



Joint Working Group on Education and Research

Action Plan 2012-2013

Introduction and Background

The increased emphasis on education and research is vital to achieve sustainable socio-economic development in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region. The formation of knowledge and innovation-based society plays a determining role in creating and developing a competitive economy in the region, thus making academia and research a significant driving force and one of the key contributors to the overall well-being and prosperity of the Barents Region. Therefore, it is viewed crucial to further promote cooperation in this sphere for the benefits of all the participating countries.

The first Regional Working Group on Education and Research (BEAR WGER) was established in 2001 after the Barents Council had approved an Exchange Programme for Higher Education and Research in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region with a Programme Board consisting of representatives from the relevant authorities in order to facilitate exchanges in higher education and research. Upon completion of its mission the Programme Board activities were terminated and its authorities were passed over to the WGER. In 2004 by the decision of the Committee of Senior Officials it was transformed into a new BEAC Joint Working Group on Education and Research (JWGER), being able to become an efficient tool of academic and research institutions cooperation in BEAR under the regional prioritized areas: economy and infrastructure, environmental protection, human resources, ICT, tourism, culture, indigenous people, etc.

In November 2011 by the decision of the JWGER meeting held in Murmansk, the Northern (Arctic) Federal University (NArFU, Arkhangelsk) was appointed the JWGER Chair with Tromsø University (UiT, Norway) as a Co-Chair. The partner universities acting under the “twin-universities cooperation model” are committed to continue implementing the positive and timely initiatives undertaken by Petrozavodsk State University during its 2009-2011 chairmanship, aiming at strengthening academic cooperation in the Barents Region in response to growing international challenges and needs in the field of human resources, research and innovation.

Overall objective

In its meeting in Umea on November 18, 2008 the Barents Regional Council adopted the Barents Program 2009–2013 that lays the basis of Barents cooperation and tackles the key priorities of the whole cooperation area with the main purpose to make it a competitive actor on the global market.

BRC prioritises the following areas for the period 2009–2013:

1. Economic and commercial cooperation
2. Sustainable living environment
3. Human resources
4. Indigenous peoples
5. Transport and infrastructure
6. Information and promotion

Outlining the above listed priorities BEAC and BRC, therefore, call JWGER for further strengthening cooperation between BEAR academic and research institutions, ensuring more active business-university collaboration, enhancing student and teachers exchange and a broader range of international study programmes contributing to break down language and cultural barriers.

The overall objective of JWGER is to intensify cooperation in academic and research spheres and exchange international cooperation experience among higher educational and research institutions of the Barents Region.

Priorities and Tasks for 2012-2013:

The general mission of the recent JWGER chairmanship is to enforce the organizational renewals of cooperation in the field of education and research, enhance synergy on different levels of cooperation and act towards more concrete cooperation forms.

The JWGER has taken over and will continue to implement the general tasks set up in JWGER Mandate and Resolution of the JWGER meeting adopted on November 17, 2011 in Murmansk, namely:

- to promote education and research as tools for regional and economic development of the Barents Region;
- to consolidate efforts for research-based education in member-institutions and interdisciplinary dialogue in fundamental and applied research;
- to support actions and measures aiming at increasing the quality of education and training in BEAR;
- to broaden the range of joint academic programs and training courses, to use e-learning as an effective instrument in the interaction among the actors;
- to facilitate academic exchange of teachers and students in the Barents area; to support the academic mobility programmes funded by EU, national programmes and bilateral universities' agreements;
- to support organization of BEAR forums and other events on education and research;
- to support establishing and functioning of consortia and networks aiming at joint activities towards integration of European and Russian education,
- to encourage partnership with the other actors of the Barents cooperation, in particular, state authorities, business, NGOs;
- to expand cooperation with other international organizations and stakeholders (e.g. the Arctic Council, the Arctic University Association, the Nordic Council of Ministers, the Northern Dimension, the European Commission, the Council of the Baltic Sea States);

- to share the experience and disseminate information about the most successful international projects in the field of education and research;
- to promote and use more actively international financial instruments (e.g. ENPI CBC Kolarctic, ENPI CBC Karelia, NCM, EU Tempus Programme, EU Erasmus Mundus Programme, 7th EU Framework programme, bilateral and national funds).

Priorities:

Within the framework of the aforementioned general tasks, the JWGER chairmanship draws up the following specific priorities for the period of 2012-2013:

Priority 1: Revitalizing the activities by strengthening the JWGER membership and streamlining the strategy in response to new challenges and needs.

The JWGER membership has been assessed as being not so strong enough to meet the new challenges faced. Moreover, the changing global conditions necessitate fostering experience exchange in different aspects of higher education modernization and networking. Therefore, it is intended to expand the frames of the JWGER by involving new members representing educational establishments, research institutions and related authorities of the Barents countries. It is also important to ensure better communication of the member institutions, create discussion arenas, update the existing JWGER strategy in line with global, national and regional priorities.

Priority 2: Mapping-out synergy potentials and developing concrete actions with other thematic Barents Working Groups.

