

Report

Group STSM to Flanders

12-15 June 2017



Vrije
Universiteit
Brussel



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Firstly, I would like to express my sincere thanks to TN1302 BESTPRAC Network for giving me the opportunity to be part of this group STSM and providing me with the necessary funding. Big thanks as well to KU Leuven, Vrije, and Ghent universities for organizing such a successful training and been such a great Hosts. It has been a very interesting and fruitful 4 days visit.

Summary

A group STSM was organized to three universities in Flanders, Belgium (KU Leuven, Vrije, Ghent) on 12th to 15th of June 2017. The main aim of the group STSM was to exchange best practices in the field of EU research support and project management. Having a first look at the agenda of the STSM it seemed very beneficial to me as an early-research administrator at The Cyprus Institute of Neurology and Genetics, with limited experience in EU research support and management.

Purpose of the STSM

The main aim of this STSM to the three universities was to exchange best practices in the field of research administration and management, and more specifically:

- To exchange best practices in the field of EU Research support, project administration and management (proposal management, budget preparation and planning, eligibility and calculation of expenses, personnel costs, financial reporting).
- To further develop my skills, among others, in project planning and controlling, financial management, coordination of financial reports, communication with consortium and EU-Commission, financial controlling, contract management and IPR issues.
- To learn from three well established universities, as much as possible for international research and innovation projects, and for their key aims in H2020 and their research strategy.
- To get a thorough knowledge for the way the three universities promote participation in International Research Projects.

Detailed Description of the work carried out during the STSM

Day 1 – Visit at UKRO Offices, Brussels

On our first day we visited UKRO, UK Research Office in Brussels. UKRO is the office of seven UK Research Councils in Brussels and delivers a subscription-based advisory service for ISO Research Organizations in UK and beyond.

Our day started with presentation of the hosts and participants institutions. Firstly, hosts gave us a short presentation about Belgium's research and innovation policy and the region (Flanders) that we were visiting. We learned that Belgium's R&I Policy are largely regionalized and that actual funds are actually Flemish. Flanders is an innovation leader based on investment on innovation, and invests a lot in Nano-electronics and biotechnology. A bottom-up approach is followed in funding, so the five universities compete between each other, in order to get as higher funding as possible.

Afterwards, each participant described briefly their organization and their duties as research administrators. We found out that some of us had similarities, but we found some differences as well. For example Research Office in my Institute deals with all aspects of a project from the pre-award phase till the end of the project. This does not apply for the most universities and research institutions in Europe.

Day 2- Visit to KU Leuven EU Support team

Stijn Delaure, Head of European Research Affairs unit, provided an introduction 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. KU Leuven is one of the most innovative universities with over 225 projects in H2020 and total operating revenue of €466M in 2016. What made a huge impression to me is the clear division of staff in research support that exists in KU Leuven, and the good communication between departments. Their research support consists of the Tech Transfer Office which deals with budget preparation for collaborative research, the Finance Department which deals with budget preparation for ERC Projects and with all financial reporting, and the Research office which has an expertise to compliance, assists in proposal application both for the scientific and administrative section, and organizes trainings for better application. This staff division

does not apply to my Institute as only one office, Research Office, deals with all aspects of the project lifecycle. This is due to the fact that we are a relatively small Institution, and we do not have the necessary resources and funds to extend it.

Another important element is the use of SAP system, an electronic IT system, where everything is recorded (personnel contracts, timesheets, travel leaves, annual leaves). Via this system scientists do not have to fulfill timesheets as these can be directly exported from the system. This is something that we do not have in our Institute, and I will suggest that we adopt such practice.

Another aspect that has stimulated my attention was the use of knowledge brokers hired to bridge research results with end-users, with the main aim to valorize and exploit research results.

The timeline basis that is used for the proposal application is also an aspect of a great importance. Stijn mentioned that they allow nine months before application deadline to firstly explain the strategy. Three months before they talk about the consortium, and two weeks before the application proposal is sent to the research office for review. Otherwise the application is not signed by the authorized representative of the university. Unless they are only partners, they allow four to five days before application deadline.

