

# **The Association of Commonwealth Universities**

**Research management  
in African universities:  
from awareness raising  
to developing structures**

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# Contents

<b>1.</b>	<b>Background</b>	<b>3</b>
1.1	What is research management?	3
1.2	The value of research management to universities	3
1.3	Strengthening research management	4
<b>2.</b>	<b>The project</b>	<b>5</b>
2.1	Method	5
2.2	Survey findings	5
2.3	Aims at the start of the project	6
2.4	Reflections at the end of the project	8
<b>3.</b>	<b>Discussion</b>	<b>10</b>
3.1	Structures for research management	10
3.2	Is research management expected to do too much?	10
3.3	Staffing the RM function	11
3.4	Establishing an internal and external presence	11
3.5	Demonstrating clarity in costing and internal use of resources	12
3.6	Recommendations	12
<b>4.</b>	<b>Conclusions</b>	<b>14</b>
	<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>15</b>

# 1. Background

## 1.1 What is research management?

Research management (RM) can be defined as any action that a university can take to improve the effectiveness of its researchers, but which is not part of the research process itself. Examples are measures to improve academic awareness of funding opportunities or collaboration opportunities and to assist researchers in presenting their ideas more effectively to donors. It also includes giving advice to ensure that research takes place on terms that are advantageous to the university, that researchers meet their obligations to sponsors in a timely way and that research results are effectively disseminated to wider society and, where appropriate, commercialised.

## 1.2 The value of research management to universities

An established research management profession can act as a catalyst for the more efficient use of resources in the short term. In the longer term it can expand the resource pool by increasing access to and improving the management of external funding, thereby enhancing donor confidence in the ability of African universities to deliver. By improving the dissemination of research results, research management can also increase the impact of universities on wider society.

Three factors have combined to increase the attention given in recent years to improving the research management of African universities. These are:

- First, the growing confidence of many international agencies that higher education has an enhanced role to play in development strategies
- Second, recognition of the need for universities to diversify their resource base in order to meet this challenge, rather than relying on core funding from their respective governments
- Third, the trend for research funding globally to become more project based and competitive, and for universities to respond by establishing research management offices (RMOs), which help their academics to compete in the new environment.

As part of a 2007 project to strengthen research management in African universities (funded by Carnegie Corporation of New York), the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU) conducted a benchmarking exercise involving the 13 project universities. The exercise showed that there was increased interest in research management both on the part of academics (with more international linkages being formed and more research undertaken) and on the part of the institutions as a whole. It was felt, however, that research management was being held back by as yet underdeveloped structures, a lack of resources and inexperienced staff. Weaknesses were perceived particularly in identifying funding sources, in negotiating contracts, and in technology transfer and dissemination of results. Similarly, in the 2010 ACU research management survey<sup>1</sup> research management staff reported a noticeable difference between the 'encouragement and support' for RM-related activities at their universities and how 'efficiently' these activities were run.

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<sup>1</sup> ACU Survey of current research management practice within the Africa and Caribbean regions 2010-11, conducted as part of the RIMI4AC project to strengthen research and innovation management in Africa and the Caribbean (2009-2012).

### 1.3 Strengthening research management

This report is based on learning from the 2009-2012 project ‘Research management in African universities: from awareness raising to developing structures’, funded by Carnegie Corporation of New York. The objective of this project was to help five universities to develop their organisational structures for research management, including supporting the establishment of a central facility with oversight of research management and forming or revising institutional research policies and strategies. The five project universities and the key contacts we worked with are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: The project universities and key contacts**

Universities	Key contacts
Makerere University (Uganda)	1 Assistant Director, School of Graduate Studies 2 Director, School of Graduate Studies
University of Dar es Salaam (Tanzania)	1 Director, Research Directorate 2 Other research management staff as required
University of Education, Winneba (Ghana)	1 Director, External Funds Office 2 A University of Winneba consultant
University of Jos (Nigeria)	1 Director, Jos–Carnegie Partnership Programme 2 Director, Office of Research
Obafemi Awolowo University (Nigeria)	1 Director, Linkages and Sponsored Research 2 Professor, Dept of Food Science and Technology

The ACU has also worked on three other ‘Africa-focused’ RM-strengthening projects<sup>2</sup> between 2007 and 2012. Experience from these projects has enabled us to develop a three-phase model for the development of research management structures. The three phases are:

- 1 **Awareness raising**: measures to ensure that practitioners and institutional leaders recognise the importance of research management
- 2 The conversion of such awareness into **organisational structures** to enable this awareness to be transformed into practice
- 3 The development of the **external environment** to support these structures and to help ensure their sustainability.

