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Research Support

in ERUA

Part 1 – Mapping and Contextualising
Current Practice, Organisation, Tasks, and
Services

31 March 2023

Table of contents

Document information	3
List of abbreviations	4
Executive summary	5
1. Introduction	7
2. Background	9
2.1 European Universities Initiative – harmonisation and the attempt to create European institutions	9
3. Scope and methodology	11
3.1 Research Question	11
3.2 Methodology	11
4. What is research support?	12
5. Contextualisation	16
5.1. Changing grants and funding landscape	16
5.2. Change in workforce composition	18
5.3. Professionalisation of research support	20
6. How is research support organized at the partner universities?	22
6.1. Preceding consideration	22
6.2. Mapping of structures and services	23
6.3. Summary of mapping	26
6.4. Excursus: Local and centralised research support – a balancing act	27
6.5. Tasks and services	28
6.6. Priorities and goals	29
7. Concluding remarks	30
8. References	32
9. Appendix	38

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List of abbreviations

EUI	European Universities Initiative
NBU	New Bulgarian University (Нов български университет)
RUC	Roskilde University (Roskilde Universitet)
UAegean	University of the Aegean (Πανεπιστήμιο Αιγαίου)
UKON	University of Konstanz (Universität Konstanz)
Paris8	Paris 8 University Vincennes-Saint-Denis (Université Paris 8 Vincennes-Saint-Denis)

Executive summary

This report presents the first part of a two-part study that examines research support structures at the five partner universities of the European Reform University Alliance (ERUA). The focus of the first part is on mapping current structures and practices of research support at these institutions. The second part of the study will explore best practices, challenges, and potential for mutualisation ('creating shared structures') in research support across the partner universities against the backdrop of the overarching goals of not only ERUA but also the higher education and research policy of the European Union more generally. We recommend reading both reports consecutively to gain a comprehensive understanding of the research support structures in place, along with the potential for mutualisation aimed at enhancing research support. Together, the two parts of the study seek to encourage discussions on how research support can be improved.

This report will be of interest to staff and management involved in research support activities to understand the current state of research support at peer institutions. Additionally, it also tends to inform those who actively participate in committees and institutional organs responsible for organizing their respective universities. Lastly, this report may also pique the interest of research staff who frequently collaborate with various research support services.

The study used an exploratory mixed-method approach, including a literature analysis, data from the 'Research Administration as a Profession' survey from 2019, and drawing on a survey answered by research support staff across the alliance and, finally, a follow-up focus group.

Against the backdrop of profound changes in the higher education sector in terms of how research is carried out, research support activities have grown in scope and complexity. While there is no standard definition of tasks and responsibilities falling under research support, they broadly refer to the range of services and resources that institutions provide to support researchers in securing funding, managing research activities, disseminating results, and ensuring compliance with relevant regulations and policies. While some advocate for greater professionalisation of research support, others are concerned that an increased focus on administration might detract from the core mission of higher education institutions. Our study is, thus, situated within a larger conversation on the role of universities.

The report explores the organisational structures and approaches to research support at the five partner universities (NBU, Paris8, RUC, UAegean, UKON). All five universities have

institutionalised research support structures. However, our mapping exercise found that there are significant differences in the perception and implementation of the research support across the partner universities. These differences range from the organisational structures, the officially assigned tasks and the number of staff members. These conditions obviously influence the capacity of the provided services. The institutional complexity and the inherent blurriness of research support tasks make it difficult to precisely define and compare the scope of the particular functions of research support across the alliance. Nonetheless, our explorative analysis sheds light on the practices and arrangements in place, with the goal of providing the basis for further discussion.

The investigation highlights that research support at the partner universities is primarily focused on navigating the research funding landscapes and the management of third-party funds and projects. This reflects the importance placed on grant acquisition and third-party funding in the current higher education environment. Research support staff across the alliance identified relieving research staff of administrative burden as a top priority, which aligns with the literature's characterisation as a 'helping profession'.

Overall, the report provides the foundation for further discussions on collaborations and pooling of resources among the partner universities in ERUA, which will be explored in more detail in the second part of the study. The findings can help to inform efforts to improve research support structures and practices across the institutions, with the aim of enhancing the overall research environment.

1. Introduction

In recent decades, universities and higher education have undergone significant changes, as science and research have become increasingly entangled in a network of multiple stakeholders from private firms and funding agencies, to public institutions, and civil society (Albert, 2003; Vallas & Kleinman, 2007). Some scholars argue that the ‘social contract of science’ has been radically transformed: Previously, scientific integrity, productivity, and excellence were largely self-regulated, and societal impact was thought to occur without deliberate action. However, the contemporary model emphasises explicit and intentional efforts to ensure (non-academic) impact of investments in science (Esko & Tuunainen, 2019, p. 404; Gibbons, 1999).

As funding, partnership, and collaboration structures change, new competences and skills are needed in higher education organisations. This has resulted in the emergence of specific support and service staff at higher education institutions taking on an increasingly important role within the research environment. These roles fall within the field of research management and administration, a profession that has sought to define itself in recent years (Gornitzka & Larsen, 2004). Today, most universities have established some form of support office or other structures dedicated to supporting research staff, e.g., in securing external funding or administering projects (Langley, 2012, p. 71; Rytberg & Geschwind, 2017, p. 335). To underline the complexity of these new types of activities, it is worth mentioning the industry of ‘academic consulting’ that has emerged external to universities.¹ Such companies assist in many tasks related to the changing context in which universities operate: From monitoring funding and policies to reporting impact. To our knowledge, discussions on private companies assisting in such matters and to which extent universities depend on them are largely absent from scholarly literature. However, in this report, we focus solely on the support staff employed locally at each university.

This report is the first part of a two-part study that assesses research support structures in place at the partner universities of the European Reform University Alliance (ERUA). We do not only examine the current layout but also address which challenges and good practices are experienced by the people working with support. ‘Mutualisation’ was addressed in the original description of the ERUA project. Likewise, ‘Deepening transnational cooperation’ is the

¹ See e.g., <https://www.sirisacademic.com/>,

overarching aim of the European Universities Initiative (EUI), which provides the framework for ERUA: European Universities are conceived as ‘ambitious transnational alliances of higher education institutions developing long-term structural and strategic cooperation’ in higher education, research, and innovation (European Commission, 2021). We critically examine the potential for various forms of mutualisation² against the backdrop of these overarching goals of not only the alliance, but also of European higher education and research aims more generally.

In this first report, we provide insights into how research support is organised and practised at the partner universities. The report is targeted at various audiences at the partner universities: We address both those working in research support units as well as the management and leadership of these units. Our aim is to inspire examination of their respective structures to identify good practices as well as potential challenges in their work. Likewise, we target research staff who participate in committees and institutional organs which are involved in organising their respective universities. Finally, the report is of potential interest to research staff who frequently interact with research support.

² Mutualisation broadly refers to collaboration and pooling of resources. We elaborate on the meaning of this term in more detail in the second report of the study.

