Investing in Success 2012 - Katherine Boylan

"INVESTIGATING RESEARCH SUPPORT AT KAROLINSKA INSTITUTET"

<u>**Background**</u>

Karolinska Institutet, Sweden, is one of the world's leading medical Universities. The Karolinska maintains a similar overall ranking in the Shanghai Jiao Tong ranking of World Universities to the University of Manchester (44th KI, 38 UoM, 2011), despite the big difference in the size (3,944 employees at Karolinska, compared to 9,755 in UoM). However, the Karolinska rises to 7th in the world for medicine, when ranked by broad subject field (compared to 51-75 for UoM).

When grant funding from EC & overseas sources for the Karolinska are compared to Manchester, the Karolinska's success is evident. Karolinska's income from the EC in 2010 was £21.7M for 204 projects, compared to Manchester's income from the EC (for financial year 2010/ 11) of £13.1M for 294 grants. For NIH grants, the Karolinska's performance is similarly impressive, with income of £3.27M for 2010 (compared to £743k for Manchester). The Karolinska is also successful at securing funding from private foundations & US sources other than NIH, something UoM does poorly at. The aim of my project was to investigate research support mechanisms at the Karolinska, compared to The University of Manchester (and particularly The Faculty of Medical and Human Sciences, which is a fair benchmark in terms of research areas).
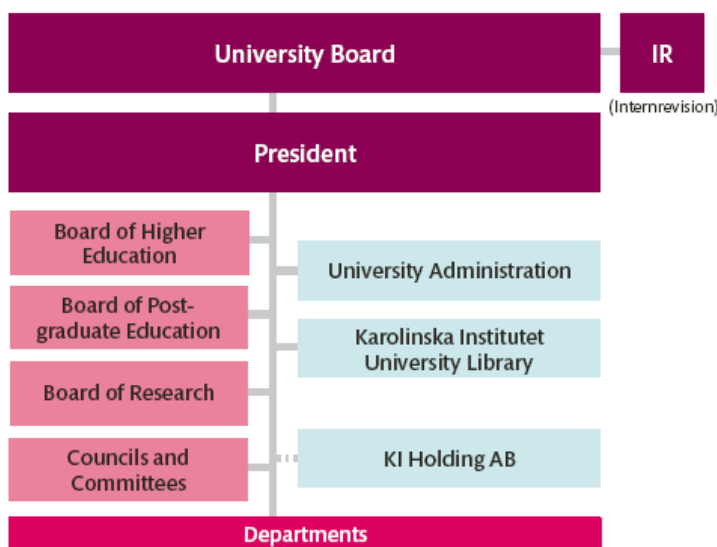
Karolinska Institutet Structure

Karolinska Insitutet comprises 22 academic departments. These are quite autonomous, and pre and post award financial management of the grants take place at the department level, similar to Manchester's structure.

The Researcher Support office sits within the central University Administration, and includes the grants office (9x FTE) and the career service (3x FTE). Everyone in the office is PhD qualified, with the exception of the communications officer.

The Activity

I arranged to spend a week with the Karolinska Institutet (KI) Researcher Support Office, which I undertook at the end of August 2012. My visit was hosted primarily by Dr Miles Davies, Head of Unit, who arranged a programme of people to talk to within his office (and elsewhere at KI). I looked at a number of different areas at the Karolinska, including peer review and general grant application support; specialist support for EU and NIH applications; use of communication and social media tools; and bibliometrics.

It is my aim that this activity isn't just an observational one, so, in addition to comparing and contrasting the approach at the two organisations, I have laid out a number of recommendations, which can be fed back and (hopefully) implemented over the next few months.

