



TN1302: BESTPRAC



BESTPRAC Short Term Scientific Mission (STSM)

Group STSM to Flanders

12-15th June 2017

Dr Orla Power-Grant, Research Funding Officer,

Faculty of Education and Health Sciences, University of Limerick, Ireland

KU LEUVEN



Summary

A group STSM was organised by three host institutions in the Flanders region of Belgium. The four day trip (12-15th June) comprised of a welcome day in Brussels at the UK Research Office (UKRO) followed by a day at each host institution Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (KU Leuven), Ghent University (UGent) and the Free University Brussels (Vrije Universiteit Brussel, VUB). During each visit we meet with professional colleagues from the EU support team/office at each institution. Each visit involved small interactive presentations with plenty of discussion and comparative observations. Topics included organisation of support services, incentives and motivation of researchers, legal and financial management pre and post award and technology transfer. My motivation to participate in this STSM, as an early career research support staff, was twofold; to learn about international best practise in research support whilst building my external network, to gain knowledge and insight from highly successful institutions in how they deliver their research support services.

This trip was hugely beneficial in addressing both aspects and I look forward to developing my role in the future based on the knowledge gained and the collaborations established during these visits.

Purpose of the STSM

COST Action TN1302: BESTPRAC The voice of research administrators – Building a network of administrative excellence is a network which aims to advance the state of the art in research administration. Creation of the BESTPRAC network aims to promote a better and more consistent administration of transnational research projects, thereby supporting excellence in research. STSM's support individual mobility, strengthening the existing networks and fostering collaborations by allowing staff to visit an institution in another participating COST country.

This STSM allowed me, an early career research support officer, to establish a professional relationship with experienced colleagues at the three institutions. I have strong desire to further my knowledge and advance my career in research support. Therefore gaining a detailed insight into the support structures and practises at KU Leuven, UGent and VUB enriched my knowledge and understanding and may allow me to contribute to the development of an efficient research support structure at the University of Limerick.

Detailed description of the work carried out:

Research and Innovation Policy in Belgium

Day one of the STSM was hosted at UKRO Brussels. The day began with an **overview of the research and innovation policy in Belgium**. This policy is managed at a regional level and within the Flanders region funding is distributed to the 5 universities and 6 strategic research centres through 3 main sources. Operational funding which accounts for 47.1% of the total budget and is used to support staffing and operations of each university, special research fund (16.3% of the total budget) supports curiosity driven research and the industrial research fund (28.4% of the total budget) which supports university lead industrial research. Both the special research fund and the industrial research fund are *competitively awarded based key performance outputs*. A key take home message: The Belgian government makes a substantial investment in research and innovation ~2.45% of GDP a much of

the success of Belgian Universities in framework programmes including H2020 is attributed to this investment.

During this session Dr Stijn Delaure from KU Leuven presented a critical analysis of participation in H2020 using data from the Vinnova platform. This analysis showed the total drawdown by academic institutions (€8.2 bn) compared to private sector organisations (€5.82 bn). He then presented an analysis of the difference in relative participation per programme/pillar in FP7 vs. H2020. This revealed a shift in participation with academic institutions favouring participation in the excellence science pillars compared to societal challenges and industrial leadership pillar. This difference was attributed to the bottom up topics in the excellence science pillar (offering more academic freedom) and the low success rates in the societal challenges pillar.

Introduction of each participant's institutions: Each STSM participant provided an overview of their university with a focus on their research support service and their role within this office. It was interesting to note that participants were from a variety of countries across Europe and that research support offices were organised and operated differently at each institution.

Name	Institution	Office
STSM Hosts		
Stijn Delaure	KU Leuven	KU Leuven Research Office
Stien Mommaerts	VUB	European Liaison Office
Margo Baele	UGent	Research Coordination Office
Participants		
Juan Abolafia	Hospital Clinic de Barcelona, Spain	European and International Projects Office
Omar Sharifullah	Central European University, Hungary	Academic Cooperation and Research Support Office
Andri Charalambous	The Cyprus Institute of Neurology & Genetics	Research Programmes Office
Sandrine Schwartz	Centre for Genomic Regulation Barcelona, Spain	Grants Office
Dorottya Orbán	HÉTFA Research Institute, Hungary	International Office
Orla Power-Grant	University of Limerick	Faculty of Education and Health Science

UKRO

Jon Brookes from the **UKRO** presented an introduction to UKRO and some information on H2020 and FP9. UKRO is the office of the 7 UK research councils. The office is located in Brussels and aims to maximise UK engagement in EU-funded research. UKRO delivers a subscription based advisory service which includes the UKRO portal which provides up to date information on EU funding and policy. Work programmes for 2018-2020 are now in draft phase and are due to be finalised by end 2017. Key points to note on the draft programmes:

