

HUMANE

Heads of University Management & Administration Network in Europe

SEMINAR

University of Lund

Friday 21 to Saturday 22 September 2001

“Research Management”

Summary

Session 1

The next Framework Programme of the European Community for Research and its major implementation instruments

***Leonidas Karapiperis: Directorate-General
for Research, European Commission***

HUMANE was extremely fortunate to have the company of Mr Karapiperis at this seminar on research management. He opened his remarks by noting that the concept of the European Research Area, introduced by Research Commissioner Philippe Busquin in January 2000 and endorsed at the

highest political level by EU heads of government and state at the Lisbon European Council in March 2000, would have far-reaching implications, if fully implemented.

Already at this stage, it was clear that a new dynamic had been injected into the European research landscape with a double “de-segregation” of research, first at the political level, and secondly in terms of its actual content. Politically, research and development policy had moved to the very top of national and European agendas, having being recognised as a key factor in the realisation of the ambitious objective to make Europe the *most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world*. In terms of research content, the first steps had been taken towards breaking away from the segregation of research within pretty much independent and non-communicating national and/or European programmes.

Mr Karapiperis explained that the new Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development proposed by the European Commission was clearly designed to be at the service of the realisation of the ERA objective. His presentation focused on the new Framework Programme, and, in particular, the new instruments which were proposed for its implementation. This extremely rich and varied topic was illustrated by several dozen slides, which thanks to the presenter are available as a Powerpoint file.

The presentation and the discussion which followed looked at the implications in all this for Universities, which represent a vital but often undervalued research actor in Europe. In particular, it was stressed that they would have to make a sustained effort to improve their R&D and related financial and IPR management capabilities, recognise the need for better communication with both research end-users of research and society at large, and pursue strategic networking with other research players.

Session 2

The Formulation of Institutional Research Strategies – or the difficulties in doing so.

Martin Conway, University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology, UK.

UMIST is a research-led institution specialising in study within and across the disciplines of Science, Engineering, Management and Languages. UMIST receives a quarter of its total revenue from research and collaborates with a wide range of industrial partners. UMIST is also about to embark upon a major expansion of its infrastructure to support research within the Life Sciences.

This presentation considered the culture of Higher Education Institutions, and the difficulties in reconciling the mechanisms of institutional management (for example, the implementation of a research strategy) with the concepts of departmental autonomy and academic freedom. Why would an institution need to produce a research strategy? How might this differ from a mission statement for research? What issues would the strategy address? What factors can derail a strategy? How can the success of a strategy be measured?

Martin Conway noted the traditional culture of academic institutions, in which academics hold autonomy, and the managers have expectations that consensus and collegiate democracy should prevail. However, drives towards transparency in the funding of the sector and greater efficiencies, including moves to more commercial working methods, suggest that the culture of the university is changing. In the past strategic change could be passively resisted; now, however, as HE moves towards a more results-driven future, it could be argued that managers, through the formulaic control of resource allocation and other political factors, have greater control over the activity of researchers.

In this presentation Martin drew upon his own experience at UMIST, using examples from the University's recent implementation of a research strategy within the Life Sciences and the development of a macro research strategy for the University, and considered the institutional support required to deliver such initiatives. The presentation also examined changes from individual to collaborative approaches to research (within and at the boundaries of the traditional academic disciplines), and the consequences this has for top-down or bottom-up planning through an institutional research strategy and for traditional approaches to the management of a university's research activity.

Session 3

Administrative support to research development

Heikki Mäkipää, University of Helsinki (FI)

Heikki's description of developing support for research was set in the context of the University's size and shape. The University of Helsinki is the oldest and largest university in Finland. It was founded in 1640 and until 1919 it was the only university in Finland. It now has over 44,000 members when students, teachers and other staff numbers are combined. About 40 per cent of all doctoral degrees in Finland are completed here. A total of about 37,000 students in the nine faculties make up a quarter of all university students in Finland.

The University is bilingual, the languages of instruction being Finnish and Swedish. Teaching in English has also been increased rapidly and today all the faculties offer courses delivered in English. The University of Helsinki is Finland's most multidisciplinary higher education institution.

