

# SHORT TERM SCIENTIFIC MISSION (STSM) REPORT

**Grantee:** Teresa Costa

**Home Institution:** Instituto Gulbenkian de Ciência (IGC), Oeiras, Portugal

**Host Institution:** Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB), Ghent University (UGhent), University of Leuven (KU Leuven)

**Title of the STSM:** Group STSM to Flanders

**STSM dates:** from 18-01-2016 to 21-01-2016

**Reference:** ECOST-STSM-TN1302-180116-070225

## SUMMARY

The BESTPRAC group short-term mission (STSM) to three universities in Flanders aimed at exchanging practices related to EU research support and project management by supporting individual mobility, in particular early stage administrators, from participating COST countries. The visit took place between 18 and 21 of January 2016.

On the welcome day in Brussels, each participant and host representative shortly introduced their institutions. We then attended a talk by an EU external speaker and other short talks on several relevant topics such as Grant Management, Ethical Issues, etc. During the last three days, we visited the University of Leuven (KU Leuven), the Ghent University (UGhent) and the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB) to benefit from the exchange of practice with the EU support teams and with several research and administrative offices from each individual host institution. The opportunity to meet and network with the other STSM participants was also extremely valuable. In this report, I present the most relevant aspects of this visit.

During the various meetings, I have gained insight into the internal procedures and methods for the dissemination of funding opportunities, the development and implementation of European research projects, as well as valuable exchange of best practices in pre-award grant management. This group STSM also allowed me to strengthen my skills in EU research support and project management and to share and transfer knowledge related to research and administration management.

## PURPOSE OF THE STSM

This group STSM aimed at sharing best practices for research administration between the institutions involved and to receive an insight into the internal procedures and services offered by the three host institutions to their researchers, namely on European projects. All participants shared common interests to be discussed during this group STSM (e.g. methods for search funding opportunities, support for the development of grant applications, management of EU funded research projects, etc.) as well as to get involved with different research administration realities in order to improve and/or implement at our home institutions different grant management practices and services.

## DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE WORK CARRIED OUT DURING THE STSM

### Participants:

TERESA COSTA, Research Funding Affairs Unit, Instituto Gulbenkian de Ciência - IGC, Oeiras (Portugal)

JENNIFER KELLEHER, Grant Service Office, Austria Academy Sciences - ÖAW, Vienna (Austria)

JOANNA BUSZKIEWICZ, Research and Development Office, Poznan University of Technology, Poznan (Poland)

DOROTTYA URAI, Academic Cooperation and Research Support Office, Central European University - CEU, Budapest (Hungary)

STINE JOHANSEN, Department of Research and Development, Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences – Hioa, Oslo (Norway)

ADÈLA JIROUDKOVÁ, Department of Science and research, Charles University in Prague, Prague (Czech Republic)

HELENA KVACKOVA, Department of Science and research, Charles University in Prague, Prague (Czech Republic)

#### Speakers at the various meetings

STIJN DELAURÉ, International Funds, KU Leuven, Leuven (Belgium)

NIK CLAESEN, European Liaison Office, VUB, Brussels (Belgium)

NATHALIE VANDEPITTE, Office of Research Coordination, UGhent, Ghent (Belgium)

ALEXANDRA BERRY, UKRO, Brussels (Belgium)

PATRICIA PARDON, Project & Budget Administration, KU Leuven, Leuven (Belgium)

TINE HEYLEN, Tech Transfer Office (LRD), KU Leuven, Leuven (Belgium)

INGE LEROUGE, Ethics Coordinator, KU Leuven, Leuven (Belgium)

ILONA STOFFELS, Office of Research Coordination, UGhent, Ghent (Belgium)

MARGO BAELE, Office of Research Coordination, UGhent, Ghent (Belgium)

VERONIQUE VICTOR, Office of Research Coordination, UGhent, Ghent (Belgium)

WENDY SONNEVELD, Office of Research Coordination, UGhent, Ghent (Belgium)

SARAH STEENBEKE and CRISTINA PINTUCCI, LabMET research Group, UGhent, Ghent (Belgium)

ANNE-LORE VERPLANKEN, Office of Research Coordination, UGhent, Ghent (Belgium)

