

RM ROADMAP

Consensus Document for Country Community Ireland

Co-Creation Session 1: Understanding the landscape: National Networks and Associations

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RM ROADMAP

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landscape: National Networks and
Associations**

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Understanding the landscape: National Networks and Associations

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1. Introduction

This is an important moment for the research management (RM) community in Europe. The European Commission (EC) and countries across Europe want to better understand the current research management landscape to further strengthen the European Research Area (ERA).

Research management includes a broad range of professionals supporting researchers to achieve excellence in research. For this co-creation exercise, Research Managers (RMs) are to be considered as broad as possible including research policy advisers, research managers, financial support staff, data stewards, research infrastructure operators, knowledge transfer officers, business developers, knowledge brokers, innovation managers, legal and research contracts managers/professionals, etc. For simplicity, we use the term research management, but this exercise covers also other terms such as research support, research management and administration, professionals at the interface of science and other terms which are used as the norm in the national landscapes across Europe.

The RM Roadmap Knowledge and Community Platform (KCP) brings research managers together to shape the future of the profession and support the strengthening of an inclusive research management community in Europe. The KCP is a place where research managers share their views and introduce issues for discussion in a solution-focused endeavour. RM Roadmap Ambassadors lead the discussions for each country on the Knowledge and Community Platform, supported by national and regional RM networks.

This co-creation exercise is the biggest collaboration between RM networks ever to take place in Europe. With a focus on learning insights from RMs, the co-creation exercise seeks to establish a robust framework that can support professional growth and collaboration across the EU and associated countries.

By 2023, 40 country communities have been established within the RM Roadmap Ambassador Network. The RM Roadmap project will use the outcomes from this co-creation exercise to make a roadmap for the future of research management in Europe and to build and exchange solid knowledge on career framework opportunities, upskilling, and networking for research managers. RM Roadmap will ultimately build a value proposition for policy makers and institutional leaders who want to strengthen and modernise their research support departments.

This **consensus document for Country Community Ireland** contains the outcomes of the **First Co-Creation Session - Understanding the landscape: National Networks and Associations**.

A short summary of the main outcomes from the co-creation exercise is included in section 2. More information about the topic of RM National Networks and Associations is detailed in section 3. Recommendations about best practices, challenges and lessons learnt about (formal or informal) national networks, associations, communities are provided in section 4.

For more information about the RM Roadmap initiative, the reader can consult the following website: www.rmroadmap.eu

2. Summary of Co-Creation Session 1

In advance of the first co-creation session, the Irish ambassadors' team drew up a stakeholder contact list, using the combined knowledge of our own professional networks and institutions, and an awareness of other research support networks. We divided the list among us and contacted each organisation. We discussed the most effective way of reaching as many potential contributors as possible and decided to take whatever opportunities presented themselves. This was done through a variety of formal presentations, informal short talks, email lists to professional bodies, with follow-ups undertaken closer to the opening of the KCP. We reached out to these contacts to provide advance information on RM Roadmap aims and plans, to promote RM Roadmap KCP training and to notify them when the first co-creation session had opened and provide guidance on how to participate. During the session, we promoted participation further via targeted emails to individuals and groups and through LinkedIn.

By the end of the first co-creation session, 56 members had joined Ireland's country community and 15 contributions had been made to the session (four by ambassadors and eleven by other community members). Only three of the eleven community member contributors addressed the session's framing questions individually. Others contributed shorter summaries in response to the overall theme and set of questions. The community reflected a diverse cross-section of RMAs in Ireland, including pre-award and post-award funding managers, knowledge transfer professionals, librarians, research integrity officers and research career development professionals. Several more members introduced themselves in the community group but did not comment on the co-creation session. RMAs from the private sector and funding bodies proved harder to engage and are not represented here. We will strive to reach these RMAs over the coming months.

3. Discussion Outcomes of Co-Creation Session 1

1. If you have a national network (formal or informal), how did it help you? If you don't, please say how you have built your (internal) network and are using it.

