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Give us a brief overview of your professional career and how you ended up at UCD in your current position?

I started in the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) over ten years ago, after completing my PhD in Immunology and then a postdoctoral fellowship with ELAN Corporation. I had an interest in graduate education during my PhD, particularly the area of transferable skills which I felt were undervalued as a key component of graduate training. I initially worked in DIT's Graduate Studies and Research Office as Postgraduate Research Co-ordinator, then moved to the Directorate of Research and Enterprise, working with our Head of Research, Dr. Steve Jerrams, as Graduate Education Manager and ultimately manager of Strategic Research Initiatives. My research management experience to date has been based primarily within graduate research education.

I have recently taken up a post in University College Dublin (UCD) as Graduate Programmes Manager. This is a new post which will involve supporting the implementation of UCD's strategy to develop 4th level education. I have quite a broad remit, but I believe my experience to date will support the delivery of a successful outcome.

What are your current responsibilities and what are the most rewarding aspects of your position?

My responsibilities in the development of strategic research initiatives primarily involved ensuring that DIT's research policy remained contemporaneous with best practice in Higher Education nationally and internationally. The areas of prioritisation included the design and implementation of DIT's Research Supervisor Support and Development Programme which was the first of its kind in Ireland and which DIT has run for nearly ten years. This programme supported over 100 new and inexperienced

research supervisors covering key areas such as student recruitment, monitoring, milestones, research policies and regulations, financial support, case studies etc. Another priority area was the development of Common Interest Groups - Joint PhD collaborations (e.g. DIT and the University of Limerick (UL)). Under this scheme students are jointly supervised and the research degree is awarded from both institutions. Recent areas of strategic development under my remit also included the implementation of policy relating to contract researchers with our human resources directorate, development of DIT's Graduate Research Enhancement Programmes (GREPS), management of one of DIT's research centres (RESC, Radiation and Environmental Science Centre) and the publication of our directorate's policies, models and approaches to research management.

In my new position, I am responsible for the streamlining and development of graduate programmes in UCD with an emphasis on embedding 4th level initiatives. The university has five graduate schools and over 100 graduate-taught and research programmes which require ongoing support and development. UCD is the biggest university in Ireland and has the largest graduate student base, so the Office of Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Training has a dedicated team to support these endeavours.

What are the key qualities required for your position?

In my opinion, the key qualities required for mine or any similar position include an ability to adapt quickly, remain flexible, think creatively, network efficiently and most definitely retain a sense of humour.

What are the major issues you see in managing research in Ireland?

The major issues connected with managing research in Ireland are:

Lack of communication amongst the various parties that manage academic endeavour. This includes the academic community itself, communications, systems operations and research management units. There is a lot of talent in Ireland and a cohesive approach to research management across the island is needed to channel it. Having worked in a number of educational roles and with a broad range of colleagues across the sector, research management often has a historical and local, institute specific function. With the introduction of the Irish Universities Association which represents the Irish University sector and the Research Alliance representing the Institutes of Technology sector, Ireland can now look towards a united, strategic and collaborative approach to educational management.

From a broader European standpoint, what do you think are the major issues that international research administrators should be aware of when dealing with Irish or European Research?

On the broader European front, the issues although quantifiably greater and influenced by politics, culture and traditions are in general quite similar. With increased emphasis by funding authorities placed on collaboration, joint applications with national, European and international partners are now a pre-requisite for funding consideration (e.g. Framework VII). This is a welcome development as it requires that specialists must get together and collaborate, a consequence of which is clustering and growth of expertise. International research administrators should also be aware of the broad ranging criteria for eligibility that is required by the major funding agencies, this can be difficult for the research community to manage.

How did you define “Strategic Research” at DIT?

Strategic Research at DIT or any other institution in my opinion can be broadly defined as: Identifying and adapting, as appropriate, initiatives that support and develop research activity as well as key areas of research endeavour which will further the research strategy of the institute and ensure that it remains contemporaneous with national and international strategic practice and development.

Are there any aspects of your international experience that colleagues in NCURA could learn from?

An interesting area in Europe which has been gaining momentum for some time is the structuring of graduate programmes into graduate schools. Under the Bologna* Process and with the development of the Salzburg Principles**, there has been an effort made on a European basis to standardise the structure of graduate education. The European Graduate School model is relatively flexible and is aimed at facilitating movement of students between countries and offering some level of consistency in the graduate experience. In Ireland, a huge emphasis has been placed on the development and acquisition of transferable skills for research students, leading to the development of the structured PhD. Unlike some international models, the Irish model tends to incorporate stage related generic and discipline specific training across the duration of a four year programme instead of a taught based element running throughout the first year of the PhD.

* <http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/>

** http://www.eua.be/eua/jsp/en/upload/Salzburg_Report_final.1129817011146.pdf

In your opinion, what are the emerging issues in international research administration over the next 5-10 years?

Over the next 5-10 years, it is of fundamental importance that key areas, many of which are flagged on a recurring basis, should finally be embedded in institutional strategy. Diversification of student profiles and structural support for student mobility must be facilitated. Another area which requires attention is the implementation of developmental and support structures for research supervisors. A huge emphasis regarding the success of graduate education is placed on the calibre of the student. Increasingly however, the abilities of supervisors to supervise and lead effectively, is quite rightly coming under scrutiny. Support and professional development for supervisors and supervisory practice is an emerging issue internationally.

What have been your greatest successes and challenges in your current position?

My greatest success at DIT was designing and developing Ireland’s first Research Supervisor Support and Development Programme. This programme has been enormously satisfying and was hailed a great success by the supervisors themselves which is very gratifying. The greatest challenges have been related to institutional politics and a degree of bureaucracy which can stifle creativity, progression and change, which I am sure are familiar issues internationally.

Do you have any final comments or observations for research managers, either in Ireland or internationally?

To anyone who has recently become or is thinking of becoming a research manager, I would give the following advice:

- i) Know the area you manage from the very basic to advanced levels.
- ii) Be a skilled networker, know who is doing what and where and get involved.
- iii) Get as much experience across the various areas in research management as possible and understand what others do and how they do it; it is a team exercise.
- iv) Don't forget to pursue some interesting research yourself.