



“Achieving Excellence at Universities: What does it mean in times of multiple crises?”

6th Coimbra Group High-Level Research Policy Seminar

13-14 November 2023

*Room Félicien Cattier, University Foundation
Egmontstreet 11, Brussels*

Programme and Concept

PROGRAMME

Monday 13 November

13:00 - 14:00	Registration	
14:00 - 14:45	Welcoming words & Opening remarks	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ludovic Thilly Coimbra Group Executive Board Chair Vice-Rector for European Networks and EC2U, University of Poitiers• Joybrato Mukherjee (video message) Coimbra Group Honorary President Rector, University of Cologne• Iliana Ivanova (video message) European Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth

14:45 - 15:45	Keynote speeches <i>followed by an open discussion</i>	Achieving Excellence in Higher Education: What does it mean in times of multiple crises? How is excellence measured and assessed? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jani Erola Professor of Sociology, Director of INVEST Research Flagship Center University of Turku • Axel Cleeremans President of the ERC Grantees Association Université Libre de Bruxelles
15:45 - 16:15	<i>Coffee Break</i>	
16:15 - 17:15	Roundtable <i>followed by an open discussion</i>	Which excellence are CG Universities striving for in the next decade? What are their goals and main reasons for pursuing excellence? Is excellence in research isolated from excellence in education? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joan Guàrdia Olmos Rector, University of Barcelona • Mari Moora Vice-Rector for Research University of Tartu • Coco Norén Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Uppsala University • Francesco Svelto Rector, University of Pavia
17:15 - 18:00	Keynote speech <i>followed by an open discussion</i>	Maria Leptin President, European Research Council (ERC)
18:00 - 19:00	<i>Welcome Drinks</i>	<i>University Foundation (Marnix room)</i>
19:00 - 21:30	<i>Seated Dinner</i>	<i>University Foundation (Salons)</i>

Tuesday 14 November

<p>9:00 - 11:00</p>	<p>Q&As with the Commission's Directorate-General for Research & Innovation on current developments</p>	<p>Are existing EU policies and programmes appropriate and sufficient to maintain and raise universities' excellence in light of current challenges?</p> <p>What should be the way forward for the implementation of the European Research Area?</p> <p>Focus on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ERA Action 3 on Research assessment - ERA Action 4 on Sustainable and Attractive Research Careers - ERA Action 13 on Empowering Higher Education Institutions (European Excellence Initiative) - ERA Action 17 on a Research Management Initiative - Horizon Europe and FP10 <p>Manuel Aleixo Head of Unit - ERA, Spreading Excellence and Research Careers, DG RTD, European Commission</p>
<p><i>11:00 – 11:15</i></p>	<p><i>Coffee Break</i></p>	
<p>11:15 – 12:00</p>	<p>Forward-looking discussion with</p>	<p>Signe Ratso Deputy Director-General for Research & Innovation European Commission</p>
<p>12:00 - 13:30</p>	<p><i>Standing lunch</i></p>	<p><i>University Foundation</i></p>
<p>13:30 - 14:30</p>	<p>Roundtable on policy and strategy issues</p>	<p>What are the implications of the acceleration of Open Science for the perception of excellence?</p> <p>Is there a distinctive European approach to excellence?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maria da Graça Carvalho Member of the European Parliament • Jukka Kola Rector, University of Turku • Ludo Waltman, CWTS Deputy Director, Leiden University

14:30 - 14:45	Concluding remarks <i>Key take-aways, Looking ahead & Farewells</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ludovic Thilly Coimbra Group Executive Board Chair Vice-Rector for European Networks and EC2U, University of Poitiers• Beatrix Busse Coimbra Group Executive Board Vice-Chair Vice-Rector for Teaching and Studies, University of Cologne, Chief Development Officer, EUniWell
14:45 - 15:30	<i>Farewell Coffee</i>	

HIGH-LEVEL RESEARCH POLICY SEMINAR'S CONCEPT

Since 2013, the Coimbra Group has organised high-level policy seminars on research every two years. They are intended as a **forum for informal dialogue between Rectors and Vice-Rectors for research and internationalisation of its constituent universities, relevant stakeholders, and key decision makers**, to reflect on trends and issues in European research policy of key importance to member universities and to the European research community.

Elements of context

The European Union and the individual Member States are required to take decisive steps forward to support the university sector in its pursuit of excellence, as defined in the Pact for R&I. **Action 13 of the ERA Policy Agenda 2022-2024 aims to “Empower Higher Education Institutions to develop in line with the ERA, and in synergy with the European Education Area”**. A subgroup of the ERA Forum Commission expert group, co-chaired by France, the Coimbra Group, and the Commission, was tasked early 2023 to pursue this aim.