The University has seven biological field stations throughout Finland, several seismological stations in different parts of the country, and the University Observatory located near Helsinki. The University's Centre for Continuing Education is the largest organisation providing adult education in Finland, with a network of independently administered specialised institutes across the country.

Heikki also noted the crucial fact that the University is a multi-campus institution, operating at four distinct campus concentrations, including the City Centre Campus (5 faculties), but with three others in different areas. This feature puts the services provided by the central administration in the position where the needs of the scientists should even more carefully be taken into consideration.

Basic funding for research comes from the national budget; however, the volume of outside funding currently accounts for about 50 percent of the total research budget. The University's total expenses amounted to 430 million euros.

Supporting services

Since summer 1994 the Research Services unit of the Department of Strategic Planning and Development of the University Administrative Office has been available to promote supporting activities. Very recently the organisation was changed by combining the former Research Services and International Affairs units. Supporting services offered by the Research and International

Services (RIS) have become an established, permanent part of the researcher community of the university.

The quality and content of the services provided by the RIS are frequently updated by a survey among scientists and other researchers. The RIS assists scientists in the acquisition of financing and in the management of projects. Services provided by the RIS also include information and advising services in implementing EU research and educational programmes, student exchange, researcher and teacher exchange, contract negotiations, accounting and drawing up cost statements.

The costs of the RIS activities (25 persons) are covered partly from the overhead part of the research funding, and partly also from the university's own resources and basic budget or international exchange programmes.

Heikki concluded by pointing out that the supporting services provided are of considerable importance in promoting entrepreneurship and in increasing competitiveness. Taking up a good strategic position in the Helsinki area, in Finland and in the European Union is helpful in finding means of funding and in establishing long-term contact networks.

Session 4

The Benchmarking of Research Management: a case study

Magnus Edblad and Urban Swahn, Lund University (SE)

The University context was that Lund is the largest unit for research and higher education in Sweden, with over 5,000 staff including some 2,000 lecturers and about 1,250 salaried PhD students. The University has seven Faculties of differing size and research interests, and (like other Swedish universities) is highly decentralised.

Most research groups at the University are dependent on external funds, many of them relying on multiple sources of funding. This could be seen sometimes to limit the freedom of choice in new research topics, but generally research planning is based on a "bottom-up" approach. The University is involved in a great number of collaborative projects with other institutions in different countries.

The benchmarking programme described in this presentation was developed by ESMU (European Centre for the Strategic Management of Universities) on the basis of the ACU/CHEMS programme for Commonwealth Universities. Lund had been part of the ESMU scheme from the origin. The programme offers the chance to compare key management processes with other institutions in order to see and develop best practice. Crucially, the programme goes beyond (mere) marks or scores to examine the processes which underlie activity.

The final criterion is the effectiveness of the operation. Each theme or process is marked on a scale from 1 to 5 under three headings:

- Approach (policy or technique adopted)
- Applications (the extent to which the approaches are applied)
- Outcomes (success in achieving and monitoring the fundamental purposes).

It was explained that the assessors were more interested in the clarity and effectiveness of the systems rather than in some uniform checklist of techniques. Questionnaires were also used. On the basis of these analyses the assessors' draft reports were sent to institutions, to check factual accuracy, before a joint seminar between assessors and all participants. A final report highlighting particular areas of good practice is then published. To illustrate this whole process the presenters chose various areas of the programme in which Lund had participated, and were very honest in showing not only the top scores of 5 but also one aspect in which the University had scored 1.

General points which were made by the presenters, and which were developed in discussion, were that the definitions of "best practice" were sometimes not equally relevant to all universities because of local or national conditions (for example, the organisation and power of research councils). This meant that apparent criticisms were more properly directed at the external system rather than the institution. Meanwhile, since the technique was aimed at understanding how the institution worked it was better at describing quality than at establishing quantitative measures of performance. However, the analyses had certainly helped greatly in the latest round of research planning, which had set out a number of priority areas including ten multi-disciplinary projects.

