

# Structuring for research management in **West Africa**

**Patrice Ajai-Ajagbe** reports on the first conference of the West African Research and Innovation Management Association.

The inaugural conference of the West African Research and Innovation Management Association (WARIMA) took place in Abuja, Nigeria, in November 2007. The workshop was hosted and sponsored by the National Universities Commission, Nigeria (NUC) and organised by the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU). With increased global awareness and interest in capacity building in Africa, WARIMA's launch has been timely, as a regional organisation presents a much quicker and easier way of working with universities across countries.

The conference keynote session outlined regional policy and strategic objectives for the next few years. After the welcome address by Professor Idowu Olayinka, Chair of the WARIMA steering committee, presentations in this session came from Dr Tembeka Mpako-Ntusi, President of the Southern African Research and Innovation Management Association (SARIMA), and Professor Julius Okojie, Executive Secretary of the NUC. Dr Mpako-Ntusi outlined SARIMA's history and aims, and its present position of delivering projects for government, a model that she hopes WARIMA will follow. Professor Okojie outlined the current state of and trends in universities in Nigeria, and said he would like to see a reassessment of the types of research taking place in universities, i.e. another look at the respective ratios of basic and applied research. He believes that, while there should always be a place for 'blue skies' research, the region needs to increase its proportion of applied research to meet the Millennium Development Goals.

The first session of the conference looked at strategies for accessing funds for research management. There was recognition that institutions need to develop strategic approaches to increase their research income, as opposed to relying on individual researchers' grants to add

up to a substantial university research income. This almost certainly means prioritising certain key subject areas over others by, for example, establishing in-house peer review panels for proposals from focus areas, or establishing links with international universities or partnerships with funders for research in specified areas. In other words, trends dictate a top-down approach to accessing funds for research within institutions. Universities, especially specialist institutions, were advised to keep abreast of government objectives and increase their quota of applied research projects, as these are increasingly becoming the 'big earners' for institutions. However, with so many models in operation internationally, it is a question of finding the right combination of emulated models from high-income institutions and 'what works' at local level.

One interesting 'start-up' model presented at the conference was fundraising from alumni to generate income, and using this income to support a linkages office in the first instance. The linkages office, in addition to coordinating the university's external relations, is used to establish strategic links with funding bodies for discrete projects, some of them on enhancing research management capacity. The linkages office then provides a research management service to

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the institution with projects paying a percentage of their grant to the office to cover overheads.

The general feeling was that 'overheads' should not be underestimated and must be accounted for in all proposals, irrespective of research management structure. It was also agreed that it would be difficult to settle on a fixed percentage for overheads and indirect costs within countries (in this region), so this must be negotiated with funders on a case-by-case basis for the time being.

The next session saw presentations from international organisations on research and funding opportunities. Dr Erol Kulahci of the Agence universitaire de la Francophonie presented opportunities for partnerships between Francophone and Anglophone universities, which is especially relevant for the linguistically mixed West Africa region. Dr John Kirkland of the ACU outlined the ACU's Professional Networks and development projects in Africa. He also reiterated the ACU's support for the strengthening of research management in West Africa. Bola Olaoye of the British Council Nigeria outlined its Development Partnerships in Higher Education (DelPHE) programme, and Jacqueline Olang of the African Academy of Sciences outlined its Science & Technology-Europe Africa Programme (ST-EAP). There were also examples of US foundation support presented by Dr Kole Shettima of the MacArthur Foundation and Professor O Bamiro, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. These presentations provided an overview of how research is funded in the US, including funding mechanisms, structure and management.

There was also a conference session on Research Africa. Diana Coates, Director of Research Africa, outlined the database and services, and informed delegates that the first 20 institutional members of WARIMA (i.e. institutions with five or more WARIMA members) receive one year's free subscription to Research Africa. This arrangement is sponsored by the British Council.

The conference also included a one-day workshop run by the Association of Research Managers and Administrators UK (ARMA), with speakers also sponsored by the British Council. The workshop covered proposal preparation, from making the decision to bid to putting together a research team, writing the proposal and ensuring it is submitted on time, the funder's perspective, and institutional policies, procedures and systems. There was also a practical activity where delegates broke out into smaller groups to work on preparing mock proposals.

While there is a lot of focus on pre- and post-award research management, there is also the whole tail-end area (or innovation aspect) of research management, which is largely overlooked. As the table shows, for the period 1985-2006, West African countries submitted significantly fewer patents when compared to China, the UK and the US.

During the conference, delegates raised questions about how to be sure that research is not being replicated when there are no established regional databases of research projects; what happens to the hundreds of papers and

research results that are produced in West Africa every year; and why there are so few cases of patents and IPR resulting from research efforts in the region.

#### WIPO patent applications by office 1985-2006

| Country                  | Total     |
|--------------------------|-----------|
| China                    | 882,715   |
| Ghana                    | 125       |
| Nigeria                  | 699       |
| Sierra Leone             | 5         |
| United Kingdom           | 645,548   |
| United States of America | 5,220,327 |

The question of 'innovation management' for existing research results is as pertinent to the region as 'research management' for incoming research and capacity building. Delegates commented that they would like to see the industry sector in the region challenge and invest in research, because they have the funds to do so. They also requested policies for the transfer of research results and discussed factoring the purchase of new equipment into

project proposals (where existing equipment is antiquated), so researchers can update their skills. At the request of the delegates, the WARIMA office will compile a database of all research papers in the region. WARIMA also aims to take stock of research equipment in the region.

The next WARIMA event will be held in Ghana in March/April 2008. This workshop will cover the fundamentals of structuring for research management – from managing people, projects and financial matters, through to ethics and integrity, and intellectual property and contracts. The workshop is being run by ARMA and hosted by the University of Ghana, Legon, at their Centre for African Wetlands. During the same week, there will also be a one-day seminar on 'Effective Dissemination of University Research Results'. This seminar will be run by the ACU and also hosted at the same venue.

Further information on both events and on WARIMA in general can be found at [www.warima.org](http://www.warima.org)

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<sup>1</sup> WIPO, 'Patent Applications by Office (1985 to 2006)' <<http://www.wipo.int/ipstats/en/statistics/patents>> [accessed 14 January 2007]



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