

COST ACTION NUMBER TN1302  
*THE VOICE OF RESEARCH ADMINISTRATORS*  
*-BUILDING A NETWORK OF ADMINISTRATIVE EXCELLENCE-*

**STSM REPORT**

From Portugal to Barcelona - Learning and sharing best practices within project offices

STSM REQUEST: COST-STSM-TN1302-36724

STSM PARTICIPANT: Elsy Karina Gonçalves

HOME INSTITUTION: Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences of the University of Porto

HOST INSTITUTION: Fundacio Clinic per a la Recerca Biomédica, Juan Abolafia

PERIOD: 27 – 29 March 2017

**SUMMARY**

The Center for Research Support of the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences at the University of Porto – FPCEUP, in which I currently work, provides pre-award and post-award support to teachers, researchers and students that seek to develop a research career in our institution. The Center works under the financial support of various project entities, both national and international, such as H2020, Erasmus+, DG Justice, COST Actions, EEA Grants, amongst many others. The very positive results show that this field is indeed one that I should keep investing in as my professional career. This was the main reason why I applied to this opportunity. It has revealed itself as a great opportunity to learn with other institutions about their internal practices and their own experiences in terms of application of proposals, management, reporting and auditing processes. Throughout these three days, I was able to strengthen my knowledge in both pre-award and post award stage but, most importantly, I was able to share the common practices of my institution with my STSM colleagues (which will also be passed on to my colleagues at the office) and to optimize my institution's procedures with the acquired knowledge in this field.

**LEARNING POINTS**

Presentation by each element (host included) of the internal procedures of each participating institution:

-“Group – Short Term Scientific Mission at FCRB”, by Juan Abolafia (host) – Spain's Bestpracs

-“From Portugal to Barcelona – Learning and Sharing Best Practices within Project Offices”, by Elsy Gonçalves – Portugal's Bestpracs

- “Exchange of Practice of EU and Other International Funders: Research Support, Financial and Project Management”, by Marija Gacic- Serbia’s Bestpracs
- Follow-up of Projects by Research and Graduate Policies Department”, Ozge Sahin-Turkey’s Bestpracs

Discussion on the topics:

- strategies to promote the participation of the research community in European and international projects;
- bestpractices related with: project finances, project management, compliance/legal;
- strategies on how to promote the participation of the industry in collaborative projects;
- strategies to promote the participation of young and senior researchers in ERC calls;
- strategies to gain new partners for collaborative projects

Some of the meetings were held in the meeting room with the host’s institution and with the project managers (topics: dimension on the support provided, existing industry/partner collaborations, project management common practices) but also with the Scientific coordination unit, with the European projects office, with the Follow-Up Projects’ Unit, with the International Action’s Office and with the Knowledge Technology Transfer Unit (topics: discussion of roles, internal processes and exchange of bestpractices, e.g., pre-award, third parties, clinical trials)

## **PURPOSE OF STSM**

The purpose of my STSM was to strengthen the practices on both pre-award and post-awards stage, along with the possible activities that may be used to improve the support that we currently provide to those who are starting their scientific careers as researchers under the supervision of our institution. Providing such support will keep them motivated to improve and to keep applying to funding opportunities.

## **DESCRIPTION OF THE WORK CARRIED OUT DURING STSM**

The work during the STSM BESTPRAC at Fundacio Clinic per a la Recerca Biomédica consisted in presentations, discussions and meetings with staff members of different departments. For me, this was a fantastic approach for the STSM because it allowed us to speak freely amongst each other and share information on the different approaches for the pre and post award stages, as well as on the different existing collaborations within each country.

27<sup>th</sup> March 2017 - 1<sup>st</sup> day

Morning: Getting to know the host institution colleagues, the STSM applicants, managers and research oriented services, as well as their areas of research. After a very warm welcome, we started our presentations and discussions on the presented information. The presentations consisted mostly in the internal practices of each of the candidate's intuitions.

Interest observations on the presentations: in Turkey and in Spain, the IP is eligible to receive additional remuneration for participating in projects; ideally, they must partake in, at least, one project.

