OpenMedChem

Medicinal Chemistry Open Innovation Doctorates

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European Industrial Doctorates

D4.4.(1). Best practices report

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1. Introduction

These notes intend to bring our experience in European Industrial Doctorates (EID) to other consortia with awarded EID Programmes ongoing and to institutions considering applying for funding to this scheme.

EID is a sub-scheme of Marie Curie Initial Training Networks (ITN) within FP7, and OpenMedChem was one of the projects awarded within the first call (FP7-PEOPLE-2012-ITN).

Since there are several reports and handbooks publicly available on general project management and reporting aspects of FP7 and H2020, this deliverable intends to focus only on the experienced gained in the particularities of the EID scheme. Of course many of the aspects listed can be applied to other collaborative projects.

2. Best practices at proposal development stage

PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

Understanding the implications of small teams: EIDs consists in two level 1 partners (and, possibly, 1-2 level 2 partners), one from the academic sector (hereinafter referred to as "academic partner" or "University") and and one from the private sector (hereinafter referred to as "private sector partner", "industry" or "company"). Therefore, as in any couple, the importance of aligned objectives and complementarities between both partners is huge at all project stages.

From the very beginning, be clear on the needs and expectations of each partner. The University and the Company will be aligned and equally committed to the project only if they are interested in the science behind and, in the case of the private sector partner, also if the science is aligned with the internal priorities (the scientist may not be able to keep the project running within his/her group) and, in the long term, with the market requirements.

Do not engage into a project proposal preparation hoping that the other partner will cover your role in its implementation. Consider whether the funding actually compensates your overall responsibilities within the consortia; they will include at least some management and dissemination activities, and will require dedication by non-scientific staff (legal, HR, finance).

For the same reason, commit yourself to an EID programme, whenever possible, with partners you have collaborated before with.

Understanding the implications of Doctorates: The Programme planning must provide a framework for the fellows to complete their PhD (if not the thesis defense, at least the submission) within the 3-years track. Accordingly, keep the scientific objectives and scope at an affordable level in terms of timelines.

Understanding the implications of mobility: The fellows´ salary (living + mobility allowance) depends, through the country correction coefficient, on the country of the hiring institution. Taxes and social security contribution will be diferent as well. While employing the fellows at both institutions will always be a possibility, recruitments at (only) one of the institutions and secondments as "visiting scientist" won´t always be. Therefore, check the migration requirement before deciding on one option. Consider both EU and non-EU nationals as the rules differ.

Proof against reality (I): And if granted? Ensure there is no legal impediment to the implementation of your project if granted: This is a rather new model, it is not strange that both the University and the company face for the first time such collaboration. Therefore run a legal revision of the proposal and make sure you will not have to change it (or your internal procedures) dramatically during the negotiation. Particularly, check that the University PhD Programmes allow for completion of the degree when 50% of the PhD has taken place at the company premises, and if there are fees implied during that period.

PROPOSAL WRITING

Like any other collaborative proposal, the document will require several number of iterations and reviews. It is advisable to start with a phone/video conference to present the team involved and agree the main areas: main objective, scope, outline of the individual projects and which partner will act as coordinator.

A ***detailed planning***, setting dates and responsibles (rather concrete names than partners) for each sections´s first draft and first review will help to build a first whole proposal draft that can be then circulated for review by anyone involved. The planning should include a list of the information required for the administrative forms of the proposal, which will be filled in quickly if the partners have already a PIC and have participated in FP7 or H2020 projects, but still need attention from both institutions. In paralell, ***regular phone/video conferences*** should continue to check the proposal progression and agree on important matters such as timelines (how long will it take to have the fellows on board from selection date, when will they stay at each partner´s site), employ or second the fellows, share the management budget and tasks or not, etc. They will help to set an atmosphere of trust and keep both partner´s teams as a single project team.

All members of the team should respect the intermediate steps contributing to initial reviews and discussion, e.g. the Programme scope should not be questionned by the time the proposal is (almost) ready for submission.

