

SHORT TERM SCIENTIFIC MISSION (STSM) SCIENTIFIC REPORT

This report is submitted for approval by the STSM applicant to the STSM coordinator

Action number: TN1302

STSM title: “Exchange of practice: EU research support and project management”

STSM start and end date: 12/06/2017 to 16/06/2017

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PURPOSE OF THE STSM:

The STSM Flanders provided excellent opportunity to learn about the research landscape and the research management at the universities in Belgium. In order to get an insight, the main objectives of the Group STSM Flanders were the followings:

- presenting the general operation of three Flemish universities (KU Leuven, Vrije Universiteit and UGent) and their EU & international offices
- sharing best practices in the field of European research management, with a special focus on Horizon2020
- discussing the frequent challenges of the pre-award and post-award phase and potential solutions
- meeting legal, financial and further administrative experts engaged in research management
- getting know EU & international project managers

DESCRIPTION OF WORK CARRIED OUT DURING THE STSMS

Day 1

On the first day, representatives of the host institutes and participants presented their institutions with a special focus on research management. Experts touched upon the research landscape of Belgium, and two organizations were presented in details. The UK Research Office (UKRO) aims to support the UK’s engagement in EU-funded research project and strengthen the research network of UK based universities and research organizations with European partners. The EARMA (European Association of Research Managers and Administrators) join experts engaged in research management from different fields, offering a platform to exchange knowledge, ideas and best practices. I have learned a lot about how extent these networks are and how they can support managers in different EU programmes by disseminating the necessary information and practical hints.

Day 2

On the second day KU Leuven was the host. Experts presented the general structure of the Grant Office and the EU support team, then specialized staff discussed further topics, such as financial procedures, legal issues, data management. KU Leuven is a very good example of how a huge university can organize its research management and how they can give incentives to researchers.

Since KU Leuven is one of the leading universities in research and innovation, its organizational structure and working procedures set a good model.

Day 3

On the third day, presentations were held by colleagues of Vrije University, focusing on research support services, process flow, Erasmus + project management. Organizers payed special attention on financial management, topics on legal issues (consortium agreement, intellectual property rights) and incentives. It was particularly interesting to see that the European Liaison Office currently performs changes in some procedures, so they could give useful advices on how they tackle with different problems.

Day 4

On the last day of the STSM, participants went to Gent, to visit UGent. Research advisors presented the general operation of the university and the research support services. During the afternoon, the session continued in Technologiemark, where different labs are operating. Here, participants could attend a very interesting presentation about business development centers and the industrial engagement of the university research. At the end of the day there was a meeting in Magneel Laboratory for Concrete Research to discuss the practical experiences of H2020 projects.

DESCRIPTION OF THE MAIN RESULTS OBTAINED

The STSM Flanders' main strength was the possibility to compare three recognized universities' research management offices from the same region. It was indeed useful and interesting to see how these institutions organize their research management and how the different approaches can work.

The main outcomes for me were the followings:

Universities should work as innovation hubs

Universities are often considered as mere educational institutions. However, they could and should operate as incubation for innovative ideas and groundbreaking projects. The host universities have recognized this several years ago and their approach support innovation in many different aspects: investments in research, management and support, incentives for researchers, international cooperation, patents. I think, the innovation-based approach can be a key factor not only in the present and future competitiveness of the universities but for the economic and social development for the broader society.

Relations with the industry and business sector

Similarly to the previous point, Flemish universities recognized that they have to cooperate with the business sector to improve their competitiveness and to meet the actual trends. People working in business have a different mindset which is very useful when research results should be turned into concrete products. The cooperation between the research community and the business sector can strengthen the usefulness of the researches' outcomes and it helps connect science with the everyday end-users.

Communication with the EU institutes

One of the main strengths of the host universities is the continuous communication with relevant EU institutes. This relation helps them understand better how the proposals should be prepared, what are the main policy issues to involve, what are the challenges to tackle.

Best practices in EU project management

As a project manager of a small research institute, it was very instructive to see how bigger institutions organize their working methods and procedures. Once, HÉTFA will have the necessary resource and capacity to improve the project management office, we will definitely pay attention to distinct pre- and post-award phase during the management and to be specialized in legal and financial issues.

Networking and supporting organizations

The STSM provided good opportunity to get know organizations that gather research managers (UKRO and EARMA), supporting them in improving their skills and providing them the necessary information about EU grants. In addition, it was also a great chance to know project managers from other European countries, having similar interest and challenges to face and to discuss their ideas regarding research management.

FUTURE COLLABORATIONS (if applicable)

I found this STSM very useful also regarding the possible cooperations. My home institute, HÉTFA Research Institute is open for future collaborations in different EU programmes (Horizon2020, Interreg, Erasmus+). Not being a university, but an independent think tank, it can provide a different approach in research and analysis, and it also has good relations with different public authorities and SMEs. We have saved hosts and participants' organizations in our contactlist and in case of any relevant project idea we will definitely contact them to develop a joint proposal.