

STSM report – Juan Abolafia

Home institution: Fundacio Clinic per a la Recerca Biomèdica (FCRB)

Host institution: Free University Brussels, Ghent University, KU Leuven (VUB-GU-KUL)

- **Summary (to be also used for reporting to the COST Office);**

During my visit met with numerous research management units available at the host institutions (Free University Brussels, Ghent University, KU Leuven (VUB-GU-KUL)). They accumulate a vast knowledge and experience covering many areas of expertise (e.g. from pre-award to post-award, from basic to applied research, and of course scientific disciplines). Additionally, they complemented my expertise within the biomedical sector since they are key players in this field. We all shared the strategies to promote the participation of the research community in international collaborative projects as well as the collaboration with the industry. Sharing of project management skills and internal processes and best practices was also useful for both, home and host institutions. This sharing of knowledge and expertise hopefully will set the grounds for future collaborations at different levels.

- **Purpose of the STSM;**

The following aims were included in my STSM and all of them were fulfilled:

- Sharing of project management skills
- Get in-depth information on strategies and key success variables to promote the participation in international research projects in both, home and host institutions
- Sharing of best practices and internal processes between both institutions
- Identify strategies to promote the collaboration with the industry
- Explore possibilities of collaboration at different levels and identify common interests to work on together

- **Detailed description of the work carried out during the STSM;**

The work carried out during the 4 days visit is summarized as follows:

Day 1:

1. All attendants presented their institution, their office and their personal profile.
2. Stijn Delauré presented the research landscape in flanders in terms of global picture.
3. Jon Brookes introduced us the UKRO office and their activities. A summary on FP9 news was also included on his presentation.
4. Nik Claesen introduced EARMA, its rationale, purposes and future plans.
5. Visit of the Parliamentarium.

Day 2:

1. Stijn Delauré presented KUL, its policies, structure and numbers.
2. Patricia Pardon presented the IT tools they work with in order to manage EU projects.
3. Myriam Witvrouw presented the TTO office, how it is structured, its usual tasks and numbers.
4. Hannelore Vanhaverbeke presented the strategy and work of the KUL regarding open access.

Day 3:

1. Wim Schreurs presented the EU office, how it is organized, its processes and its usual tasks.
2. Marie Arousseau explained more in depth the Erasmus+ programme.

3. Kim Coppens explained how they work in their finance post-award department. Their numbers related with the projects were also shown.
4. Stien Mommaerts talked more in depth on their strategies at office and institutional level to promote the ERC scheme.
5. Elger Vercayie presented very useful strategies and tips to take into account when dealing with Consortium agreements.

Day 4:

1. Margo Baele explained the normal functioning of their EU office and its numbers.
2. Katrien Windels and Ann Moens explained more in detail how the finance post-award office works.
3. Leen Verlinden introduced us the TTO office.
4. Elke Gruyaert explained the research being carried out at her lab.

During the visit many questions arose, mainly from the visitors. Some of these questions were:

- How does the PI track the economic development of his/her project?
- How do you deal with the communication among units and with PI?
- How do you perform the matching of the calls to the PIs and their ideas?
- What consultant company, other than Yellow Research, you work with?
- Are there written processes in place in order to ensure the proper administrative support to the PI?
- How do you engage the authorised official on future actions, decisions, implementations to be taken?

- **Contribution to the goals of the COST Targeted Network;**

The STSM allowed me to tackle issues usually discussed within BESTPRAC since during my STSM I interacted with many research management units, therefore, having access to a wide variety of skills and expertise.

Experience was gained, both by the home and host institutions, exchanging financial, legal and administrative experience, as well as sharing best practices and processes as described below.

The STSM also helped to promote the establishment of a network focused on improving research management according to the section below.

- **Description of the main results obtained**

- **elaborate in detail on the results obtained**
- **describe what you have learned during your visit**
- **please take into consideration that the readers of the report shall also be able to learn from it;**

A number of best practices and internal processes were shared. They mainly dealt with how is configured the internal arrangement of the research management staff units and how they interact with the research community. I would highlight the following aspects:

- Specific job positions give proper support to the PI (e.g. open access officer, ethics officer, tech transfer officer, legal support officer, policy advisor etc).
- Specific internal IT tools aid the PI to properly track the evolution of the project.
- Having devoted scientific staff to support the researcher on key sections of the proposal and for strategic funding schemes seems to be also very useful.