While writing the proposal, be sure to state clear objectives, both at Programme and at Individual Projects level, structure the content in Work Packages, not overcomplicate the management structure and remember the "impact" section has an important weight in the evaluation and should not be left for last-minute. Keep in mind that PhD students will need mentoring support and won´t be at full speed from the beginning (including a transition period between the partners) when setting the timeslines for milestones and deliverables.

Proposals must be uploaded through the online submission tool, which sometimes requires software installation (or de-installation). It is highly advisable to upload a draft in advance to be sure everything will work when uploading the final version.

3. Best practices at negotiation stage

Involve internal resources needed: If not done before, put in contact Project Managers / Projects Office at both partners, and involve all staff that will be required for the Programme set up and running, e.g. Human Resources, Legal, EHS, etc. to understand timelines and dedication required.

Proof against reality (II): The proposal as written will become contractual once the grant award is finalized and signed. Although no important modification should be introduced in the proposal, a double-check towards the implementation must be performed during the negotiation stage, considering aspects such as:

- Timelines: how long will it take to the leading partner to launch the job position, gather the applications and select the best candidates? How long will it take to have the selected scientists hired, particularly in the case of non-EU citizens?
- Planning based on Academic/Fiscal year: It is easy to write Month 1 – Month 36, but one year has more in it than twelve months: it has seasons, holidays (also for HHRR, legal and administrative departments!) and, most importantly fiscal years tend to go from January to December while PhD courses and lecture years go from September to August. Keep in mind real world time: Can the fellows start any time during the year, or should they enroll in the next academic year? Does the mobility between partners coincide with usual holiday periods?
- IP: If it is determined that the results require patent protection, how will the 3-years PhD programme be managed?
- Dissemination and outsourcing: have the partners capacity to undertake scientific dissemination and outreach activities by themselves? Is there any subcontracting (and related budget) needed, e.g. to set up a project website?

Consortium agreement: The templates available, such as DESCA model, can serve as guide. However, in the case of only two partners (i.e. no level 2 partner involved), several clauses can be simplified to adjust to the reality of small consortia. If any of the partners has been already involved in ITN projects, the ITN Consortium Agreement could be a better start point from a practical perspective, as it is suitable to the Programme specifics, and legally (pre)approved by one of the partners.

Plan for start: Once the timelines have been fixed, check whether any activity should be planned or organized before the project start date, such as the preparation of the job posting or travel arrangements for the kick off meeting (remember that those costs will not be eligible for funding in actual-cost categories[1]).

[1] Management costs were based upon actual expenses in FP7 and became a unit cost category in H2020.

4. Best practices at implementation stage

OVERALL MANAGEMENT

Selection procedures: Keep in mind to fulfill local and EU legislation for offers of public positions**.** Also, revise the company recruitment procedures. Even if the Programme scientists will not be hired by the company during the EID duration, they may hopefully receive a post EID offer.

Keep track and write down the interviews, and the reasoning for the decision making.

Continuous contact: Regular communication will help create an atmosphere of trust and facilitate the fellows´ transition between partners. Bilateral meetings (in consortia without level 2 partners) are easily organized online but at least the kickoff meeting, and the first meeting after the fellows are incorporated, should be face-to-face, ideally one at each partner´s premises, to meet the team and facilitate communication. Besides planned Supervisory Board meetings, regular meetings (with the periodicity foreseen in the proposal) should involve fellows, supervisors and mentors at both sides, to evaluate progress and agree next steps.

Even if less frequently, check regularly the formal commitments towards the REA/EC, such as documentation to be submitted or kept, deliverables, flow of funding, etc. , involving the Project Managers / Projects Office as needed. At the project start, prepare templates for the documents to be used throughout the Programme, such as the Personal Career and Development Plan, Meeting Minutes, and Deliverables. Besides keeping a project look&feel, it will ensure the key content of each document in pre-agreed in the form of headlines/sections.

Be open about potential risks and agree on contingency plans before they materialize in problems. Communicate with the Project Officer about modifications to the initial planning, to seek approval to proceed and check if a formal amendment request is needed.

Plan for transition: Prepare everything from a legal point of view: Work permits, Degree validations, contractual agreement and alignment with the University and Company types of contracts. Make sure that the contract ensures the payment of the entire amount that the ESR are entitled to.

