



Group STSM Report

Short term missions to three universities in Flanders

**Host institutions: VUB (Free University Brussels), Ghent University, KU Leuven
18-21 January 2016**

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Aim: Exchange of practice: EU research support and project management



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1. Summary

The Group STSM is aimed at supporting individual mobility, strengthening the existing networks and fostering collaborations by allowing – in particular – early stage administrators to visit more than one institution in another participating COST Country.

My STSM to KU Leuven, Ghent University and VUB (Free University Brussels) met this criteria as I am from an Inclusiveness Target Country, Hungary and I have been working as a Research Project Assistant for almost one and a half year at Central European University. The visit took place between 18 and 21 January, 2016. During the visit my fellow participants and me followed the three universities preplanned programme to meet mostly with their professionals working in their research management and financial offices. We learned about the institutions in general and the operation of their European Project offices.

The universities brought us the valuable opportunity to exchange and see best practices in:

- Research support structure and internal hierarchy and organization,
- Relevance of the role of research administrators,
- Technical support provided towards research and project development, as well as internal rules and procedures,
- Dissemination strategy and knowledge transfer activities,
- International networking and collaboration.

Within this intensive four-day meetings with experts in charge of the research support, technology transfer, and the research groups as well, the general conclusions refer to the following important issues:

- The three universities have managed to develop well-organized organizational structure with clear rules and responsibilities within the different Research support structures (units), and also to multiply researchers' commitment towards scientific excellence and collaborative research into sustainable social value and practical results.
- There is a strong commitment towards a long-term strategy for quality of the research and education, and the social impact and visible effects towards community.

2. Purpose of the STSM

Leuven Katholieke Universiteit (KUL), Ghent University and Vrije Universiteit Brussels (VUB) represent a remarkable and success case of R&D offices, in particular in relation to European projects. The number of funded European projects, ERC grants, etc., show structured units and efficient management procedures that help both researchers and administrators to collaborate on competitive proposals. Successful practices with industry and society, to promote a practical oriented research, create both economic and social value and are organized and implemented as an efficient Business model.

The purpose of the visit were to exchange practices and receive knowledge on EU research support and project management, to learn about the three Belgian universities' general operation in their European Project Offices, and to receive an insight in the internal procedures, tools and services offered for their researchers. So to say widen my competences through exposure to different university environments and working practices. In addition, to find new professional contacts with the other participants and to strengthen the already existing relationships with our Belgian colleagues.

3. Description of the work carried out during the STSM

Monday, 18 January 2016 - Welcome Day in Brussels –Agenda

10:00-10:30 - Tour de table+ short intro to Belgium/Flanders

10:30-12:30 - Getting to know each other–short presentations by all participants

12:30-13.30 - Sandwich lunch

13:30-14.30 - H2020 state of affairs – by **Alexandra Berry, UKRO**

14:30-15:15 - Participant portal – by **Nik Claesen, VUB**

15:15-15.30 - Coffee break

15:30-16.15 - H2020 grant management – by **Nathalie Vandepitte, UGent**

16:15-17.00 - Ethical issues – by **Stijn Delauré, KU Leuven**

17:00-17.30 - Discussion, outlook to next days

17:30 - End of meeting

Tuesday, 19 January 2016 - visit of KU Leuven

09:30-11:30 – discussion with **Stijn Delauré**, head European Research Affairs unit @DOC
Intro to KU Leuven and its research policy, general structure of Grant Office and EU support team, services offered, matchmaking on funding opportunities, communication and tools, workshops & trainings, stimulation policy & incentives, pre-award support, advocacy generally & WP level, networks

11:30-12:00 – presentation by **Patricia Pardon**, head Project & Budget Administration @DOC
KU Leuven financial procedures and IT tools, EU financial reporting, audits

12:15-13:30 – lunch at Leuven Grand Place, with Stijn

13:30-15:00 – discussion with **Sarah Malevé**, European Research Advisor @LRD
Intro to the TTO, the EU support unit and its services, pre- and post-award European project support to researchers, grant preparation, project management, consortium agreement and legal issues

15:15-15:45 – discussion with **Inge Lerouge**, Ethics & Integrity Coordinator @DOC
Ethical committees at KU Leuven, procedures, trainings and services

15:45-16:00 – closure of the meeting, by Stijn Delauré @DOC

Wednesday, 20 January 2016 - visit of Ghent University

10:00 - 10:15: Welcoming participants and presenting the EU-office of Ghent University (UFo, Commissiezaal) - **Ilona Stoffels**

