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Fundraising as basic literacy skill

Should "fundraising" skills be a pre-requisite for Early Career Researchers?

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Abstract

Proposal writing and fundraising skills are becoming an essential skillset for researchers, to build a team or even to remain in academic career. Yet PhD's and Early Career Researchers (ECR) frequently discover the importance of these "soft skills" much too late in their training.

Research Managers & Administration (RMA) professionals are key enablers of these "soft skills" (with a very hard impact for progression along the academic career track!). Yet we are rarely integrated into the default training catalogue of researchers in training. The outcome is that ECR could be better equipped when crossing the funding "Death Valley" of postdoc career stage.

The presentation showcases lessons learned after four years of delivery of an ECR Course on "Funding Your Research Career" (DTU Course 25619). The week-long course is designed and run by RMA professionals at DTU Aqua, and integrated in the university training catalogue to attract PhD candidates in their 2nd year and postdocs, while the content is relevant even for senior researchers.

The structure of the course is built around the full cycle of pre-grant fundraising, and core values of the course design are:

- a) learning through exercises (50% theory and 50% exercises),
- b) reliance of multiple voices to deliver the same message (professionals, administrative research leaders and top researchers),
- c) attendees end up with a concrete proposal draft, as a stepping stone for a potential postdoc position.

Structure of the course is built around the core skills of RMA professionals, demonstrating that the example can easily integrate RMA professionals into the recognised training workflows and catalogues of any university.

Take Away Messages:

- any group of post- & pre-award professionals can copy this example and set up a PhD Course in any university;
- PhD Courses with ECTS recognition, elevate RMA professionals in the educational eco-system;
- Course graduates are better prepared to navigate the postdoc funding challenges;
- After the course, relationships between Course Cohorts and RMA professionals are less transactional and more collaborative.