Peer review/ support for grant applications

There is no formal monitoring of whether grant submissions have been peer reviewed at the Karolinska, in contrast to Manchester where this is done at the application stage through the research grant approval form or PanMan. It is possible it is happening casually at the Departmental level (it certainly isn't monitored at the Researcher Support Office)- with the exception of some schemes whereby the funder sets a limit on the number of applications from an organisation

They have invested a lot in terms of maximising their ERC Starting grant applicants- these individuals get feedback from senior academics & the grants office throughout the process, similar to the approach taken by Manchester more recently- however the Karolinska goes further by hiring professional consultants for interview training for applicants who proceed to stage 2. In Manchester, interview preparation is given if the applicant wants it. The Karolinska approach is paying off as they had 4 awards last round and over half their applicants progressed to the second stage (contrasting with 1 applicant from the 10 submitted from FLS and FMHS).

The close link and co-location of the Karolinska grants office and careers service means that researchers (from PhD to Professor) have access to a range of tailored training on grant writing and applications.

In summary

Karolinska	Manchester
• No mandatory peer review, except for some Nordic schemes (where numbers of applications are limited by the funder)	• Monitored peer review
• Additional support for ERC Starting grant applicants	• ERC triage panel, interview preparation is optional
• Courses on grant writing and applications	

Recommendations

Investigate the possibility of employing external consultants for ERC applicants

Formalising interview training for those who progress to ERC Stg Stage 2

Form better links between Deanery/ RSS and Training Team, including New Academic Programme

Bibliometrics & Library Services

During my visit, I spoke to a research librarian at the KI library- they have a very well resourced research support library services unit at the Karolinska- something that Manchester has only invested in recently (previously have outsourced some bibliometric analysis to external organisations). Specifically, the Karolinska has built it's own tools for this type of analysis, based on Web of Science data.

The Karolinska use bibliometrics extensively in measuring the performance of their departments (but not individuals)- they allocate their block grant to departments based on bibliometric performance. Likewise, the government allocates funding to Swedish Universities based on bibliometrics. The Karolinska also use bibliometrics to benchmark themselves against international competitors, and to see who in the Karolinska is working with who elsewhere in the world, in specific fields. Whilst Manchester potentially has had less impetus to use bibliometric analyses as HEFCE QR funding is allocated on the peer review-based RAE/ REF system, certain funders are using bibliometric tools to assess quality of grant applicants (eg NIHR), which means this area is increasing in importance.

The Karolinska are very good at advising their PIs how and where to publish to maximise the publication impact, with specific recommendations- http://kib.ki.se/sites/kib.ki.se/files/FS_rekommendationer_till_publicerande_forskare_en.pdf   Currently, Manchester's library website just links to online resources hosted by other websites.

In summary

Karolinska	Manchester
• Library Research Services- statistician, librarian, clinician and web people • Use bibliometrics extensively in measuring research performance • Benchmarking with comparator organisations, collaboration mapping • Produce publishing guidelines	• No specialist support until recently • No dedicated online resource on publication

Recommendations

Form links between Deanery/ RSS and library services [bibliometric analysts now in post in the University library]

Future possibility of working with library to produce own publishing guidelines for MHS researchers

EU Funding Support

In terms of EU support structure, the KI has a similar model to Manchester's, with central hub of specialist support, with projects being financially managed locally. They are better resourced though as their central team are bigger than in Manchester, and additionally have no responsibility for the legal side (a time consuming part of the process)- the Karolinska engage external lawyers to review consortium agreements and grant contracts.

Like Manchester, they have no formal process or pathway in terms of identifying SMEs for projects- they rely on personal contacts. Again, in a manner similar to Manchester, they don't have a coordinated approach to trying to influence future work programmes ("lobbying"), but will support and advise academics who express an interest. The possibility of having a pool of project managers to cover breaks between projects has been discussed but not resolved (as for Manchester)- like us, they lose good PMs when funding runs out.