Afternoon:

Meeting and discussion of specific aspects of the European/international office:

Distribution of work at the office – the project is pre-award phase oriented and the tasks are divided, more or less, by programs: ICT, ERC (more strengthen support), FET, Marie Curies (fellow ships - more strengthened support), IMI, Health and clinical trials, NIH, reporting, amendment and negotiation of grant agreement. When an amendment is necessary, a draft email is sent out to be approved and then it is sent out to the coordinator. The office is also responsible for explaining the fellows and the PIs about the bureaucracy (signing the agreement, vacancies and other demands).

Meetings with the post award unit are scheduled every two months to follow up. This is very important to accompany the PI in terms of funds in order to avoid major eligible expenses. Having a meeting with the PI before the beginning of the project informing them who the contact person will be for each matter (timesheets, financial issues, human resources, etc). Bestpract to be adopted at our institution.

To what concern to time records, a software for timesheets is being implemented. I shared our internal procedure for timesheets (every 8<sup>th</sup> day of each month the timesheets are requested. An internal template is created and sent out to the elements based on the initial project chronogram. They fill in the timesheets according to that same chronogram. It already mentions how many days that person should justify on that month and it is the "guideline" for each element when filling their timesheets).

The following discussion started from the field of the projects and which are the procedures for the pre-award stage, so:

For health projects, the office follows a check list when elaborating the project.

For the clinical trial, there a is also a check list in order to assure that everything is filled correctly in the portal

Third parties – first they understand which area is the third party related to and then, depending on the area, they add the related article to the agreement (this must be clear in the application stage)

In terms of budget, budget more than 15% than the personal costs – then you have to details the budget for other costs (for collaborative projects). The check list for these projects is followed very closely.

Regarding the dissemination of calls, there is a specific list that is filled for each call and that is published every Monday. This list mentions the deadlines and it is prepared based on thematic, brief aspects, duration, amount of funds; eligibility criteria, the documents to be sent, and the link of the call. The evaluation criteria of the call is an important element that is also provide to the PI.

IPR Helpdesk template (and informative support) is available at <https://www.iprhelpdesk.eu/node/922>

As a note, we were kindly informed about an NIH (National Institutes of Health) free workshop that will be held at Barcelona for three days (6-8 June 2017). It will be all on post award stage.

#### 28th March 2017 - 2nd day

Morning:

Meeting with the post award office:

Discussion about the post award stage of the projects. A clarification about the type of hours was made before starting the discussion: the hours (competitive hours vs non-competitive hours; governmental hours vs non-governmental hours).

Sharing and deepening post-award practices used within the host institution:

Timesheet records – internal procedures about timesheets (discussion about Portuguese, Serbian and Turkish procedures regarding time record). In Turkey, they use one single template for the timesheet for all projects. My Turkish colleague kindly offered me the template for me to implement this procedure internally, instead of sending one single timesheet for each project. We also talked about the future timesheet program the host institution is developing. All the information will be input in the system from the beginning of the project (price of the salary, days per month, person per month, WPs, etc) and then, along the lifetime of the project, the PI has to input about his vacancies, absences, etc. Based on this, the system calculates and issues the timesheets.

Internal invoices – the new model of the GA, it is now possible to declare unit costs but it is still necessary to go through the audit to show the real costs. The problem with internal invoicing is that, sometimes (and as we take the example of the host institution), they have the hospital clinic and the Fundacion. It can happen that hospital clinic issues an invoice for Fundacion. This is seen as being an internal invoice and it is very hard to have the coordinator seeing this as eligible expense.

Suppliers – less than 18000€ no need to ask three offers (in Spain) but for h2020 they have to ask for 3 supplier's offers. In Portugal and in Serbia, regardless of the amount, we have to ask for 3 offers.

Fellowship grants – how to proceed when the amount of the salary of the fellow – declared in terms of time/activities - is less than the total foreseen in the budget? In Portugal, we register more time so that the amount of the budget is reached;

Exchange rate – in H2020 they have a system to calculate the exchange rate (online on the H2020 page). For Erasmus+, there are 2 exchange rates to be used: 1 exchange rate calculated when the 1<sup>st</sup> installment is received. This exchange rate is to be used until the 2<sup>nd</sup> installment is received; when the 2<sup>nd</sup> installment is received, then a new exchange rate is calculated and used until the end of the project.