However, it has also become clear that these phases are not discrete – and that a degree of overlap is inevitable. Phases two and three, in particular, are mutually supportive and likely to run concurrently. Thus, in addition to developing their internal structures for research management, the project universities have been simultaneously contributing to the development of their external structures, i.e. their respective regional Research Management Associations.

In pursuing this project’s objectives, we recognised that the five institutions have different priorities and strengths, and that progress would naturally be uneven and also relative to their individual situation. This report seeks to highlight areas of learning that may be relevant to other African universities.

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<sup>2</sup> The Carnegie Corporation of New York project to strengthen research management in African universities (2007-2008); the WARIMA project to establish the West African Research and Innovation Management Association (2007-2008); and the RIMI4AC project to strengthen research and innovation management in Africa and the Caribbean (2009-2012).

## 2. The project

### 2.1 Method

Our approach to this project recognised that much work had already been done by the five institutions at the awareness-raising stage, at least within their central management. The aim was to build on this by assisting in the creation of robust structures. Our work balanced the need for external advice, review and benchmarking mechanisms with the need for institutions to establish their own strengths and priorities. Thus the project was organised around the following main strands of activity:

- **Communication with consultants** – The African universities were each assigned a consultant. The consultants were responsible for commenting on the institutional development plans and providing ongoing (and independent) monitoring of progress against the institutional plans. Provision was made for their attendance at each annual benchmarking event and for at least one visit to their respective university during the project. The consultants worked closely with the (African) university project contacts.
- **Partnerships with ‘Northern’ universities** – The African universities were each asked to choose a ‘Northern’ university to partner with. In the interests of the project as a whole, a balance was sought between institutions in Europe (including the United Kingdom) and the United States, in order to ensure that different perspectives were reflected. The Northern partner universities were chosen on the basis of strategic fit, level of commitment and expertise. These partnerships reflected the perceived need for more proactive assistance between key events, i.e. for close ongoing relationships, enabling advice to be sought on specific issues that could not be obtained from either the project manager or the consultants. Provision was made for two-way visits of up to three weeks’ duration between each ‘partner pair’, in order to establish personal relationships and gain first-hand knowledge.
- **Targeted Initiatives awards** – As part of the project, mini-grants ranging from USD 9,000 to 25,000 were made available for Targeted Initiatives to support the development of robust research management structures, funding items identified by the universities themselves as being critical to success. In each case, a strong justification for support was required, and this would need to complement the wider institutional plan. The African universities submitted proposals for Targeted Initiatives awards. The proposals were evaluated by the team of consultants and the grants were awarded on a competitive basis according to the strength of the applications. As an example, one university was awarded a grant for the development of a university-wide research policy document.
- **Annual benchmarking meetings** – This series of events allowed participants to share their experiences and to place them in the context of a wider community of practice. The ACU coordinating team, the consultants and two representatives from each of the African universities met annually. The benchmarking events were all held alongside existing research management events, to help ensure that the group members continued to play an active role in their respective Research Management Associations and also to provide access to the wider experience available through them. The benchmarking meetings were held alongside the conference of the Southern African Research and Innovation Management Association (SARIMA) in Pretoria in 2009, the conference of its West African equivalent (WARIMA) in Monrovia in 2010 and the international conference of the Society for Research Administrators in Montreal in 2011.
- **Surveys** – Two surveys were conducted to ascertain the level of structural support for research management within the five African universities. The surveys were sent out at the start of the project and again at the end of the project.

The project worked with two contacts at each university, listed in Table 1, and supported their attendance at all the annual events. Selection of these key individuals was based on their ability to promote actual change. Most of them had some time allocated to research management and some responsibility for it within the structure of their institution, and most were at a relatively senior level. The leadership of the institutions themselves were kept informed of the project, and their support for its objectives was highly valuable, but they were not involved in implementing the project.

### 2.2 Survey findings

The universities were sent the same set of survey questions on both occasions. When the second survey was sent out, each university was also given its own responses to the first survey. This enabled the universities (and the project team) to assess changes in specific areas over the course of the project.



The universities were asked to state or estimate the numbers of full-time staff working in certain areas, namely:

- **Financial management of sponsored programmes** – All the universities reported having full-time staff working in this area in both 2009 and 2012. (This was also the only area to be rated ‘very good’ by more than one university.)
- **Technology transfer and diffusion of research results** – Three of the five universities had full-time staff working in this area in 2009, and by 2012 all five universities reported having at least two full-time staff working in this area.
- **Identifying funding opportunities and proposal preparation** – Although the universities reported staff in this area, for the most part their support took the form of workshops and assistance with large proposals (and not ‘support on tap’, including support for smaller proposals).

