

## **Professionalising Research Management: Opportunities for development and career progression**

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**Scott Rutherford:** Higher Education Funding Council (HEFCE)/ Imperial College

**John Green:** Imperial College

**David Langley:** Bristol University



University of  
**BRISTOL**

**Imperial College  
London**

## **Project to....**

- Identify demand in 20 English universities for the development of a professional framework of training for Research Management
- Explore approaches to addressing any identified demand

## Why did we decide to do this?

- Research, part of a university's core business, is increasingly complex in nature
- Greater competition, scope and complexity of research awards, regulation, audit, governance
- Complexity of research management has increased along with the complexity of research programmes
- This has resulted in a huge range of functions within research management

## Functions of Research Management

- Research strategy, planning and policy development
- Horizon scanning for opportunities
- External environment and drivers, e.g. impact
- Metrics of activity and statutory reporting requirements
- Research development and facilitation
- Pre-award activities and costing methodologies
- Bid preparation and applications
- Specialist knowledge about academic disciplines
- Interdisciplinary research themes
- Networking with funders, Government, industry, EU
- Relationship management

## More functions of Research management

- Internal peer review
- Contract negotiation
- Project management of large contracts, bids and awards
- Post-award management
- Research budgets and claims
- Adherence to funder/sponsor terms and conditions
- Audit and compliance (HEFCE, EU, RCUK, MHRA, HTA)
- Portfolio management and reporting
- Trend analysis
- Customer Care
- Research governance, misconduct, and ethics
- Knowledge Transfer, IP, and commercialisation

## Even more functions of Research Management

- Spin outs/spin in, business support, social enterprise
- Student enterprise activities
- Regional agenda
- Business development and corporate alliances
- Event management
- Consultancy
- Research business systems development
- Management information and reporting
- Postgraduate students, fellowships, research staff
- Training (academics, research staff, departmental administrators, research office staff)
- European funded research

## Why is this important?

Critical for funders and universities that

- Resources properly costed, priced, negotiated and managed
- Researchers supported by skilled, high-quality professional colleagues throughout
- Risks well managed
- Research has the greatest potential to deliver key milestones, achievements and impact

To achieve this, should the emphasis be on staff development as opposed to the increasing emphasis on audit with post-hoc penalisation?

## Why is this important?

- Efficient delivery of quality research is critical
  - for universities and their funders
  - for UK plc (Government, economy)
  - for industry
  - for society
  - For future RTD
- Important for funders that their investment (financial, intellectual, people etc) is well administered
- Perception that UK behind other countries in recognizing research management as a profession

## Research Management in the European Research Area

*"The Commission has a unique opportunity to champion a major advance in research management throughout Europe. This is an opportunity not to be missed, for research management is vital for Europe's economic and social prosperity."*

*"Europe's provision for educating research managers is poor"*

EURAB report, May 2007.

## Research Management in the European Research Area

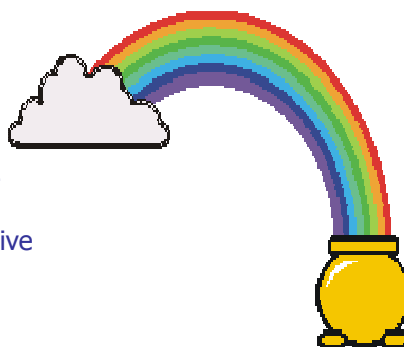
*"Without excellent research management, Europe's research and technological development (RTD) will simply not deliver the benefits expected and needed. Excellence in research management is an essential enabler of the ambitions of the European Commission..."*

Expert Group Report: Diversified Funding streams for University-based research.

European Commission DG RTD, 2008

## Research Management Utopia

- Treated and respected as trusted fellow professionals, with well understood, stable structures and roles
- Truly add value to the academic mission and alleviate workload for researchers; seen as efficient, competent, responsive and proactive
- Viewed as a key part of an organisation and resourced accordingly



## Our perception was that ...

... the UK sector is typified by

- Lack of consistency, sharing of good practice and stability in university research office structures
- Many Universities restructuring research support (and perhaps reinventing the wheel)
- Component parts differ across sector and are almost always fragmented
- An unrecognised or misunderstood profession
- Lack of holistic training and appropriate qualifications
- Poor or ill-defined opportunities for career progression
- Recruitment and retention problems

We decided to take a closer look....

## Project methodology

- Representative sample of 20 universities selected on:
  - Total financial turnover
  - Amount of externally sponsored research income
  - Age of institution
  - Geographic location
- Data collection
  - Broad ranging, semi-structured interviews
  - Two interviewers plus Research Office staff and PVC for Research
  - Background data collection from websites

*"this has been something akin to organisational therapy"*

## Research findings: strategy

- Research strategy deemed important but virtually all universities visited were "refreshing" it
- Many research strategies do not translate into tangible actions or plans; not all are backed with resources or "joined up" with other institutional strategies
- Strategic research development budgets vary in existence, size and gift
- Involvement of university research committees in setting strategy varies hugely

## Research findings: leadership

- Academic and administrative leadership of research management always in place but variation in leadership responsibilities
- Research Offices led by Registrars, PVC Research, PVC Enterprise, PVC External Relations, Directors of Finance, but commonly multiple reporting lines
- Diverse structures in place – some common components but fragmentation prevails
- Research Office not always regarded as a standard support unit, so has fuzziier reporting lines that mix academic with administrative

