

Short Term Scientific Mission (STSM) Report

STSM Title: Short term mission in three universities in Flanders

Period: 18-21/01/2016

Grantee: Joanna Buszkiewicz

Home institution: Poznań University of Technology

Host institutions: VUB (Free University Brussels), Ghent University, KU Leuven

Summary

In the framework of COST BESTPRAC action I had a possibility to take a part in short time scientific mission in Belgium that took place from 18th to 21st January 2016. The work plan included visits at three universities in Flanders: Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Ghent University and Katholieke Universiteit Leuven. It was addressed to university and research institutions administrators working in bureaus responsible for EU funded project management. With other participants we visited the offices responsible for the same field at all host institutions and with their representatives we discussed various issues related to pre-award and post-award phase of research grants – project preparation and its administrative, legal & financial management. We had an occasion to share many ideas and exchange best practice used at our entities.

Purpose of the STSM

The STSM visit at three Flanders' universities was aimed to create an occasion to exchange best practices in pre-award and post-award phase of EU funded (in the framework of Horizon 2020 programme) projects management: the dissemination of information about funding opportunities, support given to the researchers in project preparation, financial management. All topics discussed was planned with participant's suggestions and they were strongly adjusted to our needs.

Detailed description of the work carried out during the STSM

Hosts:

- Nathalie Vandepitte (Ghent University)
- Nik Claesen (VUB)
- Stijn Delauré (KU Leuven)

Other participants:

- Teresa Costa (Instituto Gulbenkian de Ciência, Oeiras)
- Dorottya Urai (Central Europe University, Budapest)
- Stine Hulleberg Johansen (Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences)
- Jennifer Kelleher (Austrian Academy of Sciences)
- Adéla Jiroudková (Charles University) and her boss Helena Kvačková.

Day 1: Monday 18/01/2016

The STSM stay in Flanders started with a kick-off meeting of all hosts and all participants at UK Research Office in Brussels. The hosts made a short introduction to the country and the region we were going to visit – Flanders. Then each participant had a possibility to present her institution (the structure, the purpose and main activities) and the offices she works in. Everyone described in details what our bureaus are responsible for: our internal procedures, what we do to encourage the researchers to apply for EU funds. We found out that our duties are quite similar but we could find many differences too – for example Research and Development Office at my home institution does both pre-award and post-award phase activities. The offices from all other institutions cope only with pre-award phase activities and when the project is awarded, other department becomes responsible for it.

After the participants' presentations we followed the slides concerning various issues related to EU funds, Horizon 2020 programme and project management, prepared by three hosts and UKRO representative:

- *Horizon 2020 state of affairs – policy update* by Alexandra Berry, European Advisor at UKRO,
- *Getting the most out of the Participant Portal* by Nik Claesen,
- *Horizon 2020 grant management: issued and solutions* by Nathalie Vandepitte,
- *Coping with ethical issues* by Stijn Delauré.

Day 2: Tuesday 19/01/2016

On a second day of the STSM stay we visited two departments of Katholieke Universiteit Leuven: Research Coordination Office (DOC) and Research & Development (LRD)– tech transfer office. We had a possibility to meet both bureaus workers and discuss issues related to EU funded projects management with them. Our host and head of European Research Affair unit at DOC, Stijn Delauré, started with a general presentation about KU Leuven and its research policy and about Grant Office – its structure and service offered. After that, we followed the slides about KU Leuven financial procedures, IT tools used in it, reporting and audits.

In the afternoon we visited KU Leuven Research & Development where we met Sarah Malevé. We discussed technology transfer, post-award phase and grant management issues as this unit is responsible

for them. After getting back to DOC we took a part in a discussion with Inge Lerouge, Ethics & Integrity Coordinator. She explained procedures, training and services related to ethical issues used at KU Leuven.

Day 3: Wednesday 20/01/2016

Third day of the STSM stay we spent at Ghent University. The meeting started with the presentation about the EU Office (its structure and services offered) by Ilona Stoffels and after that Margo Baele shared their ways to disseminate the information about EU policy and funding opportunities among the researchers (such as newsletter, direct mailing, info sessions etc.). Ilona Stoffels with Veronique Victor gave us a presentation about the procedures concerning pre-award phase support and starting up the granted project. Wendy Sonneveld explained how UGent try to impact Work Programmes prepared by EC.

