Charter on Common Research Framework Program - Re:ERUA - Policy Paper

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ABBREVIATIONS:

ERUA or Alliance: The Alliance grouping the 8 partners working together on education, research and innovation; The Alliance is formed by the University Paris 8, University of the Aegean New Bulgarian University – New partners: European University Viadrina, University of Macerata, Mykolas Romeris University, SWPS. The University of Konstanz and the University of Roskilde that remain associated partners in ERUA while they're still full partners in Re:ERUA.

Re:ERUA: Research and Engagement for the European Reform University Alliance. Complementary project funded through the Horizon 2020 – SwafS programme. It represents the research pillar of ERUA, enhanced with WP3 ERUA2 (See below).

WP: Work Package;

UP8: University of Paris 8 Vincennes - Saint-Denis (France) > WP1 : Management and Coordination; WP2 :Engagement strategy for the areas of research and innovation

HRS4R: *Human resources strategy for researchers*

WP2 Re:ERUA: Engagement strategy for the areas of Research and Innovation

WP3 Re:ERUA : *"Innovation and societal engagement" led by Roskilde University*

WP3 ERUA2 : *"Structuring ERUA's Research-Based Clusters" led Mykolas Romeris University*

Introduction and methodology

The Policy Paper - Charter for the Common Research Framework Program plays a pivotal role within Re:ERUA - Work Package 2 (WP2), serving as a foundational document for engaged research initiatives within the Alliance ERUA. The Charter is organized into a preamble and four key sections: Values, Objectives, Methods, and Implementation.

The Charter, as a living document, is poised to be a guiding force in shaping the collaborative research landscape within ERUA.

Methodology and Stakeholder Involvement

The Charter is based on progressive and collaborative feedback throughout the drafting process. To draft this Charter, the UP8 team followed the strategic input of the different WP leaders of Re:ERUA and incorporated the results of the WP2 and WP3 expert group sessions conducted over the recent years. The UP8 team produced a first draft for internal circulation among various bodies and instances of the Alliance governance, initiating discussions and exchanges around the construction of the Charter. The WP2 board played a central role in crafting the Charter, actively engaging during the board sessions held in October and November 2023. Subsequently, we collected comprehensive and continuous feedback from the Vice Rectors for Research of Re:ERUA, the WP2 expert group and ERUA Scientific Council, as well as from participants in internal meetings at Paris 8 and attendees of the summit session on Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI) practices. Later, we incorporated the input from the new partners of the Alliance, specifically through the WP3 ERUA2, in charge of research activities in the ERUA 2 project to ensure the long term vision of the charter. More detailed feedback was provided by the WP3 Board members during the ERUA2 kick-off in December 2023. The charter was ultimately approved by the Board of Rectors on January 25, 2024. This milestone signifies the acknowledgment and endorsement of the Charter by the highest governing body within ERUA, ensuring alignment with the collective goals and aspirations of the Alliance.

The Charter is the result of a collective effort to authentically reflect the shared vision and commitment of all ERUA members. After approving the Charter, The Board of Rectors recommended further analysis based of the aspirations of new partners.

Implementation of a Dynamic Charter

The Charter, designed as a dynamic set of guidelines, is subject to annual reviews to ensure its flexibility and its adaptability as the Alliance activities develop.

Engaged research activities, specifically within the framework of Re:ERUA and ERUA 2, constitute the primary avenue for exploring the implications of the Charter.

A transition period is established for the partners recently added to the Alliance. This period allows for the effective assimilation of new members into the collaborative effort, ensuring a smooth participation in ERUA's research initiatives.

The Charter

1. Preamble

Contemporary universities often reflect the ethos of efficiency, profitability, competition and economic growth. These prevailing norms may prevent research from playing a key role in contributing effectively to the transition towards societal change.

In the context of European research Area, ERUA is committed to being an agent of change in European research, promoting Responsible Research and innovation (RRI) at all levels. This Charter is intended to provide a basis for research collaboration within our Alliance that shares the principles of critical thinking and reflexivity, with a common approach aimed at making a positive impact on society and empowering the populations of our universities.

Considering reform requires a critical examination of current power dynamics and the foundations upon which research is built. We aim to create a single framework that not only meets but exceeds European guidelines for greater solidarity within the European Research Area. This goes beyond our adherence to the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers and our qualification for the HRS4R label.

ERUA members will adhere to the following principles, bearing in mind that this Charter should not be seen as a fixed document set in stone, but rather as an evolving, fluid and dynamic set of guidelines that will be revised every year. This document will be reviewed by the Vice Rectors for Research and subsequently approved by the Rectors of the participating universities.

2. Values

ERUA universities are aware of the social role of higher education institutions. They are all committed to the following values, both independently and as an alliance.

