




Chapter 5.39


The Profession of Research Management and Administration in Sweden



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Abstract

This chapter outlines the development of the Swedish Higher Education System that led to the evolution of the profession of research management and administration (RMA) in Sweden. Evolution from an informal network towards more formalised and structured work within the Swedish RMA community is highlighted. Discussion on the level of salaries development depending on the education level, gender, experience and roles are elaborated too. The majority of the Swedish RMA community are women, which does not differ from most other RMA communities around the world. Swedish Association of Research Managers and Administrators (SWARMA) is the bridge between national research and innovation funding agencies and researchers. SWARMA selected members actively participate in the reference groups for EU R&I programmes. The future for RMAs in Sweden looks bright!

The Emerald Handbook of Research Management and Administration Around the World, 751–757

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doi:[10.1108/978-1-80382-701-820231073](https://doi.org/10.1108/978-1-80382-701-820231073)

Keywords: Sweden; Research Management and Administration; professionalisation; SNITTS; SWARMA; Profession; Research Support; EARMA; RAAAP

The Swedish Research Ecosystem

Sweden ranks among the world's most innovative nations, and investment in research is among the highest in the world in relation to gross domestic product (GDP).¹ The government invests heavily in education, and more than 3% of Sweden's GDP goes towards research and development.

There are currently 35 universities and university colleges in Sweden. Higher education and research in Sweden are mostly conducted at state universities and colleges. There are also some foundations and non-state education providers.

At the beginning of the 20th century, there were only six higher education institutions in Sweden: Uppsala University, Lund University, Karolinska Institutet, the Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm University College and Gothenburg University College. The latter two had been founded as alternatives to the traditional universities, with a focus on the public benefit and adult education. Enrolment in higher education still was not for everyone. There were only 6,500 university students in the country in the 1920s² out of a population of almost 6 million inhabitants.³

In the 1960s, the Swedish higher education system was reformed. A general student financial aid system was introduced which gave more young people the opportunity to study. Colleges were established in new locations and many specialised colleges were incorporated into the university system: teacher education, social sciences, journalism and nursing. After this reform, Sweden received the world's most comprehensive higher education.

Until 1990, the Swedish research funding system consisted of the Swedish Board for Technical Development (STU), the Research Council Board (FRN), the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Council (HSFR), the Medical Research Council (MFR), the Natural Sciences Research Council (NFR) and the Technical Research Council (TFR).

The Board for Technical Development (STU) was formed in 1968. The main purpose was to finance bilateral collaborations on technical and industrial research and development. In 1991, The Board for Technical Development was transformed into The Swedish Agency for Business Development (NUTEK). In 2001, the name was changed to the Swedish Innovation Agency (VINNOVA⁴).

In the same year, 2001, the Swedish Research Council was also formed through a merger of the Research Council Board, the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Council, the Medical Research Council, the Natural Science Research Council and the Technical Science Research Council. The Swedish Research Council (Vetenskapsrådet) is today the dominant research funder of basic research.

Another dominant research funder in Sweden is the Wallenberg Foundations,⁵ which was formed as early as 1917 through a donation by Knut Wallenberg and his

¹ OECD. (2022). Table 2 – Gross domestic expenditure on R&D (GERD) as a percentage of GDP. In *Main science and technology indicators* (Vol. 2022, Issue 1). OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/a70010f6-en>

² Universitetskanslersämbetet. (2021). *Ären 1900–2000*. <https://www.uka.se/fakta-om-hogskolan/den-svenska-hogskolans-historia/aren-1900-2000.html>.

³ Population by age and sex (1860/2021) – <https://www.statistikdatabasen.scb.se/>.

⁴ Vinnova – <https://www.vinnova.se/en/>.

⁵ Wallenberg Foundations – <https://www.wallenberg.org/en>.

wife Alice, hence the official name Knut and Alice Wallenberg Foundation.⁶ Until 2014, the foundation mainly financed expensive scientific equipment and premises for research at universities, colleges and academies. Today, the foundation focuses on major joint efforts by prominent researchers or research groups. The foundation also has extensive scholarship programs for young researchers, Wallenberg Academy Fellows.