In the afternoon we moved to LabMET to meet a group of researchers who coordinate a Horizon 2020 project – ManureEcoMine. We discussed pros & cons of project coordination. The meeting finished with a presentation about financial reporting and tools used in financial management processes (budget implementation, time sheets registration etc.)

Day 4: Thursday 21/01/2016

On the last day of the STSM stay in Flanders we visited Vrije Universiteit Brussel where we met our host Nik Claesen and his colleague Stien Mommaerts. Nik gave us some details on VUB and European Liaison Office – its action undertaken to promote funding opportunities and support researchers in project preparation and submission. Then Elger Vercayie explained us some legal aspects of project management at VUB. We analysed the most popular template of the consortium agreement – DESCA.

We also had an occasion to meet Jozefien de Marrée who is coordinating a H2020 project at VUB – EnRRICH (in the framework of “Science with and for Society” pillar). She gave us a testimony that ELO support is strongly needed in project preparation and that thanks to the support she received her project was awarded.

In the next step Nik described the incentives used by ELO to encourage the researchers to apply (for example a financial bonus for a coordinator) and support gave to scientist applying for an ERC grant (CV verification, workshops “How to write a competitive proposal”, consultations, mock interview...). When we finished, we made some conclusions and we closed the STSM.

Contribution to the goals of the COST Targeted Network

I believe that this STSM stay in Flanders completely fulfilled the objectives of COST action No. 1302 BESTPRAC. Organizing the meeting for university research administrators is as important as networking the researchers. Participation in such event gives a unique opportunity to exchange the best

practice in common field of work, compare internal administrative, financial and legal procedures, share the ideas for problem solution and discuss problematic issues. Thanks to it the administrators can gain a new experience and a fresh view on their activities and then enrich their offer addressed to the researchers.

Description of the main results obtained

I have learned a lot about pre-award and post-award phase activities conducted by EU project offices at both host institutions and other participants' home institutions:

- ways to promote funding opportunities (newsletters, mailing, workshops, info sessions),
- ways to encourage researchers to apply (financial bonuses),
- procedures concerning project preparation and application – it was interesting PUT was the only institution to have an internal regulation saying that the researchers are obliged to submit an application at Research & Development Office and supply a budget to be verified – at other institutions the researchers are just advised to do this,
- coping with ethical issues,
- financial issues (it was interesting that the universities in Belgium has a different way of overheads' division than PUT – 17% goes to the institution and 8% goes directly to the research group),
- IT tools used for budget implementation and time sheets registration.

I had a possibility to learn from representatives of three universities bigger and much more experienced in EU funded project realization than Poznań University of Technology, which was very inspiring. It is also important that the participants met not only the administrators, but also the groups of researchers who were coordinating Horizon 2020 projects. They gave us proofs that the support from the administration is strongly needed to gain a grant.

Best practices/ tools/ systems from the host institution that will be tried to be implemented in the home institution

From all practices and tools discussed I found two extremely interesting and useful.

Teresa Costa from Instituto Gulbenkian de Ciência showed us an example of a newsletter prepared with Mailchimp tool that their Research Funding Affairs office send every month to the researchers. The newsletter contains the information about funding opportunities – both national and international. At this moment at PUT's Research and Development Office we do not send newsletters to the employees - we prefer direct mailing. I am going to strongly recommend my colleagues to start using Mailchimp as sending a newsletter is one of the best ways to disseminate the information about open calls among large group of researchers.

The second practice that I found very interesting is the possibility to get a small preparatory grant. 3% of the overheads from each international project run at Flanders' universities goes to the internal preparatory fund. The researchers can apply for a grant that they can spend on preparing a grant application (as a coordinator) – for example for meeting with potential partners. The researches at our entity do not have such possibility (they can apply for external preparatory grants which is much more complicated). I shared this knowledge with my colleagues and suggested to consider setting an internal fund up at PUT.

Confirmation by the host institutions of the successful execution of the STSM

See attached:

- the confirmation from KU Leuven
- and from Ghent University.