- More emphasis on achieving impact

- Bigger calls and topics, which are going to be more mission-oriented with better linkages between impact at topic, call and programme level
- Four new focus areas expected (in the areas of sustainable development/climate, digitisation, the circular economy and security). For these calls, topics are coordinated between different societal challenges and we can expect bigger budgets and a mission-oriented approach.
- Joint calls to tackle low international cooperation

Jon outlined the H2020 interim evaluation process. This evaluation has led to publication of the interim evaluation document. This document outlines a number of key challenges:

1. **Horizon 2020 suffers from underfunding**, resulting in large-scale oversubscription,, which constitutes an enormous waste of resources for applicants and of good proposals for Europe.
2. **Market-creating innovation**, such support needs to be strengthened substantially.
3. **There is a need for greater outreach to civil society** to better explain the contribution that research and innovation can make to tackling societal challenges, and to involve citizens better in the programme co-design (agenda-setting) and its implementation (co-creation).
4. While great efforts have already been made to **increase the synergies between Horizon 2020 and other EU programmes** (notably European Structural and Investment Funds), these can be strengthened further
5. While Horizon 2020 has achieved a broad international outreach, **international cooperation needs to be intensified.**
6. **Simplification is a continuing endeavour**, which requires constantly identifying new candidate areas for improvements; at the same time, there is scope for rationalising the Horizon 2020 funding landscape.
7. While Horizon 2020 has made great progress in terms of making **openly accessible to the wider scientific community and public the scientific publications and data it generates**, more can be done in this respect.

Jon concluded by presenting the current status of information on the next framework programme:

- We do not yet know the budget – threats from BREXIT and greater demand. Requests between €100bn – €120bn in some position papers.
- We do not know the timescales – 3,5 or 7 year programme.
- Horizon 2020 interim evaluation (ongoing) will provide input to the development of the next Framework Programme.
- Stakeholder consultation expected to now open in November/December 2017
- EU Budget (MFF) Commission proposal next financing period (2021-?) expected in 2018
- FP9 proposal should follow soon after (Q2 2018)

European Association of Research Managers and Administrators

Nik Claesen Managing Director of the **European Association of Research Managers and Administrators (EARMA)** presented an overview of the organisation. EARMA is a not for profit organisation fully funded by income from events, members and a small number of sponsors. EARMA aims to enhance the recognition of research management and administration as a career path. It aims to achieve this by creating networking opportunities, exchange of best practises, driving development and standard in research support and making policy makers aware of the role and

importance of research managers. EARMA hold an annual conference which in plan to attend in 2018.

Our hosts lead a discussion on some recent developments within H2020 including the pilot development of **lump sum financing** and policy priorities set by Commissioner Moedas (open science, open innovation and open to the world. Day on concluded with a visit to the European Parliament Visitors Center.

Day 2: KU Leuven

Dr Stijn Delaure (Head of European Research affairs) presented an introduction to KU Leuven and their support structures.

In 2015 KU Leuven had 55,464 students, 1946 academic staff, 6138 research staff spread across 15 campuses in 11 cities in Flanders. Leuven has a long track in high quality interdisciplinary research and is ranked 40th in the World and 10th in Europe (Time Higher Education University Rankings) and was recognised as Europe's most innovative University in 2017 (Reuters ranking 2017). In 2016 total operating revenue was €1 B of which €466 M research income (including industrial collaboration and international funds), €264 M FP7, €125M H2020, €118 M licence income. Research income from H2020 places them 5th highest academic institution (Vinnova 2017).

Research support services in Leuven are centralised and overseen by the Vice Rector for Research. Support services, from idea to project completion are delivered by the research office, technology transfer office and finance department. Central support staff is supported by a small number of decentralised project developers who provide specialist subject area expertise (eg social science and humanities) or experience in industry (knowledge brokers, business developers). Leuven research office has a very dynamic approach to research support and has changed the nature of the support service to meet the changing needs of researchers.

Some key features of the KU Leuven research office strategy:

- Use of internal funds as a leverage effect to achieve greater levels of external funding – this is a bottom up, open competition and external peer reviewed using similar criteria to H2020. This preparatory phase researchers must identify external follow on funding calls.
- Strong emphasis on inter-sectoral collaboration and exploitation of research through close involvement of the technology transfer office (TTO).
- Appointment of knowledge brokers who are appointed at the same level as a professor however they don't teach and focus solely on research. Many are research managers with a background in industry. Their performance is evaluated on EU project participation, patents, spin outs.
- Strategic use of research overheads – 25% overheads are split 8% to PI at end of the project, 14% to central university/TTO and 3% directly to the research coordination office. This 3% is invested in coordinator support grants (€10,000), runner up funding for project on reserve list but not funded (coordinators €100-200,000, partners €40,000 to finance the project for 1-2 years and reapply with 3 years).