It was obvious that the Karolinska shared many of the same problems and issues that Manchester faces in terms of administration of EU grants- amongst other things, they often don't find out about a project until it is awarded, they struggle to have researchers fill in timesheets, and more recently the EC is picking them up on how they report costs incurred by their partner hospital- all problems Manchester encounters. However, they do have a Compliance officer, a recent appointment who is going through all the FP7 project files they currently hold to ensure any systematic errors are addressed. This would almost certainly ensure income increases as audit failure decreases- something Manchester don't do effectively. Performance indicators related to increasing EU income in Manchester tends to focus on increasing awards, with no investment into ensuring these awards are managed appropriately. The Karolinska have admin networks internally and with external organisations to share best practice in EU support- something started recently here

In summary

Karolinska	Manchester
• 4x central team, projects managed at Dept level	• Current structure similar to KI (although much less resourced)
• Contract review done by external lawyers	• Contract review done by EU team
• No formal process for SME identification- personal contacts	• SMEs- as KI
• Lobbying- via NCP- limited success	• Lobbying- as KI
• Admin networks to share best practice	• Admin networks to share best practice
• Compliance officer	• No resource for resolving problems post-award

Recommendations

Compliance officer role/ remit

Increased training for administrators to ensure knowledge is refreshed

NIH Funding

The individuals at the Karolinska responsible for NIH funding support believe that success with NIH funding (by non-US researchers) lies firmly with the researcher, with world leaders making competitive applicants. That said, however, they have 2 dedicated individuals to support NIH funding, which removes any potential admin barrier for academics looking to apply. Manchester has no dedicated point of contact/ admin support for NIH, and whilst there are pockets of knowledge about the administration of NIH grants, these are not particularly obvious to the academic community.

They do have particularly good US links from postdocs going to and from the States- many of their successful applicants succeed as Co-I with their previous supervisor as PI, who is still US based. Much of their success must be due to their reputation, and some of their unique selling points & resources (for example, the Swedish Twin Database and Swedish biobanks). The NIH support team also learn and inform future applications by collating feedback from previous applications.

Karolinska also give further training to academics upon award of a grant to ensure the PI is fully aware of the rules and regulations, ensuring compliance with the funder.

Karolinska	Manchester
• 2x individuals with NIH remit (approx 1.5FTE). Both have worked in USA	• No dedicated NIH admin support- fragmented. Admin barrier
• Good US links due to PDRAs incoming and outgoing	• No monitoring of PDRAs/ academics returning from USA?
• Training for academics on post-award management- ensuring compliance	
• Routine collection of NIH f/b	• No routine feedback monitoring
• Reputation (eg Noble Committee) and USPs	

Recommendations

Give more visibility to the admin experience that does exist in Manchester

Identify academics/ postdocs returning or coming in from USA [link with Project Diamond?]

Targeted workshop for Manchester world leaders or those with unique resource

Start collecting successful and unsuccessful NIH/ US evaluation reports

Communication and Social Media

The KI grants office asked for communication & use of social media to be added as a discussion item to the programme for my visit as they wanted to find out more about how we communicated with the academic community.

It was obvious that the Karolinska is much better organised in terms of disseminating funding opportunities and other news/ events, with a full time communications officer based with the office who collates a newsletter and maintains the linked intranet site. The Researcher Support Office wanted to know about Manchester's approaches to social media, as they are unsure about the success of their current approach, but I think it is fair to say that the use of Facebook or Twitter across Manchester is patchy and random, rather than coordinated or strategic

FLS are much more organised in terms of communication than MHS- producing a monthly funding bulletin and having more information for researchers on their intranet site. MHS' intranet site has a funding section which is more than a year out of date.

The KI have good uptake of the Research Professional tools by their academics, almost certainly due to the fact that the grants office staff go out to the departments and train academics in using it. Currently, Manchester don't have many academics signed up to use Research Professional- most of the users are administrators.

Karolinska	Manchester
• Full time Comms officer supporting grants office	• Comms tends to be part of many people's roles (often the first thing to suffer)
• Newsletters- grants office (monthly); careers service (twice monthly)	• Currently no funding bulletin specifically for MHS (but is in FLS)
• Expanded info on website on funding ops and events/ training	• Intranet out of date
• Career Service uses Facebook (generally younger audience)	• Twitter is used in some areas in UNIMAN
• Good uptake of Research Professional alerts	• Very few academics signed up to Research Professional

Recommendations

Increased resource for disseminating funding opportunities- more website resource

Make existing use of other work elsewhere in the University (eg FLS; anywhere else?)

