

Session 7: Workshop 5

Title: The Scale, Scope and Sourcing of Research Management and International Offices

Presenter: Dr John Kirkland, Director of Human Capacity Development, ACU and Executive Secretary, Commonwealth Scholarship Commission in the UK

Chair: Professor Ivan Addae-Mensah, Vice-Chancellor, University of Ghana

Rapporteur: Liz Washbrooke, ACU

Dr Kirkland opened this session with a concise definition of research management and outlined the challenging climate in which today's researchers find themselves. Many are under increased pressure to demonstrate relevance to society, frequently hindered by complex contract agreements, and under obligation to deliver to exacting specifications whenever they take on new projects. For the purposes of this presentation Dr Kirkland concentrated on externally funded, project-based work as opposed to block funded research. The focus of the talk was on what the ACU could do to help alleviate the common problems facing researchers at its member universities. Dr Kirkland stressed that co-operation is possible and, indeed, desirable in a competitive environment, and in the light of this proposed a series of measures the ACU would take to fulfil the following aims:

- to disseminate best practice
- to provide a forum for discussion and mutual support
- to raise awareness of research management as a profession

Additional suggestions included: a newsletter, an email distribution list, a library of current practice (including clear job descriptions - *what makes a good research manager?*), provision of training materials and establishing links with international bodies, among others.

Discussion

The question of the role of researchers, touched on by Dr Kirkland, was discussed at some length. It was argued that traditionally academics are *not* managers, thus the term 'research manager' could be regarded as something of a contradiction in terms. One delegate suggested that we need to foster a culture in universities which sees management as part of research. It was argued, however, that researchers are a valuable force and care must be taken not to spread them too thinly: a distinction should be drawn between the duties of researchers and those of managers (ACU objective 3).

Another concern raised here was that the financial management skills of researchers are often less than well developed - and this can slow productivity. It was agreed that academics must be encouraged not to lose valuable time trying to understand routine forms or keeping accounts.

A common difficulty for vice-chancellors was identified as how to balance funding between research and teaching: on the one hand universities need the means to hire teaching staff, and on the other they need revenue to take on new research projects. It was suggested that this is one area in which the ACU could help by disseminating information on good practice from other universities (ACU objective 1). This issue was taken further by a Zambian delegate who explained how the problem of inflation in the developing world has meant remuneration has not kept pace with the changing value of currency, leading to under-funded universities. Academics therefore often have to take a second job to make ends meet, and it is difficult for vice-chancellors to insist that they spend their time researching.

It was noted that many researchers lack the skills necessary to produce a research proposal that is sufficiently convincing to generate funding. Dr Kirkland agreed that constructing a credible proposal is an essential skill, citing the CSFP as a case in point: applicants who have written the best proposals are often likely to be awarded scholarships, whereas an outstanding academic may not be given an award if his or her study plan seems vague or weak.

How the ACU's Research Management Project is addressing these issues:

issue or point raised	to be targeted by ACU objective
administrative/accounting/management tasks: to what extent are they the researcher's responsibility? (defining the role of research managers)	3
financial constraints due to: inflation; conflict of interests; funding agencies	1 and 2
need to produce credible research proposals	1
institutions are answerable to the government and the public	1, 2 and 3