Auditing – in Serbia and in Turkey, it may happen that auditors do not physically come to the institution for the auditing. They contact the project manager, ask for the documents and then they send the report of the auditing. This is doable for small projects only. In Portugal and Spain, this does not happen at all, regardless of the dimension of the project.

Interest observations: meet with the PI before the auditor arrives. Suggestion: Don't mention anything about the budget and amounts spent.

Meeting with the Camille Evard from the Institutional Action's Office IDIBAPS (depending directly from Direction of Strategy):

Presentation:

- purposes of the office:
  - 1) is to seek and obtain strategic funds from local, national or European calls in order to promote actions at the institute and actions dealing with scientific policy;
  - 2) to ease and promote the smooth development of these actions;
  - 3) to encourage the research community to engage in the definition of European research policies (disseminating calls, for example, for teachers according to their working areas/interest)
- discussion on the current MSCA Action of the host (post-doctoral clinical scientists – specifically recruited to make the bridge between project and clinical results for the two phases: ongoing phase 12-18 months; and return phase 18-24 months)
- discussion on another project funding from Spanish Ministry of Competitiveness and Economy (SIMPACT).
- Objectives of this project:
  - 1) More internacionalization;
  - 2) Reinforce the internal structure (providing good training to the ERC and other learning opportunities that would have to be paid for if the project was not available, for example;
  - 3) Create and reinforce public-private partnerships for more applied research
- Discussion on another project (all research institutions should be aligned to this code. So a strategy was adopted so that the impact in the research area was higher. How? Improving ethical and professional aspects (a welcome pack day for new comers), standardizing the recruitment, providing working conditions and social security, supervising (with a training committee and a training program). This training is not European funded. It is an investment of the institution. Euraxess has a list of all institutions adopting this strategy (I will check if any of Portuguese institutions have adopted this strategy. If yes,

contacting them would be a possibility in order to seek how they proceed to implement the strategy and recommending it to the director of our institution).

Interest Observations: having better prepared researchers with the training program and with this strategy, the institution finds itself in a better position to apply to more projects because the researchers are better prepared. This will also enable the PI to rise his probability of having an application accepted because the researchers have quality training. And not only this, this strategy allows the researcher to come back to the institution and contribute, long term speaking.

#### Meeting with Scientific Coordinator Unit IDIBAPS – Gemma Llaverias

##### Presentation:

- Managing the institutional HR programs (preparation of the call, HR process, follow up of this processes)
- Programs of collaboration with other institutions (visiting patients, doing research)
- Managing the institutional evaluation processes of researchers of projects (How? Putting limits in the number of application that can present an application to a call. This demands a pre-selection process)
- Managing the mentoring committee (scheduling the sessions, contacting candidates, analyzing the cvs, providing an evolution report, taking the evolution reports to the committee for the final decision)
- Analyzing the publications (classifying them, identifying the ones that belong to the institution, analyzing the factors)
- Preparing IDIBAPS Seminar programs (for international presentations on important topics, for in house presentations to disseminate internal results, for neurosciences results, etc.
- Stepping-stone training program (program oriented to all post-docs and students, regardless of their area of interest/study. So this program was designed to share and present different topics/practices that are common to all in house students/post-docs: how to write topic, how to start a career, how to do technology transfer, job seeking and interviews, etc (12 major topics voted via surveys by the research community). These are free sessions for all interested parties);
- Research careers strategy - Initiated 2014. A document was created to provide support in this sense. The document was divided in two parts:
  - part 1 - is about definition, i.e., finding every step of the research career;
  - part 2- is about passing from the first stage to the stage of "launching the career" stage and promoting his/her career. This strategy is organized in 4 stages where each person can find themselves in one of the 4 specific categories: pre-doctoral, post-doctoral, researcher, group leader (following the European recommendations).

Interest observation: making a survey trying to seek what would be the best topics to approach in the sessions.