The Wallenberg Foundation can be equated with the Wellcome Trust and the Volkswagen Foundation in terms of money and their funding of excellence research is on a par with the grants that Swedish universities receive from the EU framework program.

In addition to the Swedish Research Council⁷ and the Wallenberg Foundation,⁸ there are several foundations and authorities that fund research in specific areas; Swedish Research Council for Health, Working Life and Welfare (Forte),⁹ Research Council for Sustainable Development (Formas),¹⁰ Sweden's innovation agency (Vinnova),¹¹ Riksbankens Jubileumsfond (RJ)¹² supporting research in the Humanities and Social Sciences, The Foundation for Environmental Strategic Research (MISTRA),¹³ The Foundation for Strategic Research (SSF),¹⁴ The Foundation for the Internationalisation of Higher Education and Research (STINT),¹⁵ The Knowledge Foundation (KK-stiftelsen),¹⁶ the Cancer Foundation,¹⁷ the Swedish Energy Agency,¹⁸ the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency,¹⁹ the Göran Gustafsson Foundation,²⁰ Ragnar Söderberg Foundation,²¹ Erling-Persson Foundation²² and more.

The Origin of Research Support/Research Administration in Sweden

Until the 1990s, there was no systematic and qualified central support at Swedish universities for researchers regarding help with research applications and research funding. The central administrative support regarding research consisted mostly of support with external contacts in various forms of knowledge and technology transfer, such as information dissemination and company contacts or help with company establishment. What we mean today with research support in the form of science writing, legal and financial advice, seeking funding opportunities and matching with ongoing research to support scientists at the university, did not exist.

However, as EU research programs became increasingly accessible for the basic research carried out at the universities, a need arose for help with formalities surrounding the application process itself. Initially, it was a matter of interpreting and understanding new and unfamiliar rules and criteria, as well as filling in forms and

⁶ Knut and Alice Wallenberg Foundation – <https://kaw.wallenberg.org/en>.

⁷ Swedish Research Council – <https://www.vr.se/english.html>.

⁸ <https://wallenberg.org/en>

⁹ Forte – <https://forte.se/en/>.

¹⁰ Formas – <https://formas.se/en/start-page.html5>.

¹¹ Vinnova – <https://www.vinnova.se/en/>.

¹² Riksbankens Jubileumsfond – <https://www.rj.se/en/>.

¹³ Mistra – <https://mistra.org>.

¹⁴ SSF – <https://strategiska.se/en/>.

¹⁵ STINT – <https://www.stint.se/en/>.

¹⁶ KK-stiftelsen – <https://www.kks.se>.

¹⁷ Cancerfonden – <https://www.cancerfonden.se>.

¹⁸ Energimyndigheten – <https://www.energimyndigheten.se/en/>.

¹⁹ Naturvårdsverket – <https://www.naturvardsverket.se/en/>.

²⁰ Göran Gustafssons Stiftelse – <https://gustafssonsstiftelser.se>.

²¹ Ragnar Söderbergs Stiftelse – <https://ragnar.soderbergs.org>.

²² Erling-Persson – <https://www.erlingperssonsstiftelse.se>.

designing project descriptions in accordance with the formalised instructions for the funds within the EU framework program that had become increasingly attractive to researchers at universities.

This demand from researchers required new skills at the universities' central administration that could learn, interpret and understand the formalities (or bureaucracy as it became commonly known) that surrounded these research grants. As this skill is also needed to understand the background and purpose of the EU's research initiatives, these people also became increasingly involved in the application process itself.

Many higher education institutions in Sweden hired consultants to cover this need. Some of these consultants were focused on assisting with scientific writing or, more precisely, formulating successful applications. When it turned out that their contribution to this process was successful, the demand for this form of support increased among the researchers, and it was those who helped with formalities who had to shoulder this role as research advisors.

