Subgroup of the Committee to look at methods to free-up time in RDO to best support implementation of the programme - 5 Committee members, the ADoR (chairing), and the Research Development Manager.

The Subgroup met on the 25 January 2011 and in attendance were Ailbhe Ni Chasaide; Jane Ohlmeyer; Shane O'Mara; Seamus Martin; Anil Kokaram, Doris Alexander; Patrick Geoghegan (chair).

The Research Development Office (RDO) met on Tuesday 8th February 2011 and again on Monday 14th February 2011 to discuss the output from the meeting above and to investigate other ways of achieving time savings. The RDO then met with the Dean of Research on 21st February 2011 to further understand the concept of thematic areas/champions and the development of these themes and supports required.

Overall context including feed in from meeting with Dean of Research

1. Following on from a meeting between the Research Development Office and the Dean of Research it is apparent that the scenario in relation to the development of the thematic areas and champions has changed. It is likely that the following scenario will follow:

Each thematic champion is to try to identify what is the activity in College in that area and who is involved. Through the town hall meetings, it is anticipated that the research community will present their research to each other. The champions will work with Directors of Research and use the RSS to ascertain who is working in their area. The College has 5 major research priorities and 8 major programmes matched to those and each of the 17+ targeted thematic areas have been mapped to the major research priorities. Schools/TRIs with projects or aspirations associated with targeted thematic areas are already mapped into the areas. Thus the thematic area will become defined by those who want to be in it. Once this definition has occurred, the College wishes to get visibility for these thematic areas – to showcase them to the external world. Funding opportunities will be mapped into the thematic areas but there will now be no requirement for the RDO to free up 50% of its time. Much of the Research Community associated with the different thematic areas would/will be already applying for funding so it is more about the development of mechanisms to bring such activity together via the townhall meetings (which are likely to occur in a step wise manner) and the production of a strategic 5 year plan (which includes areas of funding to target) and the showcasing of these areas to the external world . It is anticipated that members of the RDO would attend the town hall meetings to gain a better understanding of the context of the thematic area and to then be in a better position to help with mapping appropriate funding opportunities to those areas.

2. Some ideas suggested by the subgroup will benefit the Research Community but may not free up time of the staff of RDO (particularly without engagement from the College community).

3. The Sian Thomas Report referred to at the meeting, which was presented and seemingly endorsed at the time of its production by Executive officers is currently being referred to by the Dean of Research and the COO. This report indicates (page 14), as was discussed at the meeting, that TR&I cannot support every individual academic and that engagement by Schools (the document refers to Directors of Research) by way of identifying candidates in need of wanting

support etc is required. This context of further engagement by Schools/TRIs will be needed if some of the issues discussed are to free up RDO time whilst benefitting the research community. There has to be real prioritisation (a ranking) which needs to be bought into by the research community. It seems likely that the RDO will prioritise these elements directly linked to the College's research implementation plan. It is apparent that Directors of Research do not have adequate time to devote to the duties of Director (as laid out and on the College's internal governance website) but equally well that some level of intelligent engagement between the RDO and Schools/TRIs is vital.

4. The requirements for RPAMS are being captured at present – whilst this will provide efficiencies when in place, it will also require significant time allocation of staff to ensure the correct development and implementation. However, the system will better allow the researcher to self serve and will provide valuable information for Schools/TRIs in relation to overall performance as well as highlighting those who have been trying to become more research intensive.

Proposition:

I am proposing that the recommendations (below) which arise from the suggestions made by the Subgroup, contextualised by feedback from the RDO and input from the meeting with Dean of Research, be accepted by the Subgroup and brought back to the Research Committee for noting.

Feedback by the RDO to Suggestions made by Subgroup

1. (a) It was suggested that rather than bring in external consultants (with little practical experience or credibility) to advise on major grant applications, workshops would be organised which would be presented by successful internal academics. People who had experience of judging applications would also be enlisted to provide peer-to-peer advice and support.
   (b) These workshops would be targeted and customised for the different research areas, recognising that a presentation for a successful Biosciences application might not be of much use to someone applying for a grant in the Humanities.

