

Establishing research management in West Africa II

Patrice Ajai-Ajagbe reports on the project behind the establishment of the West African Research and Innovation Management Association.

It is almost a year since the convening of academics and policymakers in Lagos for the international conference on Research and Innovation Management in West Africa (as reported in *Research Global 15*). The meeting was organised to canvass support for 'structured' capacity building in research and innovation management in the West Africa region – and it was agreed at this meeting that this would be best achieved through an association specifically set up to enhance capacity in this area.

It would be practical to have such an association for the region. Most West African countries (excluding Ghana and Nigeria) have fewer than ten higher education institutions – and some countries have only one! Thus, having a shared association would not only be cost-effective, but would also give many institutions and individual research management staff a sufficiently large network with which to share and compare notes.

In addition to the above, the association is expected to provide services (e.g. training, consultancies, updates to members); act as a galvanising agent for research activity in the region through the pooling of resources; and be a representative body through which the region's research activity can be accessed and profiled. However, because the West Africa region operates in three 'official' languages (Arabic, English and French), at this stage we expect membership and participation in the association's activities to come primarily from the Anglophone countries in the region.

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The West African Research and Innovation Management Association (WARIMA) steering committee (which was formed at the 2006 meeting) actively sought external support for its first year, recognising that the success of this period would be vital to WARIMA's long-term sustainability. A grant was obtained from the England-Africa Partnerships (EAP) programme for a one-year project, which will specifically cover start-up, development and running costs for WARIMA in its first year.

The Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU) which was a sponsor of the 2006 Lagos meeting, was instrumental in bringing together all the partners for this one-year project, including the Institute of Education, University of London (IOE) as the England partner for the project. The IOE formally applied for and was awarded the above-mentioned EAP grant for this purpose. The project director based at the IOE is also the Deputy Chair of the Association of Research Managers and Administrators (ARMA) UK, and through ARMA will play an important role in harnessing wider UK involvement. Already, several ARMA members are involved in preparing good practice guides for research management, which will be distributed at an ARMA-run workshop for WARIMA members in Abuja, Nigeria, in November 2007.

The Africa partners of the project are the University of Ibadan, Nigeria (where Prof Idowu Olayinka, the Chair of the WARIMA steering committee, is based), the University of Sierra Leone and the University of Ghana (which are both represented on the steering committee), and Walter Sisulu University in South Africa, which has first-hand experience of developing new research structures in recent years. The ACU is also a partner and provides administration support to the project director at the IOE.

Since the EAP grant was awarded in March 2007, the project partners and the steering committee have been working to establish WARIMA's focus in its first year of operation. Interestingly, the more established research management associations were formed by existing research management staff who came together to create a forum for their occupation – with the resulting associations serving to professionalise their work further. However, in this case it is expected that WARIMA will help 'create' and develop the sector at the same time (the overwhelming majority of delegates at the 2006 WARIMA conception meeting were senior academics – an indication of profile of the sector). Thus, WARIMA intends to take a more overtly steering (as opposed to representative) role in its first few years.

Most of the 'start-up' work has already been done by Prof Olayinka and his team at the University of Ibadan – formal registration of the association, WARIMA office staff recruitment and training, recruiting membership, publicity and provision of the WARIMA office premises. The inaugural conference and annual general members' meeting scheduled for November this year will bring together much of the work being done to develop the association. Non-regional colleagues are most welcome to attend!

The ARMA-run workshop mentioned earlier will take place during the conference and it is the first of three such training events scheduled to take place in West Africa between November 2007 and March 2008.

Further details on the conference, the workshops and WARIMA in general can be found on the WARIMA website at www.warima.org **RG**



Prof Idowu Olayinka, Chair of the WARIMA steering committee

Patrice Ajai-Ajagbe is Programme Officer at the Association of Commonwealth Universities.
Email: p.ajai-ajagbe@acu.ac.uk