2. Background

In the initial ERUA proposal, the overarching goal relating to research support was to increase coordination and collaboration between partner universities, particularly between those units working with funding from external sources within Europe, e.g., Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe. It was specified that ERUA would establish ‘common coordinated research support services’ to organise collaboration between research support units and, more specifically, target joint submissions to European funding programmes. Subsequently, extensive pooling of resources and mutual approaches to funding and support constitute long-term goals of the alliance. We examine opportunities of these mutual initiatives and to which extent they help to achieve the overall strategic goals addressed by the alliance. We seek to critically examine not only how to implement such ‘mutualisation’ of the partner universities in research support but also to ask the fundamental question of whether this is fruitful for the partner universities in ERUA.

As reform universities working towards common strategic goals relating to both research and teaching, we believe that there are important lessons to be learnt from surveying the current practices of research support to identify not only possible roads to improvement which can enhance the impact, engagement, and innovation derived from scientific production as well as education at the universities but also to identify challenges along the way.

2.1 European Universities Initiative – harmonisation and the attempt to create European institutions

ERUA is part of the European Commission’s ‘European Universities Initiative’ (EUI), which constitutes the most recent expression of the aim of convergence and compatibility to increase European attractiveness and competitiveness in higher education. The Bologna process paved the way for an ambitious programme to significantly accelerate – deepen and widen – transnational collaboration. Various described as either a game-changer, or the canary in the coalmine, the EUI builds on the achievements of over two decades of European collaboration in higher education and research towards the establishment of the European (Higher) Education and Research Areas (EEA & ERA). While implementation and capacity across the European region remain uneven, the EUI presents a significant leap in terms of ambition: from mutual recognition to mutualisation and ultimately the creation of ‘European institutions’ (cf. also shared infrastructures, legal statute, European degree etc.). The EUI, therefore, emphasises the importance of a shared long-term strategic vision for collaboration at alliance level. Thus, the

alliance is situated in a European context, where ambitious efforts towards mutualisation are strategic goals.

3. Scope and methodology

3.1 Research Question

The main research question of this report is how research support is organised at the partner universities. To address this question, the study maps the current organisational structures of research support, officially assigned tasks, and staff capacity of research support services at each partner university. By providing an overview of the current state of research support at the ERUA partner universities, the report aims at providing a foundation for discussions on potential areas for collaboration and resource-sharing, which will be elaborated in the second report of the study.

3.2 Methodology

This section briefly outlines the methodological approach used in the study, highlighting the study's explicit exploratory nature. Besides a literature analysis, we draw partly on the Research Administration as a Profession (RAAAP) survey from 2019. To obtain input from research support staff at the partner universities, an online survey was conducted after mapping the research support structures and services through university websites and directories, as well as some personal communication. To complement our analysis of survey responses, we conducted a focus group.

We include 39 full and 41 partial survey responses. Additionally, in the focus group, four research support staff from two partner universities participated. Further information on the methodology, including the survey design, qualitative coding process, and response rates, can be found in the appendix.

4. What is research support?

At the heart of this report lies the notion of ‘research support’. In this section, we present this term and the background behind the emergence of this relatively new profession at universities that the term covers. At its very core, research support can be described as ‘the help that is offered to researchers to help them during the research process’ (Sewell, 2020, p. 2). The support can come from different places, such as colleagues and supervisors, as well as the wider institution. In this report, we primarily focus on institutionalised research support structures (e.g., support offices, research administrator positions, project managers) as distinct from support from colleagues and/or supervisors.

Looking back in history, research support came primarily from university libraries with assistance in finding and managing information (Poli, 2018; Sewell, 2020). However, in recent decades, the external and internal environment of the higher education sector has changed significantly as a result of reforms based on the governing ideals related to New Public Management. The introduction of concepts such as ‘steering at a distance’ that emphasises stronger accountability (Kickert, 1995), external competitive funding mechanisms (Auranen & Nieminen, 2010), as well as the demand for higher education institutions to contribute to social, economic, and cultural development through exchange with external actors (Compagnucci & Spigarelli, 2020; Zomer & Benneworth, 2011) have led universities to intensify investment in the management of the research process (a more detailed discussion follows in chapter 5).

Taken together, these developments have resulted in a more comprehensive role for research support with an expanded set of services and tasks that run throughout the ‘research life cycle’: This ideal-typical model and the terminology related to it is used as a reference by many organisations working with research support. Roles and staff groups are often categorised based on their placement in this cycle, whereby the acquirement of external funding is frequently used as a dividing line in the organisation of support structures, e.g., ‘pre-award offices’ and ‘post-award offices’.

Research support tasks

The UK's Association for Research Managers and Administrators (ARMA) outlines 21 task areas gathered under seven broader themes in its Professional Development Framework:

Developing Proposals: Identifying Funding Sources and Customers; Preparing Proposals; Costing, Pricing and Submitting Funding Proposals

Project Lifetime: Drafting, Negotiating and Accepting Contracts; Dealing with Project Finance; Employing Staff on Research Projects; Reports for Funders

Translation: Pathways to Impact (Dissemination and Public Engagement); Knowledge Exchange and Business Development; Technology Transfer; Supporting CPD Courses

Postgraduate Researchers: Supporting Postgraduate Researchers

Policy and Governance: Contributing to Research Policy and Strategy; Contributing to REF; Supporting Research Ethics and Governance

Management Information and Related Functions: Working with Management Information Systems; Supporting Audit; Making Statutory Returns

Service Organisation and Delivery: Managing a Research Support Service; Organising and Structuring a Research Support Service; Mapping and Reviewing Research Support Service Functions

Infobox: Overview of research support tasks

The infobox illustrates the broad remit of research support in the current research landscape. The wide palette of tasks highlights that there is no standard definition of what research support encompasses. Rather, the responsibilities and structures are influenced by the unique institutional and cultural context of individual universities and research organisations (Kerridge, 2021; Langley, 2012; Poli, 2018; Shelley, 2010). This is also apparent in the case of the ERUA partner universities; the institutional support settings vary greatly, as we will show in section **Fejl! Henvisningskilde ikke fundet.**

As research support has grown in scope and complexity, a new professional role has emerged in the ecosystem of research institutions – namely, research support staff, as they are designated in this report (we discuss the issue of a title for this role in the following paragraphs). The growing significance and the continued push for the professionalisation of research support are also manifested in the European Research Area (ERA) Policy Agenda¹ with Action 17, which includes the implementation of a Research Management Initiative aimed, among other things, at supporting networks and training programs for those working in research support roles (Delaure, 2022). It is worth noting that the push towards increased professionalisation of research support and its subsequent resource allocation is not without tensions between different stakeholders in the research community (Delucchi et al., 2021; Ginsberg, 2011; Martin, 2016; Shelley, 2010).

The ongoing debate over the role and status of research support staff is complicated by national and institutional differences in terminology, competencies, and responsibilities. In this report, we use the term ‘research support staff’ as a more neutral term reflecting our explorative approach to defining and understanding the scope and nature of their work.³ Nevertheless, we would like to give an overview of other terms used in the literature for professionals working in research support to link our findings to ongoing scholarly discussions.