Since JWGER mission and activities are closely interlinked with the issues tackled by BEAR working groups and are given special emphasis in the mandates and action plans, the efforts will be put to create better synergies between different groups and levels that will favour increased cooperation with other chairmanships. It has been recognized by all the actors that the successful implementation of the BEAC strategy will require close partnership and a shared willingness to collaborate on all the levels. JWGER will encourage constructive dialogue with other Working Groups within the framework of Barents cooperation.

Priority 3: Promoting cooperation with business and industries by analyzing their needs and studying possibilities for joint initiatives.

Recognizing the crucial role of academia and research in sustainable socio-economic development of the Barents Region, the decision was made to prioritize university-business cooperation during 2012-2013. The group will then continue working with the other directions in forthcoming years. The efforts will be put to promote cooperation with business and industries by analyzing their educational needs as well as proposing concrete actions and joint projects (e.g. educational standards, LOs, qualification frameworks, alumni associations).

Priority 4: Contributing to solving climate change challenges.

During the two years presidency the special focus will be put on JWGER contributing to solving climate change challenges and eco-efficient economy. It is vital to increase collaboration in the related applied interdisciplinary research and innovations to address climate challenges timely and in a proper way.

Priority 5: Supporting activities of consortia and networks.

Since most of the BEAR academic and research institutions are active members of different networks it is important to strengthen links with existing networks, institutions and associations. With this regards, it is viewed useful to achieve more synergy and encourage the exchange of information, approaches and best results. E.g. in the strategic context of High North focus of the Barents institutions it is intended to extend links with University of the Arctic Association.

Action Plan for 2012-2013

Based on the set priorities JWGER has planned the following activities:

Action Point 1.

- Work start-up under NArFU and UiT co-chairmanship. Making organizational arrangements, nominating the co-chairs and contact persons.
- Call for membership to Barents institutions and for their proposals for cooperation lines within the framework of JWGER activities.
- Defining the challenges and priorities.
- Working-out JWGER Action Plan for 2012-2013.
- Organizing JWGER meetings (face-to-face and by video-conferencing).

Action Point 2.

November 27-29, 2012: Holding Barents Conference in Arkhangelsk *“Cooperation in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region in the Field of Education and Research as a Resource for Regional Development”*. The conference will be hosted by Northern (Arctic) Federal University in Arkhangelsk and welcome about 80 Barents participants (scholars and students; politicians and officials; business and industry representatives, mass media and the public) to discuss past, present and future of academic cooperation and its significance for the Barents Euro-Arctic Region development. The event commemorating 20th anniversary of Kirkenes Declaration and development of Barents cooperation will highlight success stories of HE&R cooperation; point out new challenges and perspectives for further colaboration, define ways to promote cross-border capacity building within BEAR.

Action Point 3.

Call for interaction for BEAC Working Groups on national, regional and joint levels to encourage constructive continued dialogue and concrete joint initiatives (e.g. research, surveys, joint events, workshops). Based on the defined priorities in 2012-2013 and previously made contacts the special attention will be put to establish links with BEAC Working Group on Economic Cooperation, Regional Working Group on Investments and Economic Cooperation, Joint Working Group on Tourism and others. The working groups interaction could be realized via e-mail communication, video-conferencing, attending work group meetings, organizing and participating in joint events.

Action Point 4.

Reaching out chambers of commerce, associations of the Barents countries, BEAC Working Group on Economic Cooperation, Regional Working Group on Investments and Economic Cooperation to assemble information about the key actors among businesses and industries in

the trans-border cooperation in BEAR. Evaluate the state of the current cooperation between universities/research and businesses and explore ways and means to analyze their educational needs as well as proposing concrete actions and joint projects (e.g. research, survey, developing qualification frameworks, alumni associations, etc.). There exist the following pre-requisites for such activities, namely: willingness of entrepreneurs to cooperate and participate in the research; support of the related coordinating structures (authorities, chambers of commerce, associations); available funds.

Action point 5.

Call for universities and research institutions for measures and proposed projects to be included in BEAR Action Plan on Climate Change.

Assembling information on the on-going international projects in the sphere of environmental protection and climate change and reporting to BRC.

Support projects and events related to climate change issues, encourage the results dissemination.

Invite BEAC and Regional Working Group on Environment for closer cooperation under the projects and capacity-building activities.

Initiate and implement international research expeditions.

Action point 6.

Share experience in networking on different levels.

Enhance interaction with the existing national and international networks, e.g. Association of the Russian Leading Universities, European Union, Nordic Dimension and Nordic Council of Ministers initiatives. Extend links with University of the Arctic and the Arctic Council via participating in Arctic-focused research projects and activities of the UArctic Research office headquartered in NArFU.

Action point 7.

Disseminating best practices of Barents universities/research cooperation.

Visualization of the activities under Barents cooperation.

Financing

Financing of JWGER activities is planned to be carried-out on projects-based approach. The Working Group will collect information on fund-raising and promote financing by financial organisations and international actors such as the EU, Nordic Council of Ministers, Northern Dimension, Norwegian Barents Secretariat, etc.

-