



Chapter 5.35

The Profession of Research Management and Administration in the Netherlands

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Abstract

In this chapter, we show the development of the Dutch research funding support during the past 40 years. As well as the evolution of the research funding ecosystem in science and innovation.

We show where Research Managers and Administrators (RMAs) started, how they developed and which developments in the research and innovation policy coincides with those origins and developments. Especially showing the exponential development of RMA in the past 10 years. The past and current situation in the Netherlands is distinctive due to the history behind the professionalisation of the profession.

Keywords: Netherlands; Research Management and Administration; Professionalisation; RMA; demographics; EUPMAN; RAAAP; ARMA-NL

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The Dutch Research and Innovation Ecosystem¹

Innovation policy in the Netherlands is mainly a public–private partnership affair in which research institutions, Industry & Businesses and societal partners work together. The Dutch government stimulates this process via three complementary tracks:

1. *Generic Innovation Track*: These are mostly fiscal arrangements for innovative businesses and industry to stimulate research and development work. Tax reductions to stimulate innovative businesses and industry to do more research and development and strengthen the business climate for innovative industry.
2. *Public–Private Track*: This is a continuation of the former TopSectors Policy,² in which the economic opportunities of societal challenges are the main objective. Co-operation between relevant businesses, knowledge organisations and societal partners established 25 missions grouped in four societal themes. Based on these missions 18 multiannual Public–Private Knowledge and Innovation agendas (KIAs) have been defined.
3. *The Risk-bearing Financing Track*: The supply of risk-bearing financing for innovative businesses and projects: Innovation credit, the Seed Capital arrangement and the Dutch Venture Initiative³ (Ministerie van Economische Zaken en Klimaat, n.d.).

Research and Science

Universities (13) and Applied Universities (37), receive basic funding from the government, including a research component which is very modest for the Applied Universities. This basic funding is a lump sum amount and the organisations are autonomous to decide how to spend the budget. For universities there are three legal tasks/responsibilities: scientific education, scientific research and valorisation. The (applied) universities receive additional funding in competition from NWO⁴ (2nd funding stream) on the basis of excellence and thematic priorities. All other income for research is considered to be the 3rd funding stream. This consists of funding for contract education and contract research. In mainly medical sciences, the fourth funding stream consists of contributions from private persons and private foundations (Heart Foundation, etc.).

NWO, The Dutch Research Council invests around 1 billion euros annually in curiosity-driven research, research related to societal challenges and research infrastructure. Funding is organised in five funding lines and each line has a distinct objective: Open Competition (free research); Talent Programme (veni-vidi-vici); KIA; Dutch Research Agenda; and Research infrastructure⁵ (NWO, 2019).

KNAW,⁶ The Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences is dedicated to the advancement of science and literature. The KNAW is the forum, the voice, and the conscience of research in the Netherlands. It operates a number of research institutes.

¹ Innovatieve Samenleving Brede Maatschappelijke Heroverweging (2020, April 20). *Inspectie der Rijksfinanciën BMH-Secretariaat*. BMH@minfin.nl.

² <https://www.topsectoren.nl/>

³ <https://www.bedrijvenbeleidinbeeld.nl/beleidsinstrumenten/dutch-venture-initiative>

⁴ <https://www.nwo.nl/>

⁵ <https://www.nwo.nl/onderzoeksbeleid-nwo>

⁶ <https://www.knaw.nl/>

TO2 Institutes,⁷ a substantial part of applied research is done by five TO2 institutes. These independent institutes for applied research receive an institutional budget from the government: basic funding plus funding for research indicated by law and contributions from the public-private initiatives.

RKIs:⁸ *Governmental Knowledge Institutes*, a number of governmental knowledge institutes (RKIs) are being financed by a fixed governmental budget, another number of RKIs are financed on the basis of assignments. They support the Ministries with the preparation and implementation of policy, or develop knowledge for the good functioning of societal sectors.

All these knowledge organisations are free to participate and contribute to international or European public-private collaborations.

Development of RMA

At the beginning of the 1980s the government concluded that the innovation strengths of the Dutch industry needed to be stimulated and Technology Transfer Offices (TTO) were introduced at universities to accelerate the transfer of the innovative findings into new products and services. More or less at the same time, the first EU research programmes (mainly ESPRIT and Euratom) became part of the research mix. The TTOs became involved in this and formed the foundation from which the RMA profession evolved. At that time, there were funding opportunities for researchers from the big Dutch charity Foundations who mainly acted in the field of Health and Medicine Research and on the industry side there were big industrial research organisations, such as Philips, Shell, Unilever and DSM.⁹

Around the 1990s two different but related policies were being developed, namely, the Innovation policy,¹⁰ and the Science policy. In the next 20 years, these policies would be more and more integrated and the number of research-performing institutions became more diverse and the research funding increased. Also, in the 1990s, the Dutch Research Council introduced the competitive ‘Vernieuwingsimpuls’,¹¹ *NWO* (2000), a funding scheme of individual grants at three levels of the researcher’s career called Veni, Vidi, Vici, based on the excellence of research. This was a tremendous success and individual researchers were more in need of RMA support. For the growing RMA community, this was a turning point since with this scheme the profession became more interesting as a career path for RMAs with a scientific background.