In the literature, the designations ‘research administrators’ and ‘research manager’ or ‘research managers and administrators (RMAs)’ are often used when discussing support activities for research and research staff (Acker et al., 2019; Allen-Collinson, 2006; Kerridge, 2021; Poli, 2018; Shelley, 2010). Yet, there is a growing awareness that ‘administrator’ or ‘manager’ carries a somewhat negative connotation in the higher education environment (Whitchurch, 2008). Klumpp & Teichler (2008) introduced the term ‘higher education professionals’ (HEPROs) for the group of professionals who are not primarily active in teaching and research but support these activities (Schneijderberg & Merkator, 2012, p. 53). Bossu & Brown (2018) use the term ‘professional and support staff in higher education’ and Rytberg (2020) applies the term ‘professional support staff’. Whitchurch (2008, 2009) proposed the notion of the ‘blended professional’ who works within the so-called ‘third space’ between academic and administrative domains. In an effort to encompass the vast and complex responsibilities of this group of professionals, Agostinho et al. (2020) propose the name ‘Professionals at the Interface of Science’, thereby following the concept of a ‘third space’ by Whitchurch (2009) that breaks the classic dichotomy of ‘researchers’ and ‘administrative support’, positioning them as additional significant players in research and innovation. However, the concept of a ‘third space’ has also been criticised in a German context for deepening the alienation of research and administration (Wissenschaftsrat, 2018). Considering the growing importance of ‘research impact’, Dunleavy et al. (2019) discuss the emergence of so-called ‘publicly engaged research managers’, who support academic teams to engage with the public about the research process and findings. Their findings underline the various demands concerning the job designation, as the labels ‘administrator’ or ‘manager’ were perceived as insufficient to convey the actual focus of the work since ‘the most important skills were not process-based but interpersonal.’ (Dunleavy et al.,

³ Exception will be made when referring to the RAAAP survey, where the designations ‘research administrators’ and ‘research managers’ are used. Likewise, in the survey distributed to the research support staff at the partner universities (see Methodology section) we used the terms ‘research administration’ and ‘research management’ to draw on familiar terminology.

2019, p. 115) Alternative job titles such as ‘facilitator’, ‘associate’, and ‘coordinator’ were discussed (Dunleavy et al., 2019, p. 115).

As the paragraph above works to underline, the issue of ‘naming’ or ‘labelling’ extends beyond formal nomenclature but indicates fluid role expectations and diffuse responsibilities of research support within the ecosystem of higher education institutions. Hansen & Moreland (2004) describe the role as ‘Janus-faced’ in order to navigate the ever-changing research landscape with respect to regulatory, economic, and political changes while simultaneously ensuring adequate support *for* research, especially concerning critical, novel, and creative research. Already Kaplan (1958) pointed to the conflicting role of research support (he used the term research administrator) as a ‘man in the middle’, caught between, at times, conflicting demands and needs of research staff and those of higher authority within the organisation; today's context adds external funding authorities and external partners to this list.

In conclusion, the group of research support staff which constitute the focus of this report is subject to significant discussion, relating not only to terminology but also in terms of changing structures within the universities.

5. Contextualisation

Executive summary

This section provides a contextual framework that situates the subsequent analysis and discussion. Based on the scholarly literature, we present the context in which research support is considered increasingly important. The traditional notion that universities inherently contribute to society is being challenged by a new emphasis on accountability and intentional efforts to demonstrate societal impact. This is perhaps most notably reflected in substantial changes in funding structures: Now, grant acquisition has become an increasingly important factor for universities, which has stimulated a need for specialised research support skills in project management and grant application support. We show how there is a substantial discussion about the development of academic staffing, specifically on the question of whether administrative expenses, for example, for research support, are growing too rapidly at the cost of academic resources. Finally, we show how there has been a growing push towards the professionalisation of research support through various efforts towards increased formalisation in training, certifications, and status. The discussion of the attempt to professionalise research support will be a useful foundation for further analysis, seeing as it is a highly contested occupational group for which the boundaries and specific attributes are still being negotiated, which influences how their work is organised.

5.1. Changing grants and funding landscape

As grant application has become a decisive factor in higher education research in general, the work of research support offices is increasingly structured around the pre- and post-award phases of grant acquisition. Therefore, we find it worth outlining the changes in the grants and funding landscape more closely.

Public funding of research institutions, particularly of universities, in Europe has undergone significant changes. While the ‘old social contract for science’ (Martin, 2003) based on the Humboldtian ideals⁴ left the universities with considerable autonomy regarding the allocation of resources and thus regarding their research activities, the new rationales of funding imply demands for greater accountability and requirements to address social and economically relevant research problems in exchange for public funds (Lepori et al., 2019). Against this background, a shift from recurrent block funding towards project-based funding mechanisms has been observed (Hicks, 2012; Lepori et al., 2007).⁵ Consequently, funding arrangements for research activities in the higher education sector have become more complex and competitive (Aagaard, 2017; Sörlin, 2007; Whitley, 2010). Obtaining funds entails additional transaction costs as it involves the application for funds and contract negotiation, as well as project monitoring and submission of reports to the funding body (Raudla et al., 2015, p. 961), expanding the administrative tasks.

In the European context, the European Union has played an increasingly significant role in the research funding landscape since the 1990s by defining the framework for European research policy and through direct funding instruments such as the European Framework Programmes (Heilbron et al., 2017, pp. 2–3; Lepori et al., 2007, pp. 372–373). As the importance of EU funding grows, there has been a corresponding rise in the demand for professionals with specialised knowledge in EU project management (Büttner & Leopold, 2015, p. 62).

As external funding sources have become more prominent, grant writing has become a central activity in the academic world. Effective communication and promotion of project ideas are now crucial skills (Velarde, 2018). As various scholars (see, e.g. Luukkonen & Thomas, 2016) highlight, applying for grants can be complex and academics may need support to navigate it effectively. Success in grant application depends not only on the quality of the proposed research itself but increasingly, applications are also evaluated on the basis of factors such as the socio-economic impact and visibility as well as the way the project is being managed

⁴ The Humboldtian ideals refer to the educational philosophy of Wilhelm von Humboldt introduced in the early 19th century. The central elements in the Humboldtian notion of the university are the unity of teaching and research, academic freedom, the university as a research institution and the concept of ‘Bildung’ (the cultivation or formation of the self).

⁵ For an overview of current reforms of higher education funding models, see Pruvot & Estermann (2021): In an analysis in the context of the NextGeneration EU recovery package, they found that “[t]he general narrative is of a greater focus on the efficiency of public investment in higher education, research and innovation, through performance-based funding and competitive funding schemes.” (Pruvot & Estermann, 2021, p. 17)

(Wedekind & Philbin, 2018, p. 48). In response, universities have seen an increase in the number of staff dedicated to assisting and supporting research staff in the grant proposal writing process (Acker et al., 2019, pp. 61–62). These professionals assist in developing and refining research ideas and writing proposals while overlooking the funding landscape to ensure compliance with funding organisation requirements (Cunningham, 2020). In the context of EU grant application, the research support staff serve furthermore as ‘facilitators’ or ‘translators’ who are responsible for translating between research staff and EU jargon (Gengnagel et al., 2022, p. 1585).