10:15 - 11:00: Dissemination of EU policy and call information to researchers (UFo, Commissiezaal) - **Margo Baele**

11:00 - 12:00: Pre-award support and starting up projects - **Ilona Stoffels, Véronique Victor**

12:00 - 13:00: Lunch + How to give input to Work Programmes - **Wendy Sonneveld**

13:30 - 15:00: Visit to LabMET, a lab with extensive experience in EU-projects - **Sarah Steenbeke, Véronique Victor**

15:30 - 16:30: Financial reporting (Meeting room Projectbureau) - **Anne-Lore Verplanken**

16:30 - 17:00: Wrap up session

Thursday, 21 January 2016 - visit of VUB

9:45-10:15 – Welcome and Coffee

10:15-11:15 – Short introduction to VUB, EU project support at VUB by **Nik Claesen**

11:15-11.30 - Short Break

11.30-12.30 – Legal aspects of EU projects at VUB by **Elger Vercayie**
12:30-13.30 – Informal Lunch
13:30-14.00 – Providing incentives to researchers by **Nik Claesen**
14:00-14:45 – Testimony on an EU coordinator project at VUB and the support received by **Jozefien De Marrée**
14:45-15.00 – Short Break
15:00-16:00 – The ERC Support Track: VUB support and group discussions by **Nik Claesen**
16:00-17.00 – Conclusions of STSM in Flanders

The STSM was very fruitful experience for me, since I managed to receive important practical solutions and successful approaches towards project management and research support, to create new contacts and to share the experience of my work in my home organization so that to receive professional feedback and advices.

4. Contribution to the goals of the COST Targeted Network

My training at the three universities of Flanders was very useful and it perfectly matched the BESTPRAC goals. When doing research administration you often have the feeling of being isolated and nobody around you to share best practices in this very special field of work. But sharing best practices is extremely important when being a research administrator and therefore it is crucial to have such networks like BESTPRAC to exchange on financial and administrative issues with other institutions and universities encountering the same problems and how different the solution approach of the various institutes can be. Throughout the presentations and discussions I gained valuable insight into how proposal development and grant management are handled at three different institutions which have a vast amount of experience with research projects.

5. Description of the main results obtained

During our meetings I had the opportunity to share some of our practices in the discussed fields and compare different management processes of our institutions. There were a lot of similarities but the differences were still considerable. We are a small university where all the

proposals and all project-related tasks are taken care of within one office while the visited and my fellows' institutions have different units and offices to handle the same tasks and the procedures are often split into different phases. This STSM gave us the opportunity to learn from each other and how the universities foster collaboration and enhancing participation of researchers in H2020 projects, how they foster researchers publishing in top-ranking journals, cooperating with external partners, etc. For me it was very interesting to see how other universities deal with the different topics and similar problems or issues in research administration. I would like to highlight 2 topics, which impressed me the most:

1. It was very interesting to hear Elger Vercayie's presentation about the Legal aspects of EU projects at VUB. He used a current draft of a Consortium Agreement as an example to introduce the structure, the importance of the content and the potential problems with this type of documents. Although I am not an expert in law, it was really useful to see and understand how these documents evolve.

2. We heard a great overview on financial reporting related to EU Research Project from Anne-Lore Verplanken at Ghent University. As a Research Project Assistant, I often face tasks and solvable problems related to financial matters of projects, so it was really useful to have a whole picture of the practices from a financial point of view.

BEST PRACTICES

- Ghent University has a great tool (CATS) developed by their IT office to precisely monitor time records of researchers on a monthly bases on H2020 projects. Financial office can count personnel costs according to time sheets generated by the system which is based on the data given by the researchers.

- Ethics is becoming a more and more important aspect of Research Projects. In KU Leuven they are coping with ethical aspects in H2020 on a high level. They provided us great overview as well as examples about ethical issues in research projects and the procedures that researchers have to go through before they submit their research proposals.

- VUB has a newly expanded Project Funding tool with a very good structure. It guides the researchers through four levels to find the best and relevant opportunities for them and lead them to the right contact person in the office, so this is a great solution to provide support in searching and disseminating funding opportunities. It would be highly useful to develop something similar for our office too. <https://intranet.vub.ac.be/research/guide/>

I would like to say thank you to all three universities for looking after us and for introducing us to so much useful and interesting knowledge and experience.

Dorottya Urai