The innovation policy after 2005 shows a strengthened focus on specific top sectors: identified technologies in which the Netherlands can excel: High-tech systems and Materials; Flowers&Food; Water; Creative industry; Chemistry; in which the whole knowledge chain is involved. While the science policy focuses on the individual researcher’s career on all levels: from PhD to full professor and diversity and inclusiveness. All these individual applications were in need of RMA support.

On the EU side, the ERC and EU Framework programmes and other European subsidies are by now a major part of the funding mix. The Dutch Charity foundations

⁷ <https://www.bedrijvenbeleidinbeeld.nl/beleidsinstrumenten/to2>

⁸ <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/contact/contactgids/rijkskennisinstellingen-rki>

⁹ <https://www.dsm.com/corporate/home.html>

¹⁰ Tweede Kamer, vergaderjaar 1986-1987, 19 704, nrs. 1-2.

¹¹ Lit. translation ‘innovation impuls’ now renamed as NWO Talent programme: <https://www.nwo.nl/onderzoeksprogrammas/nwo-talentprogramma>.

become a more integral part of the mix by larger budgets and developing clear research objectives and developing strategic (international) partnerships.

Evolution of the Profession in the Netherlands

In the mid-1980s, the profession of RMA started with the introduction of TTO offices in universities financed by the government. At the same time the independent foundation 'EU-Liaison Office',¹² started with the objective to promote Dutch participation in the European programmes. The RMA community at that time was small. From the very beginning, a national platform of TTO/RMA existed hosted by the VSNU.¹³ This platform ceased to exist in due time. The Dutch RMA community re-organised themselves in 1996 in a more or less informal group called EUPMAN with an e-mail discussion list and they organised meetings hosted by the universities.

The RMA profession itself developed on-the-job through learning by doing, most had a degree from the HE sector (University or an Applied University degree) and some RMAs came from research. The financial RMA (project controller) needed the correct financial qualifications and has been the most defined RMA position. The work at first was promoting activities about funding opportunities and mapping exercises to match opportunities with the researchers. In the 1980s the funding landscape became more diverse and complex, correspondingly the tasks performed by RMAs also became more diverse and complex. Specialisation into particular areas began, such as legal aspects, specialisation into post-award support (project management), administrative support with the (administrative) forms and communication and training. Pre-award activities were mainly policy and strategy with the executive board, deans and external networks. With the introduction of National and European-funded individual research grants the pre-award individual support to researchers became a strong specialisation. RMA colleagues more involved in Innovation Technology Programmes (Dutch and EU) became experts in their specific scientific area and collaborative projects support: building complex consortia and coordination of the writing process.

Within universities, many RMA jobs are devolved in due time into the university organisation to faculty or institutes level, in order to be closer to the researcher. Internal university RMA networks and knowledge sharing starts to develop. Key performance indicators in EU research (provided by RVO¹⁴) opened eyes and university management began to feel the need to open representation offices in Brussels (jointly or alone) and be more involved in the lobbying. During the first decade of the 21st century, new compliance issues became part of the eligibility criteria in external funding, such as ethical and integrity issues, research data management, and publication pressure. It was the RMA community that looked into those requirements and stimulated that new support centres came into existence: expertise centres in the field of data management, university ethical review structures, etc.

The Netherlands RMA Community

The Dutch RMA community is in rapid transition towards a more professionalisation and recognised as a profession, becoming an important stakeholder and asset within

¹² EG Liaison Office was later merged with RVO.nl <https://www.rvo.nl/>.

¹³ Universities of the Netherlands. <https://www.universiteitenvannederland.nl/>.

¹⁴ RVO: Dutch National Agency to execute the application of national and European regulation, including the European Research and Innovation.

the Dutch research ecosystem. This is to keep up with the increasing complexity of research funding and the compliance to all the transversal elements requested by funders and legislation which results in specialisation and an increase in the number of RMA support staff at research-intensive organisations. While in the early 1980s and 1990s the background and knowledge of the RMA was primarily on finance or valorisation, nowadays we now see project management experts, financial controllers, grant advisors, data managers, ethics officers, legal experts, liaison officers, and lobbyists. In addition, the support to large collaborative grants and the strategic alignment of the organisation is less coincidental, and at national and organisational levels the importance for excellent research support is being recognised. Associations like EARMA¹⁵ and ARMA-NL¹⁶ (the successor to EUPMAN) are professional associations with large numbers of members in the Netherlands which are also active in developing their own expertise. But there are also several national groups organised on different specialisations, like finance, valorisation, data management, open science, national funding and European funding. These groups, consist of individuals from all research-intensive organisations share best practices, provide feedback to the funding organisations, the EU and the government. These developments provide a strong research ecosystem being at the core of the successful Research & Development in the Netherlands.