The universities were also asked what they viewed as their current priorities. In 2009 they all gave different answers to this question, but in 2012 three of the five universities placed ‘Training the younger generation of academics in research proposal writing/ Strengthening the capacity for the conduct of research by young researchers’ first on their list of priorities.

In addition, we asked the universities what skills they thought were important to certain areas of research management. In both surveys, in the Pre-award area, ‘strong writing skills’, ‘strong negotiation and presentation skills’ and ‘attention to detail’ were ranked as most important by all the universities. In the area of Post-award reporting, monitoring and accounting, ‘numeracy skills’ and ‘IT literacy’ were ranked as most important by all the universities.

We asked the universities to rate their RM provision in 18 different areas, some of which are shown in Figure 1. ‘Financial management of projects’ was the only area to be ranked satisfactory or above by all five universities in both the 2009 and 2012 surveys. However, in the 2012 survey other areas (‘admin support for grant applicants’ and ‘ethics’) were also ranked satisfactory or above by all five universities. The areas of ‘intellectual property’ and ‘technology transfer’ received particularly low ratings in most cases – and one university’s ratings of these two areas actually went down over the course of the project.

Overall, the survey responses indicate improvement in most areas over the course of the project. It will be noted, in particular, that four out of the five institutions reported improvements in the administrative support for grant applicants, in awareness of ethical issues, in financial management and in research management training for junior staff. In the areas of technology transfer and intellectual property (IP), progress was more mixed. In the former area, two universities reported improvement but one a decline. In the case of IP, one reported improvement and one a decline. The latter finding is interesting, given the attention paid to IP issues by the governments of some of the participating countries. A possible explanation, which has been noted in previous ACU work, is that expectations tend to rise as awareness of what is possible increases.

## 2.3 Aims at the start of the project

As part of the project, the ACU facilitated three annual benchmarking events, bringing together all the participating universities and the project consultants. ACU process benchmarking is designed to identify examples of good practice and improve management processes. Adopting a methodology that looks at the processes by which results are achieved, it goes beyond the comparison of metrics and conventional performance indicators and is therefore more formative and developmental in nature. The process begins with an extensive institutional review document or survey, which the participating institutions complete in advance of an in-person benchmarking meeting. Using the responses as a guide, the institutions share their experiences and hold a frank and open discussion of the areas they have identified as particular strengths or weaknesses.

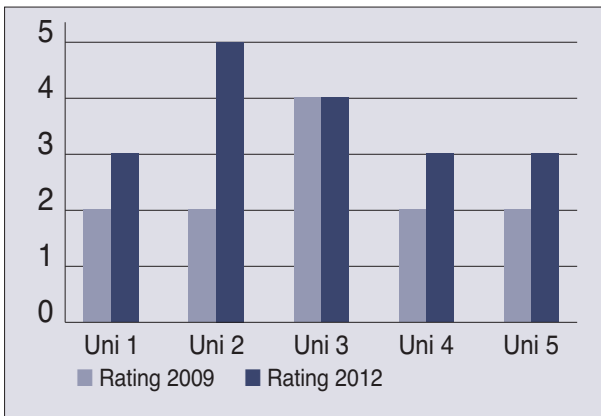
From the discussions at the first annual benchmarking event, several common aims (and issues) emerged. The universities agreed that they needed to achieve the following objectives in the areas listed below.

### Identifying opportunities and proposal preparation

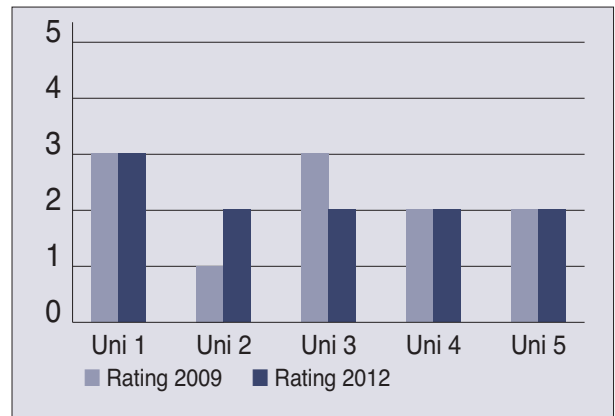
- **Define the type of person required for this function** – The level at which RM staff are appointed has implications for the number of staff that can be appointed and for the degree of influence they will have.
- **Define the relationship of the RMO with other internal offices** – These include the Advancement Office and academic departments.
- **Be more efficient** – Universities need to get the right information to the right people in good time.