1.RDO staff thought workshops initiated by Schools/Centres represent a good way to engage but Schools need to look to their strategic plans and decide whether they want to target the recruitment of external researchers, retention of internal research staff, and/or the development of collaborative research etc and in what areas. Whilst quantity at a workshop is not a measure of success, participation and post workshop participation by applicants appears to be most effective when Schools have themselves encouraged would be applicants to attend. The best framework for these information sessions/workshops should be in the context of School Research Committee meetings or other such meetings where an audience is more likely.

Such workshops on specific calls and topics are already underway and the RDO will maintain a count on the level of attendees and subsequent comments as to whether attendees formed part of the cohort of subsequent applicants

As indicated in my previous e-mail the concept of the external consultant was NOT to discuss how to write a successful application for an individual application but to aid heads of Schools/Directors of research to think about how to put together a FP7 strategy for their school. Whilst there appears to be a diversity of views in relation to the role of Director of

Research, the RDO was planning engagement based on the academic governance documentation on the College web site (http://www.tcd.ie/vpcao/academic-governance/dir-of-research.php) which has a prescribed definition for Director of Research which includes.

"2.2 Developing a research strategy for the School in consultation with the School Executive, taking due regard of College policy. Submitting the research strategy to the Dean of Research for noting."

Following on from this workshop, it is apparent that Directors of Research felt that the scale of the task would require a school appointed person to assist them to develop a detailed FP7 strategy and that whilst the RDO could help feed in to that process –they could see that different levels of support were needed and the scale of resources available through RDO was not sufficient and feed in from the RDO would be at a higher level. The concept of a self financing research support team (similar to that indicated in the Sian Thomas report) to help coordinators was also noted as having been adopted by some successful institutions and appeared to be positively received.

Recommendations:

1.1 That, within the level of existing resources, Schools would engage more with the RDO.

1.2 That Schools look at what strategic planning they can carry out themselves (e.g. encouraging staff to be evaluators or to act on expert groups, to target candidates for the ERC, asking emeritus staff to help mentoring etc).

1.3 That the RDO will provide more topic specific workshops and engage with the Schools via such forums as the Schools Research Committees.

1.4 That the concept of Self Financing Research Support Teams be given consideration.

2. It was suggested that ways should be investigated of simplifying the signing off process for grant applications. Who should be signing off on the applications and how should they be signed off? If electronic signatures could be used it would save a considerable amount of time (both for the PIs and the Directors of Research/Heads of School).

The RDO would be happy to accept electronic sign off from head of school. In relation to the inclusion of the requirement for Head of School Sign off, this would be a matter for Head's of Schools in their meetings to decide on.

In relation to authorised sign off, aside from internal college procedures and the reasons for them I should have mentioned that ***most sponsors request sign off from a centralised RDO*** *(and increasingly a TTO). Nearly all sponsors using an IT system will liaise with only one named centralised office/individual that is hard wired into their system.*

We need to make researchers aware not only of what has to be provided by the internal deadline, but what does not have to be! (that unless it is an electronic submission process where the RDO push the application through the system to the sponsor, the scientific writing of the proposal can continue). In relation to internal deadlines cognizance needs to be given to the fact that the RDO is providing supports to high volume of applicants at the one time and that by and large if we are informed that someone has a problem meeting a deadline we can work around them (it is a matter of keeping us in the loop). The expectation by sponsors is that

if we are endorsing the application we are confirming that it does adhere to rules and regulations set by the sponsor. Staff in the RDO are professional and will not put their names to something that is obviously wrong. Added to that, it would be highly embarrassing for the College to allow applications to be submitted which are subsequently returned without review.

Recommendations:

2.1. That RDO accept hard copy, electronic signature or e-mail confirmation of sight of budget (with attached budget) from Heads of School but that it would be up to a school to decide whether to avail of this or not.