The subgroup particularly targets strategic institutional cooperation of universities and focusses on identifying relevant policy and programme measures. It aims at making the university sector more research-competitive globally, by (i) raising and (ii) promoting R&I excellence of the university sector across the ERA, in particular through joint capacity building, and (iii) creating effective synergies at policy and programme level between the education and research missions of the university sector, including increasing the impact of excellence research on education. The subgroup acts as well as an informal platform of exchange, and works on proposals for actions to (iv) build and maximise investments and synergies across national and EU programmes to jointly increase the visibility and competitiveness of Europe's university sector. These measures aim to form a comprehensive European Excellence Initiative toolbox of policy measures and programme actions to raise and promote excellence in Europe's university sector.

At the same time **the European Commission is setting up a new expert group on the interim Evaluation of Horizon Europe**. The group's aim will be to provide the Commission with strategic recommendations on maximising the impact of the future framework programmes, based on the conclusions of the ex-post evaluation of Horizon 2020 and of the interim evaluation of Horizon Europe, in order to feed into the design of the next Framework Programme 2028-2034 (FP10). This is the right moment for the Coimbra Group to analyse the gaps in Horizon Europe and formulate a first set of recommendations on the main components of the future framework programme.

General Objectives

The seminar will examine the systemic components of excellence, looking across the spectrum of Universities' missions (education, research, innovation and service to society) as well as at related human resources-related policies (e.g. careers, equality, diversity & inclusion (EDI), research assessment...).

The seminar will also address the appropriateness of policy actions currently implemented under the European Research Area (ERA), among others the European Excellence Initiative under development within ERA Policy Agenda Action 13. We aim to assess the relevance of the discussions going on under the ERA Action 13 sub-group on empowering universities and formulate further recommendations for the next steps.

Furthermore, the seminar will draw on the experience learnt by our members with the Horizon Europe programme and address strategic questions on how to shape the best possible FP10 in this regard.

Specific Objectives

- Provide a space for reflection at CG leadership level on the concept of excellence in higher education, a concept which is often overused and in so many different ways that it is even sometimes misused.
- Consolidate CG vision and provide new input to the implementation of the European Research Area Policy Agenda – notably for action 13 (European Excellence Initiative) as well as actions 3 and 4
- Offer opportunities to CG universities' Rectors/VR for Research to strengthening links as a community and to establish direct contact with high-level decision makers from the EU institutions.

Tentative issues to address

- Concepts of excellence and goals and reasons for striving for excellence.
- Definitions of excellence and their relation to topics.
- Intertwining between excellence in research and excellence in education.
- Relationship between excellence and HR policies.
- Measurement and assessment of excellence.
- Relevance of existing policies and programmes at EU and national/regional level for maintaining and raising universities' excellence in light of current/future challenges.
- Effectiveness of national excellence initiatives to raise and reward excellence in universities.

- Relationship between excellence and inclusion.
- Relationship between excellence and open science (and reforms of research assessment).
- Opportunities and challenges raised by the co-creation of a new European Excellence Initiative.
- Identification of needed EU instrument(s) for empowering universities within the current constraints. (relevance of specific EU instrument supporting universities' capacity-building under the next FP).
- Scope of next FP's pillar on Excellent Science: restricted to individual researchers only or supporting institutional capacity-building as well.

Outcomes

- Input for ERA Action 13 subgroup (next meeting foreseen early February).
- Input for potential new actions to be included in the next ERA Policy Agenda 2025-2027.
- Other policy recommendations as appropriate.

Useful resources

- "Funding for few, anticipation among all: Effects of excellence funding on academic research groups" (Science and Public Policy, Volume 48, Issue 2, April 2021), Wout Scholten, Thomas P Franssen, Leonie van Drooge, Sarah de Rijcke, Laurens K Hessels - [Link](#)
- "The Concept of Excellence in Higher Education. European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education" (ENQA, January 2014), Manuela Brusoni, et. al. - [Link](#)
- "University excellence initiatives in Spain, a possible strategy for optimizing resources and improving local performance" (Technological Forecasting and Social Change, Volume 113, Part B, 2016), D. De Filippo, F. Casani, E. Sanz-Casado - [Link](#)
- "Qui sont les relais d'excellence au sein des établissements ?", Audrey Harroche, Savoir/Agir 2022/1 (N° 59-60) - [Link](#)
- "Entre *executive shift* et gouvernement à distance : la genèse des politiques 'pour l'excellence' dans le secteur de l'enseignement supérieur et de la recherche (2009-2012)", Natacha Gally, Revue française de science politique, vol. 68, n°4, 2018, pp. 691-715 - [Link](#)
- "Current university rankings are not consistent with Open Science", Henk Kummeling, Coimbra Group October 2023 Newsletter – [Link](#)

- “Leiden rankings to add open-source version in 2024”, James Brools (ResearchProfessional News) - [Link](#)
- ERA Action 13 - First set of recommendations to the ERA Forum (August 2023) - [Link](#) and Annexes - [Link](#)
- ERA Action 9 - [Concept and Summary Report of the Workshop on Research Excellence](#) (1 June 2023) organized under the Multilateral dialogue on principles and values in international research & innovation cooperation