



STSM Report
Jennifer Kelleher

BESTPRAC COST Action: TN1302
Group STSM to Flanders held on January 18-21 2016

Table of Contents

Summary3

Purpose of the STSM3

Activities4

Contribution to the COST Targeted Network goals6

Tools/systems/practices that are beneficial7

Potential future collaboration8

Foreseen publications/documents resulting from the STSM9

Annexed documents10

Summary

The BESTPRAC COST Action TN 1302 consisted of a short term scientific mission (STSM) to Flanders, Belgium in January 2016. This was a four day event, comprised of a visit by five participating fellows to three host universities, namely the world-renowned and leading universities: Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (KU), Ghent University (UGent) and the Vrije Universiteit Brussel/Free University Brussels (VUB). The event took place from the 18th to the 21st of January in 2016. The first day was a welcome day with all three hosts and all five STSM fellows held in Brussels at the offices of the UK Research Office (UKRO). Thereafter followed a day at KU Leuven, UGent and VUB respectively. The event took the format of small interactive presentations, with plenty of discussion and comparative observations. The general layout of the visits were an exchange and practice with the EU research support team in the morning, followed by an exchange of practice on specialized topics of interest to us, in the afternoon, which I shall elaborate on below.

Purpose of the STSM

The main objective of BESTPRAC is to promote a better and more consistent administration of transnational research projects, thereby supporting excellence in research. The central aim of the STSM therefore, was for the five fellows, namely our group made up of early stage pre and post award officers to be given the chance to learn and exchange on best practice in the field of EU research support and project management. The onus was certainly on what *we* wanted to learn and gain from our hosts and to stimulate discussion around preconceived agendas created by the hosts. With this in mind, we were invited to submit questions and points for discussion prior to the event, which shaped the format of the agenda. This was a really great aspect and made the event very meaningful and fruitful for each fellow.

For the Grant Service of the Austrian Academy of Sciences, we made the following suggestions as points of departure for further discussion which I emailed to KU host Dr. Stijn Delauré in advance of the mission.

- i. The general structure of Grant Service offices: Ours has a pre/post award structure, but I would be interested to learn if others have a more topical structure, it would be useful to learn if others interact alone or with the support of other departments in their central administration.
- ii. The range of services provided by Grant Service offices: For example, we are a 'one-stop-shop', our Grant office is responsible for pre-award advice and support as well as financial management; it would be useful to learn what services are provided by others and if there are related good practice suggestions and innovative ideas that we could learn from!
- iii. Any relevant project management networks: Could other participants discuss what networks they participate in and if they can recommend same.

- iv. Successful participation in consultation rounds for the drafting of funding work programmes (in H2020): Whether participants have experience with lobbying activities.
- v. H2020 and collaborative institutional activities: For example, if there are activities to better coordinate research groups at the institutional level in order to create awareness for potential H2020 collaborative project participation.
- vi. H2020 project time keeping: Tips for good practice.

Activities

- i. Day One: 18.01.2016

As aforementioned, the first day was a welcome day with all hosts and fellows held in Brussels at the offices of UKRO. The *Tour de Table* allowed for introductions of the hosts, fellows, institutional background and workload of each. Each host gave an overview of their university and then a special focus on their Grant Service office. It is interesting to note that the fellows are from a variety of countries, all institutions of COST participating countries of course. I think this is where the success of the mission lay, in that many colleagues came together. We were: A fellow from the Department for Research and Science - European Centre of Charles University in Prague, Czech Republic; a fellow from the Academic Cooperation and Research Support Office of the private university Central European University in Budapest, Hungary; a fellow from the Research and Development Office of the Poznań University of Technology, Poland; myself, a fellow from the Grant Service office of the ÖAW, the Austrian Academy of Applied Sciences in Vienna, Austria; a fellow from the Research Funding Affairs Unit of the Gulbenkian Institute for Science of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, Oerias, Portugal; and finally a fellow from the EU Support Office of the College of Applied Sciences of Oslo and Akershus University, Norway. This introductory session was very revealing in that, it was notable how each Grant Service office is named differently and are in fact are structured differently. This gave me the idea to perhaps think about conducting a short comparative article on EU Research offices at third level.

