

Session 7: Workshop 6

Title: COS: the global expertise database as a route to developing teaching and research partnerships

Presenter: Mr Richard Tomlin, Managing Director, COS (Community of Science)

Chair: Professor David Ross, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, University of Abertay, Dundee, UK

Rapporteur: Tamatha Webster, ACU

Richard Tomlin delivered a highly interactive working session, which commenced with some background information about COS:

- COS currently holds individual profiles for more than 460,000 researchers (across 1,300 Universities) and
- provides details of over 21,000 funding opportunities - information which is gathered via web trawls of the internet thereby saving users the effort of trying to identify these for themselves

He also provided details of the collaboration between ACU and COS, which resulted in the creation of “K” - the Commonwealth Knowledge Network linking researchers from across the Commonwealth electronically and facilitating the development of research partnerships.

Managing Research

Richard illustrated the need for such a service in order to help institutions manage their research assets, especially in the light of current demands upon universities to work on ‘Mode 2’ problem solving research. He provided an agricultural example from his time at the University of Newcastle whereby three departments integrated for a ‘Mode 2’ type alliance which allowed for the exploitation of universities' assets across faculties. He believes that, in order to manage research operations within institutions effectively, more of this type of collaboration will be required, and that rigid and distinct faculty structures are often one of the major institutional barriers that need to be overcome. He also pointed out that, of course, this type of integrative research should be taking place across different institutions and not just across faculties.

The session thus far provoked the following interaction:

- In answer to a question from the Chair, Richard Tomlin explained how valuable a tool COS can be for research leaders to use to facilitate this kind of interaction by identifying appropriate research partners.
- Professor Gibbons (ACU) questioned why researchers are initially so reticent to put their details onto the database when it can have such obvious advantages.

Richard Tomlin's response was that researchers are sometimes shy about collaborating with others and that this is where the research leaders need to intercept, encouraging them to consider the benefits.

- It was suggested that maybe the emphasis on the Vice-Chancellor's involvement is too much and that perhaps it should not rest with the Executive Head to take this forward.

Richard felt that Vice-Chancellors do need to take some responsibility, as they are responsible for setting institutional priorities and their commitment is critical. However, it would of course be neither possible nor appropriate to do this alone and this is why the research management function needs to be developed. Research centres are required whose directors can move across traditional department divides and where high quality administrative support is available (e.g. individuals to negotiate contracts).

Richard highlighted the value of such approaches in the case of the University of Newcastle where they had consistently “batted higher than their league position” by proactively seeking research, by seeing what was required and consequently initiating it within the University (especially by seeking to extract more money from Europe). Professor Gibbons stressed that universities need to start creating configurations across universities (or even further e.g. with corporations) in order to produce work suitable for industry.

Managing Researchers

Relating how large universities often have little knowledge of what research is on-going in their institutions, Richard Tomlin outlined the administrative benefits of using COS as an additional tool in the management of researchers. Good research leaders need to be able to sow new ideas and promote new collaborations and this process needs to be systematic. Using the COS database facilitates both the appropriate exploitation of the university's researchers and the development of relevant partnerships.

Summarising how COS can specifically add benefit to the research management needs of institutions, the Presenter identified the following:

- by supporting research-led initiatives
- by opening doors to new collaborations
- by helping researchers to present themselves professionally to many audiences
- by supporting wider engagement

The Chair asked how it is possible to establish whether the researchers with profiles on the database are actually any good. Richard explained that researchers are invited to link their publications' record to their research profile, so that readers are able to judge for themselves the quality and relevance of the subject's research.

COS Funding Alert

In describing some of the more advanced features of the COS Workbench Richard described the funding alert facility where keywords are taken from the user's profile and used to identify and alert the subscriber to funding opportunities as and when they arise. The advantage of this is self-evident at a time when institutions need to be proactive in locating funding for research.

Cost implications

Finally Richard answered questions concerning the costs of COS for institutions. He outlined how, through the collaboration with the ACU, the basic functions available through "K" are free. There is a cost, however, attached to accessing functions such as the funding opportunities database, funding alerts and the administrators workbench - although exact prices are determined by the size of the institution.

Next Steps

He also briefly delineated COS's next steps to:

- deepen the partnership with the ACU
- develop their global vision into a reality
- work with diverse universities
- perhaps collaborate with clusters of universities rather than individual institutions (which might help to reduce the cost of accessing the advanced functions)

Summary

- I. Universities need proactively to seek research funding and in order to do this need to seek collaboration with other institutions and, perhaps, with corporations as well as within the institution itself by looking to develop projects that span different faculties. COS can act as the tool to facilitate this interaction by putting researchers in contact with other researchers in a suitable field.
- II. Universities need a research management facility, particularly in light of the need for cross-collaboration and external funding. Research leaders need to encourage university staff to recognise the benefits of developing collaborative research projects.

Points for ACU to take up

It was clear from the evidence of the Executive Heads at this session that many are still unaware of ACU's relationship with COS and all that it has to offer. It was similarly clear that, as the session progressed, they became not only profoundly

interested but also very enthusiastic about it. It seems that somehow despite the various methods employed to notify member institutions of these developments, the message is still not getting through. Attention therefore needs to be given to ensuring that more hear about "K" and COS.

Similarly, we need to address the problem of encouraging more researchers in our member institutions to make use of it and put their profiles onto the database.