Of great importance is also the way they allocate overheads from research grants (25% total). 14% of the total overheads is allocated to the central administration, with 7% remaining centrally and the other 7% is being used for the operation of the Technology Transfer Office. Employees of this TTO are paid with this percentage. 8% of the overheads end up to the Principal Investigator only if the project finishes. The remaining 3% of total overheads is divided for preparatory funding, for the support of the research manager and administrator, and for RUN. RUN is a 'project' created to subsidize researchers who gained high ranking in H2020 but were not funded because of limited funds. So the university continues to pay them in order to continue their consortium for two to three years and then reapply. I will suggest a similar way of allocating overheads to my Institute.

In the afternoon we had a presentation by Mrs. Myriam Witvrouw, European Advisor at LRD (Leuven Research & Development Office). LRD's main tasks are divided around 20% in pre-award phase, and 80% in post-award phase (project implementation). Myriam explained that they receive national, international and European funding. In 2016, they had a total of 2005 new agreements. She also noted that for internal invoicing they use unit cost. At the end of the day we had a discussion with Hannelore

Vanhaverbeke, Data & Analysis coordinator, for open access in Horizon 2020 and Data Management Plan.

Lessons Learned.

Firstly, I am impressed with the clear division of staff in research support. Additionally, hiring knowledge brokers to bridge research results with end-users is a very successful strategy used by KU Leuven. The use of financial incentives to researchers is another aspect that leads to success. Finally, the allocation of overheads is another element of successful strategy used by Leuven, and stimulated my attention.

Day 3 – Visit to Vrije University Brussels.

Our visit to VUB started with an introduction to VUB and research support services offered, by Wim Schreurs. There are four departments supporting research:

- Research and Development Office (pre-award phase – info days, workshops, eligibility issues).
- Tech Transfer Office (pre-award phase, helping researchers to set up proposals).
- FIMO (Financial Department, post-award phase).
- IRMO (International Relations Mobility Office, Erasmus+).

A data management system, PURE, is also being used by the university where funded projects are added.

Mrs. Marie Aourousseau, Erasmus+ Project Manager, gave us a presentation about supporting Erasmus+ project proposals. They target in capacity building projects and impact in developing partner countries. Staff mobility is available for job shadowing, training, and meeting.

Kim Coppens, provided us with helpful insights regarding best practices in financial management of EU projects at VUB. They keep up an excel file with blocked cells on weekends and holidays as a timesheet template. We, as an Institute, keep a similar excel template but without blocked cells.

At the start of the project, financial department has an internal kick-off meeting with the PI, the secretary, and someone from the HR department. At that meeting finance department always gives the PI and secretary a one page advice. This page gives some hints and tips to the PI. For example, they

advise that equipment is bought at the start date of the project, and that no equipment is bought in the last six months of the project. A pre-financing of 100% of the overheads to the PI applies.

After lunch, Stien Mommaerts presented how ERC is being supported at VUB. She noted that they cooperate with external consultants, ELO Research, who is specialized in ERC and Marie Curie Actions. A workshop is being organized at VUB on 'How to write an ERC Grant'. R&D office always advises researchers to strengthen their CV with citations. This is a service offered by VUB that we do not have in our Institute.

Afterwards, Elger Vercayie provided us with the basics of a consortium agreement, and specific sections that we must be careful of.

At the end of the day, Stien discussed on incentives related to EU projects. A bonus incentive for EU projects applies from €15.000 to €120.000. However, this is subject to change because the original purpose of the bonus incentive was to provide incentives to new promoters.

Lessons learned.

I really liked the way ERC research projects are being supported at VUB. The cooperation with specialized external consultants, ELO Research, is a component that ensures success at VUB. Moreover, I admired the financial incentives given to researcher for proposal writing. Finally, I really much appreciated the guides, hints and tips, and what to beware of at the consortium agreement.

