


Chapter 1.4


History of Research Management in Australia and New Zealand

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Abstract

This chapter describes the beginning of the RMA profession in Australasia and its subsequent development over the last 35 years to what is now a recognised profession supported by a popular and well-accepted accreditation programme. RMAs are increasingly seen as an integral support to research and researchers, mainly in the higher education sector but increasingly in government agencies as well. Through the local professional society (the Australasian Research Management Society or ARMS), RMAs are collaborating with other professional support elements of the research ecosystem to facilitate high-quality research.

Keywords: Australia; New Zealand; Singapore; research management; ARMS; research; accreditation

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The Genesis of Research Management in Australasia

The end of the 1980s was a period of transformational change for higher education in Australia as the so-called Dawkins revolution¹ of higher education resulted in a Unified National System of Higher education (Marginson et al., 2013). This Unified National System replaced a previous binary system of universities, consisting of Institutes of Technology and Colleges of Advanced Education with a single set of universities. Many new universities were formed as a result of mergers from the previous binary system. In a sense, this also marked the beginning of the modern Research Management Office (RMO) in Australia as new government funding was made available for university research infrastructure and, with many new university researchers, competition intensified for peer-reviewed government research grants.

Similarly, in New Zealand, the growth in specialist research organisations occurred predominantly through the 20th century, via universities, Crown Research Institutes (CRIs) and Independent Research Organisations (IROs). The major components of the current New Zealand system were established in science sector reforms circa 1990. Changes in the structure and role of the RMO continue apace as funding agencies – especially NZ government funding agencies – respond to changes in government priorities.

In late 1989, the Australian federal Department of Employment, Education and Training (as it was then known) convened in an inaugural meeting of Australian research managers in the national capital (Canberra) to outline government research policy and research funding arrangements. This event continued annually until the 1998 meeting, when a group of research managers met and ‘agreed to take responsibility for the profession’. In order for research managers to be more than ‘grant processors’ and to add value to the research enterprise, they needed to take control of the annual gathering of research managers and set a broader agenda for the meeting encompassing strategic, political, and funding input from a variety of sources. Additionally, the group agreed that they would benefit from a New Zealand perspective.²

The inaugural meeting of Australian and New Zealand Research Managers and Administrators (RMAs) was held in Adelaide in November 1999. It was the first occasion in which a conference for RMAs had been designed and managed by RMAs themselves. The initial conference convenors, Research Office Directors of the three South Australian universities were Ms Janet Dibb-Leigh from the University of Adelaide, Dr Wayne Harvey from Flinders University, and Dr Mark Hochman from the University of South Australia with the conference theme of ‘Helping Research Happen’. The conference also saw the launch of the Australasian Research Management Society (ARMS) with Ms Janet Dibb-Leigh appointed as the inaugural ARMS President. It became an inspiring inaugural conference with delegates at the conclusion of the conference standing and cheering the birth of their new professional society! As an aside, for those who are interested in trivia – the after conference dinner entertainment for this inaugural ARMS conference was a magician and illusionist (Raymond Crowe),

¹Prior to the Dawkins revolution, the Australian higher education system was described as a ‘binary system’ with universities which were funded to undertake research as well as provide undergraduate and graduate teaching, and Colleges of Advanced Education/Institutes of Technology, which were not funded to undertake research. The Dawkins revolution was to remove this distinction and create a Unified National System where all higher education institutions would eventually be funded on the same basis.

²A fuller account of the ensuing actions and the attributed quotes above can be found at the link. https://www.researchmanagement.org.au/sites/default/files/uploaded-content/website-content/arms_origins.pdf.

who chose a 'willing' volunteer from the audience to be his ventriloquist's dummy. The 'willing volunteer' had only commenced in the research management profession in the preceding week and probably wondered what sort of career he had chosen for himself!

Australasian Research Management Society (ARMS): Structure

From the beginning, ARMS encompassed membership broader than the university sector including medical research institutes, State government, and the national research organisation, Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO). Membership was international in nature with New Zealand its own Chapter, and joined by delegates from the US, UK, Denmark, Korea, South Africa, and Canada in ensuing years. It is of note, and a reflection on the multi-faceted nature of the RMA profession, that over its initial 10 years as a developing Society, ARMS presidents were elected from Medical Research Institutes and private consulting firms as well as from the dominant university sector. This clearly demonstrated the multi-profession nature of ARMS, especially in its formative years. In the latter years, the university sector played a more dominant role in ARMS membership. Subsequent annual conferences were held each year in capital cities of the Australasian States until 2003, where it was held in Auckland, New Zealand – a significant milestone being the first annual conference meeting of ARMS held outside of Australia.

In addition to a national executive, ARMS was structured into local Chapters based around States and regions that were responsible for organising local ARMS events. In the early years, it was a common feature for local Chapters to demonstrate increased activity in the lead up to hosting an annual meeting in their respective State, but following the annual conference, activity would subsequently diminish. As a result, local Chapter activity and events were largely dependent on the enthusiasm and time of local members, leading to inconsistencies in local Chapter offerings.