In a critical stance drawing on the case study of three Swedish universities, Beime et al. (2021) argue that the development of grant offices within universities not only reflects a broader shift toward the marketisation of research but that the grant offices themselves with their intervention shape research staff according to neoliberal policies of performativity. Although further research is necessary to fully understand the market mechanisms at work within higher education institutions (including research on the mechanism of self-control and compliance to managerialism and marketisation on the side of research staff, see, e.g., Alvesson & Spicer (2016); Gerdin & Englund (2022)), it is important to acknowledge that research support staff can wield considerable influence over research activities. It is essential that research support staff themselves also recognise the power they have, as this notion might stand in opposition to their self-identity (‘We’re problem solvers’, see Reardon (2021)) in order to make more conscious decisions in their work to support research.

5.2. Change in workforce composition

In this section, we provide context into the extent of the occupational group of research support staff at universities – how big has the change in workforce composition been seen in the light of the inclusion of these types of staff categories?

The relationship and balance between the administrative component and the academic labour force in higher education institutions is a complex issue that continues to be the subject of much debate in the academic literature (see, e.g., Ginsberg, 2011; Gumpert & Pusser, 1995; Krücken et al., 2013). Changes to the staffing profiles of universities have been linked to greater numbers of students, financial pressure and cost-effectiveness, demands of new funding settings, and emphasis on accountability and performance targets (Acker et al., 2019; Baltaru & Soysal, 2018; Croucher & Woelert, 2022). The perception that administrative expenses are growing too rapidly

and at the cost of academic resources has given rise to the term ‘administrative bloat’ (Hedrick et al., 2009; Williamson et al., 2018). The underlying critique is that universities are becoming more bureaucratic, with an increasing focus on administrative procedures rather than teaching and research. This issue is closely related to broader debates about the role of universities and academic identities (Deem et al., 2007; Krücken & Meier, 2006; Martin, 2016; Maskell & Robinson, 2002; Ramirez, 2010; Taylor, 2012).

Although the binary classification as either ‘academic’ or ‘non-academic’ does not accurately capture the complexities of personnel classification within higher education institutions (Sebalj et al., 2012), studies investigating the staff composition at higher education institutions are often based on this binary format. The question of whether the administrative component is growing at the expense of the academic workforce cannot be answered straightforwardly. As we will outline in the next paragraph, studies have found varying trends. Thus, a nuanced view of temporal and country-specific developments is necessary to understand this complex issue.

For the USA, Rhoades & Sporn (2002) found that the proportion of faculty staff decreased in the period from 1976 to 1995, while the proportion of non-faculty and support staff increased. Similarly, Visakorpi (1996) for the Finnish context from 1989 to 1992 and Gornitzka & Larsen (2004) for Norway from 1987 to 1999 describe a stronger increase of ‘non-academic’ staff compared to academic staff. Looking more closely at the group of ‘non-academics’, the growth was in both case studies primarily driven by an increase in the number of higher-level administrative and managerial staff, while the number of administrative positions with lower levels of qualification decreased (Baltaru, 2018, p. 11; Blümel et al., 2010, p. 159); the latter group covers many areas in which outsourcing has been most evident (Wolf & Jenkins, 2021, p. 26). In contrast to the findings for the USA, Rhoades & Sporn (2002, p. 17) showed in their analysis that in Austria, for the period from 1993 to 1999, the number of academics increased faster than those of administrators. At German universities, the staff composition even shifted slightly in favour of academic staff over the same period (Rhoades & Sporn, 2002, p. 17). This trend was confirmed by Krücken et al. (2013), pointing out that between 1992 and 2007 a strong growth of academic staff was observed, while the size of ‘non-academic’ staff decreased. This increase can be attributed to a rising number of academic staff financed by third-party funding and teaching staff for specific tasks (Krücken et al., 2013, p. 424). These empirical findings seem to stand in contrast to the subjective assessments of many university employees in Germany, especially on the part of academics (Blümel et al., 2010, p. 166). Regardless of the divergent trend of a decrease in the total number of ‘non-academic’ staff at German universities, a more fine-grained analysis revealed that – in accordance with the results for other countries – a distinct

increase could be observed in higher and highly qualified non-academic positions, while at the same time positions that require lower levels of qualification decreased notably (Krücken et al., 2013, p. 424). In line with the results from Germany, Stage (2020) showed for the Danish context for the period 1999 to 2017 a trend towards a strengthening of the academic side of the university. This picture stands '[...] in contrast to a popular narrative of an ever-growing administration at the expense of the academic heartland.' (Stage, 2020, p. 87) However, the analysis by Stage also showed that the growth on the academic side is, to a considerable extent, the result of a vast growth of temporary positions for junior academics. At the same time, on the administrative side, there was an increase of 'degree-holding professionals' at higher levels (Stage, 2020, p. 89).

These analyses show that a structural change has occurred *within* the administrative staff (as well as within the academic structure) of higher education institutions. However, there is little empirical investigation of the determining factors of this change. Further research is needed to pinpoint the determinants in order to provide a fuller picture of the complexity of the staff compositions within higher education institutions.

5.3. Professionalisation of research support

There is a growing push towards the professionalisation of research support. Accordingly, much of the existing literature focuses on research support as an emerging *profession*. While the theoretical notion of a profession is subject to conceptual debate, it typically entails the presence of some degree of formal status, education requirements, and formalised networks within an occupational group. Thus, the *professionalisation* of research support implies that it is generally being formalised through various efforts relating to training, certification and status (Gornitzka & Larsen, 2004, pp. 462–463). Examples of initiatives relating to the push towards professionalisation include professional associations for research support staff, such as the European Association of Research Managers and Administrators (EARMA)⁶, and the development of training and certification programmes specific to research support roles⁷.

⁶ See <https://earma.org/>

⁷ Examples include 'Certificate in the Leadership of Research Management' (EARMA), 'The Certificate in Research Management' (ARMA)

Descriptions of research support staff in the past as ‘back office’ or ‘below stairs’ (invoking a Victorian view of Downtown Abbey, see Dale-Black (2015)) have portrayed them as a somewhat marginalised occupational group, largely rendered invisible (Allen-Collinson, 2006). Thus, the deliberate process of professionalisation and formalisation of the work might be considered a reaction to the perceived subordination of these roles.

Why is considering the professionalisation of research support relevant to the present report? The literature highlights that the occupational group – and potentially *profession* – of research support is highly contested; it is a group for which the boundaries and specific attributes are still being negotiated. As we will show, this has concrete effects on the way their work is organised.

6. How is research support organized at the partner universities?

Executive summary

The following chapter takes an exploratory approach to examine the institutionalised research support structures and services provided by the five partner universities. The analysis aimed at shedding light on the structures and arrangements in place. However, identifying the relevant structures and personnel proved challenging due to varying definitions of what constitutes research support. Despite the difficulties in defining sharp boundaries around the notion of ‘research support’, our investigation provides valuable insights into the support ecosystems at the partner universities. We found that there are large organisational differences in research support within the alliance. From our investigation, we can deduce that research support at the partner universities is primarily focused on navigating the research funding landscapes and the management of third-party funds and projects. According to the survey we conducted, the top priority for research support staff in their work is to relieve the research staff of administrative burden. We believe that our analysis serves as a first exploration of the topic and acts as a foundation for further discussion on research support at the partner universities. Ultimately, understanding how research support is currently organised is crucial for institutional learning and promoting successful collaboration in the ERUA network.