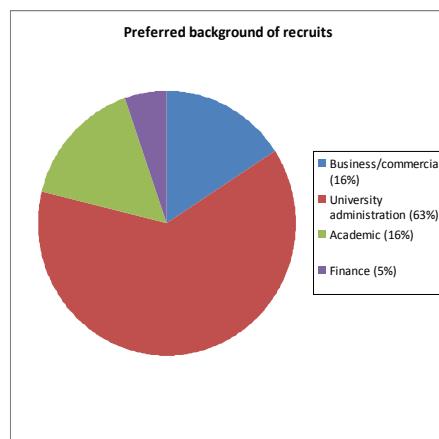
## Research findings: perceptions

- Research Management not always understood by other parts of university administration
- Directors of Research Services rarely included at 'top table' or high level strategic committees (unlike Finance or HR)
- Few universities realise that Research Office has a key role to play in increasing research income or actively monitoring and managing the portfolio
- Staff within Research Management do not always find it easy to identify themselves with a professional grouping or activity (unlike Finance or HR)
- Disparate community of specialists, often lacking a common identity

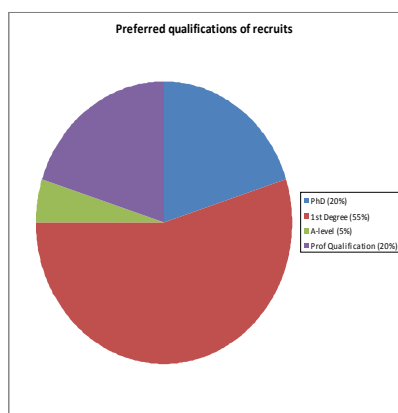
## Research findings: recruitment

- Recruitment often difficult, particularly at senior level
- Varied backgrounds

*"Most people fall into the career"*



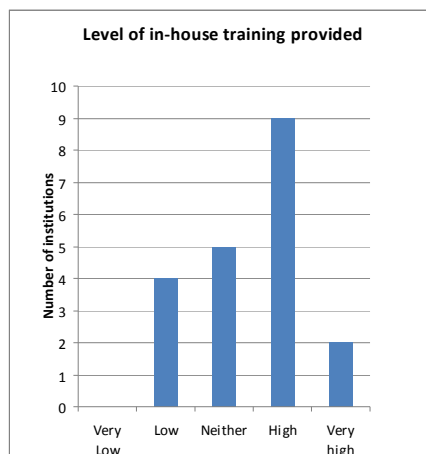
## Research findings: recruitment



- Preferred qualifications of recruits varies
- Most appointments external...  
... but given that the role of a research manager is so complex and varied, is it any wonder that people outside the sector do not understand it, and that therefore we might not attract best talent?
- Lack of identity to the activity of Research Management

## Research findings: training

- A number of providers, most of whom highly regarded but little co-ordination between them
- No professional framework, common curriculum and few modular components
- Universities have budget for training
- ... but most rely on internal training



## Current training issues

- Gaps in provision across the spectrum of research management
- *Ad hoc* delivery – little coordination or cooperation by various players, competition
- Lack of coherence, consistency and common purpose in provision
- Lack of transparency in quality control of content, delivery and usefulness
- Suitable time, suitable price, suitable level and quality

## Research findings: training

- Lack of training in core skills of Research Management – most current training provision aimed at Knowledge Transfer
- Lack of opportunities for recognised specialist training, e.g. research misconduct, governance, contracting
- But, lack of agreement on what core skills constitute

## Accreditation

Mixed views:

- Any accreditation must be high quality and clearly recognised as such by employers
- Postgraduate qualification – modular approach
- But would accreditation be a barrier to encouraging people into Research Management?

Would it be better first to ensure that Research Management was an identifiable career?

... Or do the two go hand in hand?

## Demand for a professional framework

- Strong sense that there is a need for some kind of professional framework for training and development
- Budget holders prepared to pay for training that is:
  - High quality
  - Modular, flexible
  - Caters for local needs
  - Broad in content but with opportunities to specialise
  - Builds to “something tangible” for staff
  - Becomes recognised and thereby valued

## Demand for a professional framework

- But concerns about professionalising Research Management:

*"If you call Research Management a profession then you create barriers for potential recruits – it has grown out of university administration"*

*"The trouble with making it a professional qualification is that research administrators have to wear so many hats"*

## Implications of the context within which research is currently managed

Not surprising that:

- Little sharing of practice across sector
- In-house training dominates and embeds differences in approach

With inconsistency in structures and behaviours it is no wonder that current training provision is patchy

Is it possible to address training issues before identifying and spreading good practice across the sector and thereby creating more uniformity in the way research is managed?

## Solutions and next steps

- Need an 'enabling skeleton' rather than a 'constricting shell'; define the skills gap, more benchmarking ?
- Improve training opportunities, perhaps through a national/European framework (common curriculum, modular, project based, qualification)
- Work with existing training providers or universities for delivery
- More opportunities for networking and work exchanges
- Explore and address leadership needs
- More awareness raising of what we do
- Ensure funders and Govt recognise they have a stake

## Conclusions

*"There is huge frustration that we work in an educational sector, and we are professional people, but we have been left to just muddle through. The waste in the sector must be huge."*

Research Support Manager

Life as a research administrator is rarely easy...



**Thank you**

[www.professionalisingresearchmanagement.com](http://www.professionalisingresearchmanagement.com)