

Short Term Scientific Mission (STSM) Report

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Home Institution: Institute of Social Sciences – University of Lisbon

Host Institution: University of Iceland & Reykjavík University

Title of the STSM: Bridging Research Management - Meeting the Icelandic Support Team

Summary

The STSM BESTPRAC is aimed at supporting individual mobility and at strengthening the existing networks and fostering collaborations by allowing in particular early stage administrators to visit an institution in another participating COST Country. The hereby proposed STSM at the University of Iceland & Reykjavík University meet that criteria.

The visit took place from 18 to 22 May. During my visit I attended the University of Iceland and the Reykjavík University to be familiarised with the Research and Administrative Offices. I was introduced to the grants office, pre and post-award and to some legal issues, such as contracts and IPR. I also had the possibility of looking closely to the different aspects of project management such as time-recording, filing, and accounting. I was acquainted with the RU Research Service and Quality Assurance, as well as Research statistics and dissemination of research activities. I also had an opportunity to meet administrative support staff across the Universities.

It was very important to me to see how the pre-award offices worked and to witness that the difficulties and challenges they face are partly the same we face here at the Institute of Social Sciences. These best practices exchanges are useful at various levels, but one that stands out is at preventing duplication of work, meaning we can establish more efficient lines of response and reaction, when facing problems that have already happened, and learn from different experience.

Purpose of the STSM

The aim of this STSM was to share best practices of research administration of the institutions involved and to receive an insight in the internal procedures and services offered by the University of Iceland/Reykjavík University for their researchers. During various meetings with the different units involved in research administration I had the opportunity to understand to at which extent services are offered for the researchers and how they are used and valued by them. Moreover I could compare my home institution with the different communication channels used within the host institutions.

Detailed description of the work carried out during the STSM

Participants at the various meetings:

Baldvin ZARIOH | Project Manager | University of Iceland

Eiríkur Smári SIGURDARSON | Director of Research | University of Iceland

Ólöf Vigdis RAGNARSDÓTTIR | Secretary of the Intellectual Property Committee | University of Iceland

Sigurður GUDMUNDSSON | Project Manager | University of Iceland

Björgvin RICHARDSSON | Program administrator | Reykjavík University

Jóhann HJARTARSON | Director of Finance | Reykjavík University
Kristján KRISTJÁNSSON | Director of Research Services | Reykjavík University
Nomedas GUDELIENÉ, Senior Manager | Mykolas Romeris University | Vilnius Lithuania
Thomas BRANDL | Project Manager | Institute of Science and Technology | Austria

Monday, 18 May 2015

The morning meeting took place at the University of Iceland. All participants introduced themselves and the programme for the week was also presented. The presentation concerning the University of Iceland was delivered by Baldvin Zarióh, Project Manager, Division of Research Affairs. The other STSM participants also briefly introduced their organisations. Then the Icelandic team showed us around, they discussed the division between centered and distributed system of research project management, as well as the relations with business and media.

The afternoon meeting took place at Reykjavík University (RU) where we were able to get acquainted with the campus and the structure of the University. RU is a private university divided into 4 schools: School of Law, School of Computer Science, School of Science and Engineering and the School of Business. Kristján Kristjánsson, Director of Research Services at RU, informed us about the organisational structure of Reykjavík University as well as their strategic direction. It was very interesting to learn that the quality of research and the number of publications has increased during the last 5 years due to business strategy & assessment system. R&D collaborations are mostly done with the USA and the Nordic countries.

Tuesday, 19 May 2015

The morning meeting took place at the University of Iceland. Baldvin Zarióh gave a presentation about the bonus system at the University of Iceland for scientific efforts of their researchers. It is an accumulative system, in which points are given to researchers for different activities such as publishing scientific results, teaching, doing administration within the University, and service to society. Based on the assessment in these fields a yearly report is written for every researcher. Researchers have to submit annual reports by the 1 February, the final results are delivered in July and the bonus is usually paid in September.

Ólöf Vigdís Ragnarsdóttir, Secretary of the Intellectual Property Committee, University of Iceland, informed us about the duties of the Intellectual Property Committee at the University of Iceland which was established to encourage staff and PhD students to transfer technology. Ólöf also presented us some successful patents held by University of Iceland as well as the challenges they are facing in the future. Quite often they are facing the problem that researchers do not value the importance of an IP office at an Institute, so the researchers have to be convinced to get in contact with the IP committee. There is a clear connection with the Tech Transfer Unit of the University of Lisbon, especially concerning the 'Non-disclosure agreements').