ELGER VERCAYIE, European Liaison Office, VUB, Brussels (Belgium)

JOZEFIEN DE MARRÉ, Science Communication Office, VUB, Brussels (Belgium)

#### **Monday, 18th January 2016**

VENUE: UKRO, Brussels

9:30 – 10:00	Welcome Coffee & Tea
	Tour de Table, Short Introduction to Flanders & Belgium, <i>Stijn Delauré</i> (KU Leuven)
	Presentations by the STSM Participants (10+5 min each)
12:00 – 13:30	Lunch
	Horizon 2020 Policies, <i>Alexandra Berry</i> (UKRO)
	Participant Portal, <i>Nik Claesen</i> (VUB)
	H2020: Grant Management, <i>Nathalie Vandepitte</i> (UGhent)
16:00 – 17:30	EU Ethical Issues, <i>Stijn Delauré</i> (KU Leuven)

The first day of the meeting took place at the UK Research Office (UKRO) in Brussels. Everyone present introduced themselves and the host Stijn Delauré from KU Leuven provide a brief introduction to Flanders/Belgium and this region's impressive participation in Horizon 2020 as well as the overall agenda for the day. Afterwards, the participants and the three representatives of the host institutions shortly introduced their institution. In the afternoon, Alexandra Berry from the UKRO gave us an overview on Horizon 2020 Policies focusing on what is coming up and needs to be looked at carefully in the near future. The host Nik Claesen from VUB talked about the Participant Portal and provided useful tips on the tools available. Next, Nathalie Vandepitte from UGhent, presented potential solutions to overcome issues that may arise during the preparation, implementation and follow-up of H2020 projects. Stijn Delauré also told us about the H2020 Ethical Issues and how KU Leuven established several internal committees and procedures to deal with them. After the closing remarks and outlook to the next days, several of the participants decided to join together for an informal dinner which was very pleasant and allowed us to start knowing each other better.

## Tuesday, 19th January 2016

VENUE: University of Leuven - KU Leuven, Leuven

9:30 – 10:00	Intro to KU Leuven, <i>Stijn Delauré</i> (Head, International Funds)
	Overview Grant Office and EU support teams, <i>Stijn Delauré</i> (Head, International Funds)
	Financial procedures, <i>Patricia Pardon</i> (Head, Project & Budget Administration)
12:00 – 13:30	Lunch @ town centre
	Tech Transfer Office, <i>Tine Heylen</i> (Tech Transfer Office)
	Ethical Committees, <i>Inge Lerouge</i> (Ethics Coordinator)
16:00	Closure, <i>Stijn Delauré</i> (Head, International Funds)

The second day of the meeting took place at the University of Leuven (KU Leuven) where we were able to get acquainted with the overall structure and organisation of the University. KU Leuven is a private multi-campus University with 15 Faculties in the general fields of Humanities & Social Sciences, Engineering & Technology and Biomedical Sciences. More than 5000 research staff and around 1350 Professors work at KU Leuven. Stijn Delauré, head of the International Funds Office, gave us an overview of the grant service and EU support teams at KU Leuven. The Research Coordination Office (DOC) is organised in several offices such as: Information Architect Research; Communication Adviser; Internal Management & Contracts; Data & Analysis; Internal Funds; Process Management & Organisation; National Funds; and International Funds. Of particular interest, Stijn explained the different type of incentives provided to KU Leuven researchers when applying for funding opportunities and also the networks they are involved with. Also, Stijn explained the tools used for dissemination of funding opportunities (e.g. internal database, online newsletter) and support provided in the development of proposals (e.g. informative sessions and workshops, intake meetings). They also provide special support to ERC applications (KU Leuven uses consultancy companies but is not experiencing an increase at the success rate level so they are considering if it is worthy to use this type of support or not) and to collaborative projects (set up an internal committee of senior advisors). Next, Patricia Pardon, head of the Project & Budget Administration of the Financial Department at KU Leuven, explained briefly the procedures related to the central financial monitoring of ongoing projects. She advised that budget revision and tools should be provided to the researchers during preparation of the proposals. After a very pleasant lunch at the city centre and a short visit to the rectory building, we met Tina Heylen at the KU Leuven Research & Development (LRD) Department. LRD is the knowledge and technology transfer office at this University that collaborates with industry to secure and license intellectual property rights, create spin-off companies and stimulate knowledge-driven regional development. All projects in consortia and with some applied potential received pre- and post-award support from LRD. Next, Inge Lerouge, the KU Leuven Ethics Coordinator, explained the role of the Ethics Coordinator and the implementation of different Ethical Committees for responsible conduct of research and research integrity.