In the afternoon of the first day, we had a number of short sessions. Alexandra Berry gave a very informative presentation on the workload of UKRO and the H2020 state of affairs. She concentrated on lobbying by UKRO and ways to better improve the H2020 process for applicants, for example simplification measures, the H2020 Mid-Term Review and the potential impact of the European Innovation Council. Thereafter Nik Claesen of VUB gave an informative presentation on the Participant portal, which was very practical and useful. Next, Nathalie Vandepitte from UGent discussed the topic 'H2020 Grant management: Issues and solutions'. This was insightful as she traced the life cycle of a grant project from application to follow-up. She flagged issues and provided creative and interesting solutions for same, which I have communicated to our team here at the ÖAW in Vienna, especially with regard to the project reporting issues such as timing issues and how to set up internal time sheeting systems. Thereafter Stijn Delauré gave a presentation on the topic 'Ethics in H2020' where he

discussed the ethics life cycle at the project level, how to self-assess, procedures that can be implemented and issues that may arise. He also pointed out practical examples in order to illustrate the theory behind ethics reviews.

ii. Day Two – 19.01.2016

On the 19th of January, we visited the campus of KU Leuven at a meeting room of the Research Coordination Office (DOC). The day consisted of four substantive sessions beginning at 9.30am and finishing at 4pm. The morning session was hosted by Stijn Delauré who is head of the Research Affairs Unit at DOC. We had an introduction to the research policy of KU Leuven, the general structure of the Grant Office and the entire EU support team, the services that they offer, matchmaking on funding opportunities, how they communicate with their clients and networks and the tools that they use, workshops & trainings that they provide, incentives to stimulate research, pre-award support and other topics of interest. He also discussed the peculiarities of the Belgian national funding system, which is largely regionalised and interesting to learn about. As Stijn had received many of our requests by email beforehand, he proceeded to go through them in detail, in order to answer the many questions posed by the fellows. This was a very valuable session with many insights gained.

The second session was presented by Patricia Pardon, head of Project and Budget Administration, where she walked us through their financial procedures and IT tools, in addition to how they carry out their financial reporting and the protocol for assisting in the audits of European projects. After lunch, an advisor from the Tech transfer office introduced us to the Tech transfer office and explained their role and the scope of their activities. Finally, in the afternoon, we had a meeting with Inge Leroueg, who was appointed Ethics & Integrity Coordinator at KU, and she talked us through the varying ethical committees at KU Leuven and the different procedures, trainings and services when dealing with ethical issues.

iii. Day Three – 20.01.2016

On the third day, we travelled to UGent where we were met by Nathalie Vandepitte at the main campus building. From there we were directed to Commissiezaal of the university to a welcome presentation about the EU Research office at Ghent University by three colleagues of the Research Coordination Office. Thereafter followed a discussion by Margo Baele on how to disseminate information about EU policy and opportunities and calls to researchers. This is an area that at ÖAW we have found issue with. The challenge 'reaching the researchers' was something that they have explored with technology developers. UGent showed us, using PowerPoint slides, how their intranet webpage allows researchers, both early and advanced, to gain advice and information tailored to their needs. This is something that we are now aiming to implement at ÖAW. They also gave us the important advice of making the support office visible to the researchers with faculty visits and personal researcher visits. We had another short session on pre-award support delivered by Ilona Stoffels and Véronique Victor about how to get projects started. We then visited LabMET and had a really good overview

of the actual running of an EU project by Sarah Steenbeke. This was a detailed presentation about the project implementation stage and the issues that arise periodically for the PI and administrative staff. The final session was a financial reporting session given by Anne-Lore Verplanken, which as the name suggests, covered the entire financial spectrum of EU project implementation. This session was quite interactive with many fellows given the chance to ask questions of specific interest to them. Ms. Verplanken provided handouts and talked us through their online system with those printouts.

iv. Day Four – 21.02.2016

The final day was a visit to the Brussels VUB campus, where we were welcomed by Nik Claesen and Stien Mommaerts. The research support office at VUB is a smaller office, similar to the Grant Service office at ÖAW, in comparison to the larger offices at KU and UGent. The day started off with a short introduction to VUB and the EU project support office by Nik. Here, many questions of mine were answered with regard to the structure of their support office and the range of services that they provide. Then a session followed entitled 'Legal aspects of EU projects at VUB' delivered by Elger Vercayie. This session was especially interesting as we were able to look at how to draft Consortium Agreements in H2020, the significance of major issues and how to access and understand the various clauses of the standard template DESCA agreement. There was also ample time for discussion so many fellows raised specific issues that Elger answered.