There is no overall formal network for RMAs in Ireland. However, the Irish 'RMA' community itself, broadly defined as those supporting research in some capacity across the lifecycle, includes some groups that have had professional organisations for a long time (e.g., librarians), others who have established professional organisations more recently (e.g., knowledge transfer professionals), and others who do not currently have formal networks (e.g., pre-award funding specialists, post-award project managers, research career development and research ethics and integrity professionals). In the latter case, most contributors reported participating in a range of informal networks at national and European level and several described work in progress to establish formal networks, including an overall Irish RMA network. It should be noted that Ireland, as a small country, has good connectivity between higher education institutions, research centres, funding agencies and government departments. For example, we have relatively quick access to national contact points and National Delegates' expertise because of our small size.

Having carried out a thematic analysis of the contributions, we identified several ways contributors experienced benefits from being a member of either formal or informal networks.

- **Networking opportunities:** Events and conferences provide opportunities to meet professional colleagues from Ireland and other countries. These events are also particularly helpful for special interest groups to meet and share ideas. Contributors also value the opportunity for the informal meetings with colleagues that these events enable.
- **Practice sharing:** Networks facilitate communities of practice to enable sharing and developing good practice and resources, including solutions to common challenges encountered in relation to specific funders or operational issues. These groups often assist individual members with issues or problems that require specialist knowledge.
- **Advocacy and policy development:** Having a unified voice means that group interests can be represented at national and international level. Networks and professional organisations can also lobby for changes in policy and regulation. Working together on policy issues such as reducing research bureaucracy and influencing European funding policy through collaboration in European networks were cited as examples of this.

- **Emotional support:** Several contributors mentioned the value of networks in providing emotional support, sharing coping mechanisms to deal with heavy workloads and alleviating the isolation RMAs may experience working in demanding roles with little formal support.
- **Career enhancement:** Some professional bodies provide continuing professional development, either through provision of training courses, conferences, or accreditation. These courses are highly regarded, well attended, and sometimes run at the request of members.
- **Links with industry:** Knowledge transfer professionals observed that professional networks can be a useful point of contact for industry, as a provider of information on licensing, other legal issues or funding opportunities for international companies coming to Ireland for the first time. They can also provide useful documentation such as templates.

2. What challenges do RM networks and associations encounter in contributing to national and European R&I systems? If there are no networks, please elaborate if there have been networking initiatives and if not, please state why you think that is the case.

Irish RMAs have been very active in informal networks at national level and in European-level networks. However, there is considerable fragmentation at national level. Professional associations exist for some groups within the wider RMA community, such as librarians and knowledge transfer professionals. Informal networks for groups without these formal supports operate based on roles, e.g., pre-award funding managers, often sub-divided by institutional network affiliation (e.g., the Irish Universities Alliance (IUA) and the Technological Higher Education Association (THEA) have separate informal networks). Informal networks frequently subdivide further to better support practice-sharing among highly specialised professionals, for instance pre-award and post-award funding managers participate in networks with others working with the same funders or programmes. This is beneficial for practice-sharing and addressing common operational challenges but reduces the opportunity to leverage the community to influence the national funding system or national policy on research and education. Additionally, inter-institutional competition for National, European and industry funding can be an obstacle to open practice-sharing. One contributor provided the example of the new national funding agency that merges the two largest existing agencies. RMAs had little opportunity to influence this. Another contributor noted that Ireland has not signed up to Action 17 of the European Research Area (ERA) policy agenda, the Research Management Initiative, suggesting that the lack of professional

recognition and a unified voice for the RMA community is one reason it has been challenging to advocate for this nationally.

Many Irish RMAs are active in formal European and international networks. The current Chair of EARMA and several current and past Board and Standing Committee members work in Irish institutions, while Irish RMAs have had leadership roles in the creation and operation of EARMA thematic groups such as the Impact and Post-Award Project Management groups. Irish knowledge transfer professionals are also active at European level in the ASTP. Individuals and institutions also contribute to influencing European policy through working groups of European-level university networks such as the League of European Research Universities (LERU) and the Coimbra Group. There is some fragmentation at international level too, though. For example, pre-award funding specialists and post-award managers more likely to participate in EARMA, while knowledge transfer specialists participate in ASTP. There are good reasons for these divisions, but also a missed opportunity to collaborate on areas of common concern. Even within existing professional associations, members may benefit from opportunities to connect with a broader 'RMA' community through an umbrella organisation, for example librarians with a stronger focus on research or knowledge transfer professionals with a strong focus on research project management. However, their needs, expectations and levels of engagement may differ from those who currently lack professional organisations and accreditation. More broadly, an RMA umbrella network that includes public and private sector members could facilitate relationships that could strengthen partnerships and help build trust between academia and industry.