## Wednesday, 20th January 2016

VENUE: University of Ghent - UGhent, Ghent

9:30 – 10:00	Intro to EU-office at UGhent, <i>Ilona Stoffels</i> (Office of Research Coordination)
	Dissemination information to researchers, <i>Margo Baele</i> (Office of Research Coordination)
	Pre-award support, <i>Veronique Victor &amp; Ilona Stoffels</i> (Office of Research Coordination)
12:00 – 13:30	Lunch & Input to EU Work Programme, <i>Wendy Sonneveld</i> (Office of Research Coordination)
	Visit to LabMET research Group – extensive experience in EU projects, <i>Sarah Steenbeke</i> (Admin staff) and <i>Cristina Pintucci</i> (Project Manager)
16:00	Financial reporting, <i>Anne-Lore Verplanken</i> (Office of Research Coordination)

The third day of the meeting took place at the University of Ghent. The University of Ghent (UGhent) consists of 11 faculties dedicated to Medicine & Health Sciences, Engineering & Architecture, Psychology & Educational Sciences, Bioscience Engineering, Pharmaceutical Sciences, Economics, Political & Social Sciences amongst others, comprising a total of 1288 professors, 1227 postdocs and 4710 pre-doctoral researchers. Ilona Stoffels from the Office of Research Coordination provided some insight into the EU-office at UGhent. Next, Margo Baele, also from Office of Research Coordination talked about dissemination information to researchers. I was impressed with the online newsletter which was developed with the support of the IT team at UGhent and allows a dynamic update of news that researchers can access directly by subscribing to daily or weekly feeds. Interestingly, I recognised that many of the dissemination tools used (as well as the pre-award support tools explained by Ilona Stoffels and Veronique Victor) are similar to the ones we also implement at our pre-award unit at IGC (e.g. support provided to the Marie Curie individual fellowships' candidates through the preparation of an annotated guide; several in-house training courses prepared by the office staff). Challenges and tips to reach the researchers were also discussed. During lunch, Wendy Sonneveld (Office of Research coordination) explained the UGhent strategy to disseminate the H2020 work programmes among the researchers for awareness of the topics, and also how input to the work programmes being develop is achieved internally and sent to the EU by an UGhent representative. After lunch, we went to the Faculty of Bioengineering to meet Sarah Steenbeke (admin staff) and Cristina Pintucci (project manager) from LabMET, a research Group with extensive experience in EU projects. They have explained their strategy on consolidating existing collaborations and stimulate student exchange as a way to find partners for future projects in consortia. Tips on best practices to start a proposal and to deal with legal issues and budget preparation were also discussed. Lastly, Anne-Lore Verplanken from the Office of Research coordination explained how the post-award financial reporting is done at UGhent and some of the online tools used. Importantly, as also mentioned by other host institutions, intake meetings at the beginning of projects implementation are thought as crucial in order to inform the researchers and everyone involved (admin staff, etc.) about the guidelines to successfully carry out the awarded projects.

#### Thursday, 21st January 2016

VENUE: Vrije Universiteit Brussel - VUB, Brussels

9:30 – 10:00	Intro to VUB, <i>Nik Claesen</i> (Head, European Liaison Office)
	EU project support, <i>Nik Claesen</i> (Head, European Liaison Office)
	Legal aspects – Consortium Agreements, <i>Elger Vercaeyie</i> (Legal Advisor, European Liaison Office)
12:00 – 13:30	Lunch
	Testimony coordinator of a H2020 SwfS project, <i>Jozefien De Marré</i> (Science Communication Office)
	Internal budgets & Reporting, <i>Nik Claesen</i> (Head, European Liaison Office)
	Providing incentives to researchers, <i>Nik Claesen</i> (Head, European Liaison Office)
16:00	ERC Support Track, <i>Nik Claesen</i> (Head, European Liaison Office)