2.2 That Heads of School discuss if they wish to be involved in a sign off process at all at the application stage. A possibility could be that Heads of School could recommend that that they do not need to sign off of budgets less than 20K (unless there is a particular issue that the RDO draw to their attention, unless there is cofunding involved or unless the external sponsor actually requires it)and heads of school could devolve sign off to Director of Research.

2.3 That the RDO make it clear that in many instances the internal sign off process does not prohibit the applicant from continuing to work on the application whilst they check the budget and other terms and conditions.

3. It was suggested that we should also think about how we interact with the major funding programmes. Do we influence the agendas of something like the Framework Programmes, or do we merely react? Should we have a joined-up and co-ordinated approach to how we share the knowledge about the various programmes?

In terms of joined up thinking or a coordinated approach, this needs to be encouraged from both central and school level. The RDO is part of a another subcommittee of the Research Committee, the FP7WG which has both academics and administrators as members and has lobbied successfully in the past for rule change in FP7 (e.g. Marie Curie Fees) and will continue to do so for FP8. Whilst, the RDO is best placed to ensure that the legal terms and conditions set by the EC are as beneficial as possible, as was correctly pointed out topics and the inclusion of scientific areas etc needs the engagement of researchers. We can, as was suggested, connect applicants with each other and are happy to do so and this is a good idea. In other words what came across at the meeting was the view that we all need to be thinking a little bit more collegially for the College strategy to be implemented.

Recommendation:

3.1 That the RDO continue to lobby the EC in relation to beneficial legal terms and conditions and work programme development of FP7 and FP8

3.2 That the Research Community be encouraged by both RDO and School level to feed into the technical development of programmes for FP7 and 8.

4. It was recognised that the relationship between the RDO and Schools and TRIs was very important. It was suggested that experts from the RDO should be invited to visit the various School Research Committees and advise on different items. Rather than use words like 'inactive' when discussing researchers (even when quoting from other

reports), the emphasis should be on turning active researchers into 'active intense' researchers, and helping those with difficulties researching into becoming active.

As indicated in number 1, we would be happy to do so but as also indicated an engagement by Schools in relation to individuals to be helped/encouraged by BOTH the RDO and Schools needs to occur.

Recommendation

4.1 That the various School Research Committees invite members of the RDO to their meetings to discuss their strategic plan or particular specified points of interest.

5. There is some confusion about the various stages of the application process (for example, the move from the RDO to the Contracts Office to the Treasurer's Office). This means that much time is wasted on trying to identify the correct person to contact. It was suggested that a diagram and brief explanatory document might be produced to assist people in understanding the various stages and how things are done.

Recommendation:
5.1 That a diagram outlining the remits of the RDO, Contracts and Treasurer's Office be included on the TR&I website.

6. A general point was that sometimes procedures were too complex, intimidating people and turning them off making grant applications. For some there was a perception that the RDO was an obstacle rather than an aid and it was felt that this perception needed to be corrected. Relating to this were specific suggestions about how important it was to check budgets, especially as they would have to be rewritten if successful anyway. Was time spent on unnecessary paperwork across the board, thus wasting time that could be spent on other related things? Could it be said that the bureaucratic system helped or hindered applications?

Links to comment on point 2 above and does need more consideration. The problem for the RDO is being sandwiched between conducting adequate risk minimisation (not necessarily seen to be added value to a proposal) which, if not conducted properly, just pushes problems down the line to contracts to deal with, versus development on a more rounded proposal view point. Many applications are now cofunded ones and hence it is more important that it was to check what 'input' College is expected to provide and whether it is feasible or not.

Recommendation:
6.1 as per 2.3 above

6.2 That the development of RPAMS be continued to be supported a College level. The requirements capture for RPAMS is under way and the guiding principles of RPAMS is to have processes and systems aligned, streamlined and standardised, allowing improved access to information when it is needed and to allow TR&I staff and the research community to better self serve as well as having reduced paper based administration.