Initially, ARMS managed its operations internally through volunteer executives and other volunteer support. Throughout the early 2000s, ARMS moved from a volunteer-based organisation to a contracted professional secretariat, which was described as a partial-professional support model. Financial accounts and conference support were outsourced, leading to many queries at executive meetings unable to be resolved. Growing dissatisfaction with this model and increasing expectations from members led to ARMS appointing its first full-time Chief Operating Officer in 2012. Since 2012, staff numbers have steadily increased and now include an in-house accountant, conference and events management, and administrative support for the growing number of professional development and membership benefit programmes. Business development support has been provided both through the committee structure, volunteers and part-time or consultancy personnel.

Australasian Research Management Society (ARMS): Focus Areas

Perhaps reflecting the organisational background of many ARMS executive members, the Society has always had a strong emphasis on strategic planning. The first ARMS strategic plan was developed in 2006 to guide the progress of this newly formed professional society and ensure financial sustainability and relevance to members and the broader research enterprise. Plans have been updated regularly with the most recent strategic plan being available in the references.

Whilst strategic priorities have varied over the last 15 years, there have been several enduring themes: internationalisation, professionalisation, and collaboration.

Internationalisation

Australia and New Zealand are a long way from the research powerhouses of the US, UK, and Europe, but international connections have always been important for both researchers and research managers. From its inception, ARMS established an International Committee that played an important role in bringing the world of research management to ARMS and ARMS to the world. ARMS played a lead role in the establishment of the International Network of Research Management Societies (INORMS), coordinating the first multinational forum where INORMS was established (Fremantle, September 2004) and hosting the first INORMS conference in Brisbane in 2006, which was attended by 250 delegates including 130 from 23 countries [see further in Chapter 1.7 (Kulakowski, 2023) and Chapter 5.17 (Thomson et al., 2023)].

Reaching out to the international community continued through the 2010s, with three study tours to the UK (2015, 2017, and 2019 – the first organised privately, the other two under the auspices of ARMS). These study tours were themed around research impact and knowledge exchange and attracted mainly senior research management professionals with approximately 12–15 participants per tour. Participants benefited from hearing the policy settings around impact and knowledge exchange in the UK and from seeing how universities managed these elements ‘on the ground’. A similar study tour of the US West Coast in 2017 themed around interacting with industry attracted fewer participants, but provided an opportunity to visit some US West Coast research powerhouse institutions including Stanford University, UC Berkeley and the University of British Columbia in Canada. Additionally, ARMS’ constant goal to collaborate with other global RMAs has established a fellowship programme with NCURA in the US, resulting in an organisation of a joint meeting with SRAI in Hawaii in 2019 titled *Disruptive Trends in Research Management*.

In the past decade, ARMS has also looked to align itself with the growing profession in the Asia-Pacific region and established a Singapore Chapter (2014). This led to a highly successful annual conference in Singapore in 2015, which attracted delegates from a much wider Asian and international catchment than would have normally been the case. This is, to date, the only annual meeting outside of Australia and New Zealand. More recently, ARMS has been active in Malaysia, seeking to establish a local Chapter and also in the South Pacific.

Professionalisation

Given the paucity of formal training for research managers, ARMS has, from its inception, had a strong emphasis on professional development. In addition to local Chapter events, early professional development centred around workshops at the annual conference on topics related to research policy, grants management, etc. In 2012, the ARMS executive commissioned a proposal to develop an accreditation programme for the profession. This required the entire Society to be consulted through input sought via survey and via meetings with each local Chapter, including New Zealand. Since 2012, several hundred individuals contributed to the resulting model, which was accepted in late 2012 for implementation at the 2013 annual conference.

Through this effort, it was established that to be an effective research manager requires a mix of technical and relationship skills, supplemented by contextual knowledge of the broader research environment. The initial ARMS Foundation Level Accreditation Program comprised eight modules delivered at the Adelaide annual conference in September 2013. These consisted of three compulsory modules (written Bodies of Knowledge) covering the national research systems, legislation in Australia

and New Zealand, a module on understanding research and researchers, and elective modules on practical research management topics such as pre- and post-award grants management, ethics and integrity, and data management. Further details are given in the footnote below.³

Since its inception in 2013, the number of modules has grown from the initial 8 to now 20. Additional modules cover Higher Degree by Research (HDR) management, working with industry and research finance. In keeping with ARMS' strong focus on having an international perspective, it has also developed modules on the national research and innovation systems operating in the UK and Vietnam – developed by writers from Vietnam and the UK respectively. At the time of writing, RMAs have completed more than 5,000 Foundation level modules since the inception of the programme in 2013, with more than 500 graduates.