Afterwards Eiríkur Smári Sigurdarson, Director of Research at the School of Humanities, University of Iceland, commented on the importance of research funding for the University of Iceland and the consistent process of finding grant opportunities. At the University of Iceland there is no central grant office/research service department, the departments dealing with grant related issues are rather located directly in the different schools of the University, though the school of engineering and natural sciences plan to launch a joint post-award office in the future. Since each EU project contemplates budget for administration, they contract a person to manage the project. Regarding pre-award, they

think they should focus on ERC and MSCA, because it has a broad perspective and Social Sciences stand a chance.

The afternoon meeting took place at the Reykjavík University. Kristján Kristjánsson gave us an insight on the research service at RU. The main tasks of the research service at RU are monitoring funding opportunities nationally and abroad, assisting academic employees in writing grant applications and offer them support in writing reports and manage their research projects. Due to its geographic position RU is not only interested in national and European grant opportunities but also in Nordic and American grants. They have pre-idea check. A group of experts has to approve the idea (not even the proposal, but the idea). Thanks to this high level service Reykjavík University was recently awarded an ERC grant (CoG)¹. This case study was actually truthfully worthy of admiration, since the researcher, Inga Dora, has been three times let down, until she finally got a positive review. For this fourth successful time, a communication expert was hired, Mr. Sean McCarthy (EARMA), whose contribution the researcher has found useful.

Moreover, the annual evaluation is carried out by 4 distinguished external researchers. This panel is selected by the Research Council. The costs are not huge, since there are no travel arrangements, only Skype conferences (2000 € per person + 300 € for the chair).

Wednesday, 20 May 2015

The meeting took place at Reykjavík University. Kristján Kristjánsson delivered a presentation on dissemination activities used by the University. He presented the PURE system that is owned by Elsevier, and widely used by Nordic universities, and that Reykjavík University plans to acquire. In addition, Jóhann Hjartarson, Director of Finance at Reykjavík University, explained us the split of tasks and responsibilities between the different units and between the researcher and administration when it comes to set up a grant within the administrative departments at Reykjavík University. It has been a surprise that only 1 person is in charge of 150-200 projects due the accounting system that is used by Reykjavík University.

Contribution to the goals of the COST Targeted Network

It is my strong belief that this STSM completely fulfilled the goals of the BESTPRAC project. We all shared best practices and this is extremely important when being a research administrator. I find, therefore, crucial to build such networks as BESTPRAC to exchange on financial, legal and administrative issues with other institutes/universities, in order to promote efficiency and better frameworks, since encountering the same problems but approaching them differently can be of very important use (to avoid duplication of tasks). Within the scientific community there are a lot of networks and collaboration. For the area of research administration these kind of networks are rarely put through, but they should be fostered and are fostered with networks such as BESTPRAC.

¹ Inga Dora, 'A multilevel analysis on the effects of stress on biology, emotions and behavior in children'.

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

The most interesting thing for me was to learn how other institutes deal with the different topics in research administration. This STSM gave us the opportunity to learn from Icelandic partners and how they foster collaboration and enhancing participation of researchers in H2020 projects, how they foster researchers publishing in top-ranking journals, cooperating with external partners, etc. I was able to learn from their experience and know-how on how to form strategic goals and measures to achieve them, find research partners and empower researchers to take an active part in international projects.

In particular, I would like to point out 2 topics that impressed me the most:

1) The internal evaluation/incentive system used by the University of Iceland. This system prompted the increase in the number of publications, projects, PhD students. Though the system also shows weaknesses, since the bonus system is based rather on quantity than on quality, the basic principle of the system is clear and shall encourage the researchers to do excellent research.

2) The research support system used by Reykjavík University especially when applying to H2020, ERC grants. Their experience show that the Research Service unit is crucial and very important for researchers in obtaining grants. It was also very impressive that only 2 persons work full time in the Research Service unit. This example shows that a well-established Research Service department/Grant Office is very important for a researcher and can have a major impact on obtaining grants.

Describe which of the best practices / tools / system from the host institution will be (tried to be) implemented by you within your institute. Please also describe the reason / benefit of its implementation.

Reykjavík University presented us their newly implemented PURE system owned by Elsevier and widely used in Nordic universities. This system automatically collects and updates data electronically. This area is not directly related to my job as being a research administrator in pre award, but it was truly impressive to see its results. I would like to take the opportunity to speak with my colleagues from the academic affairs, as well as the IT department about this.

I would also like to take this opportunity to share among the researchers of my Institute the success story of Inga Dora in order to inspire them and enhance them to submit more proposals.

Future collaboration with host institution (if applicable)

The Institute of Social Sciences is open for further collaboration with the Mykolas Romeris Vilnius, the Institute of Science and Technology Austria, and of course with both the University of Iceland and the Reykjavík University. We seek to foster collaboration, namely through joint consortia, projects, joint

events for networking, joint publications, joint study programmes, etc. We will be open and seek proactively further cooperation through MSCA and mobility programmes (ERA-Chairs).

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

See attached.