Patricia Pardon, head project & budget administration provided an overview of KU Leuven financial procedures and IT tools, EU financial reporting, audits.

Leuven provides upfront pre-financing of the KU Leuven budget to the PI at the start of a project. The finance department are responsible for central financial monitoring during the entire lifecycle of the project. This monitoring is enabled internal portal for financial management SAP-KU Loket. KU Loket is the user friendly researcher interface of the IT system.

Myriam Witrouw provided an overview of KU Leuven research and development (LRD). KU Leuven has a reputation as an entrepreneurial university which may in part be attributed to the long established TTO. LRD was established in 1972, making it the first TTO office in Europe. Today the office is self-sustaining from revenue generated through licencing and patents examples include Samsonite cases, Kanzi apples, Uncle Bens rice and the Viread drug. The office oversees research collaborations, protects and exploits IP, coordinates the establishment of spin off companies. In 2016 this activity generated €139 M and 2005 new agreements. To date LRD has 116 spin off companies and 525 active patents in their portfolio. EU team at LRD are involved pre-award during proposal development and post award during project implementation, consortium agreements and advising on legal issues.

Day two conclude with **Hannelore Vanhaverbeke**, Data & Analysis coordinator providing an overview on open access in Horizon 2020, advice on data management plans and service offered to KU Leuven researchers.

Day3: VUB

Wim Schreurs (Coordinator European Liaison Office) provided an introduction to VUB and research support services at VUB.

VUB has 6,800 employees and 15,000 student's 21% of which are international split across two campuses in Etterbeck and Jette. VUB has a research income €103 M of which 45.5% comes from projects funded by the government, 13% from the Flemish government support for fundamental research, 23.5% collaboration with private sector and 18% from own research means. VUB has an IP portfolio of more than 100 patents.

EU support at VUB is delivered by the European liaison office (ELO), tech transfer office, financial management office (FIMO, Kim Coppens EU financial officer) and the international office (IRMO, Marie Arousseau, Erasmus+ Project Manager) who work collectively to support researchers during the pre and post award phases. The ELO has 4 staff including one individual with legal expertise (Elger Vercayie) to provide dedicated advice legal aspects such as consortium agreements and contractual obligations.

Some key features of the VUB research office strategy:

- VUB has a good track record in securing ERC grants. Period 2013-16 they had success rates of 17.4 % in starting, 17.6% in consolidator, 6.6%. The average success rate was 15% which was higher than the average Belgian success rate of ~12%. Some of this success is attributed to the *dedicated ERC support programme* provided by ELO staff. The strategic objective of this support programme is to promote basic researcher and attract the best researchers to VUB. Supports include engagement of an external consultant (Yellow research) to support applicants, hosting an ERC writing workshop and proposal writing guide 6 months prior to the deadline, CV analysis and strategic advice on position their project, proofreading, support with administration and budget, facilitated one on one proposal discussion with the external consultant, interview preparation with evaluating Professors and ERC awardees.
- VUB offer a number of financial incentives for participation in H2020. ERC starter awardees are offered a tenure track position at the University. MSCA individual fellows are offered a two year post-doctoral position at VUB after completion of the fellowship.
- Top up funding for successful EU project grants. This support ranges from €15-120,000 depending on; role as project partner or coordinator, first time coordinator and the amount of the award. This top up grant is currently under re-evaluation.

Day 4: UGent

Margo Baele (European Research Advisor) provided an overview of the organization of the European Research Office and support services, European strategy and incentives, trainings offered to researchers.

UGent has 42,000 student's (11% international), 9000 staff (12% international) split across three main campuses. There is 6551 research staff at UGent consisting of 1489 Professors, 2546 researchers, 1430 assisting academic staff and 1086 with external grants. UGent has a typical research income €265 M (2014). UGent has made strategic investment, €13 M over 5 years, in the creation of 5 multidisciplinary research platforms in the areas of biotechnology, bio-informatics, nano and biophotonics, neurosciences and inflammation and immunology. There are 13 new Professorial appointment linked to these research platforms. UGent has 142 H2020 projects awarded to date including 25 ERC and 45 MSCA.

UGent EU office has 10 staff focused on the following areas policy and strategy, project advisors, legal advisors and financial advisors.

