
DOI

https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.5278195.v1

Link to record in KAR

http://kar.kent.ac.uk/62935/

Document Version

Publisher pdf
INTRODUCTION
The Research Administration as a Profession (RAAAP) project, funded by the NCURA Research Program*, includes a worldwide survey of research administrators, which:

a) Provides a global snapshot of the profession; and

b) Examines the key skills necessary to hold a leadership position in research administration.

The aim of the project is to provide Leaders with guidance on how best to support and develop their staff in their careers, and for junior staff to be able to map their own professional development. For the purposes of this study, we define a research administrator as someone whose role is devoted to, or includes support for, some part of the research lifecycle. Research administrators mostly work in universities and research institutes, but many also work in hospitals, charities, private foundations and government.

METHODS
The investigators developed a cross-sectional, online questionnaire, with the input and advice of an advisory group of six senior individuals** from several international professional associations, and surveyed research administrators around the world. The questionnaire comprised of three broad sections:

A. What role do you currently have and why did you join and stay in the research administration profession?

B. What skills (hard and soft) are important in your current role, and what level of expertise is needed?

C. What formal training have you received, and what associations do you belong to?

The survey was released on May 20th 2016 and closed on September 7th 2016. Eleven professional associations*** distributed the survey to their membership. We received 2,691 responses with over 200 data variables.

RESULTS
Basic demographics of the respondents were collected to provide a snapshot of the profession for each region. Figure 1 shows the number of responses received across the world from various areas; responses from areas with lower response rates such as Asia, Africa, and South America were combined in the region “Rest of World”. Given the high number of responses from the UK, this region was pulled out separately for analyses from the rest of Europe. Hypothesis: Soft skills (such as communication and adaptability) are more important than hard skills (such as proposal development and costing) for those in leadership roles in research administration.

Although the skill set was existing, developing the confidence to act and direct others comes with time and respect from Senior Leadership and the Board of Directors.** – survey respondent

Survey respondents were asked to select their level of responsibility: Strategic, Managerial, Operational, Assisting or N/A against ten different areas of research support and administration. Looking at self-reported Leaders who responded to the area of Audit and Compliance, Figure 3 shows a marked difference in responses for Very and Extremely important (purple and yellow bars).

“RA is a neat niche profession and RAs are unsung heroes.” – survey respondent

“I didn’t realise that what I was doing was research administration initially” – survey respondent

“IAA is a great fit and damn good at the role.” – survey respondent

CONCLUSIONS
Leaders and Managers reported higher importance of soft skills as compared to the proposal development related hard skills, as depicted in figures 3 and 4. Whereas Operational roles reported a higher proportion of their hard skills as being more (extremely) important than their soft skills. Indeed, the increasing importance of soft skills when progressing from Operational to Managerial to Leadership roles is marked. This suggests that those in leadership positions in research administration place more importance on their soft skills, such as communications, project management, and conflict resolution, than hard skills in the profession.

FURTHER WORK
More analysis with the datasets can be conducted by those interested in exploring, for example: how long Leaders have been in the field, the professional associations they belong to, and the training they have received. This should assist those in more junior positions (and their mentors) to map their careers toward a leadership path.

The investigators and the project advisory group strongly suggest that a shortened version of the survey be conducted, perhaps every two years, to obtain further snapshots of the profession and provide longitudinal data.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
*NCURA Research Program: http://www.ncura.edu/MembershipVolunteering/Programs/NCURAREsearchProgram.aspx
**The Advisory Group is comprised of: Patrice Aja-Ajabe, Programme Officer, ACU (UK)
Jan Andersen, Senior Executive Advisor, TUD; past president EARMA (DK)
Janice Besch, Managing Director, Alzheimer’s Australia NHMRC; President, ARMS (AU)
Cindy Kiel, EAVC for Research at UCD; President, SRA-I, (US)
Susi Poli, University of Bolgnia; EARMA Board Member (IT)
Deborah Zornes Director, Research Services, RRU; President, CARA (CA)

***ARMA (UK), ARMS (Australasia), BRAMA (Brazil), CARA (Canada), EARMA (Europe), NCURA (USA), NORDP (USA), RMAN-3 (Japan), SARIMA (Southern Africa), SRAI (USA), and WARMIA (Western Africa). EARMA extended the survey to other members of the Leiden Group (including the Austrian, Danish, Finnish, German, Icelandic, and Norwegian associations) of European associations of research administrators.

CONTACT THE AUTHORS
Simon Kerridge, DProf, University of Kent, UK
s.kerridge@kent.ac.uk

Stephanie F. Scott, MS, CRA, Columbia University, NY
sfs2110@columbia.edu

Simon Kerridge, DProf, and Stephanie F. Scott, MS, CRA
Funded by the NCURA Research Program

R A A A P worldwide.wordpress.com