- Having a tech transfer officer integrated into the EU offices in order to support the PI on impact section seems to be key.
 - The culture of accountability among the admin and research community seem to help a lot to get funds and to properly administer the projects. e.g. prefinancing or even the whole direct costs are given to the PI at the very beginning of the project.
 - The PIs (namely the new ones) are provided with tools and information in order to let them figure out by themselves what and how to get international funding.
 - Independent work and at the same time collaboration among admin staff seems to be very well balanced.
 - Anticipation is key for success, e.g. inform the PIs well in advance on the topics of the future work programmes.
 - It is possible to have a central grants office which gives support to the research community as long as there is a vast amount of people supporting the office. Central & decentral project developers & project antennas.
 - The internal distribution of the overheads is very useful, both for the research community and the admin staff.
 - Incentives to the researcher community (e.g. ERCs) are also very useful tool to promote the participation of the research community in international projects.
 - In order to properly track the implementation of the institutional strategy and take decisions, frequent analyses are performed on the statistics (e.g. participation, success, types of projects etc).
 - Surveys are also performed to the research community in order to track the quality of the admin support.
 - iglortd.org... why shall an institution has an office in Brussels when an agency of my country has an office...that's the logic
- **It is mandatory to describe which of the best practices / tools / systems from the host institution will be (tried to be) implemented by you within your institute. Please also describe the reason / benefit of its implementation. In this regard identify the 1) tools/systems/practices that are beneficial, and more importantly, describe their content (please obtain permission from your host to reproduce, if necessary)**

Having personnel with a tech transfer background giving support to the PIs is something to be definitely discussed with our authorized official.

The specialization of the project management staff per funding scheme is also important to allow a better understanding and tracking of each funding scheme and, therefore, better support to the principal investigators. The figure of policy officer (taking care of courses, attendance to events, sending newsletters etc) is also key.

Being subscribed to UKRO newsletter at institutional level is strategic and will increase the efficiency of information flow. This will be suggested to our authorized official together with the annual institutional subscription to EARMA.

Anticipation of future events as well as regularity in the interaction with the PIs will definitely be promoted.

In September this year we will check the launching of the new funding scheme at EARMA which consists of 500 euros for developing new actions to promote within H2020 management.

The internal distribution of the overheads will be also discussed with our authorized officials in order to see how we could implement this at internal level. Other incentives schemes (e.g. those

towards ERC scheme) discussed during the visit will be also explained to the authorized official.

The possibility of further empowering our European projects office will also be discussed (e.g. stop an application not fulfilling the admin and financial criteria).

Further usage of the statistics (e.g. vinnova) will be performed in order to inform our authorized official and to help define our strategy.

A survey to the research community on our office's services will be discussed.

The tips to take into account when reviewing consortium agreements will also definitely be implemented in our office.

- **Future collaboration with host institution (if applicable);**
 - Information on Pre-commercial procurement will be shared.
 - Information related with NIH funding will be shared.
 - Overall availability of home and host institutions was made very explicit, whether for establishing future collaborations for research projects, or for solving doubts, or sharing resources.

- **Foreseen publications/articles/dissemination tool or document resulting or to result from the STSM (if applicable);**

Each STSM report will be uploaded onto the Targeted Network website.

- **Confirmation by the host institution of the successful execution of the STSM (see Annex III);**

See attached signed letter.

- **Other comments (if any).**

I definitely believe that this type of Short-Term Scientific Mission where visitors have access to 3 different institutions expertise plus the topics covered at UKRO is of great benefit for everybody. An agreement among the visitors was patent regarding how complete and rich this visit was. Having the possibility to interact with other visitors (8 in total) plus staff of 3 universities, plus EARMA representative, plus UKRO staff, is just outstanding. Probably this is the best instrument for the early stage researchers to learn about project management and to promote the exchange of knowledge.