Day 4 – Visit to Ghent University.

Firstly, Margo Baele, welcomed us at Ghent University and talked about the organization of the European Research Office and support services, European strategy and incentives, and trainings offered to researchers. Ghent was founded in 1817 and currently has 70.000 students. Research expenditure in 2014 reached up to €265 million. University has 9.000 staff members out of which 6.551 researchers. According to Shanghai ranking, Ghent University comes to the 62nd place world-wide and 1st nationally. Student mobility reaches up to 1.500 students per year, coming and going. Their main research platforms are Biotechnology, Bio informatics, Neurosciences, Inflammation – Immunology, Nano and Bio Photonics. Currently, over 150 projects are running.

Among others, Margo mentioned that at the University they keep a newsletter, which is a web application designed by their IT, with a daily or bi weekly subscription. This newsletter provides news about research policy (national and EU), funding possibilities for research, financial issues in project management, events on research policy and funding. This is a nice and interesting idea that we could adopt as well as institution. Currently we keep an online newsletter, which is published every two months, but only includes articles for research. Maybe we could make minor changes including other aspects such as research funding opportunities, news about research policy and funding, and ensuring its availability and update daily or even weekly.

Furthermore, Margo mentioned the training sessions offered to researchers. These sessions include:

- Introduction to H2020 newcomers
- Workshop for coordinators
- Workshop on H2020 proposal writing
- Workshop on ERC Grants (Q&A session)
- Workshop for MSCA – ITN applications
- Workshop for MSCA Individual Fellowships.

Following, Katrien Windels, financial officer at ERO, explained different issues for H2020 financial administration and reporting. She noted that ERO supports researchers from the pre-project phase with budget preparation till grant award where budget is opened at SAP (accounting system), and financial reporting. All costs for a particular project are extracted from SAP.

Leen Verlinden, talked us about Ghent's Tech Transfer Office which is supported by Flemish Government. Last year, they got funding from the government of €8.5 million for industrial funding. The main aim of Tech Transfer Office is valorization of research results into commercial or industrial use in order to strengthen economic development. Its elements for success are Demand Driven Research, IP Licensing, and creation of spin off companies. One aspect that was quite interesting is the creation of spin off companies with the ultimate goal for regional employment, career perspective for university researchers/graduates, and long-term R&D partnerships. In this way, they prevent youth leaving abroad for work. At the end of the day, we had a meeting with Dr. Elke Gruyaert from Magnet Laboratory for Concrete Research sharing her practices about the FP7 research project HEALCON, 'Self-healing concrete to create durable and sustainable concrete structures'.

Lessons Learned.

Firstly, I admired the training sessions offered to researchers at Ghent University, and especially the 'Introduction to H2020' for new coming staff. Another idea that drew my attention is the online newsletter offered, involving with this way researchers in EU projects through dissemination activities.

Conclusion.

The three universities, KU Leuven, Vrije University Brussels, Ghent University are different in size, structure and research income. However, they have similarities as well. They are all extremely organized, and their Research Support Staff team provides exceptionally dedicated and efficient support to researchers and professors.



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 Andri Charalambous from June 12th to June 15th , 2017.

Yours sincerely

First name and last name: Dr. Stijn Delauré

Signature:

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

Nathalie Vandepitte
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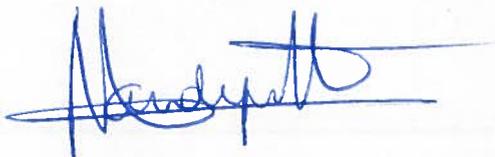
OUR REFERENCE

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

Dear Ms Charalambous,

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

With kind regards,



Nathalie Vandepitte
European Research Advisor
Ghent, 26 June 2017

VUB Reference RE/R&D/2017/0166
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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 Andri Charalambous from June 12 to June 15 2017.

Yours sincerely,

Prof. Dr. Caroline Pauwels, Rector of VUB

Signature: _____

