innovation that is legitimate, durable, and publicly trusted.

- Europe must be a knowledge-rich ecosystem that promotes both fundamental research and applied research. Without a strong commitment to fundamental research, there is no long-term knowledge to apply. A knowledge-rich ecosystem will provide fertile ground for innovation.
- Funding criteria should not be closely pegged to short-term or standardised impact metrics. Fundamental and specialised research delivers public value through multiple pathways, including education, civic capability, cultural institutions, and long-term societal resilience.
- Accordingly, research alignment with industrial strategies should be enabling rather than exclusive, preserving room for frontier and curiosity-driven inquiry. We also need recognition of the power and importance of the creative and cultural industries, the Heritage sector, and GLAM (galleries, libraries, archives, and museums).
- Open Access should be advanced in ways that do not create new inequalities. Unduly strict Open Access regulations can embed APCs (article processing charges) with harmful consequences for research, especially in the Humanities, by necessitating access to research grants to enable publication (where routes to funding remain inequitable and inconsistent).

III. Structural barriers to research mobility

- In some countries, rigid teaching load regulations hinder universities from facilitating and rewarding research: in some places, course-buyouts are not an option and sabbaticals are hard to obtain.
- Multinational research careers are hindered by age limits on hiring and by structural disadvantages for internationally mobile researchers in salary seniority and pension arrangements.

IV. Why the Humanities are essential to Europe's research and innovation capacity

- The Humanities provide resources to align socio-economic and technological progress – especially regarding AI – with human values.
- They interrogate current value systems that may decrease the quality of life, and they illuminate the cultural frames through which societies interpret both present shocks and inherited histories – an increasingly important capability at a time of polarisation and cultural contestation.
- Most technical solutions involve and depend on human solutions (e.g., conflict management, trust in medicine and science).
- The Humanities promote long-term thinking across cultures, conflict transformation and intercultural understanding.
- The socio-political foundations of our societies are shaped by the Humanities and require their ongoing input.
- The Humanities equip Europe to navigate uncertainty – by interpreting risk, learning from historical precedent, and testing the assumptions behind policy and technology.


Europe has thrived and continues to thrive not only due to its promotion of economic and technological progress, but also because it fosters core human values like wisdom, imagination, wonder, memory, justice, care, hope, and purpose. Future funding priorities must ensure that this vision and tradition continue, recognising the vital contribution of the Humanities.



**For more
information**

More information at

 www.heranet.info

 HERA- Humanities in the
European Research Area