Lesson 5: Institutional proposals, research strategy and governance

Learning outcomes:

LO#5 - The student can differentiate external from internal drivers of research policy.

LO#8 - The student is able to recognize the main components of a funding proposal and link them to the evaluation criteria of a given call for funding.

LO#10 - The student can explain the main governance structure of a given research institution.

LO#12 - The student can distinguish and discuss at which stage of policy and strategy development intervene pre-award and research policy/strategy related professions.

LO#16 - The learner interiorizes and commits to the values and the mission of the institution.

LO#17 - The student demonstrates curiosity and interest for systemic approaches and for the organization of the research ecosystem.

LO#18 - The student is able to accept others' views, and work together to provide the necessary support for the proposal's preparation.

LO#19 - The student is critical regarding his own work and that of others taking on a constructive attitude.

LO#20 - The student takes responsibility for its own work.

This lesson explores the institutional funding proposals that research performing institutions have to prepare in order to get funds to develop their own funding and impact strategies , or simply their strategy to assess research productivity and enhance the ranking of the institution. To prepare this type of funding proposals one requires to get knowledgeable about institutional research organization, infrastructure that exists to support research, and how the work carried out at research performed institutions is assessed and funded. Thus, this lesson focuses on the governance of the research ecosystem.

What type of research performing institutions can the student identify?

This question could be used for searching and mapping the scientific institutional ecosystem, based on the existent knowledge of the student and that obtained by internet searching.

Examples of research performing institutions: research-universities, research centres (public and private), national governmental bodies/public administration, Research Councils (e.g. [UK Medical Research Council](link)), European governmental bodies/public administration (e.g. DG [Research Joint Research Centre](link) or the [European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA)](link), research laboratories (e.g. [USA Health & Human Services Laboratories](link)), scientific societies (e.g. - [Max Planck Society](link)), R&I companies and SMEs, innovation centres, technology centers, NGOs, etc. In many countries the public system is divided into a panoply of different types of institutions, thus national contexts can provide good material to do this mapping. In Portugal, for example, there are Research Units, Associate Labs, Collaborative Labs, State Labs, etc. Each type has their own specific institutional funding programme.

Research performing institutions need funding to function and to provide good conditions for research and innovation to flourish. There are many very different ways on how research performing institutions can be funded. Some institutions receive core funds that are **non-competitive**, which for public institutions is generally from the State budget centred. Other institutions rely heavily on open competitions - there is an «institutional research project». To get it, it is necessary to prepare and submit a grant proposal, and of having it approved afterwards. In addition, there are international funding programmes (e. g. European) devoted to institutional capacity building that can partially fund the operation of a research performing institution, but institutions generally rely substantially on national assessment and evaluation schemes to reward national research institutions.

Any funds distribution to research performing institutions, independently of using competitive calls or not, should be based on a system to assess the quality of the research being produced by a given institution.

Institutional research assessment

There is a wide diversity of quality assessment systems affecting research performing institutions across Europe. Any assessment system exists due to existing competition. Given that the resources are scarce, research performing institutions compete to be able to attract the best talent (researchers, the students, RMAs), to offer the best conditions (infrastructure, equipment, services, environment) to be able to produce the most relevant discoveries, with greatest impact in science, society or the economy. Hence, there are external drivers guiding the strategy of research performing institutions, such as the funding pressure, but also internal drivers, such as those that render an institution competitive in its specific action environment.

Which types of institutional research assessment exist assessing the quality of research producing institutions?

This question could be the motto for a group brainstorming on

- ranking systems
- institutional bibliometric indicators
- research assessment frameworks

Some references for ranking systems:

- Scimago institutions ranking https://www.scimagoir.com/
- QS World University Rankings https://www.topuniversities.com/university-rankings
- U-Multirank https://www.umultirank.org/
- Leiden Ranking https://www.leidenranking.com/
- Times Higher Education Rankings https://www.timeshighereducation.com/
- Shanghai Academic Ranking http://www.shanghairanking.com/

Some references for institutional bibliometric indicators:

- Scimago indicators (https://www.scimagoir.com/methodology.php): Output, % International Collaboration, Normalized impact, % Q1, Specialization Index, % Excellence Rate, % Scientific Leadership, % Excellence with Scientific Leadership
- Publications databases that can provide bibliometric indicators: ISIWoS, Scopus, Scielo, Latinger, Google Scholar
- Individual publication profiles with bibliometric indicators: Researcher ID (Thomson Reuters), ORCID ID (open)

Some references for research assessment frameworks:

- UK REF https://www.ref.ac.uk/
- Assessing Europe's University-Based Research Expert Group on Assessment of University-Based Research
- Performance-based research funding in EU Member States—a comparative assessment

Explore a specific research assessment framework in some detail.

According to the next institutional evaluation exercise planned in the UK's REF, what will be the assessment criteria? How are they linked to policy?

The institutional proposal

The research assessment evaluation exercises that determine how much funding an institution will get for several years demand considerable efforts in time and resources in assembling an institutional proposal and in coordinating their submission.

During the assembly of the institutional proposal, a concrete plan for action for a given period has to be set. Hence, a strategic action plan has to be envisaged, discussed and produced. RMAs can have key roles in supporting institutional evaluation exercises, which are often very demanding and important periods in the life of research performing institutions. RMAs can intervene in different ways: from the preparatory phases of evidence collecting, providing the policy review, and proposal planning, to the assembly of the proposal and to the support to all evaluation steps, which can involve site visits of the external expert evaluators.

The KU LEUVEN presentation is an example of an RMA working on policy that can help Leuven university to be better prepared for Research assessment exercises.

Also, RMAs working on pre-award can have a role in assembling institutional strategic proposals. The student can be asked to **brainstorm on the areas needing RMA support to put institutional proposals together and to support the full cycle of institutional assessment exercises** at research performing institutions.

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