Plurality is a distinctive value of our reform universities. We recognize the importance of alternative views and inclusive decision-making processes and encourage participatory governance. Our universities are committed to tackling inequalities and promoting equal opportunities. Solidarity, not only among member institutions but also in a wider societal context, is a core value. We actively pursue inclusion, improve gender balance, challenge physical and mental ableism and promote an ethic of care. We remain open and committed to diversity in our collective efforts, particularly in our research practices.

All partner universities are committed to the promotion of the principles and values set out in the Charter, both internally and externally.

3. Aims and objectives

3.1 Alternative excellence

To develop a different assessment of research quality, of alternative excellence, which can take into account RRI and societal engagement practices, while also taking into account how this research has been conducted and what societal impact it may have, rather than simply applying traditional criteria of scientific excellence[1].

We thus encourage reflection on research evaluation and alternative metrics that also take into account the 'invisible' aspects of research, as promoted by responsible research practices.

3.1.1 Promoting 'alternative' research excellence within and across the Alliance

- Broadening the criteria of excellence within internal evaluation criteria to include ethical concerns and criteria of social responsibility/innovation, not only in outputs but also in research processes. ERUA universities should emphasize dimensions such as scientific integrity, ethical responsibility, accountability, public engagement, environmental sustainability and cultural inclusiveness, as well as disruptive skills and heightened critical thinking, in assessing research excellence.

-Critique the rigidity of traditional metrics for measuring excellence (publications, citations, H-index) in national and international working groups and forums;

- Integrate fieldwork initiatives and stakeholder engagement into the career evaluation of researchers.

3.1.2 Promoting "alternative" research excellence by advocating for its recognition by decision-makers

ERUA is committed to promoting its values in research assessment and objectives to decision-makers at national and European levels, and to participating actively in international discussions such as the development of the CoAra agreement, and enhance together for FOREU1 and FOREU2.

3.2 Fostering RRI culture considering the reformist approach of ERUA universities

A reflection on RRI with a care perspective should be encouraged at the level of each partner university and within them, promoting all necessary actions to increase awareness and practice of RRI and societal engagement at member universities. .

In this context the ERUA endorses the values of RRI and its six policy keys (*Ethics, Gender equality, Governance, Open Access, Science Education, Public engagement*), as described by RRI toolkit Project and Re:ERUA WP3 works[2].

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[1] Valeria Sergueenkova, Dimitar Trendafilov. "Research and Engagement for the European Reform University Alliance" Grant Agreement No 101035808. European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme. Project Acronym: Re:ERUA. Project Start Date: November 1, 2020. Related Work Package: WP 6. Lead Beneficiary:.NBU, June, 30 2022

[2] This reflection should take into account that:
• 	RRI should be ethically acceptable, sustainable, socially desirable
• 	RRI should commit to emphasizing public engagement, open access, gender equality, science education, ethics, and governance.

In the context of national regulations and internal institutional assessments, encompassing governance considerations, ERUA universities are tasked with implementing RRI and societal engagement recommendations delineated by ERUA universities[3]. These recommendations are translated into the following objectives:

3.2.1 Institutional support for RRI

Promote the integration of RRI and societal engagement as institutional support by raising awareness and providing guidance to researchers and research support services. Establish a framework that facilitates guidance and support for researchers at all levels, as well as tailor-made support and documentation. In particular, prioritise awareness-raising and training for early career researchers in RRI practices to foster a new generation of research practitioners.

3.2.2 Incorporate RRI criteria into ERUA collaborative projects

Our ambition is for partner institutions to surpass the conventional citation-publication-based career review and adopt innovative criteria rooted in RRI and societal engagement principles. The RRI criterion, designed for all project objectives emerging from our collaboration in ERUA, should, whenever possible, be seamlessly integrated into our joint calls.

3.4   ERUA, a cradle for experimentation

ERUA universities maintain their commitment to fostering experimentation at all levels. They actively promote collaborative formats, including participatory and inclusive methodologies, and advocate engagement with non-academic stakeholders throughout the life cycle of research projects, from the conception of a research project to the dissemination of its results in society. For instance,

- Promote alternative models, especially for socially engaged research (action research, interventions, social design, and systemic and social innovation using participatory methodologies).

- Promote ERUA's third mission initiatives by emphasizing innovative models for knowledge sharing between researchers, students, start-ups and larger companies.

•   RRI should be inclusive and interconnected, ensuring a diversity of voices while recognizing the mutual dependencies in research and its broader context.
•   RRI should challenge established academic norms, encouraging reflexivity and continuous adaptation throughout the research process to ensure responsible and caring outcomes.
•   RRI should always aim at integrating criteria of sustainability and prefer alternative green solutions whenever possible.
•   RRI should be responsive and adaptive to change
•   Whenever possible, RRI should apply a transdisciplinary approach as a Response to Systemic Crises - Recognizing that societal engagement and transdisciplinary research stand as vital tools in addressing systemic crises and instigating social change. Upholding transdisciplinary research with a strong input from SSH in order to navigate complex challenges.
[3] Katia Dupret, Jennifer Eschweiler, Anna Umantseva, Ronja Hyldkrog, et al. 'Re:European Reform University Alliance.' Grant Agreement No 101035808. European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme. Project Acronym: Re:ERUA. Project Start Date: November 1, 2020. Related Work Package: WP 3. Lead Beneficiary: Roskilde University, December 1, 2022.