Session 5

Challenges and Strategies for Research Management at the University of Salamanca

Antonio Alonso Sanchez, University of Salamanca (ES)

Over the previous ten years the University had deployed two main strategies with a view to maximising excellence in all fields. Firstly, in academic terms there were permanent committees composed of researchers together with advisors to the senior academic responsible for research affairs. (This initiative had allowed the creation and development of a number of new research themes.) Secondly, and in terms of professional management, there had been two policies: the creation of an office for promoting research projects and commercialisation, and also a deliberate expansion of the number of well-qualified administrative staff who could deal with research applications and thus relieve pressure on academics.

The University had focused attention on the following areas:

1. The creation of a Research Management Agency – an umbrella organisation covering the new offices and allowing greater speed and flexibility in dealing with research projects, as well as innovations such as a credit card for use by research staff and an on-line guide for dealing with queries by researchers and potential customers.
2. The creation of a position of Administrator to help with research bureaucracy and paperwork.
3. The establishment of links between Research Management and the overall management of the University – for example, improving relations between the Agricultural Research Institute and the School of Agricultural Sciences, so as to reduce costs and use resources more efficiently.
4. A Quality Plan for laboratories and research units, using accredited systems such as ISO 45000.

Antonio also drew attention to the major challenges faced by the University, apart from the standard complaints that universities now receive a reduced percentage of the GDP, or that business provides little R&D input. The three main problems were as follows:

1. A need to change to mentality of research staff – at present too individual in approach and producing too many small units – so as to accept more shared space and equipment.
2. A need for more decentralisation so that the administration comes closer to the researchers themselves, via the figure of the Administrator mentioned earlier.
3. Government systems need to change, to evaluate research production better. The current focus on the personal research of staff at the expense of teaching has distorted activity.

While there was what Antonio called some “timid” progress in terms of strategic planning, notably helped by developments in Management Control and Audit Units, he felt that evaluation of research needed to be on a wider basis than the institution.

Session 6

Monitoring Research Performance

*Noel Lloyd, University of Wales Aberystwyth
(UK)*

Noel Lloyd opened by describing the national context in which universities conduct research in the UK. Research is included as a specific element in the contracts of employment of all lecturers, but one of the main stimuli for institutional interest in individual performance has been the periodic review of university research in the UK, conducted by the Funding Councils in the form of a national Research Assessment Exercise (RAE).

Future income for research is determined by the outcome of this assessment, and the public’s perception of institutions is governed by the results. One aspect of the exercise is the selection of those individuals who are to be entered. The amount of research funding in a subject (discipline) is determined by a formula based directly on the quality ‘score’ and the number of academics entered; the score, in turn, is determined by the average quality of the research entered, not the best. As a result of the way in which the exercise is conducted, it is necessary to ensure that all members of academic staff produce enough research of international standing. Over the last few years the University of Wales Aberystwyth (UWA) –

in common with most other UK universities - has sought to develop robust mechanisms for monitoring the research performance of academic staff.

The mechanism which has been developed at UWA separates the encouragement and stimulation of research from the monitoring of performance. The latter involves six-monthly assessment of all academics. Heads of Department meet with senior management to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of their department's profile, in terms of quantity, quality, external income and external perception. Quality is especially difficult to assess under these circumstances. A separate objective is to seek to improve the commercialisation of research and the volume of contracts obtained from industry.

It became clear in the talk that there were many tensions for senior managers to resolve, not only in terms of distinctions between research submissible to the RAE and contract research but also between the rival claims of research and teaching. A further serious issue was the response of management in cases where an individual's research profile is seen as inadequate, and the associated requirements of staff development.

During discussion it became clear that the RAE system adopted in the UK was a source of some surprise to members in other countries. There was particular concern at the scope for "game-playing" and at the extent to which the system naturally led to a concentration of funds in perceived areas of excellence.

COM (2000) 6

COM (2001) 94 final.

Both can be found in <http://europa.eu.int/comm/research/nfp.html>

To derail is to stop the progress of something (as in a train coming off a railway track). Similarly, people who start acting in a disreputable way (perhaps students who discover extra-curricular activities which interfere with their studies) are said to have "gone off the rails".