6.1. Preceding consideration

Before delving into the specific services and institutional settings for research support, it is important to acknowledge the national differences that impact the structures and conditions of research. While analysing and outlining these variations in detail is beyond the scope of our study, we still highlight the significance of acknowledging them to establish effective

collaboration across national borders. Additionally, the size and research orientation of the universities can also influence the conceptualisation and organisation of research support. These contextual factors create a complex landscape for research support among the five partner universities in ERUA.

We furthermore want to caution that a direct comparison of the number of staff, which we will present in the following section, is only of limited value, as not all people work full-time. For example, at UKON, most people in research support work part-time.

6.2. Mapping of structures and services

We conducted a mapping of the staff working with research support at the five partner universities. For each university, a member of the working group identified the staff working with tasks relating to research support. However, this task proved to be challenging as there were different understandings of what research support constituted at each university. As such, the seemingly simple task of identifying the people working with research support was not as straightforward as first expected. The difficulty in even identifying those who work with research support strongly underlines the lack of standard definitions of this type of work across universities.

It is worth noting that all universities in the alliance have, to some extent, implemented research support structures, and all employ staff members for whom tasks related to research support constitute a significant part of their portfolio. However, it was strongly emphasised in our focus group that there are substantial differences in the overall structural conditions of the individual universities. Although the overall conditions vary, there are some shared challenges, which we will elaborate in the second report of the study, suggesting that the discussions in this study are relevant for all the partner universities.

Furthermore, as our survey was distributed independently among the university teams (see appendix **Fejl! Henvisningskilde ikke fundet.** with the methodology), in some cases, additional support staff, which was not visible from our initial investigation of university directories or websites and personal communications, came to emerge. This was particularly true for NBU. This 'discovery' process suggests that there are (in some cases) hidden support processes and structures in place. In that sense, our study should be seen as a first exploratory investigation that does not claim to comprehensively capture the entire complexity of research support structures in the individual partner universities. Rather, we see our analysis as a starting point

for further inquiry and discussion on research support structures in the partner universities. We hope this study will stimulate ongoing conversations about what constitutes research support and how best to structure and organise it for the benefit of research staff and the wider academic community.

Roskilde University

RUC has a centralised department with the *Research Support Office* handling the overall research support across the university. Located within RUC Communication & Rector's Office, the office is responsible for tasks such as advice and guidance on opportunities for external research funding and collaboration, management support, analysis and support for strategic research and development activities, networking with external universities, partners and funds, EU-funding possibilities, and handling of EU-applications. Besides the central support office, each of the four departments employs one or more *research coordinators* who carry out support functions and constitute the link between research staff at the departments and the central research support office. Furthermore, each department employs a varying number of pre-award and post-award officers. The departmental research support handles concrete application management, while the Central Research Support Office only becomes involved in specific applications. In total, we identified 36 persons working in the above-described research support roles at RUC.

University of Konstanz

UKON has recently undergone a restructuring of its support organisation, creating a new staff unit called *University Development, Research and Transfer*. The centralised office includes the following subunits: *University Development and Policy, Research Support, and Knowledge and Technology Transfer*. Its responsibilities include acquiring third-party funding for research projects, ethical issues in the research process, the operation and coordination of research infrastructures, the transfer of research results to industry and society, as well as support for spin-offs. Moreover, it aims to support the Rectorate in developing strategies and monitoring science policy. The research support officers at the subunit Research Support are responsible for the applications and pre-award phase of all disciplinary areas represented at UKON. Despite the centralisation of the research support office, each department, and consequently the research staff located there, has a designated contact person for communication. Notably, the Research Support unit deals solely with pre-award tasks, while post-award responsibilities fall to the *Research Funding Administration* in the Division of Financial Affairs, whereby specific

contact persons are again assigned to specific disciplinary areas and departments. Overall, UKON has 28 persons working in the above-described research support roles.

University of Paris 8

At Paris8, the central *Research Support Department* ensures the link between the research units, the four doctoral schools, other services and authorities of the university as well as with external organisations and stakeholders. The department has three service units: Research Units Support, Research Development, and Doctoral School Coordination. The *Research Units Support* assists in administrative, budgetary, and scientific activities. For example, it coordinates and manages research budgets and external funding allocations for projects, including research budgets, external funding, event coordination, and ministry inquiries. Here, the so-called laboratory managers serve as key links to the research laboratories and the research staff. Their responsibilities include administrative and financial coordination of the laboratories, carrying out administrative support, facilitating external relations with suppliers or partners, accompanying, guiding, and advising teachers and doctoral students, helping with the organisation of scientific events, and assisting in the development and support of research projects. The *Research Development Service* facilitates connections to the wider institutional, economic, and social communities. It provides information on funding opportunities, assists with contractual procedures, and supports research outcomes dissemination. Finally, the *Doctoral School Coordination Service* aids in producing reports and evaluations, fosters international appeal through thesis co-supervision and exchange programs and advises and assists the directors of doctoral schools. Our mapping exercise revealed that 24 people work in the above-described research support roles at Paris8.

University of the Aegean

At UAegean, the *Special Account for Research Grants (S.A.R.G.)* is responsible for the research grants management and utilisation of scientific research, education, training, technological development, and innovation. The S.A.R.G is formed and operates in all higher education institutions in Greece and runs according to ministerial regulations. The S.A.R.G. is managed by the Research Committee and the Financial & Administrative Support Unit. The latter addresses the contractual, procedural, administrative, financial accounting, and employment aspects of grant management in collaboration with the project's principal investigators. At UAegean, we could identify four people working in the above-described research support roles.

New Bulgarian University

At NBU, the *Project Office* serves as a centralised unit for research support, with a focus on pre-award activities, such as collecting and publishing information about announced competitions for projects with external funding as well as consulting and technical assistance in finding partners and developing external projects, networks, platforms, or coalitions to the NBU departments. Additionally, the Project Office oversees the coordination of Erasmus+ activities. We identified three people working in the Project Office at NBU. According to information from one of the focus group participants, the university statutes state the obligation of the individual departments (more specifically, their heads) to organise research support in the departments; however, this obligation is not accompanied by resources. As a result, there is a lack of formal, institutionalised support structures at the department level, and more experienced research staff step in to support research activities.

6.3. Summary of mapping

To summarise our findings, our mapping exercise shows that while RUC has institutionalised support structures both at the central level and locally at the departments, the other universities have centralised their research support offices. However, there are significant differences in the nature of the centralised offices: Our results indicate that the support offices at UKON and Paris8 have a visible link to the department level or research units, whereas those at UAegean and NBU are exclusively implemented at a central level, with no formal relationships to departments or research units. In conclusion, it is evident that there are significant differences in the perception and implementation of research support across the five partner universities. Acknowledging the diverse approaches to research support is crucial in any conversation about mutualisation and capacity development.