**Figure 1: How the universities rated their provision in specific areas**

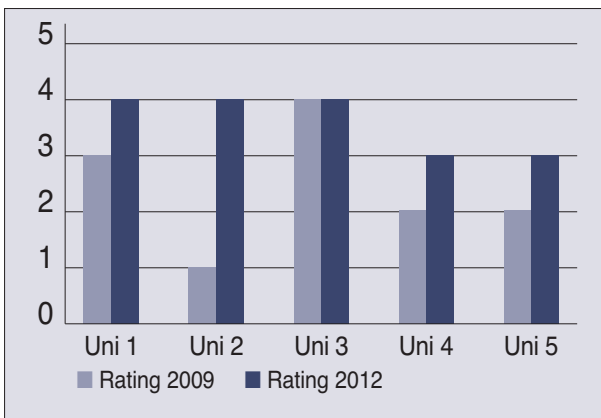
1 = Very poor, 5 = Very good



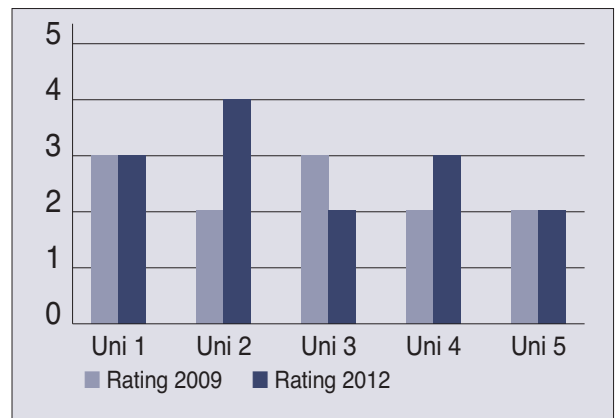
Admin support for grant applicants



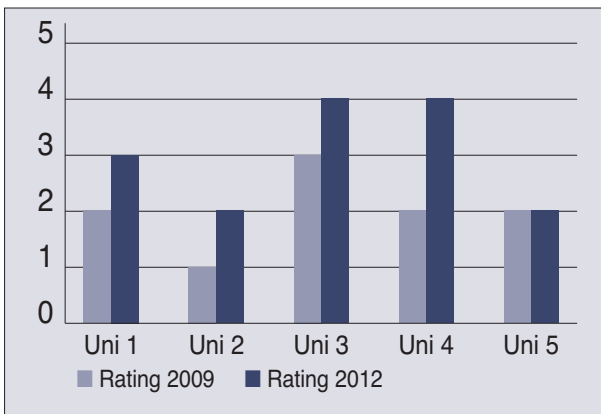
Intellectual property



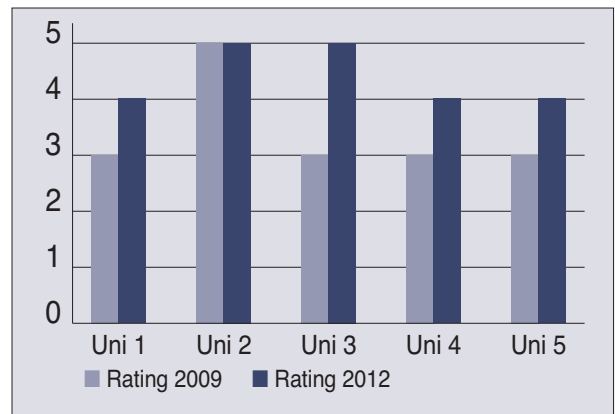
Ethics



Technology transfer



RM-related training for junior staff



Financial management

**Financial management and reporting**

- **Move towards External Funding Offices (or equivalent)** – Funds from external sources need to be kept separate from ‘main’ university funds. This enables external funds to be accessed and reported on with ease. However, it is also important to retain close links with the university’s finance systems and the bursar’s office.
- **Bring all university projects on board** – The financial management of all projects should be conducted through the university system and not through individual researchers’ accounts.

### Ethics and conduct of research

- **Be aware of external requirements and standards** – Universities must keep abreast of international policy developments.
- **Develop a plan for staff training** – This would include combining internal tuition with external accreditation, and developing a long-term strategy of teaching ethics to emerging research staff.
- **Promote RM activity as adding value** – It is important to engage staff and get them interested in issues of ethics and research conduct.

### Knowledge transfer and dissemination

- **Highlight that this is not only about making money** – Linking activity in these areas to promotion could serve as an incentive to academic staff.
- **Consider this from an early stage in research design** – It is important to understand the university's current position and evaluate the potential of research outputs.
- **Be realistic about costs and risk** – This includes developing a patenting strategy and distinguishing between markets (users, policy makers, academic, commercial, etc.).