Some key features of the UGent research office strategy:

- Subscription based newsletter is used to disseminate information and enhance visibility of the research support services to research staff. All newly appointed research staff are automatically subscribed.
- Staff training is an important emphasis. Courses are delivered in a variety formats and groups sizes and include introduction to H2020, workshops for coordinators, H2020 proposal writing, ERC workshop focused on templates, successful grantee and evaluator perspectives, MSCA workshops including call details and testimonials.
- Emphasis on creation of strong links with internal colleagues who has expertise relevant to funding application topics including ethics, gender, IP, internalisation, data protection, open access and bibliometric.
- UGent offers a number of incentives to promote participation in the framework programmes. These include seed funding for H2020 proposal coordinators (hire consultant or travel to meet partners). This funding is conditional on the proposal scoring above the threshold, budget approval two weeks prior to the deadline and EU-office notified one month in advance. If the proposal succeeds additional funding is provided to hire a project manager.
- Specific incentives are provided for ERC including consultant support during the proposal phase, ERC awardees will receive a full time professorship for those not yet professors at UGent, teaching buyout for existing professors.
- UGent TTO is very engaged with researchers at early stages of the research. They have created a number of financial and career incentives to encourage valorisation activity. The university *proof of concept fund* provides bridge financing to take concepts/technology closure to the market. This funding have proven a crucial step for projects and has led to 15 spin-outs to date. UGent has also created a number of *business development centres/clusters* focused on areas of strategic research priority. Each centre has a business development manager that acts as the point of contact for setting up industrial partnerships, collaborative research, or IP licencing. Much of this activity is located in the *science park* which is a campus with ~3500 professionals including university department, research institutes, centres and high tech enterprises.

The day at UGent ended with a visit to Magnel Laboratory for Concrete Research. Post-doctoral researcher Dr. Elke Gruyaert provided a short presentation outlining practical experiences with FP7 and H2020 projects and cooperation with the European Research Office.

Contribution to the goals of the COST BESTPRAC

The primary goal of the BESTPRAC network is to share experiences and best practise among research administrators and managers and to support excellent research. The STSM hosts were very open in sharing their institutional practises and willing to engage in discussion on all topics. This STSM has enhanced my knowledge and understanding of some key topics relating to EU funding, created a greater awareness of the importance the institutional strategy in support participation in EU funding and enhanced my external network of research support staff.

Possible Implementation of the STSM tools/systems and best practises

The key features identified at each institution are outlined above. Some of these policies and practises could be considered within my institution including:

- Provision of strategic support for priority external funding programmes (ERC support at VUB)
- Model for internal funding (KU Leuven)
- Model for use of overheads (KU Leuven)
- Incentive offered for participation in framework programmes (VUB and UGent)
- Creation and investment in multi-disciplinary research platforms (UGent)
- Effective communication strategy (UGent)
- Training for early career researcher and post docs (UGent)

Implementation of these practises would require management support at faculty or university level.

Future Collaboration

Our faculty are interested in designing a post-doctoral researcher support programme. During the STSM I discussed our intention with Margo Baele at UGent and expressed an interest in the UGent post-doctoral programme. Following the STSM Margo put me in touch with her colleague Jasmien Van Daele who coordinates the programme at UGent. I have arranged a follow up phone call with Jasmine to gain an insight into their programme and her experiences and advice on establishing such a programme.

Acknowledgement

I want to acknowledge the EU COST network for selecting me to participate in this STSM. I want to express my sincere thanks the three host institutions VUB, Ghent University and KU Leuven for organising informative sessions, offering useful insights and discussions and for being so opening in sharing their experiences and best practises in EU research funding support. I look forward to continued participation in the BESTPRAC network.

Appendix 1: Host letters



RESEARCH & DATA MANAGEMENT
ADMINISTRATION & CONTRACT MANAGEMENT

VUB Reference RE/R&D/2017/0167
Contact Stien Mommaerts
E-mail elo@vub.be
Tel +32-(0)2-629.21.84 (or 22.13)
Attachment -
Date 19 June 2017

**Confirmation of the host institution
on the successful completion of the Short-Term Scientific Mission**

To the Grant Holder of the COST Targeted Network TN1302 – BESTPRAC

Brussels, 19 June 2017

The host institution Vrije Universiteit Brussel hereby confirms the successful completion of the STSM stay of Ms Orla Power from June 12 to June 15 2017.

Yours sincerely,

Prof. Dr. Caroline Pauwels, Rector of VUB

Signature: _____



**Confirmation of the host institution
on the successful completion of the
Short-Term Scientific Mission**

Nathalie Vandepitte
European Research Advisor

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DATE
26 June 2017

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OUR REFERENCE

To the Grant Holder of the COST Targeted Network TN1302 – BESTPRAC

Dear Ms Power,

The host institution Ghent University hereby confirms the successful completion of the STSM stay of
Orla Power from June 12th to June 15th , 2017.

With kind regards,



Nathalie Vandepitte
European Research Advisor
Ghent, 26 June 2017



To the Grant Holder of the COST Targeted Network TN1302 – BESTPRAC

OUR REFERENCE

YOU REFERENCE

LEUVEN July 1st 2017

Confirmation of the host institution on the successful completion of the Short-Term Scientific Mission

The host institution Katholieke Universiteit Leuven

hereby confirms the successful completion of the STSM stay of Orla Power from June 12th to June 15th, 2017.

Yours sincerely

First name and last name: Dr. Stijn Delauré

Signature: