



COST Short-term scientific mission - Best practice for building a network of administrative excellence

Final Report

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STSM type: Regular (from Italy to Netherlands)

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STSM Topic: Bestprac

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Summary:

- professional inputs from the Erasmus University Medical Center Rotterdam (Erasmus MC) in The Netherlands
- exchange of knowledge and information between University of Trento and Erasmus MC
- weakness and strength of research support organization in Erasmus MC and in Sophia Children's Hospital
- detailed description of the work carried out during the STSM
- future collaborations between University of Trento and Erasmus MC

Professional inputs from the Erasmus University Medical Center Rotterdam

(Erasmus MC) in The Netherlands

As clearly described in my STSM application the decision to choose Erasmus MC as hosting institution is easily explained by the fact not only that I am biologist with a PhD in Neuroscience and with several years spent by doing bench research in biomedical field, but also because UNITN has a very dynamic and eclectic Centre for Integrative Biology (CIBIO). In the last years, CIBIO has become an active actor in the international research programme and more and more requires expert administrative staff to help itself in designing a competitive international project. To be in touch with the Erasmus MC research support staff allowed me not only to compare and understand if knowledge, tools, systems and practices I usually use for my research support activity in UNITN are in line and updated with respect of those utilized in another European higher education institution, but also to identify key work instruments that I didn't contemplate in my previous research support activity and that can help me to improve the quality of my work.

As emerged through direct interaction with Erasmus MC research support staff I strongly need:

- to organize an efficient monthly research newsletter focused on publicizing European support research programmes, such as H2020, Research Fund for Coal & Steel, COSME, 3rd Health Programme and Consumer Programme, and news, events, calls deadlines, strategic documents published directly by European Commission and that can help academic staff in international funding programmes participation. The building of this newsletter first of all implies a good knowledge of specific websites where to find material to broadcast and second a big ability in handle it by filtering and selecting announcements and events.
- to be physically close to the research team that I have to support, in order to establish a direct connection and an easy interaction with the principal investigator and his/her collaborators. This is the easiest way to start building a confidence-based professional relationship.
- to participate in the internal lab meeting of research teams, of which I'm in charge to give research support, in order to better understand its strength, its weakness and above all its needs. This allows me to direct all the energies and available time to encourage and to support research staffs in the international funding programmes participation.

Exchange of knowledge and information between University of Trento and Erasmus MC

The direct interaction with my BESTPRAC STSM tutor Dr Ellen Schenk allowed me to exchange mutually knowledge and information on how to handle and organize a project life-cycle.

One of the most delicate steps on handling the project management is the grant preparation phase, especially for people learning how to do it. That is why, in this regard, Dr Schenk helped me a lot to understand how to use the Horizon 2020 participant portal and where to find concrete instructions for issues related to GA preparation (for instance how to assign a project legal signatory for an institution and how to sign a declaration of honour).

On the other hand I gave to Dr Schenk some information concerning how to extend the "view of research" in the different H2020 work programmes in order to find the major number of topics useful for a research team.

Speaking about Erasmus MC it means not to dwell only on H2020 WP related to Life

Science but to study also other WPs in which life sciences play an important role for the project development (for instance the WP concerning Information and Communication Technologies and the WP concerning Nanotechnologies, Advanced Materials, Advanced Manufacturing and Processing, and Biotechnology).

As a result of my recent work in the University of Trento I shared with Dr Schenk some tips and suggestions on how to create a webpage entirely dedicated to H2020 in order to insert it in the main page of Erasmus MC intranet website, trying to give maximum visibility to H2020.

The “H2020 window”, that has the goal of guiding the academic staff through the H2020 discovery in a pragmatic, efficient and fast way, is a source of selected, filtered and collected informations related to this international funding programme operation and to progressive steps for the online project submission

Weakness and strength of research support organization in the Erasmus MC and in the research office Sophia Children’s Hospital

Grant support at Erasmus MC is organized in a decentralized way. At a central level, a Research Policy Department defines policies and provides general information on EU funding programmes, but is not involved in hands-on support. At the level of the departments, grant support is organized in different ways or even absent.