The fourth and last day of the meeting took place at Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB), a University comprising 8 faculties in different fields from Medical and Bio-engineering Sciences to Economic and Social Sciences. We were hosted by Nik Claesen (Head) and Stien Mommaerts (officer) from the European Liaison Office which aims at encouraging participation in European and international research projects and to advice on participation in these type of research funds. The European Liaison Office (ELO) acts as a contact point for researchers at VUB and as an intermediary with the European Commission. Nik Claesen started with a brief introduction to VUB and then explained the EU pre-award support provided by ELO. They also use a dynamic online newsletter for dissemination of funding opportunities, as well as informative sessions (done by consultants) and personalized actions to motivate the researchers in applying. Interestingly, their

timeline of funding opportunities provided to the researchers is organised according to TLRs. As at KU Leuven, their office also provides annotated H2020 work programmes to specific researchers (match topics). Elger Vercayie, also from ELO, provided an overview on some legal aspects, namely on the preparation of consortium agreements and the use of DESCAs models. After lunch, Jozefien De Marré, the coordinator of a H2020 Science with and for Society funded project (“EnRRICH”) testified how important was the support from ELO and their constant interaction with the EU representatives for the success of their proposal. Nik Claesen also explained briefly the internal procedures with budgets and reporting. Next, he also talked about the incentives provided to the VUB researchers, not only when applying to ERCs and to be project coordinators but also financial bonuses attributed to successful projects that can then be spent on research by the principal investigators. VUB has extra budget to support ERC candidates that is used on consultants that work together with ELO in the CV review, workshops on how to write competitive proposals, revision and proofreading of draft proposals, mock interviews, etc.

## **CONTRIBUTION TO THE GOALS OF THE COST TARGETED NETWORK**

This group STSM contributed to the general goals of the BESTPRAC project by: i) promoting the exchange of best practices in pre- and post-award grant management regarding the development of European research projects, ii) strengthening skills in EU research support and project management, iii) gaining insight into internal procedures connected with application and implementation of research projects, iv) sharing and transferring of knowledge. Both the participants and the host institutions benefited from the specific activities performed. As a participant, I believe that having met with research management staff from the host Institutions will potentiate not only my own efficiency in research and administration management but also of all participants involved in this group STSM. Also, this STSM motivated strengthening of cooperation between the home and host institutions. Moreover, building networks such as BESTPRAC, that foster exchange of good practices and networking, is crucial for the field of research administration where these kind of networks are still sparse.

## **DESCRIPTION OF THE MAIN RESULTS OBTAINED**

My visit to the Flanders host institutions within the framework of the BESTPRAC group STSM programme was based on the work plan proposed in my application. Together with the training and discussions on management of European research projects planned, I was interested in discussing and learn more about: Strategies to search & disseminate funding opportunities, Support for EU projects applications, EU projects negotiations, Strategies to stimulate participation in European and international research projects, and Share experiences on training/workshops related to funding provided to the researchers. The specific activities presented by the host institutions met these interests and were extremely useful for sharing of practices and knowledge.

It was very interesting to understand how the different institutions (most universities having central administrative offices) are organised and deal with the different topics in research administration. We have also learned what type of tools Flanders’ partners use to support their researchers, how they foster and motivate the participation of researchers in H2020 projects namely through internal incentives, and how the different administrative and management services are integrated and collaborate among each other. All activities presented allowed me to learn and strengthen my expertise on developing strategies to better support the IGC researchers in the development of EU research proposals and to ultimately increase the IGC success rate in attracting EU competitive collaborative funds. The exchange with the hosts’ EU support teams allowed me to exchange best practices in order to maximise EU proposals applications and management.