Afternoon:

Meeting at IDIBAPS (non-profit organization) premises with Elisenda, responsible for the Knowledge Technology Transfer Unit

Presentation: organization is divided in 5 areas of research; goal: define intellectual Property Rights (returning to society with new products and services to improve our health). When a PI has a product/project worth sharing and applying they come to the unit and the project is evaluated by the unit. They decide if it can be patterned (protection of the information). Then we contact a company. There is the BIO meetings (where a meeting can be arranged with partners that may share interest in the product). This is the marketing stage, where the product has to have the FDA or other proper institution's approval. If there is an agreement, it may take up to months until the license agreement is signed and the royalties/pattern cost are negotiated. The pattern costs is what is demanded to be returned to IDIBAPS because the costs are very high. Then it gets to the market and there is the follow up stage (doing some activity during at least one year. If they don't do anything, the amount of the pattern is demanded to be returned.). The final stage is the reporting.

Patent: an exclusive right granted by the government to an inventor to manufacture, use or sell an invention for 20 years. Patents have criteria to be respected (novelty, inventive step, industrial applicability, disclosure has to be sufficient and clear). Patents have their own timeline (priority date, PCT, Publication National Phases (note: finding a partner before national phases (license agreement, option agreement, etc).

Disclosure Form (inventors; type; area: oncology, for example; description; stage of development; timeline; agreements signed; potential market; business development). All this information is requested then the percentage is negotiated. The ownership is to the institution (one thing is the applicant; another thing is the inventor). The profits are shared in thirds (inventor/researchgroup/IDIBAPS).

29<sup>th</sup> March 2017 - 3rd day

We had two intensive days of meetings, presentations and discussion of all the topics that were foreseen to be covered. In this day, and because no further meetings were required, we had the opportunity to do a little bit of sightseeing.

## **DESCRIPTION OF THE MAIN RESULTS OBTAINED**

Main result obtained during STSM:

- Facilitating and promoting project management at our institution from the researcher's end, for example, by trying to implement a similar stepping-stone training program. Project managers tend to complain on the lack of support from the researcher's end but perhaps this could be seen as an opportunity to improve this feeble existing cooperation in our institution. We could do this by investing in the researcher's training, for example.

- Implementing an electronic time-recording tool in order to facilitate our time consuming procedures for time sheets.
- Creating an internal guideline for project management support, for example, templates of documents, internal rules, FAQ, charts with most important rules of participation in different research programmers/different funding schemes but also with information about research funding possibilities, important conferences and workshops and success stories to encourage researchers to apply for external funding.
- Implement the two meeting system, i.e., one meeting with the PI after the grant agreement is signed and one meeting 6 months prior to the end of the project, for financial, administrative and scientific support and clarifications
- Improving ethical and professional aspects following the host institution's practices, a welcome pack day for new comers and a standardizing recruitment with supervised training, duly followed by a training committee. This training is not European funded. It is an investment of the institution. Euraxess has a list of all institutions adopting this strategy (I will check if any of Portuguese institutions have adopted this strategy. If yes, contacting them would be a possibility in order to seek how they proceed to implement the strategy and recommending it to the director of our institution.

## COMMENTS

My Short Term Scientific Mission was a very rewarding opportunity for me, both professionally and personally. It offered me the possibility to, not only strengthen my knowledge in this area, but also to get to know that other European and non-European institutions share the same concerns regarding the same issues in terms of management, especially in terms of personal costs, time sheets, in terms of internal invoicing, amongst other. And, even though, I also learned that the solutions found to overcome some of these obstacles were adopted by all of the participating institutions. This brought me some assurance in terms of procedures. It was really enlightening for me to be able to see how much investment they are putting on the researchers and this made me realize that this is something that really needed to be improved if we expect return from their end (in terms of time, productivity and status).

I would also like to give a very special thank you to Dr. Juan Abolafia, Javi, Maria and all the colleagues. They kindly separated time from their very busy work schedule to prepare and offer us such a complete and rich presentation on how their work runs inside the institution.

Elsy Karina Gonçalves  
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30/3/2017