3. Please list all of the formal and informal networks and associations of research managers in your country and link to their websites or online groups.

As outlined above, there is no single formal network for RMAs in Ireland and RMAs have predominantly relied on participation in European networks and organisation of informal networks. There has always been strong Irish participation in EARMA events and leadership and there are plans to develop an Irish RMA association soon, with a planning meeting anticipated in early 2024.

Contributors reported participating in the following networks:

Formal networks

- All-Island Research Excellence Network ([AIREN](#))
- The Library Association of Ireland ([LAI](#))

- International Federation of Library Associations & Institutions ([IFLA](#))
- European Association of Institutions of Higher Education ([EURASHE](#))
- NERQ – The Embassy of Good Science [The Embassy of Good Science](#)
- Consortium on National and University Libraries ([CONUL](#))
- Ligue des Bibliothèques Européennes de Recherche – Association of European Research Libraries ([LIBER](#))
- Knowledge Transfer Ireland ([KTI](#))
- Irish Knowledge Transfer Association (IKTA)
- Trinity's Research Development Office (pre-award) participates in joint efforts to inform and influence European funding policy via research officer working groups within the university's European networks such as LERU and the Coimbra Group
- Irish RMAs have participated in co-founding and leading several new EARMA thematic groups (Impact, Post-Award Project Management) and many are and have been active in leadership positions within EARMA.

Informal networks

- There are no formal networks of pre-award or post-award research funding managers but there are several informal networks that meet regularly, including:
 - The [Irish Universities Association](#) (IUA) has Research Officer sub-groups for Horizon Europe and the main Irish funders: [Health Research Board](#) (HRB), [Irish Research Council](#) (IRC) and [Science Foundation Ireland](#) (SFI).
 - [The Technological Higher Education Association](#) (THEA) has a Research Officers working group.
 - A standing meeting of Research Managers from SFI Centres (multi-institution) is organised periodically to pool knowledge and resources on operational issues. These centres often have small team of operations staff who work across most RMA roles and have a specific remit to collaborate with industry.

- [Enterprise Ireland](#), who coordinate Ireland's National Contact Points (NCPs) and National Delegates for Horizon Europe, organise periodic [National Support Network](#) (NSN) meetings where research funding staff from HEIs can meet each other and NCPs. Ireland's NCPs are part of Europe-wide NCP networks. Enterprise Ireland is also a member of the [Enterprise Europe Network](#) for SMEs. Enterprise Ireland's [IDIRUS](#) platform is a knowledge bank and forum primarily for pre-award RMAs and NCPs.
- NCPs or national funders facilitate several informal networks, including:
 - MSCA-COFUND managers group – facilitated by the NCP but run by members
 - Health Research Board (HRB) Cancer Trials Groups Project Managers
 - Health Research Board (HRB) Programme Managers
 - SFI Programme Managers
- There is no formal network for Researcher Career Development, but IUA Training and Development network occasionally addresses topics relevant to researcher development.
- The National Open Research Forum (NORF) currently have a funded project called [Sonrai](#), which will develop a network of data stewards in Ireland. The project is currently scoping the community's needs and will contribute towards the professionalisation of the work of data stewards.
- Consultancy pilot project managers informal network (now within IKTA)
- Many Irish HEIs are part of the HERCG (Higher Education Research Contracts group).

4. Please list and link to any policy documents and funding which mentions research management or the equivalent national name(s) for research management.