7. There was a discussion over the use of the word 'filter' in the document circulated and whether that was the appropriate word.

As indicated at the meeting we cannot work both with thematic champions and with the complete breadth of individual researchers and have to find ways to concentrate our effort otherwise we remain in reactive mode. We need to think about which groups of individuals we are prioritising – the already excellent who should be going for grants such as the ERC and/or those who need help and support as identified by Schools. If not this cohort of researchers, then whom and how will they be identified to the RDO? There has to be engagement by Schools in identifying and perhaps even mentoring of these individuals

Recommendation:

As per 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3 above

8. There was a recommendation that the discussion of the RDO should take place in the context of a wider debate about Trinity Research and Innovation. Without this problems might be viewed in a distorted way.

Recommendation:
8.1 That discussion of proposed changes occur with other units in TR&I. RPAMs is being developed in a holistic manner in which streamlined processes will have buy in from all units in TR&I.

9. It was suggested that a survey might be done of PIs to identify the problems they feel need to be addressed, and get feedback on what parts of the system work very well.

The down side to this is the question as to who is going to carry out the survey. In the past when we have asked for input very little response was forthcoming. It may be better to have discussions in the contexts of visits to School Research Committee meetings.

Recommendation:
9.1 That staff from the RDO be invited to the School Research Committees- as per 4.1

Other things to emerge from the RDO meetings:
The need for access to an Executive Officer would enable some time to be freed up.

At present current Executive Officer for all of TR&I is spending some time aiding the Contracts Office but it is recognised that allocating time to support other units in TR&I is required. Several tasks could then be carried out by the Executive Officer which would enable some time of RDO staff to become available.

The question as to whether the RDO should continue to take Research Committee minutes was raised – At the present time this is difficult as there are no alternative personnel to take on this task.

Things that the RDO should not add to its remit:
Non Research Applications
HEA capital related queries/surveys

Summary of Recommendations –renumbered in running order for the Research Committee:

1. That, within the level of existing resources, Schools and TRIs would engage more with the RDO.

2. That Schools look at what strategic planning they can carry out themselves (e.g. encouraging staff to be evaluators or to act on expert groups, to target candidates for the ERC, asking emeritus staff to help mentoring etc).

3. That the RDO will provide more topic specific workshops and engage with the Schools and TRIs via such forums as the Schools Research Committees.

4. That the concept of Self Financing Research Support Teams be given consideration.

5. That RDO accept hard copy, electronic signature or e-mail confirmation of sight of budget (with attached budget) from Heads of School but that it would be up to a school to decide whether to avail of this or not.

6. That Heads of School discuss if they wish to be involved in a sign off process at all at the application stage. A possibility could be that Heads of School could recommend that they do not need to sign off of budgets less than 20K (unless there is a particular issue that the RDO draw to their attention, unless there is co-funding involved or unless the external sponsor actually requires it) and heads of school could devolve sign off to Director of Research.

7. That the RDO make it clear that in many instances the internal sign off process does not prohibit the applicant from continuing to work on the application whilst they check the budget and other terms and conditions.

8. That the RDO continue to lobby the EC in relation to beneficial legal terms and conditions and workprogramme development of FP7 and FP8.

9. That the Research Community be encouraged by both RDO and School/TRI level to feed into the technical development of programmes for FP7 and 8.

10. That the various School Research Committees invite members of the RDO to their meetings to discuss their strategic plan or particular specified points of interest.

11. That a diagram outlining the remits of the RDO, Contracts and Treasurer's Office be included on the TR&I website.

12. That the development of RPAMS be continued to be supported at College level. The requirements capture for RPAMS is under way and the guiding principles of RPAMS is to have processes and systems aligned, streamlined and standardised, allowing improved access to information when it is needed and to allow TR&I staff and the research community to better self serve as well as having reduced paper based administration.

13. That discussion of proposed changes occur with other units in TR&I. RPAMs is being developed in a holistic manner in which streamlined processes will have buy in from all units in TR&I.