It is important to acknowledge the limitations of our mapping exercise, which is a snapshot of the current state of support structures based on university directories and websites alongside some personal communication. We validated these findings partly with the focus group participants. However, as not all universities participated, we may have missed some informal or less institutionalised support structures. As mentioned earlier, hidden support practices became apparent at some universities through the internal forwarding of our survey. However, as the survey distributions depended strongly on the underlying understanding of ‘research support’ (and the willingness to distribute) of the identified contact point, we cannot assume that

we captured all structures of research support activities at each university in equal measure. Furthermore, we want to point out that our mapping (following the label of ‘research support’ in the official title) primarily identified offices whose tasks are strongly centred around grant applications and management of research projects (see also section ‘Tasks and services’). Less focus was directed towards, for example, libraries and their support services. This is of particular note as libraries were historically a vital source of support for research staff, cf. chapter 4) **Fejl!**
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6.4. Excursus: Local and centralised research support – a balancing act

When the organisational structure of higher education institutions is on the agenda, centralisation and standardisation are recurring themes. The academic literature indicates a general shift of university structures towards more centralised settings, although at different paces and to varying extents in different contexts (Maassen et al., 2017; Martin, 2016). To go into the depth of the discussion on centralisation vis-à-vis decentralisation goes beyond the scope of this report. However, we illustrate the findings of a study by Rytberg & Geschwind (2021), as their analysis directly addresses the question of the centralisation of support functions at universities. Rytberg & Geschwind (2021, p. 55) concluded that ‘[e]very support task will require its own setting and combination of competences and levels of service. The organising of support and the broad palette of support tasks thus turn into a complex and entangled process of deciding what support is the most efficient and effective: centralised or decentralised.’ Furthermore, the findings of the analysis emphasise that allocating effective support structures is a balancing act: Providing answers as rapidly as possible, thus being close to research staff is seen as an advantage, while at the same time providing support in specialised fields, which might function well and be more efficient when managed centrally (Rytberg & Geschwind, 2021, p. 55).

In line with these findings, some participants in the focus group emphasised the importance of being physically close to the research staff they support, and the informal nature of good relationships with research staff was also mentioned. The importance of personal relationships with research staff, which favours more local structures, will be discussed further in the good practices section of the second report of the study.

6.5. Tasks and services

Looking more closely at the tasks and services carried out by research support, we derived from the RAAAP survey results that most tasks can be categorised under three broad topics: Firstly, the category of research development and policy includes the monitoring of funding opportunities as well as national and international policies. Secondly, pre-award activities, such as project applications for funding, are another key area. Finally, post-award activities, including the administration of funds and project management, comprise the third category. These categories are closely linked to third-party funding and align with the responsibilities assigned to university support offices, as illustrated in the section ‘Mapping of structures and services’.

Likewise, as shown in Figure 1, when we asked in our survey the alliance’s staff across the universities working with research support what five tasks they spend the most time on, the most frequent answer was *project proposal and application support*, followed by the *development of research strategy*. Furthermore, *project and process management*, *monitoring and communicating funding opportunities* and *accounting and finances* were among the top 5 most frequently chosen tasks.

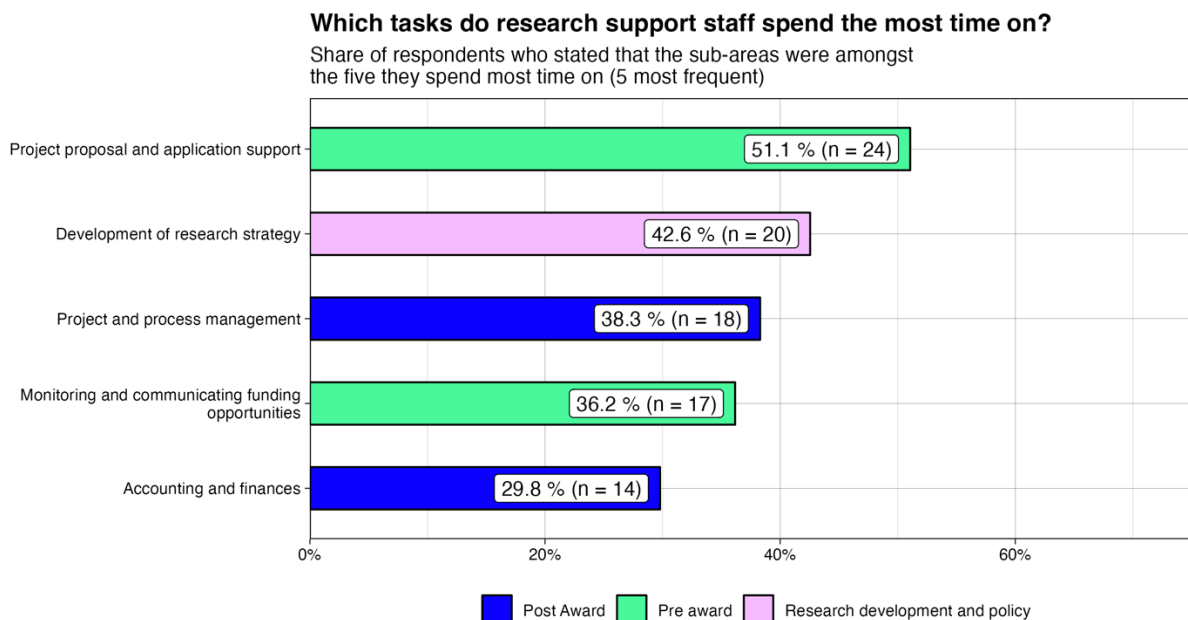


Figure 1

This underlines that research support structures are primarily geared towards the navigation of research funding landscapes and the management of funds and projects. While we may not

have captured all forms of support offered, we can conclude from our results that these are the most visible and most prominent tasks when discussing ‘research support’ from the perspective of the research support staff.

6.6. Priorities and goals

In our survey, we asked which factors are considered most important for determining the success of research support. Relieving the research staff of administrative burden was identified as a top priority by the survey respondents. This result is in line with the described self-image as a ‘helping profession’ in the literature (Acker et al., 2019). Additionally, increasing awareness of funding opportunities, furthering individual researcher careers, fostering interaction with society, and promoting interdisciplinary collaboration were also considered significant contributors to successful research support (see Figure 2).