3.5 Open, mutually beneficial and equitable international policies

Current global societal challenges such as climate change and the green transition, the digital transition and the rise of AI, the demographic transition, migration and ageing societies, etc. require that we rethink how we, as institutions, serve society and how we can contribute to tackling the complexity of this new type of challenges to humanity.

3.5.1 Internationalization for societal engagement

We are committed to addressing global issues through co-creation processes and social innovation for more equitable and sustainable economic, environmental and social outcomes. Our aim is to explore and analyse societal engagement in relation to the role of different stakeholders in knowledge creation and consumption, using concepts such as social entrepreneurship, social innovation, citizen science, public engagement and sustainable and social impact. By integrating these concepts, we aim to promote a more innovative society.

3.5.2 International Cooperation and Outreach

With the aim to operate across various languages, borders, disciplines, and sectors to empower citizens, thereby transforming the academic, economic, social, cultural, and political landscapes, we want to:

Enhance global outreach by solidifying partnerships not only within EU Member States and Associated Countries but also beyond.

Develop partnerships with universities globally, with a particular emphasis on those that emphasize alternative epistemologies

3.6   EU Open Science policy

- Provide European researchers, innovators, businesses and citizens with a federated and open multidisciplinary environment where they can publish, discover and re-use data, tools and services for research, innovation and education purposes.

- Create research-based clusters for ERUA researchers

- Participate in the openU initiative

- Encourage early sharing and open collaboration

4. Methods

4.1 Foster Collaborative projects across the Alliance

- Use existing and forthcoming tools such as the Research Portal and Collaboration advertisement to promote collaboration between Alliance researchers.
- Encourage collaborative research efforts for the creation of joint projects eligible for university and national funding by establishing tailored mechanisms such as the ERUA label.

- Facilitate research collaboration for joint projects targeting European grants, thereby increasing the likelihood of securing funding for ERUA research initiatives.
- Strengthen the existing research support network to foster stronger relationships between research support services and ensure specialized support for collaborative European projects.

4.2 Human Resource Development

- Ensure HR policies align with the principles of the Charter and Code, encapsulated in the HRS4R initiative which underscores gender equality, inclusivity, and internationalization.
  - Prioritise reskilling and upskilling in a way that respects individual needs and aspirations and promotes a lifelong learning strategy. In particular, consider all RRI and societal engagement related skills and ERUA languages.

4.3 Commitment to Equality and Inclusiveness

- Be steadfast in ensuring gender equality and providing equal opportunities.
- Focus on inclusive gender equality, gender dimension and equity and access, while also being mindful of broader diversity aspects.
- Develop a joint action programme based on ERUA's gender strategy

4.5 Celebrating Diversity in Research

- Recognize the variety of research activities and practices with a diversity of outputs
- Acknowledge that researchers have distinct strengths and weaknesses and adapt internal criteria of career assessment accordingly
- Develop frameworks that allow researchers to play to their strengths and determine their own scientific aspirations.

4.6 Comprehensive Assessment Criteria

- Implement evaluation metrics that cater to various scientific disciplines, research methodologies, and career stages.
- Use assessment criteria and processes that respect the variety of disciplines, research types, and methodologies and that acknowledge multi-, inter-, and trans-disciplinary as well as inter-sectoral approaches when applicable.

4.7 Broadening the Scope of Research Roles

- Recognize and reward diverse research roles, including those beyond the academic sphere, and "non-visible" actors of scientific research[4].
- While individual skills, competencies, and merits remain essential, the value of teamwork and collaboration in research should also be recognized.

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[4] Dragsted, B., Ejrnæs, M., & Tjørring, L. (University of Copenhagen). "Noir: The Danish Infrastructure for Societally Engaged Research Problematized Through Success Stories." Presentation at the ERUA Summit, Roskilde University, 12 October 2023.

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5. Implementation of the Charter

ERUA universities recognize the diversity among members in the implementation of this Charter in accordance with national regulations and other relevant rules.

The primary channel for exploring the implications of this Charter is through the activities in Re:ERUA, and ERUA 2 WP3, **with a transition period for the new partners joining the Alliance.**

At the annual meeting of the Board of Rectors (or Vice-Rectors for Research), member universities are required to provide updates on actions taken to meet the objectives of the Charter. This will include discussion of challenges as well as success stories. Rectors will provide an overview of their progress, objective by objective, and to share best practice with their peers.

As ERUA universities enter the second phase of the project, they commit to pursuing the objectives outlined in this Charter, starting with co-funded research projects. Funding collaborative projects across the Alliance will require the development of evaluation criteria in line with the Charter's objectives, and will be used as "pilot cases" to drive internal institutional change.