- National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030, Report of the Strategy Group, January 2011.
<https://hea.ie/assets/uploads/2017/06/National-Strategy-for-Higher-Education-2030.pdf>
- Innovation 2020, Ireland's Strategy for Research and Development, Science and Technology, Interdepartmental Committee on Science, Technology and Innovation, 2015.
<https://dbei.gov.ie/en/Publications/Publication-files/Innovation-2020.pdf>

- Impact 2030: Ireland's Research and Innovation Strategy
<https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/224616/5f34f71e-e13e-404b-8685-4113428b3390.pdf#page=null>
- Ireland's National IP Protocol 2019 and associated IP Protocol Resource Guide
<https://enterprise.gov.ie/en/publications/irelands-national-ip-protocol-2019.html>
- Enterprise Ireland KT Boost Programme https://www.knowledgetransferireland.com/About_KTI/KT-Boost/KT-Boost-Call-Guidelines.pdf
- SFI ARC Hub Programme: Accelerating Research to Commercialisation
<https://www.sfi.ie/funding/funding-calls/sfi-arc-hub-programme/SFI-ARC-Hub-Programme-Call-Document.pdf>
- SFI Research Centres Programme https://www.sfi.ie/funding/funding-calls/sfi-research-centres/Call_Document_Research_Centres_2023_22sept.pdf
- National Smart Specialisation Strategy for Innovation 2022- 2027
<https://enterprise.gov.ie/en/publications/publication-files/national-smart-specialisation-strategy-for-innovation-2022-2027.pdf>
- Innovators' Initiative (2023) <https://globalambition.ie/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Innovators-Initiative-Call-Guidance-Document-.pdf>
- Irish Research Council: Strategic Plan 2020- 2024*
<https://www.ircset.ie/assets/uploads/2020/01/Irish-Research-Council-Strategic-Plan-2020-2024.pdf>
- Shaping Our Future – SFI Strategy 2025 (SFI, 2021)* <https://www.sfi.ie/strategy/SFI-Strategy-2025.pdf>
- National Framework on the Transition to an Open Research Environment (National Open Research Forum, 2019) <https://enterprise.gov.ie/en/publications/publication-files/national-framework-on-the-transition-to-an-open-research-environment.pdf>

*These national research strategies mention 'knowledge transfer' as an activity but do not discuss the knowledge transfer or RMA professions.

4. Recommendations

1. **Build on existing informal networks.** Many people will have good working relationships with colleagues carrying out similar roles in other organisations. These informal networks can be leveraged to create a more formal network. It may help to start small, creating a community of practice within an existing professional body or informal network from the RMA community, then growing.
2. **Carefully consider the needs of the RMA community and the specific needs of different groups** within the overall community. Consult with the community to understand their needs in terms of support, information, training, and career development. Consider how broadly you want to define the RMA community in creating an umbrella organisation and whether a broad definition strengthens or undermines efforts at professionalisation and recognition, particularly for groups without existing professional associations. Within an umbrella organisation, thematic groups based around specific RMA functions may be needed, with structures in place to ensure interaction between these groups.
3. **Use professional facilitators to enable genuine co-creation in network development.** Leverage the experience of those who have already held leadership roles in national and international networks (formal or informal) but ensure meaningful input from a diversity of voices.
4. **Clearly define the scope, goals, objectives and membership benefits of the new organisation, in consultation with the RMA community.** In doing so, consider good practice examples from countries with established networks and share these with the community. Ensure transparent governance structures and opportunities for participation from RMAs at different career stages and from different kinds of organisations.
5. **Develop an agile structure** that can respond to funding landscape changes and new priorities, as they arise. For example, time-limited working groups on a particular issue, with a defined output.
6. **Explore how to ensure recognition for contribution to the network** within individuals' institutions.
7. **Think about funding models.** Are there funds or grants available to support the organisation's activities? If you are considering a membership fee, will it be paid by RMA employer organisations, individual membership contributions or a combination of these? Consider if it is appropriate to align with or gain support from a national or governmental body (e.g., Knowledge Transfer Ireland is part of the government agency Enterprise Ireland). This may also help with initial funding challenges when setting up a new network, however, this needs to be balanced with careful consideration of professional independence.



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