This new role or service to support researchers with EU applications began to be established at several universities in Europe, but this role was most developed in the UK. Eventually, this role at the central university administration became useful and also helpful for national research funding. At the same time, in the 1990s, national research grants had also begun to become more complex. National research funders had begun to set new requirements and framework conditions for their grants. This could apply to requirements for utilisation, reporting and, in some cases, business collaborations.

Today, in 2022, most research-intensive universities (and also many companies) have a department for research support with a number of people employed who are dedicated to advice in various aspects of research funding.

An Urgent Need for Advanced Training Occurred

In Sweden, more and more universities began to assign staff who could assist researchers with advice and support for the EU framework program. Initially, it was the technical universities in Gothenburg and Stockholm, Chalmers and KTH Royal Institute of Technology, as well as Uppsala University, Swedish Agriculture University and Lund University. For those who worked in the administration with this task, there was a need for training to be able to provide support to researchers who wanted to apply for EU funding. But the range of skills training was limited.

At the University of Bradford, there was a unit called the European Briefing Unit, which was one of the first to offer training in how the EU's research program worked. *Richard Tomlin*, Head of Research Services at Newcastle University was one of the lecturers in their course. Newcastle had one of the first Research Services as a function within a university administration in Europe. During the 1980s and 1990s, support for researchers at Swedish universities was limited to technology or knowledge transfer.

Bert Bohlander at the University of Delft had created a mailing list called EU_UNITE. UNiversities International Team of Experts (UNITE) aimed to safeguard the universities' interests in the regulations for, above all, the framework programs. The aforementioned *Richard Tomlin* and *Lotte Jasper* at the University of Amsterdam were active contributors to this mailing list. EU_UNITE focused on issues related to contracts and agreements for EU research funding. The rules for the EU Framework Program were initially not adapted to academic conditions. It was also UNITE that initiated an alternative template for consortium agreements that were adapted to the

universities' conditions. The templates that existed for consortium agreements were designed based on the needs of the industry. This template was the first version of the template we know today as DESCA (see [Groeninx van Zoelen, 2023, Chapter 1.6](#)).

EU_UNITE mailing list, which many Swedish Research Administrators (RA) subscribed to, became a model for the Swedish network for the EU that was formed under the name EU-R&D network.

Evolution of the Profession in Sweden

During the 1990s more and more universities began to assign staff, who could assist researchers with advice and support for the EU framework program. An informal network between such staff was formed under the name EU-R&D network. The aim that has guided the network from the start has been, and still is: benefits to us all by exchanged and shared experiences, contacts and knowledge. From around 25 members of the informal network in 2001 it has grown into a more structured network of 350+ members in 2022.

No specific titles for what we would call RMA staff today were used. Later, a variety of titles have been used. 'A loved child has many names' is a proverb in Swedish that indeed is applicable to RMA staff. Custom titles like economist, RA and advisor began to be used in the beginning of the 2000s. Suddenly titles like project advisor, EU coordinator, research assistant and more started to be used. A small inventory within the SWARMA network from 2021 shows that the names of RMAs are still diverse, around 15 titles are named in the inventory. Research advisor is however now the most used title but also the more general Coordinator is quite frequent. Economists specialised in the field seem to have fewer specific titles in their roles as RMAs, but EU grants specialists is one. Some Grants Offices are nowadays connected to/integrated into units with Innovation Offices. An effect of this is that RMA titles have expanded to also include, for example, Innovation advisors. A tendency is also to name some RMA staff as 'strategists' and thus moving the focus from RMAs giving hands-on operational support to be more of a strategic asset at the university.