### Future priorities in research management

- **Develop structures and resources** – Setting up and equipping RMOs and training specialist staff.
- **Sell the research management office** – Promoting the RMO within the university and showing where it can add value, as well as capturing information on all research and consultancy activities.
- **Create and strengthen external linkages** – Accessing or subscribing to funding databases and participating in the activities of the regional Research Management Association.

## 2.4 Reflections at the end of the project

The five institutions have different priorities and strengths, so over the course of the project each university addressed the above aims and issues in ways that related to its particular context. At the final benchmarking event, in addition to asking the universities to discuss their own progress over the three years, we asked them the following questions.

- **What single strategy was the most effective in building research management capacity?**

All the universities identified the staff-training and capacity-building workshops (in proposal writing and the 'fundamentals' of research management) as an area of success. Some of the universities have already drawn up training plans to reach, for example, 100 individuals per semester. Others intend to run training events in response to demand and the availability of resources. The universities all agreed that their training groups ought to comprise fewer than 50 people.

Learning from and sharing with other African universities was also highlighted as contributing to building capacity. All the universities reported that they had benefited from participating in the activities of their regional Research Management Association and from networking with colleagues in other African universities.

- **What strategy was the least effective in building research management capacity?**

Most of the universities identified internal communication and dissemination as an area of weakness. A common problem was researchers not responding to funding opportunities sent out by the RMO. In addition, the RMOs reported not getting responses to memos (unless they were signed by the vice-chancellor or deputy vice-chancellor, which would be unsustainable in the long term).

Another non-effective strategy (at least in the short term) was the assumption that a university-wide subscription to a funding opportunities provider would help and 'empower' academics to find funding opportunities themselves. All the universities that had subscribed to a funding opportunities provider reported that their academics were not making as much use of the service as they had hoped. Poor bandwidth and unreliable internet connections made searching the funding opportunities database a very slow process. In addition, setting up profiles or searches on the system was time consuming.

The universities acknowledged that getting their staff to use their funding opportunities database, or the RMO itself, would require a significant level of supervision, promotion and support: things would not run themselves.



## Comments on further development

- **The influence of wider university and national plans** – The universities commented that their best efforts to develop research management are sometimes ‘interrupted’ by wider university and national plans. For example, one university was instructed by a national government decree to set up an IP office – even though the university does not yet have the staff required for such an office or the business to justify it. Another university is currently decentralising to form a collegiate system. The university intends to retain a central RMO and to strengthen the RMO’s links with the colleges, but staffing the colleges with ‘college research administrators’ (who would be based in the colleges but would report to the central RMO) is proving to be a challenge in the short term.
- **The influence of university ‘stalwarts’** – Another common issue was obtaining buy-in from university ‘stalwarts’ such as the bursar and the registrar, to enable RMOs to implement the necessary financial and human resources (HR) structures. One university reported that, in the recent past, they had lost several IT staff whose skills were worth a lot more in the market (in a global environment people expect to be paid at their market value). They had also had difficulty in finding the right person at the right salary scale for their new IP office. The RMO in another university had eight members of staff, but only one worked full time for the RMO. The part-time staff (including a director, deputy directors and clerks) spent 60–70% of their time working for the RMO, which was negotiating with the bursar over taking on a finance officer. A third university had started encouraging key university staff (bursar, registrar, deputy vice-chancellors, etc.) to attend regional research management events, so that they could understand the wider research management context. The group agreed that this was a good move and that awareness raising is an ongoing task.
- **Increasing and enhancing research activity** – The universities agreed that it is important to apply the ‘correct problem analysis’ to understand why researchers are not submitting proposals for funding. It is often assumed that communication is the problem, whereas it could be that the academics are too busy teaching and/or out of the office on external work. The group agreed that they must find a way of supporting large groups of research teams, i.e. finding the right people and bringing them together. In addition, it was agreed that they must seriously consider giving academics incentives to submit proposals. An idea that emerged was to pay staff according to how much research income they brought into the university.
- **Establishing the research management profession** – The universities acknowledged that the wider research management community was an important factor in their development, especially if they wished, for example, to gather support for the revision of funders’ requirements or national government requirements. The universities are all active and play leadership roles in their respective regional Research Management Associations.
- **Partnerships with ‘Northern’ universities** – The universities said that these were useful and in most cases would continue after the end of the project. At least two of the five pairs of universities have drawn up memoranda of understanding for longer-term collaboration with their Northern counterparts, and others are known to be collaborating on specific projects and applications.