Start the contractual and migration procedures well in advance taking into account the nationality of the fellows. Work permit, visum, validation of degrees, etc. may take long depending on the recruitment country and documentation required. This applies to each placement, for instance a recruited research may finish his/her contract and visa at one country meaning that, if the migration process is not finalized in the other country, he/she would not be able to stay in any European country until it happens.

With such a short time for the whole PhD it is important to make sure that the start of the project is not delayed. Think about travel arrangements, accommodation, etc. in real world time.

Besides legal permits and contracts, the scientist will usually have additional requirements to enter the labs. While medical check, vaccines, etc. should not postpone the project start,

internal procedures (training on standard operating procedures) will be needed at the start of each placement resulting is some delay in the experimental work.

From the science perspective, as already mentioned, the engagement of the fellows´ supervisors (and possibly mentors and project managers) in the regular progress reviews with the fellows will facilitate transition.

INDIVIDUAL PROJECTS MANAGEMENT AND SUPPORT TO FELLOWS

From the very beginning, agree with your partner ***how/where to record, storage and transfer data***. This is important not only for the sharing of results, but also for tracking purposes for publications and thesis defense (data integrity policies).

Besides effective communication with the Supervisors, be sure the fellows have a ***mentor*** with enough availability for day-to-day lab/science procedures and questions.

Share openly with the fellows how the programme budget is used: the living and mobility allowances are fully transferred, while research cost category is managed by the host institution and will cover for the research and training programme, which includes the costs of travel, courses and conferences fees but it is also a contribution to the project research costs (lab supplies) at the home.

Comply with ***legal requirements on PhD*** supervision: different countries have different legal rules for the management of PhD students, including the roles (promotor, supervisor, mentor, etc), the number of meetings that the ESR must have with their supervisors and the documentation that must be prepared (minutes, agreements, reports, personalized career plans, etc). Begin with compliance of the rules from the University, but keep in mind also the company country rules, that maybe taken into account for validation of degrees. If possible, plan to defend using an "European Committee" including judges of the Company country Universities.

Decision Making: It is important to include the ESRs in the decision making process. It gives them a broader perspective and the possibility to take responsibility of the overall project and prevents un-alignment of expectations that may provoke negative feedback.

Contingency Actions: There is no perfect planning. From both the human and scientific side of the project may arise unexpected problems that can cause alterations to the plan. The EU is quite flexible when dealing with project/contract extensions due to personal matters. Keep record of the risks and problems, and the actions taken to solve them and present them to the Officer, that will ultimately decide if they present ground for an amendment request.

DISSEMINATION AND EXPLOITATION

Dissemination (scientific and towards the wider public): In general, PhD students should be capable of explaining their research to public. Besides that of scientific background, it is increasingly demanded to explain also research in general terms including foreseen applications to the society. Set the framework and give the needed support for the fellows to

participate (besides scientific dissemination) in Outreach actions such as presentations in High Schools, Researchers´ Night, videos or articles.

IP and exploitation of results: All decisions and agreements on IP will take into account the aim of the researchers involved, which is to achieve the objectives contained in their individual projects and the ESRs' completion of their degrees.

There is the possibility that publications might need to be delayed due to IP considerations. Non-public defense of theses is an option that can allow the PhD Degree to be obtained and at the same time permit a patent filing, and thus should be considered. Again, if there is no previous experience, this and other options should be discussed (best during negotiation) with the University Post Graduate School.

If this happens it is for a good reason, so explain it to all parties involved, including of course the EC (REA)

Final remark: while the scientific project is the final aim, remember an EID is about PEOPLE…. Keep in mind what the fellows considered appealing when they applied for the position (working in industry in the future, interest in certain research fields, prestige of the Marie Curie fellowships, networking opportunities, international experience, etc) and try to live up to their expectations.

Annex: Abbreviations and Acronyms used in this document

D	Deliverable
EC	European Commission
EU	European Union
EID	European Industrial Doctorates
EHS	Environment, Health and Safety (Department)
ESR	Early Stage Researchers
FP7	7th Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development
H2020	Horizon 2020
HR	Human Resources (Department)
ITN	Initial Training Networks
REA	Reseach Executive Agency