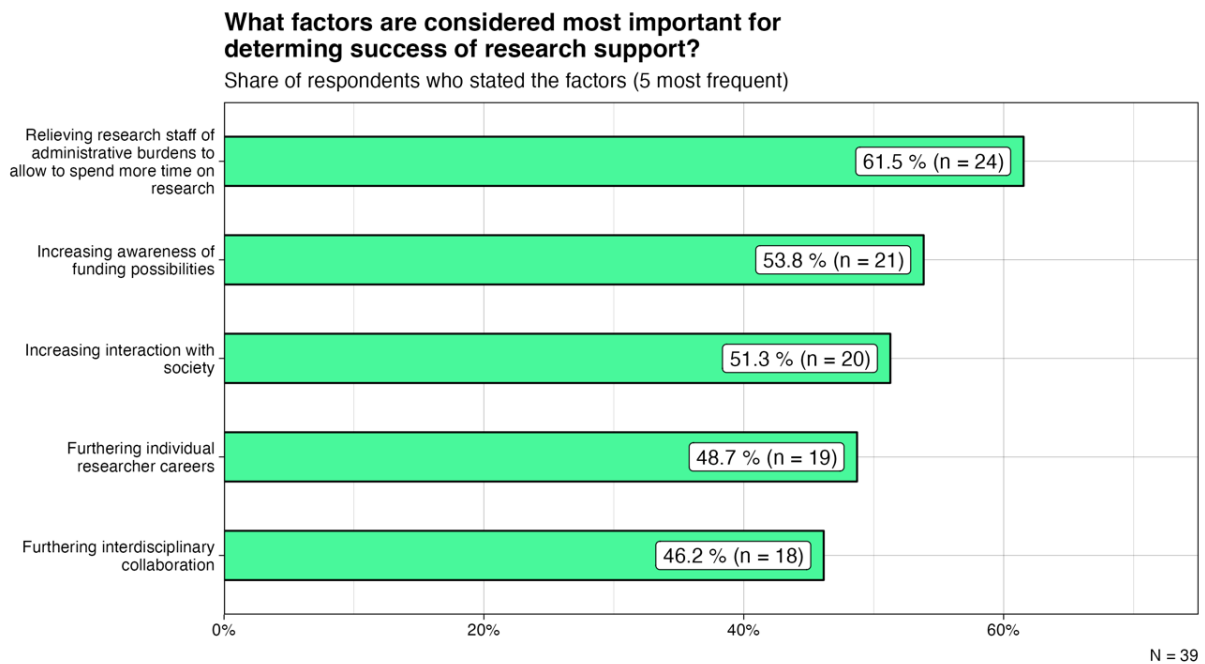


Figure 2

7. Concluding remarks

The aim of this report was to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the support structures and services provided by the five partner universities to their research staff. Due to varying definitions of what constitutes research support at each institution, identifying the relevant structures and personnel proved challenging. We see our analysis, thus, as a first exploration to shed light on the practices and arrangements in place. The wider aim is to prompt consideration of what enables and constrains effective research support and the implications for research activities. We elaborate on the analysis of good practices and challenges in the second part of the study.

While all partner universities have research support structures and staff dedicated to this task, it is essential to note that there are significant differences in their overall structural conditions. Consequently, the resources and capacity provided to research support activities vary. In addition, our mapping exercise has, in some cases, uncovered informal support structures that are not visible on the surface. This is particularly true for the NBU, as their formal research support structures were found to be focused merely on pre-award grant management and leave much of the post-award support to individual researchers. These findings highlight the complexity of the issue and raise questions about the role informal support among research staff at the other partner universities play and how they complement the formal structures in place, which in turn leads to a fundamental discussion about the concept and understanding of 'research support'. Ultimately, it is evident that there is still ambiguity and blurriness surrounding this topic.

However, we argue that the difficulties in defining simple, sharp boundaries around the notion of 'research support' do not eliminate the value of this investigation but rather highlight the complexity of the support ecosystem and its close ties to institutional structures.

Furthermore, we want to note that the mapping exercise focused primarily on structures under the official title of 'research support', which led to an emphasis on grant applications and project management. Yet, this approach prompts us to reflect upon how much significance we place on traditional sources like libraries and their integration within the broader research support ecosystem.

We hope our findings will inform the discussion on research support at the partner universities and ultimately contribute to enhancing the quality of support for research activities. Future

research should focus on the perspective of the research staff and their experiences with research support to gain further insights into how the structures, services and practices can be improved. In addition, a management perspective could also be useful in understanding how research support structures and practices can be optimised from an organisational perspective.

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9. Appendix

RAAAP Survey

The presented analysis utilised data from the 2019 RAAAP (Research Administration as a Profession) survey. The survey includes 4,325 responses from more than 70 countries, reflecting a significant and diverse group.⁸ However, it is essential to note that the frameworks in which the respondents carry out their work may vary significantly across countries and institutions. After an initial exploratory quantitative analysis of the survey data, the focus was narrowed to questions related to the challenges of showcasing the impact of research outside the academic realm. The participants' qualitative feedback on their challenges when undertaking impact-related tasks in the context of research support was systematically coded.

Survey on research support at partner universities

In addition to the RAAAP survey, we conducted a separate online survey in February 2023 to gather input from individuals working with research support at the five partner universities. The overall goal of the survey was to shed light on the challenges and good practices perceived by those working with research support.

To map the organisational framework and services of research support at the five partner universities and to identify potential participants for our survey, we searched university websites and directories using a broad understanding of research support activities. Next, invitations to take part in the survey were sent to all identified participants via personal emails. Overall, 95 personal invitations were sent out, with the number of individuals contacted varying considerably between the five partner universities, reflecting the differences in the organisational settings. In addition, central contact points at each university, such as the head of the research support office, were identified and contacted to help distribute the survey among their respective team.

⁸ The RAAAP survey 2019 was carried out by a taskforce under INORMS (The International Network of Research Management Societies). Data and documentation can be found here. The RAAAP Survey aims to develop a longitudinal dataset about the research administration profession. The first round of the RAAAP Survey was conducted in 2016. The third iteration of the RAAAP survey (RAAAP-3) was launched in 2022. However, the results were not yet available at the time this report was being compiled.

This was done to ensure that anyone who may have been missed in the initial distribution was given an opportunity to participate in the survey.

For the analysis, 39 full and 41 partial responses could be processed and interpreted. For respondents we identified, the response rate was 37.9 %. The following table gives an overview of the responses differentiated according to the five partner universities. While the unevenly distributed responses across the five universities are not ideal, they also reflect the differences in the institutional context and understanding of research support at the partner universities. Hence, it is sufficient to draw meaningful conclusions from the data collected.

ERUA University	n
New Bulgarian University	45
Roskilde University	14
Paris 8 University	10
University of Konstanz	9
University of the Aegean	2

Table: Number of responses per university

Conducting a complementary survey with researchers as participants was not within the scope of this report. Yet, we recognise the potential benefits such a survey could bring to understanding the needs and perspectives of researchers concerning support structures and the areas of tension between different professional groups. Thus, we believe that further research in this area is needed to fully explore the field of research support.

Survey design

We designed the survey based on themes and perspectives that emerged from our literature review and the RAAAP data. For a detailed overview of the questions, please refer to the table below.

Question		Aim
Do you work with research management and/or administration?	Close-ended Yes No	
With which level of research management do you work?	Close-ended Central level Department or faculty level Other	This question aimed to provide context to the responses regarding the institutional settings.