After lunch, there was a short session about how to provide incentives to researchers to apply for EU funding. This was interesting to compare as the ÖAW provides similar incentives. In the afternoon, Jozefien De Marree, an EU project coordinator gave an account of the support received. Finally, Nik discussed the ERC support track at VUB and led a group discussion with any final issues and questions answered. Something interesting from VUB is their Intranet Virtual Platform for researchers and all of the information for researchers on how to apply for funding. This website also provides a useful template for ÖAW to draw from.

Contribution to the COST Targeted Network goals

The COST Targeted Network goals are the goals of the BESTPRAC COST initiative, namely those contained under the theme 'The Voice of Research Administrators – Building a Network of Administrative Excellence'. This theme aims to advance the state of the art in excellent administration of transnational research projects by creating a network of research administrators, thereby supporting excellence in research. I have heard many times 'Excellent science needs excellent administration' (both in English and in German) and therefore, I interpret BESTPRAC as aiming to explicitly achieve that maxim.

More specifically, the network aims to establish connections between research projects administrators (including legal, administrative and financial staff in universities and other research institutions) in order to overcome their isolation, stimulate mobility and encourage

professional development. This is to help strengthen the retention and recruitment of project administrators and emphasize the need and importance of a profession that guarantees high quality support to S&T collaborative projects and networks across Europe. The network also strives to develop knowledge and resources for best practices through for example, a best practice guide, 'knowledge hubs' in certain areas and potential 'twinning services' where research support offices collaborate on targeted challenges.

I feel that the Flanders STSM fulfilled all of the above objectives, both in the appointment of hosts and fellows and the content offered during the STSM. It was a professional, comparative workshop with an informal and relaxed approach. The circulation of all data afterwards has made it easier to consolidate everything that I learned. Further, the STSM illustrated that administrators, rather than simply carrying out purely administrative roles, can rather contribute to the smooth running of interesting and exciting European research projects, and contribute significantly to their success at all stages. BESTPRAC therefore recognizes this central role of administrators as a key component of the process.

Tools/systems/practices that are beneficial

As mentioned above, I came with certain topics that I wished to learn more about, both to improve my general knowledge and to perhaps learn innovative processes from my colleagues. The hosts answered all of my specific questions through the elaboration of our activities. In addition, I will flag some additional topics that arose from discussions that I found very useful to my work, e.g. information management.

- i. First, generally, I learned a great deal about the entire **EU funding and research landscape**. This general overview has given me a fantastic depth of knowledge and has allowed me to approach my job with a new perspective, since I now understand much more about how universities and non-universities operate within this landscape. All of my questions (i) to (iv) above were answered in detail by all participants, both hosts and fellows.
- ii. **The general structure of Grant Service offices** was something I was able to learn about in depth from hosts and fellows, leading me to consider writing an article on this topic. This, of course, relates directly to the **range of services provided by Grant Service offices**. While we are all roughly divided into pre and post award, the broad scope of services are the same.
- iii. **Information management**: The research landscape is a dense information minefield and finding ways to disseminate that information in a meaningful and tailored way to avoid researchers feeling 'spammed' is an issue at ÖAW. We have been using monthly newsletters and post-its to inform researchers. However based on the models of UGent, KU and VUB, we will now develop an internal intranet portal with our IT office whereby information is posted every day regarding funding opportunities, subscribers can choose whether to subscribe daily, weekly or monthly themselves. Each host has