During my BESTPRAC STSM I had the chance to discover the strength and the weakness of research support in the Erasmus MC and in the Research Office Sophia, in which the Grant Support Office headed by Dr Schenk is positioned, that provides research support to 6 departments including those of the Sophia Children’s Hospital. I summarize my impressions from discussions with the Research Office Sophia team and with Erasmus MC support staff from various departments in the scheme below.

	Research support Erasmus MC staff	Research Office Sophia
Strength	-well-organized and detailed research support newsletter -research support administrative staff well prepared, well-connected (despite the lack of research support central structure) and dedicated to its work	- clarity of roles distinction and job in the task -ability to manage an outstanding project management.
Weakness	-lack of research support division able to guide at central level the co-ordination of Erasmus MC research development, strategy support and implementation, advice on costing and submission of grant applications and University authorization for submission, negotiating activity on contract terms with funders and collaboration agreements with other HEIs and public sector collaborators,	-the staff, although well-organized, is sensitive to the lack of scientific advice and guidance to monitor its policy and strategic choices and its activity on research project life-cycle. -while the involvement in international funding programmes is really strong the staff seems to be a bit reluctant to face new challenges due to current

post-award financial administration of externally funded research projects.

-hidden intranet webpage totally dedicated to selected, filtered and collected information about H2020 operation and its funding opportunities

workloads

-the staff should be more dedicated and focused on international funding programmes operation

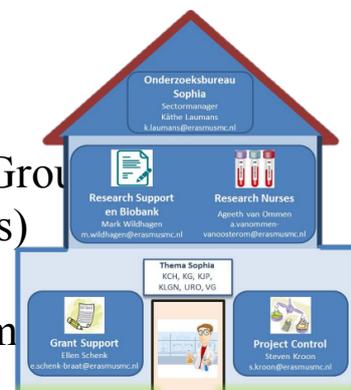
Detailed description of the work carried out during the STSM

My BESTPRAC STSM workprogramme was really exhaustive, allowing me to familiarize with the work of all the persons involved in research support activities organized by Erasmus MC. It provides me a detailed overview of how the management of these complex activities is organized in a country which is different from mine.

Day 1: Monday 28 September 2015

a-Meeting with Research Office Sophia Management Team and project controllers:

- Käthe Laumans (Sector manager)
- Steven Kroon (Head Project Control)
- Mark Wildhagen (Head Research Support Group)
- Ageeth van Ommen (Head Research Nurses)
- Ellen Schenk (Head Grant Support)
- Tjitske van der Zanden (Grant support team)
- Els van Beek (project controller)
- Kevin Kops (project controller)
- Robert Immerzeel (project controller)
- Wiebe Jelsma (project controller)



Erasmus MC is organized in 9 Themes, each having a number of departments. The Theme Sophia, hosting 6 departments, has organized its own research support staff (Research Office Sophia) to manage national and international research projects and to help academic staff from the department of paediatrics, paediatric surgery, child and adolescent psychiatry and psychology, clinical genetics, obstetrics and gynecology, and urology in designing their research projects.

The Sophia office, which was born in 2014, supports research with an efficient infrastructure, advising grant applications, research co-ordination and management (including Biobank management), medical research done by nurses and project control.

The sector manager is responsible for the management of services and processes that support the core business of an institution and is involved in both strategic planning and day-to-day operations. In the Sophia office the sector manager coordinates, the project control, the research nurses, the data management and the grant support office.

The head project control in the Sophia office is in charge to administrate all the research projects from the 6 departments. The project controllers are key members of the Sophia office team and work directly with the head project manager to help defining the project's goals and objectives, to create and maintain a project's budget and schedule, to analyze progress reported against the work schedules and to recommend actions to improve progresses. Currently 377 research projects are under financial management of the Sophia Research Office.