Question	Close-ended	Aim
How would you define your current role?	Close-ended Leader or Manager Operational Don't know Other	This question aimed to determine the participants' positions in the institutional hierarchy. By asking this question, we could better understand the role and responsibilities of the participant.
In your work, which of the following sub-areas of research support do you spend the most time on? Please rank the sub-areas you previously selected from 1 (most time spent on) to 5 (least time spent on)	Close-ended Choose up to five sub-areas	The aim of this question was to determine the areas of focus in their work with research support. By asking participants to rank the sub-areas they previously selected, we gained a better understanding of how their time is divided among different tasks in research support.
To what extent do you agree with the following statements about your job? Overall, I am satisfied with my job I feel appreciated for my contributions at work In my unit, participation in further training and development opportunities (e.g., professional accreditation or project management courses) is encouraged I receive adequate support from my management team I get the help and support I need from my colleagues I often feel overwhelmed by the amount of work I have to do I find my job stressful	Close-ended Agree strongly Agree Neither agree nor disagree Disagree Disagree strongly Don't know	The aim of this set of questions was to evaluate job satisfaction, support from management and colleagues, opportunities for development, workload, and stress levels of the respondent.
To what extent do you agree with the following statements about your work with research management and administration? Research staff and research administrators often have different views of things. It can be hard to engage research staff in the issues that are important in my work. I feel that my work is being appreciated by the research staff I feel that with my work I am shaping the way research is conducted at the university or at the department/faculty The demands of the research staff seeking support and the structural demands of the current research environment (e.g., requirements of research grants, audit culture) are often conflicting It can feel as though my work is often invisible to research staff	Close-ended Agree strongly Agree Neither agree nor disagree Disagree Disagree strongly Don't know	This set of questions aimed to provide insights into the respondent's perceptions regarding the interaction between research staff and research support staff, including their work's value, impact, and visibility, as well as potential conflicts that may arise from the demands of research staff seeking support and structural requirements.

Question
Aim

<p>To what extent do you agree that your work in research management and administration...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ... helps to support the possibility to conduct novel and innovative research ... helps to support the possibility to conduct interdisciplinary research (e.g., by facilitating contact of researchers across faculties, departments and/or disciplines) ... helps to promote collaboration and cooperation amongst researchers from different faculties, departments and/or disciplines ... helps to promote an environment that fosters societal impact of research ... helps to support dissemination and public engagement of research 	<p>Close-ended</p> <p>Agree strongly Agree Neither agree nor disagree Disagree Disagree strongly Don't know</p>	<p>This set of questions aimed to assess the extent to which participants perceive their work in research support to promote the core values of ERUA, such as innovation, interdisciplinary research, societal impact, and public engagement.</p>
<p>In your opinion, what factors do you consider most important for determining the success of research management and administration? Please rank the factors you previously selected from 1 (most important) to 5 (least important)</p>	<p>Close-ended</p> <p>Choose up to five statements</p>	<p>The aim of this question was to identify the factors that the respondents consider crucial in determining the success of research support. By offering predefined statements to select from, the responses could be more accurately compared.</p> <p>The raking of the statements previously selected helped to clarify the respondents' priorities.</p>
<p>What do you consider the biggest challenge in your work?</p>	<p>Open-ended</p>	<p>The aim of this question was to identify the most significant challenge that the respondent faces in their work in research support.</p>
<p>Can you share examples of good practices in research management and administration that have proven to be particularly successful or effective, either from your own work or from others that you have observed? (e.g., good or effective ways to structure work processes, successful initiatives, effective strategies, fruitful collaboration efforts)</p>	<p>Open-ended</p>	<p>The aim of this question was to gather information on successful or effective practices in research support.</p>
<p>What are in your experience the most important factors that enable good research management and administration?</p>	<p>Open-ended</p>	<p>The aim of this question was to gain insight into the respondents' perspectives on the essential factors that enable effective research support.</p>
<p>If resources were not a limitation, in what ways could the work with research management and administration at your university and/or in your department and/or faculty be improved?</p>	<p>Open-ended</p>	<p>The aim of this question was to explore the respondents' ideas and vision for potential improvements in research support.</p>

Question
Aim

Which skills and competencies do you feel are the most important for your work?	Open-ended	The aim of this question was to understand the respondents' perspectives on the most critical skills and competencies necessary for their work in research support.
Do you feel that there are currently any important competencies (e.g., project management, contract negotiation or budgeting) lacking in your unit that might improve the work of your unit?	Close-ended	This question aimed to identify any skills or competencies that the respondent believes are currently lacking in their unit but could be beneficial in improving their unit's work in research support.
Do you have any other comments or experiences you would like to share relating to your work with research management and administration?	Open-ended	With this last question, respondents had an opportunity to provide any additional feedback or comments that they believe are relevant to their work with research support but may not have been covered by the previous question.

Analysis of open-ended questions

As described in the table above, we included several open-ended questions in the survey to allow respondents to provide their own unique perspectives and experiences. The following table shows the shares of respondents that replied to each open-ended question.

Question	Share that responded
What do you consider the biggest challenge in your work?	42.5 % (n = 34)
Can you share examples of good practices in research management and administration that have proven to be particularly successful or effective, either from your own work or from others that you have observed?	31.2 % (n = 25)
What are in your experience the most important factors that enable good research management and administration?	38.8 % (n = 31)
If resources were not a limitation, in what ways could the work with research management and administration at your institution could be improved?	38.8 % (n = 31)
Which skills and competencies do you feel are the most important for your work?	37.5 % (n = 30)
Which important competencies do you feel that there are currently lacking in your unit that might improve the work of your unit? *	21.2 % (n = 17)
Do you have any other comments or experiences you would like to share relating to your work with research management and administration?	5.0 % (n = 4)
	172 qualitative responses

Note:

* Only asked to respondents who stated that they felt that important competencies were lacking in their unit

Across all the open-ended questions, we retrieved 172 qualitative responses. We analysed the responses using NVivo software. Our coding strategy followed a 'deductive-inductive' process (Kuckartz, 2014, p. 34), in which we developed thematic categories based on various iterations based on our initial understanding of the issues raised whilst being open to the themes and

reflections presented in the data. We employed a thematic approach, identifying categorisations related to our research focus within the comments (Bryman, 2012, p. 580). Ultimately, we used a framework approach where each respondent was assigned in rows, and codes were organised in columns (Bryman, 2012, p. 579). To ensure the highest possible validity of the results of the coding process, several individuals coded the materials independently of each other. After the individual coding processes, we compared and consolidated the results.

Focus group

We conducted a focus group to complement our analysis of survey responses. The focus group was organised as an online meeting in March 2023. As is pointed out in the methodological literature, group interviews like focus groups often result in participants being required to make explicit certain logics that are typically implicit because the interview is structured as a social negotiation between participants (Halkier, 2016).

The focus group aimed to 1) explore current good practices in research support, 2) discuss challenges faced by research support staff in their work, and 3) identify opportunities for improvement in research support, including new approaches that could enhance the effectiveness of research support activities. By bringing together research support staff from the partner universities, the focus group discussion provided a platform for sharing and exchanging knowledge and experiences.

To recruit participants for the focus group, we utilised two approaches. Firstly, we directly contacted individuals and requested their participation in the focus group. Secondly, we included an invitation to join the focus group at the end of the survey. Although more participants had initially signed up, for various reasons, only four participants from two partner universities attended the focus group. Nonetheless, their insights proved informative for our research purposes.