Netherlands RMA Demographics

The Dutch RMA community, although it started in the early 1980s has, in recent years, taken a leap in its development. The original EUPMAN-email discussion list has about 600 participants and ARMA-NL has about 300 members. According to the 2019 RAAAP-2 survey (Kerridge, Ajai-Ajagbe, et al., 2022),¹⁷ there are about twice as many women (71% of $n = 77$) as men working in the RMA profession in the Netherlands. The age range of the Dutch RMA group is 25–34 years 16%, 35–44 years 34%, 45–54 years 31% and 55–64 years 19%, and approximately 60% of the RMAs have more than 10 years' experience. From 2020 we see an increase in the number of job openings for RMA positions in the Netherlands and their expertise is in high demand. Even so, experienced project managers or grant advisors are hard to find in the current labour market. This also reflects the current demographics in the Netherlands, the numbers of RMAs has increased, and many younger, inexperienced RMAs are hired due to the shortage of experienced RMAs. This has led to an increased demand in training for early career RMAs from the association and Research Support Offices.

The Dutch RMA Association ARMA-NL

Without volunteers there would never have been an association in the Netherlands; their contribution has been and still is essential for the development of the profession, and still is for the development of ARMA-NL. ARMA-NL the Dutch Association for RMAs was founded in 2018 but started more than 10 years earlier as an independent forum for EU project managers, EUPMAN, where people could ask and answer questions about practicalities and exchange experiences about the coordination and management of European Framework or other EU programmes. Ten years

¹⁵<https://earma.org/>

¹⁶<https://armanl.eu/>

¹⁷<https://inorms.net/activities/raaap-taskforce/raaap-survey-2019/>

later EUPMAN had over 500 members from academia, research organisations and industry. This forum has been the place for professional development for new project managers learning from those who were more experienced in sharing their knowledge and expertise.

After a(n internal) survey to identify the needs of the members of EUPMAN, the outcome revealed that it was time to take the next step, first of all, to be able to provide better opportunities for development such as more and professional training opportunities, a better website containing best practices, different working groups on specific topics and more and professionally organised conferences. And second, the group simply became too large for a university or research organisation to host a meeting for everyone free of cost. In the 10 years of existence many organisations have been kind enough to host events but finding one became an ever-reoccurring struggle. Having financial means would make life much easier for finding a large enough venue so everybody could join and provides independence for the conference committee. The survey also revealed a large diversity in the jobs of the members; it was not just project managers or grant advisors. There were also people working in research policy, strategy or finance meaning that the organisation should extend their scope providing a haven for a broader group of RMAs. This also reflects the development of the research support profession in the Netherlands which shows in members of EUPMAN. After the survey was discussed with the members and the members voted on the future developments the road towards an official association started for ARMA-NL. The steering group made plans and looked and talked to sister organisations in other countries to get tips and tricks for the next steps. ARMA-NL also became part of the International Network of Research Management Societies (INORMS¹⁸). In 2018 ARMA-NL obtained a formal registration at the chamber of commerce and has statutes, house-rules, a bank account, and offers a professional network, personal development, advances the interest of the profession, and acts as a discussion partner for stakeholders on developments concerning research support. Its strength and success are largely due to the involvement of the members in trainings, getting the website up and running, finding sponsors, and arranging the official registration of the association. The association started small and this work is all done next by volunteers who already have a demanding job. Now after the first years after the official registration, new board members have started and the association is slowly starting to move towards the next phase of its existence.

The Future of RMA in the Netherlands

The level of maturity of the RMA profession has in recent years taken a leap and initiatives at the national as well as the European levels will result in further development of the profession in the near future. It seems probable that RMAs in the Netherlands will undergo further specialisation and become highly trained specialists needed to maintain compliance and tackle the transversal elements of grants. The further development will come for a large part from the community itself as expertise is scarce and there are no formal education programmes for these positions and in addition play a larger role in the research ecosystem involved in policy and strategy. Highly experienced experts with a more general view on the funding landscape and research are likely to become highly prized/treasured unicorns within the organisation, as oversight is becoming increasingly complex. The association in the Netherlands, ARMA-NL, plays a central

¹⁸<https://inorms.net/>

position in the future of RMAs in the Netherlands but so will reforms at, for instance, universities that are trying to increase their position in the funding success and provide the next level of support to their researchers.

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