The Swedish RMA Community

SWARMA is the main forum for the RMAs working at Swedish higher education institutions. However, some SWARMA members are also members of other national networks such as SNITTS.²³ SNITTS is a non-profit member-driven organisation and a knowledge arena for actors in the academic innovation support system. Also, there is another network called Innovation and R&D,²⁴ members of which are experienced managers with strategic and personnel responsibility having a title of *inter alia* Research Director, R&D Manager, Innovation Lead, etc. This network, however, targets the Research Institutes and private sector rather than the higher education institutions.

It is worth mentioning that being the bridge between national research and innovation funding agencies and researchers, SWARMA selected members actively participate in the reference groups for EU R&I programmes, within the framework EU-funded programme, currently named Horizon Europe. The role of SWARMA members in the reference groups is to represent the network, not their home universities, and channel

²³ <https://www.snitts.se/>

²⁴ <https://egn.com/se/networks/innovation-och-research-development/>

the information to and from the network and thus provide a structured and comprehensive input to the EU R&I work programmes.

Swedish RMA Demographics

The RMA network in Sweden, SWARMA, has around 350 RMAs and as stated in earlier chapters the role or title of the RMAs differs a lot. Both the title of the person and also what that person does as daily work can be very different depending on where that person works. Despite the differences the Swedish network has tried to have a recurrent survey to keep track of how salaries are developing and also to have something to work with towards getting the role more accepted and cohesive. The survey is a great tool to include in a salary negotiation.

The last survey was ready at the beginning of 2022. It gives some interesting figures regarding the division between men and women, different salary levels, education, roles and how it has developed. During the years the survey has been conducted in its current form, 2011–2021, the division between men and women answering has been almost the same, 70% women and 30% men. That is almost a perfect reflection of the number of men and women who are members of the network. The total number of individual members is 340, and 71% is women and 29% is men. What we can see if we compare the surveys performed from 2011 until 2021 is that the differences between men and women have decreased among financial managers but increased between the research and innovation advisors. There are still differences but not in the same size as before, in 2011 the differences between men and women were more distinctive. Nevertheless, the difference between people with a PhD degree or not is still and has always been significant. Among people within the same role the salary levels differ widely, which may reflect the difference in tasks that a role can include in different universities or higher education institutions and therefore also the challenge to compare.

From the international survey RAAAP-2 (Kerridge, Ajai-Ajagbe, et al., 2022) in 2019, we can see that data from Sweden ($n = 49$ of $N = 4,260$) paints the same picture regarding the division between men and women. A few more men were answering this survey, so the female proportion is 62.5% ($n = 48$) and the male proportion is 37.5%. Interesting facts to mention are that 49% of the RA have worked between 9 and 19 years in the field and 16% have worked 5 years. The conclusion is that RAs in Sweden have a lot of experience and love their jobs since they stay in the field for so long. We can also see that most of them, 85.7%, are full-time RMAs and 79.6% work in a Central RA office. Before becoming an RMA 42.9% have a science background and the rest are not equally divided between medicine, engineering, business, social science, humanities and others.

To summarise both the international and national survey it is clear that we have a larger number of women working in the RMA sector, and there is a lot of experience and a real strength in the Swedish RMA community is the diversity of background.

Directions/Future

So, what will happen in the future? How will SWARMA evolve, will it expand even more, how will our profession develop? The future for RMAs in Sweden is promising. The main reason for that is the formalisation of the network and how it has developed from an informal network to SWARMA. With that said, SWARMA is not as formalised as some other networks being legal entities, but have developed a good structure with engaged people working for the continuation of networking, keeping

sub-groups active and making meetings, both small and large network meetings happen. SWARMA has a strong desire to keep the network as open and informal as it is possible and at the same time, to give the RMA title higher status. The development of the profession is also dependent on which path the European Commission takes, moving towards more lump-sum projects with less financial reporting will make the RMA role even more advisory and less in need of financial skills. If we also compare the demands from different financial sources in both national and international projects' controls and demands are getting tighter all the time and the role of RMA will always be important to support the research community. SWARMA welcomes the European Commission which turned their attention to the RMA community in Europe and will support RMAs in their strive for professional recognition.

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