## Lessons learned and advice

The universities were asked, on the basis of their experience from involvement in the project, what advice they would give to other African universities who were about to restructure or were currently restructuring for research management. Their comments can be summarised as follows:

- Do the groundwork of creating awareness among key stakeholders.
- Involve all interests in policy formation.
- Make sure you understand your university’s leadership, so that you understand key institutional structures.
- Don’t stage-manage success – don’t be in a hurry.
- Continually sensitise staff.
- Reach out to researchers.
- Twin with a well-established university.
- Participate in the activities of your regional Research Management Association.
- Adopt a multiple-approach plan for developing a research management strategy.
- Provide professional training for RMO staff.
- Apply the ‘correct problem analysis’ – don’t make assumptions.

### 3. Discussion

#### 3.1 Structures for research management

At the start of the project, all the universities were in agreement that developing structures for research management means establishing an office (or offices) distinct from the Graduate School (which was the predominant home for university research activity), even if it remains under the same umbrella as the Graduate School. For example, one of the universities has transformed its Schools of Graduate Studies into a Directorate of Research and Graduate Training, with separate divisions for the graduate studies and RM functions. Another university has renamed its School of Research and Graduate Studies ‘School of Graduate Studies’ and transferred the RM functions from this to its Externally Funded Projects Office (see Table 2).

This was seen as a critical step in articulating the institutional thinking and processes relating to the research management function. It reflects the fact that universities require support services for research management (administration of externally funded research activities) above and beyond the academic management of research projects (graduate supervision, ensuring research integrity, etc.).

Another point of agreement was that a further critical step in developing RM structures is formulating coherent institutional strategies and policies for research. This involves recognising that it is advisable to align the strategy both with national goals and with identified institutional strengths, and that the strategy must give sufficient direction whilst also remaining flexible.

Other aspects of developing RM structures were for the most part particular to the institution. For instance, although the universities agreed that the technology transfer, public relations, research management and academic functions needed to coordinate their activities and know their demarcations, opinions differed on the extent to which these various functions should be harmonised. The universities also noted that whether they adopted a centralised or decentralised system for RM would depend on wider university plans. (The project consultants, however, advised that the management of the IP function should always be centralised, even if other RM functions were or had to be decentralised.)

#### 3.2 Is research management expected to do too much?

In the last decade, governments across the globe have demanded more and more from universities: universities to be agents of change; to contribute to the economy; to compete for a smaller pool of funds; to account better for university income; to take on more applied research; and so on. In the case of African universities, they are also expected to contribute to delivering the Millennium Development Goals. Furthermore, in the African context, the overwhelming majority of research takes place in universities (as there is no substantial home-grown commercial sector conducting research). Thus it can be very difficult to challenge the established government goals in fields where the university feels that an important stream of research is emerging or should emerge, as there is often no other vehicle for delivering government goals.<sup>3</sup>

**Table 2: Two examples of restructuring for RM**

Former structure	New structure
Schools of Graduate Studies	Directorate of Research and Graduate Training, containing two divisions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Graduate Training Coordination Division (serving the graduate studies function)</li> <li>• Division of Research, Innovations and Knowledge Transfer Partnership (serving the RM function)</li> </ul>
School of Research and Graduate Studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Externally Funded Projects Office (serving the RM function)</li> <li>• School of Graduate Studies (serving the graduate studies function)</li> </ul>

<sup>3</sup> N’Dri Assié-Lumumba, *Empowerment of Women in Higher Education in Africa: The Role and Mission of Research*, UNESCO Forum Occasional Paper Series, 11 (UNESCO Forum on Higher Education, Research and Knowledge, 2006).

African universities are additionally expected to train the next generation of researchers and academics and to increase their numbers. This entails the rebuilding and/or expansion of existing postgraduate activities. African universities also report high student-to-staff ratios (and therefore a heavy workload), making the aim of getting more academics into research unrealistic. The project universities are structuring for research management within this environment, with the intention that sound research management structures will link otherwise fragmented functions and achieve the following aims.

- Within the university:
  - Attract more income, through better proposals facilitated by the RMO
  - Better manage university income (especially external funds), by means of structures developed to deal with differing reporting requirements
  - Get more academics (back) into research, using the income acquired from external sources.
- Externally:
  - Better communicate the university's research to the public
  - Better 'sell' the university's research, through consultancies, IP, etc.

Nevertheless, even where strong institutional commitment exists, the universities agreed that sustainable structures were unlikely to be developed in the short term (for example, within the term of a one- or two-year grant). To some extent this is inevitable, given the need to develop overall capacity as a condition of winning external grants and also the time taken by many funding organisations to respond to proposals. The project identified three major issues, detailed in sections 3.3 to 3.5 below, which represent longer-term constraints on effectiveness and on which we recommend that further work be undertaken.