- an extremely useful and user-friendly intranet with step by step instructions on funding opportunities.
- iv. **Good practices in timekeeping for post-award officers:** UGent developed with their internal IT department a centralized system of time-recording. They conduct monthly meetings with PMs in order to accomplish correct and exact time-keeping. It was also beneficial to learn about the **simplification process** from the UKRO colleague about the potential for providing feedback for structural changes on this particular issue and for the H2020 Mid Term review going forward. This is something that the ÖAW would be keen to contribute to and learn from.
 - v. It was very useful to learn about the **simplification process** but also how they work of **UKRO generally**. UKRO, as one of 7 research councils in Brussels, monitor the plans for policies and initiatives, the structures and rationale behind the work programmes, and mainly monitor and are involved in FP7 ex-post evaluation, giving feedback to the simplification survey, suggesting structural changes in various issues: improve timesheets, oversubscription of emails in PP, and potentially changing the annotated Model GA. They will also conduct a **H2020 mid-term review**, look at progress against the objectives of H2020, impacts, efficiency, use of resources etc. This information is very useful in order that the ÖAW can look ahead to contributing to a review of FP7 and H2020 processes.
 - vi. The **Ethics Coordinator (EC)** appointed at KU: She works together with a number of ethics committees to ensure that ethical issues are rigorously examined, e.g. medical ethics, animal experiments, scientific integrity, dual use, social and societal ethics, data protection, high risk destinations procedure. An ethics appraisal scheme is now embedded in their H2020 process from pre-screening up to signature of the GA, called the "Ethics review life cycle". The EC will run courses for researchers, coordinate the platforms, read and advise the proposals and check for ethical issues and refer to the committees when needed. The ÖAW will hold ethics workshops in the coming months and can learn from the useful examples and format that the EC at KU uses.
 - vii. It has been a goal of the ÖAW to consider forming **multidisciplinary research platforms**, as a way to encourage activities that would better coordinate the research groups at the institutional level in order to make them more acquainted for H2020 collaborative project participation. UGent has such a multidisciplinary research platform, where they have appointed 25 professors at a cost of €13m for a period of 5 years.
 - viii. Likewise, it has been a goal of ÖAW to **stimulate research in Social Sciences and Humanities** so the policy by UGent to stimulate research in the Social Sciences and Humanities since 2012 is very interesting for the ÖAW to learn about. They have invested €4,25m to provide extra tenure track positions and provide sabbaticals for up to a third of professors in the coming years.

Potential future collaboration

On a practical level, it is hoped to have an exchange between KU on their experience dealing with audits. Further, considering KU and UGent are so strong in the theme of 'Innovation' and the fields of life sciences and material sciences, it would be fruitful to try to identify potential institutions from those universities that may be interested in a potential future

cooperation with ÖAW. I hope to contact the hosts with this in mind in the coming weeks. We may also be able to create a network under the Helix Health in Vision 2020.

Foreseen publications/documents resulting from the STSM

The STSM Best Prac brought together eight university and non-university research institutes, providing fertile ground for useful comparisons. As aforementioned, the introductory session on day one was very revealing in that, it was notable how each Grant Service office is named differently and are in fact are structured differently. This gave me the idea to perhaps think about conducting a short comparative article on EU Research offices at third level. Perhaps data gathered on Grant Support offices could be looked at in light of how successful the Grant offices are in helping researchers to obtain funding at the EU level. This could potentially contribute to the assessment of Grant Management as an overall theme and may contribute to a wider recognition of the profession as per the article Sheila Vidal, Raul Laureano & Margarida Trindade (2015): Assessing the impact of Grant Managers on the success of grant applications, Perspectives: Policy and Practice in Higher Education, DOI:10.1080/13603108.2015.1019948.

However, it may not make sense to compare a large comprehensive university such as KU Leuven with a small, non-university research institution such as the ÖAW, so I need to look into whether one of the other institutes would be eager to engage in a comparative analysis. This would involve comparing the roles of the staff inside the EU Research Grant offices and the tasks that they perform. Also, the article would compare the offices and how to organize their pre-award officers, and whether being divided thematically has an impact on efficiency.

Finally, it is interesting to note that even comparing the names of the departments illustrates a difference in how the crucial EU funding research support office operates.

Organisation Name & Place	EU Research Support Office Name
Charles University in Prague	Department for Research and Science - European Centre
CEU Budapest	Academic Cooperation and Research Support Office
Poznań University of Tech.	Research and Development Office
ÖAW Vienna	Grant Service
Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, Oerias	Research Funding Affairs Unit
Akershus University, Oslo	EU Support Office
KU Leuven	Research Affairs Unit at the Research Coordination Office (DOC)
UGent	Research Coordination Office
VUB	Dept. of EU funded research

Email: Jennifer.kelleher@oeaw.ac.at

Annexed documents