The large continental and international area covered by ARMS has meant that the initial face-to-face delivery model for its Foundation Level modules has been constrained by the availability of local members to deliver modules, or further constrained by the financial cost of flying authorised Training Fellows interstate, and in some cases overseas, to deliver training. Consequently, ARMS commenced work in 2018 on transitioning key Foundation Level modules into an online Learning Management System (LMS). The necessity of this transition was further hastened with the arrival of COVID-19 and subsequent travel restrictions. Whilst modules continued to be delivered through the pandemic via video conferencing platforms, ARMS has now transitioned all its compulsory modules (for Australia, New Zealand, and Singapore) into an LMS.

Following the success of the Foundation Level Accreditation Program, ARMS introduced an Advanced Level Accreditation Program for those at more senior levels in the profession.⁴ Whilst extensive in nature, it failed to attract the similar substantial numbers as had the Foundation Level Program, possibly due to the availability of leadership programmes within member's own institutions or through other professional bodies. Consequently, in 2022, ARMS revised its inventory of all accreditation programmes to a points-based system where individuals can 'choose their own adventure' (with some compulsory modules) depending on their area of interest. These can be packaged to achieve accreditation at three levels – Foundation, Established, and

³Candidates are required to undertake five modules, including the three compulsory modules on their national research and innovation system, national legislation and understanding research and researchers and must achieve a minimum of 75% grade in each module. Following successful completion of these five modules, they must undertake a case study providing short paragraph answers that are assessed by experienced research managers to determine their understanding of day-to-day issues confronting those in the profession. The entire accreditation programme is overseen by an independent Accreditation Council with representatives from funding agencies and the research management community across different countries. The Accreditation Council comprising volunteers from government agencies, and senior university personnel is responsible for the quality of the modules, the persons who deliver training (Training Fellows), and the assessment process.

⁴This programme comprised five interrelated elements including a compulsory two- and half-day workshop on leadership, management, and strategic thinking, a choice of several full-day electives which were 'deep dives' into more specialised areas of research management, a mentorship programme, attendance at facilitated group discussion sessions with a capstone assessed workplace-based assignment of 5,000–10,000 words. The programme was delivered approximately annually and was cohort-based.

Advanced level Research Managers. This new approach still maintains a considerable assessed component and also allows for the inclusion of some non-assessed components such as the ARMS PD@zoom sessions, and a minor non-ARMS element.⁵

This significant change reflects the evolution and increasing specialisation of the RMA profession whilst still retaining a requirement for a base level of broad sector knowledge including knowledge of the national research environment, applicable legislation and the benefits of research itself.⁶

Collaboration

Supporting research is a multi-faceted business with many players, and ARMS has always been active in engaging with other players in the RMA sector including government, peak bodies, and funding councils. A feature of the ARMS calendar for several years has been an annual ‘Canberra Roadshow’ where the ARMS President and key staff discuss how to best collaborate in supporting the national research effort. This ‘Roadshow’ has also occurred sporadically in Wellington, NZ. In recent years, this has included collaboration with the Association of Australian Medical Research Institutes (AAMRI) in developing a joint Research Integrity Advisor Training Guide, the Council of Australasian Librarians (CAUL) in developing a web-based Open Research Toolkit, and the Council for Advancement of Science and Education (CASE) in a joint conference on maximising research funding through research and philanthropy.

Apart from these enduring and underpinning priorities in developing the RMA profession in Australasia, ARMS has been maturing as a professional society. This can be observed in the expansion of its organisational structure and a range of services. In addition to the Chapter based structure outlined previously, ARMS has also developed Special Interest Groups (SIGs), which function as communities of practice in specialised areas of research management. Currently, there are 10 SIGs in areas as diverse as research impact, research development, first nations research, ethics and integrity, and more. ARMS also offers a range of awards which recognise distinguished service to the RMA profession, excellent practice. It also provides travel scholarships to enable members to access international meetings. The Society has introduced Fellows of ARMS, and given the history and length of tenure of some members, it has also recently introduced the category of Life Members.

The governing executive has been replaced by a governing Board with positions being well contested – always a sign of a healthy Society. The Board is supported by four Standing Committees – Conferences and Major Events; Education and Professional Development; Governance, Finance and Audit; and Member Services. The annual reports provided at the Annual General Meeting held in association with the yearly conference (whether virtual or in-person) indicate that despite the perturbations caused by COVID-19, ARMS remains in a sound financial position.

Conclusion

The recognition, reputation, and contribution of ARMS as a collective ‘brain trust’ has certainly grown over the years. This is evidenced by the increased engagement and

⁵Further details can be found at this link: <https://www.researchmanagement.org.au/pointsbased-accreditation-programs>.

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consultation with ARMS and the RMA sector by research councils, funding bodies, other government departments, and similar.

For a profession with only 30 years of history in the Australasian region, RMAs are making an impact both in the region and globally. RMAs are increasingly seen as an important component of the research enterprise itself with multiple support roles of development, facilitation, and stewardship of research in addition to the often-recognised compliance role. RMAs still have a clear role of 'helping research happen!'

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