### **3.3 Staffing the RM function**

Since no professional tradition currently exists, institutions remain unsure of the type of individual or the skill set needed to perform research management roles. In other words, they do not know where to find RM staff, what skills they should have or at what level they should be appointed. The universities all agreed that RM staff would have to come from within the university. This was first because there were no external sources and second because, in a context where there is a very rigid demarcation between academics and non-academics, the RM function would have to be led by (former) senior academics – as only a senior academic would have the authority to get things done. However, the universities all reported difficulty in getting academics (and other staff) to move sideways into RM full time. At three of the universities, the RMO was staffed mainly by academics (and others from finance and IT) a portion of whose time had been allocated to working in the RMO. This situation reflects the finding of the 2010 ACU Survey<sup>4</sup> that most RM staff in Africa, including heads of RMOs, combine their RM duties with academic work.

The universities further agreed that, although the RM function would have to be led by academics, the ideal was to get administrators and other non-academics into many RM roles. However, they all acknowledged that staffing the RM function with administrators (and with specialists) would have to be a gradual, medium- to long-term process.

All the universities reported quite rigid employment policies, often involving lengthy recruitment procedures. They all reported great difficulty in taking on short-term employees to work on, for example, one aspect of an externally funded project which might last for just a few months. This situation is no doubt exacerbated when hiring for new positions that previously did not exist.

Two universities were investigating the harmonisation of academic and RM salary scales within their institutions. They felt that there were probably already too many separate salary scales for different professions (for example, IT and library professionals had their own salary scales), so introducing yet another scale for the RM staff would not be helpful. Instead, they felt that a clear career progression (at least in the form of salary progression at first) and salaries comparable to those of academics would demonstrate the importance of the RM jobs.

### **3.4 Establishing an internal and external presence**

The universities all reported a tradition of consultancies, grants and contracts being placed with individuals or research units rather than through central structures – and that, even though policies for these areas existed, they were largely unenforceable.

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<sup>4</sup> ACU Survey of current research management practice within the Africa and Caribbean regions 2010-11.

This meant that academics had to be convinced of the usefulness of the RMO, if they had so far managed without it. In some cases, a long-standing suspicion existed that the ‘centre’ was there largely to put obstacles in the way of active researchers, rather than to support them.

The universities reported that many academics felt that, if they were not going to be remunerated for time spent working on large-scale and/or time-consuming proposals (with no guarantee of success), it was not worth their while to respond to opportunities coming from the RMO. In this context, it is important that research offices are seen to add value and save academic time, rather than adding obstacles. The universities acknowledged that, to achieve this, they must find ways of evaluating the RMO and must also actively promote the RMO within the university.

The universities also reported that the partnerships formed with Northern universities and the input from their consultants during the project had proved useful in helping to promote (and justify) the RMO within their institutions. During the course of the project, the consultants visited their respective ‘client’ universities, where – in addition to holding meetings with senior university management and RM staff – they helped to deliver RM sensitising and training workshops on campus. All the universities cited this RM sensitising/training as a contributor to progress and confirmed that staff attitudes were changing (even if slowly).

### 3.5 Demonstrating clarity in costing and internal use of resources

The universities acknowledged that clarity was needed about where the funds for indirect costs are directed within the university. That is, it must be clear why indirect costs are charged and what internal supporting services or activities they will support. However, the universities reported that setting a university-wide rate for overheads is difficult if funders pay widely differing rates for overheads/indirect costs. For researchers, this means that they must argue the case for taking on a project that does not pay overhead costs, and for the RMO it means ascertaining whether the university can (and should) make an in-kind contribution to the project.

The difficulty is exacerbated by the fact that in many African countries there are no research councils and no equivalent of the EU programmes; in other words, there is no established pool of external funds for research. While their Northern counterparts, for example in the UK, have been able to work closely with their major in-country funders (such as the research councils) to establish a ‘Transparent Approach to Costing’ system that can be applied nationally, for African universities many of their major funders are external to the country. Thus articulating the university’s position, aligning research with in-country goals and chasing the funding dollar can become a tricky balancing act.

### 3.6 Recommendations

The project universities and consultants devised a matrix of recommendations based on the experiences of this project, which is reproduced in Table 3.