Best practices and tools learned from the host institutions that I will try to implement (or alert for) within my institute:

- 1) All three hosts, and also most of the participant organisations, offer institutional incentives to researchers to motivate them to apply for highly prestigious and competitive funds (e.g. ERC) and to be coordinators of collaborative H2020 projects. Also, a percentage of the overheads of all awarded projects is often offered to the researcher (usually 8% out of 25%). All institutions that implement this type of incentives recognise these tend to increase the number of applications and prompt researchers to do excellent research. At the IGC, we specifically aim at motivating researchers to apply for collaborative projects and if possible be coordinators of EU projects. So, I will call attention to the IGC Board of Directors to this type of incentives as they might help in achieving our goal.
- 2) I became aware that all host institutions perform intake meetings after a grant is awarded, that I would also like to implement at my institution. These meetings are strategy sessions involving the researcher and the pre- and post-award managers aiming at providing guidelines to prepare the implementation of the project. I believe these meetings may be extremely useful in the successful implementation of the projects as many times the researchers are not totally aware of their obligations in respect to a specific grant or of internal procedures required by the financial and post-award services.
- 3) Support for ERC candidates: our pre-award service at IGC provides all support for the ERC candidates namely, informative sessions, CV revision, completing the administrative data of the proposal, prepare institutional letter, preparation of mock interviews and also provide advice if requested. However, we feel that candidates should also have a stronger scientific support and advice. Therefore, similar to that implemented at KU Leuven and VUB, we would like to organise an ERC committee at the IGC composed by the Deputy Director for Science, a previous grant holder, a senior researcher, an ERC evaluator and the head of the pre-award service. This committee would be responsible to support and assist each ERC candidate throughout the entire application process.
- 4) Our Research Funding Affairs Unit at the IGC organises individual “Welcome Info” sessions with group leaders that are new at the institute in order to inform them about our services and tools to support them in applying for competitive funds. I have also learned during this STSM that the EU team at UGhent invites the newcomers for a meeting every 2 months to show them the strategies implemented. Together with the welcome sessions we already prepare for the new group leaders, I feel that it would be very useful to do a similar meeting for new postdocs and PhD students at a regular basis (e.g. every 3-4 months) to raise awareness on our service inside the IGC.
- 5) Another practice that I believe would be extremely useful to implement is a H2020 strategy to distribute work programmes in due time to all researchers at our institution. To try to maximise its impact, we would also like to provide annotated work programmes and do the matching of topics to specific researchers. This is done both at KU Leuven and VUB. Although this is a highly time consuming task, I believe it would help in motivating the researchers to apply for EU projects (namely to the societal challenges) and in increasing their application rate. Similar to UGhent, we would also like to identify a senior researcher that would be responsible to collect input of several researchers on the draft work programmes when requested by the national contact points. Another tool we would like to implement are informative sessions on the readability of H2020 work programmes. We find researchers have many difficulties in understanding the specific/technical type of language used by the European Commission. If a researcher is able to better understand a call text, he/she will easily be more motivate to apply.
- 6) Lastly, but not least, I would like to improve our newsletter to disseminate funding opportunities among researchers at the IGC. UGhent developed a very dynamic newsletter with the support of the IT team, that is regularly updated and to which researchers can subscribe and receive daily/weekly/etc. news feeds. KU Leuven and VUB also have a similar type of newsletter. I will check with our IT team if this type of tool would be possible to implement at IGC. This kind of newsletter would make our job easier and it is a more attracting system for the researchers.

I also took the chance to share my experience at this group STSM with my colleagues:

- 1) I have presented an overview of my BESTPRAC Group STSM visit to the Flanders Universities at the monthly group meeting that my Unit organises together with the Science Communication Office at the IGC.
- 2) I will also share my experience among other colleagues at the “FINCA-PÉ” meetings. These meetings are organised every 2 months by science communication officers and research managers working at various institutes and universities in the Lisbon region. The next meeting will take place on 16<sup>th</sup> of March at the IGC.

#### **FUTURE COLLABORATION WITH HOST INSTITUTION**

The Instituto Gulbenkian de Ciência, and its Research Funding Affairs Unit, are open for further collaboration with all host and participant institutions at this group STSM. We would like to promote exchange of best practices amongst the administrative and management services as well as to foster collaboration between researchers. We would like to seek collaboration through joint consortia projects, mobility programmes, networking events, etc.