The Head Research Support Group and Head Research Nurses are involved in many different activities such as to optimize logistic procedures around research patients, to support in drafting, to screen study patients, to inform study patients and to supervise study patients, to obtain and register data, to collect biomaterial for translational research. All these activities are fundamental in biomedical field.

The head grant support office plays a central role in the Sophia research office managing international, national and local research networks, organising grant support procedures and tools during the entire project life cycle, covering the coordination of grant applications, contracting negotiations, monitoring project and reports, handling financial and legal issues.

b-Attendance of Erasmus MC EU Support Staff Network meeting:

-Presentation concerning COST Targeted Network BESTPRAC on best practice in research administration 2013-2017 (WHY, WHAT, aim, target group, working groups, activities). Speaker: Dr Schenk

- presentation focused on the reporting of personnel costs in Horizon 2020. Speaker: Dutch auditor

Day 2: Tuesday 29 September 2015

- Individual meeting with Riet van Zeijl (Biomedical Sciences staff), was focused on highlighting the activities of a coordinator during the several steps of life-cycle project: before and after application, during granting, during project and during closing period.

-Although Dr Marloes de Vries (working at Department of Orthopaedics) and me are in charge on handling different steps of the project management, our individual meeting was focused on mutual exchanges of knowledge on issues and limits on organizing the project life-cycle.

- Individual meeting with Dr Erik Kreiter (Daniel staff) was focused on mutual exchange of knowledge on how to advise academic staff on funding opportunities

and how to support in grant application writing. He suggested me the idea to organize a research support newsletter in my higher education institution and to participate in lab meetings of the research team that I currently support in my higher education institution.

- Attendance of Research Office Sophia work discussion focused on setting up a budget for a Horizon consortium application
- Attendance of Erasmus MC Postdoc Network Meeting on grant writing with Jantine Spithoven, Dr Kim van der Heiden, Prof. Marion De Jong and Prof. Hemmo Drexage.
- Individual meeting with Jantine Spithoven (Erasmus MC Research Policy staff) gave me a general overview of Erasmus MC research policy with respect to European funding programmes and research collaborations. She is not only the LEAR of Erasmus MC but she also organizes different activities such as Erasmus MC research newsletter. She is involved in the medical research advice committee and in the advertisement of Horizon 2020-European Research Council (ERC) and the NWO national funding programme.

Day 3: Wednesday 30 September 2015

-Discussion with Dr Schenk on:

- potential future collaborations
- processing of notes
- evaluation of STSM
- planning of STSM report

-Individual meeting with Emmy van Oosterom concerning the role of Erasmus MC Technology Transfer Office in EU-funded projects

- the last individual meeting with Paul Huber (Department of Viroscience) allowed me to confront with Administrative, financial and legal management of European collaborative projects. He gave me good tips and suggestions on how to support a biomedical research team in building step by step a successful international proposal.

Future collaborations between University of Trento and Erasmus MC

As a result of our professional interaction, Dr Schenk and I have planned to work together in the following activities:

- to create a specific research support newsletter that can keep on informing academic staff of University of Trento about European funding research programmes and news, events, calls deadlines, strategic documents published directly by European Commission and that can help it in applying for international funding opportunities. The organization of this tool will require a previous work of selection and collection about useful information to broadcast.
- to organize H2020 guidelines tailored for Erasmus MC academic staff interested to participate in the last framework programme for research and innovation. This document will shortly describe H2020 policy, strategy and rules of participation and will offer tips and suggestions on how to handle the H2020 participant portal, how to electronically manage proposals or grants and how to complete different project tasks. Moreover it will include links and references to guidance notes, to templates, to user manuals of the relevant tools and to frequently asked questions.
- to check the possibility to open a collaboration between CIBIO (UNITN) and

Erasmus MC by screening and monitoring common life-science research fields for both Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).

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