**Table 3: Matrix of recommendations for future development**

Themes	For institutions	For national authorities	For donors
Making best use of existing resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Review allocation of resources and reallocate to support research activity.</li> <li>● Work to remove barriers to progress in developing effective RM capacity.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Evaluate base allocations to institutions in support of RM and research to meet national needs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Be mindful that most African institutions have limited financial capacity to make in-kind investments in support of grants.</li> <li>● Do not request significant matching contributions.</li> </ul>
Establishing central structures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Establish a research management policy.</li> <li>● Establish RMOs.</li> <li>● Procure staff and resources.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Work through the institutional central structures.</li> <li>● Support through assistance.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Work through the institutional central structures.</li> <li>● Support through indirect cost payments.</li> </ul>

Themes	For institutions	For national authorities	For donors
Establishing a research management profession	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Ensure that structures are sufficiently high-level and have appropriate authority and status.</li> <li>● Provide funds for staff development and training opportunities for research managers in institutional budgets.</li> <li>● Recognise specialist skills.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Support professional development activities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Support training and professional development for RM staff.</li> </ul>
Creating incentives to participate in research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Grant remission of time spent on research.</li> <li>● Provide fair compensation.</li> <li>● Ensure that full costs are understood and included in all proposals for external support.</li> <li>● Be mindful of the power of non-monetary rewards for participating in sponsored activity (prestige, promotion, flexible budget).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Make research allocations to institutions transparent.</li> <li>● Ensure there is no penalty to institutions for full recovery of costs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Ensure that full costs are met.</li> </ul>
Considering human resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Consider available and potential HR when establishing RM structures.</li> <li>● Set realistic timescales for staff development.</li> <li>● Review HR policies, making provision for temporary and contract employment.</li> <li>● Foster culture of respect for non-academics.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Support development of in-country expertise for new offices and functions.</li> <li>● Review conditions for non-academic and temporary staff.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Avoid spreading resources too thinly: aim to support more than one project per institution.</li> </ul>
Improving confidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Ensure that there is no penalty for failure, but encouragement to try again.</li> <li>● Establish mentoring systems.</li> <li>● Encourage junior researchers.</li> <li>● Provide training in proposal preparation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Provide training in proposal preparation.</li> <li>● Provide seed funds for new/young researchers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Give constructive feedback on submitted proposals.</li> <li>● Provide programmes focused on young researchers.</li> </ul>
Delivering outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Ensure outcomes/milestones are realistic and attainable.</li> <li>● Seek feedback from donors on quality of work done.</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Ensure outcomes/milestones are realistic and attainable.</li> <li>● Give feedback on quality of work done.</li> <li>● Hold grantees accountable for reporting.</li> </ul>
Creating a regional support network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Engage with national/regional Research Management Association activities.</li> <li>● Provide support for active individuals, e.g. allocate time and resources for staff participation in network-building and staff-development events.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Support these networks.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Conduct training through these networks.</li> </ul>

## 4. Conclusions

A university is not an isolated entity, but part of its wider environment, at the local, national, regional and global levels. Structures, strategies and policies must reflect this interaction between the institution and its environment – and this in turn influences the pace of an institution's development and the shape of its emergent structures. In addition, universities need a clear picture of what they are doing, and what they are doing well. To achieve this, the RMO requires sufficient time to devise the best means of collecting, collating and analysing research-related data from the university – and to determine the most appropriate metrics.

The development of effective research management structures should therefore be seen as a medium- or even long-term process. The project universities all reported that they had underestimated the task of establishing the presence of an RMO within their respective universities. However, the survey responses and feedback from the universities indicate overall improvement in building RM structures over the course of this three-year project.

Experience from this and other RM capacity-building projects suggests that research management is in a constant state of flux. Thus it requires flexibility, the ability to respond promptly to change (especially change in national policy) and constant preparedness for redefinition (again often in response to national or donor policy). Universities must find their own particular niche but at the same time develop structures and systems that are compatible with what others are doing. In addition, universities may also need to accept that structuring for RM may be a perpetual work in progress.

Our findings from this project confirm that strengthening research management should proceed in three phases: **awareness raising**, conversion of such awareness into **organisational structures**, and development of the **external environment** to support these structures and help ensure their sustainability. It has also become clear that these phases are not discrete and must be considered simultaneously.

The findings indicate that staffing the RM function is an area of particular concern, often as a consequence of rigid HR policies. Experience from this and other projects suggests that universities will have to be flexible both when allocating existing staff to externally funded projects (so that the staff are not overstretched) and when hiring new staff for these projects (which come with their own timetable of activities) to ensure that the projects keep to schedule.

A further conclusion is that rules and regulations, without appropriate systems for monitoring, enforcement and evaluation, become merely guidelines – which are then easier to ignore. (For example, there is a difference between a university having a policy requiring consultancies to be registered, and that university being able to ensure that they are in fact registered.) It is a challenge for African universities to acknowledge significant discrepancies between policy (what is on 'paper') and practice – and a challenge for their research managers to devise practical and flexible systems that their university staff can work with.

This being the case, it may be necessary to prioritise systems over structures. We propose that the next phase for the African universities should be to develop the capacity to 'translate' their structures into workable systems and practice, tailored to their particular context.



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