Highlight/ train academics in using existing services (eg Research Professional)

Conclusion

Karolinska Institutet and The University of Manchester have similar overall research support structures (especially for EU applications) and the two organisations face common issues with grant applications, and engaging with the academic community.

The Karolinska central grants support office is better resourced, especially for NIH grant applications and in terms of communication. However, much of their increased success compared to Manchester could be attributable to the fact their reputation (hosting the Noble Committee for Medicine or Physiology, for example) allows them to attract a higher overall level of quality of investigator- allowing for selection of the very best, and further success breeding success, and so on.

There are some lessons learnt which can be applied in Manchester, which can be explored and hopefully implemented over the next few months (see Appendix). Additionally, since returning from the Karolinska, I have presented an overview of the visit to a number of different groupings, including the Head of Research Support Services in MHS, the FLS-MHS EU working group, and the MHS Research Deanery. I hope to continue this feedback process over the next few months to interested parties.

Progress towards these recommendations will be assessed by reviewing the actions below at 6 and 12 months after the visit (end of February 2013 and August 2013, respectively).

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Appendix

Recommendations and further actions

Recommendation	Actions	Comments
Investigate the possibility of employing external consultants for ERC applicants	- Find out which consultant KI uses [DONE] - Feedback to HoFRSS [DONE]	
Formalising interview training for those who progress to ERC Stg Stage 2	- Feedback to HoFRSS [DONE]	
Form better links between Deanery and Training Team, including New Academic Programme	- Invite Head of Training Team to meet Deanery team [ONGOING- to be completed by end 2012]	
Form links between Deanery/ RSS and library services [bibliometric analysts now in post in the University library]	- Invite MHS bibliometric analysts to meet Deanery team [ONGOING- meeting set for early November]	
Future possibility of working with library to produce own publishing guidelines for MHS researchers	- Discuss with bibliometric analysts when meet [TBC]	
EU Compliance officer role/ remit	- Feedback to HoRSS [DONE]	Unlikely to be further progressed until restructure of EU support function has finalised (likely early 2013)
Increased training for administrators to ensure EU knowledge is refreshed	- Feedback to HoRSS [DONE]	Unlikely to be further progressed until restructure of EU support function has finalised (likely early 2013) Possibility of external training providers might be explored
Give more visibility to the admin experience that does exist in Manchester	- Discuss with NIH-knowledgeable RSM (Debbie Fitton) [DONE] - Highlight expertise of FRSS in guide to NIH funding (to be launched at workshop- see below) [March 2013]	
Identify academics/ postdocs returning or coming in from USA [link with Project Diamond?]	- Discuss with HR as to whether it is possible to get alerted to new starters, including where they have come from [end 2012]	
Targeted workshop for Manchester world leaders or those with unique resource	- identify optimal candidates (who haven't previously applied) for NIH funding [end 2012] - schedule/ run workshop [March 2013] - drive forward at least 2 NIH submissions, resulting from workshop [July 2013]	Have received permission to use remaining Invest in Success funding (~£800) to run a small workshop for academic with a chance of being successful at NIH funding
Start collecting successful and unsuccessful NIH/ US evaluation reports	- collect NIH grant feedback from previous applicants [ONGOING] - collate into common mistakes/ top tips document for future applications [early 2013]	
Increased resource for disseminating funding opportunities- more website resource	- Funding info website (see comments)	This will be addressed by the development of the Deanery website (led by Sarah Barton) which will include funding ops info
Make existing use of other work elsewhere in the University (eg FLS; anywhere else?)	- Get agreement to input into and share FLS bulletin [DONE]	
Highlight/ train academics in using existing services (eg Research Professional)	- Feedback to FRSS [DONE] - Include in NAP? Discuss with training team [end 2012]	