FOSTERING COLLABORATION IN RESEARCH MANAGEMENT THE CA' FOSCARI UNIVERSITY'S *RESEARCH MANAGEMENT COMMUNITY* – RMC

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ABSTRACT

What is new?	Ca' Foscari University of Venice has established a Research Management Community (RMC): a structured, cross-organizational initiative launched in March 2022 to tackle fragmentation, high turnover, and process inefficiencies in research support. This model formalizes collaboration among research managers and aligns with emerging European frameworks like RM-Comp.
What was the approach?	The RMC adopts a blended and participatory approach, combining peer-to-peer collaboration, structured knowledge sharing, and continuous review of processes. It draws inspiration from international trends and EU-funded initiatives (e.g. CARDEA and RM ROADMAP), emphasizing the strategic role of research managers in academia.
What is the academic impact?	The RMC has improved the quality and consistency of research support provided to professors and researchers, enhancing internal communication, aligning workflows, and reinforcing institutional knowledge across departments and central services.

What is the wider impact?	The model offers a scalable and transferable framework for other institutions dealing with similar organizational challenges. It contributes to professionalization trends across European research management and supports the broader recognition of the research manager's role within universities and funding ecosystems.
Keywords	Research; Managers; Community; Support; Professionalization

INTRODUCTION

Research Management plays a central role in enabling scientific progress and innovation. Across Europe, institutions increasingly recognize the importance of structured Research Management systems, as reflected in the development of professional networks (e.g. EARMA), policy frameworks (e.g. European Research Area), and strategic support instruments (e.g. Horizon Europe Policy Support Facility). The professionalization of Research Management has accelerated in recent years through initiatives promoted by national and regional authorities, as well as growing investments in European and international funding schemes.

Effective Research Management practices are essential to managing the complexities of modern research environments. At Ca' Foscari University of Venice, the rapid expansion of research activities and staff turnover have posed significant challenges to Research Management. Several attempts to coordinate and strengthen the research support services "value chain" actors have been made: since the 2010s informal research managers groups have gathered, pushed by the need for dialog and exchange of experiences among the professionals involved in supporting the full project lifecycle.

This effort has proven to be insufficient, thus the need to create a new solution. This article explores the establishment and early impacts of the Research Management Community, a cross-functional task force designed to address these challenges by fostering a collaborative and integrated approach to Research Management.

THE CONTEXT AND THE ISSUES ADDRESSED

PRE-AWARD AND POST-AWARD RESEARCH MANAGEMENT SERVICES AT CA' FOSCARI UNIVERSITY

At Ca' Foscari University, research management and support services are organized through a "hybrid" model that integrates centralized pre-award support and decentralized post-award management. At central administration level a research office operates, known as Area Ricerca (*ARIC – Research Area*), which works in synergy with nine Departmental *Research Units* established within the nine Ca' Foscari University Departments.

Furthermore, Central Administration offices such as legal affairs (*Affari Legali*), Human Resources (*ARU*) and Financial & Budgeting (*ABiF*) also provide information and support to Departments' decentralized *Research Units* for legal, financial and personnel management issues, even beyond research management strictly related needs.

This structure is designed to provide comprehensive support across all stages of the research project lifecycle, as described in Figure 1.
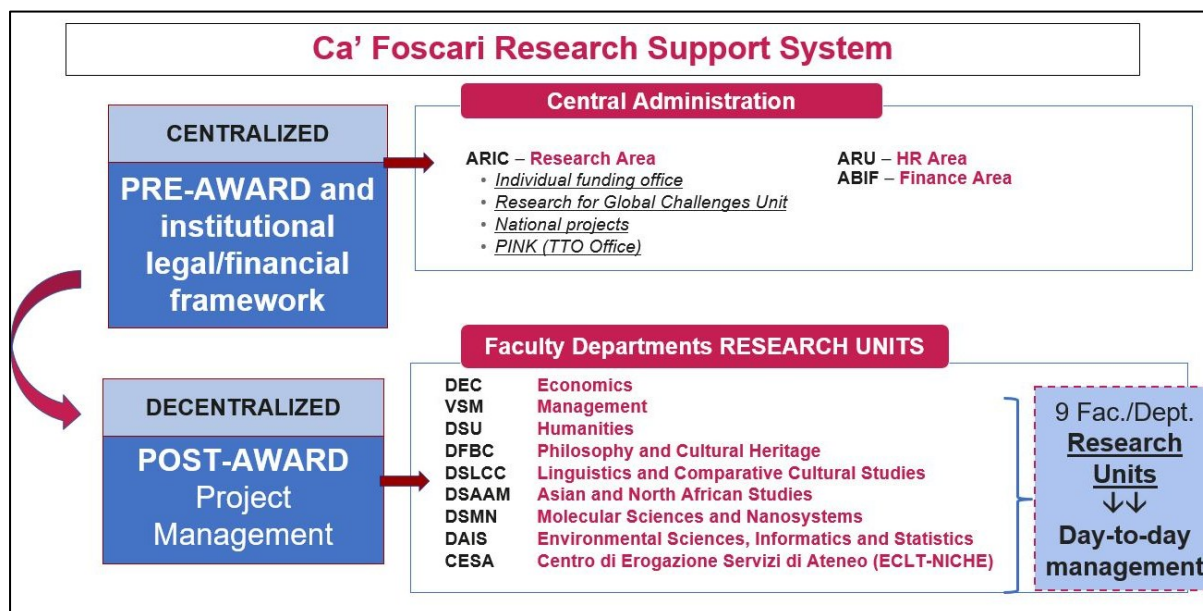

Figure 1. Structure of the Research Management Support System at Ca' Foscari University. *ARIC* (pre-award, coordination, guidelines), *Departments' Research Units* (operational post-award management)

CENTRALIZED AND DECENTRALIZED SUPPORT SYSTEM

The University's research support overall infrastructure comprises a central administrative headquarter called Area Ricerca (*ARIC* - Research Area) and nine *Research Units* established within the Departments, each with management autonomy.

This system allows researchers to receive support throughout the entire lifecycle: ARIC offers in-depth pre-award services to researchers (scouting and monitoring funding opportunities, matchmaking and networking activities, hand-in-hand proposal drafting and budget preparation) in synergy with the Departments' *Research Units*, and serves as a backup to the latter in all post-award related matters. The *Research Units* within Departments deal with the daily project management providing direct support to researchers working within those premises, as further explained in the next sections.

Communication flows horizontally (between departments) and vertically (with central offices), though increasing complexity and staff turnover have highlighted the need for improved coordination.

As of 2025, the University employs approximately 1120 academic staff and 760 technical-administrative staff. In order to understand the balance of the organization

Research support system, it must be pointed out that of the above mentioned technical-administrative staff number, 90 individuals are strictly involved in "research management", distributed across both central administration and within Departments' *Research Units (vide infra* "Structural growing challenges").

In particular, Central Administration *ARIC* employs 33 staff members, while 57 staff members are involved in research management support within Departments' *Research Units*.

This dual system allows for tailored support while ensuring strategic alignment.

CENTRAL ADMINISTRATION (PRE-AWARD SUPPORT AND POST-AWARD BACKUP SUPPORT)

Central administration is composed of administrative offices covering the usual institution management: legal, finance, human resources, management control, general affairs, procurement, and contracts. These departments are essential for the management of the institution and provide support in areas of routine administration not directly related to research activities. Their expertise may also be crucial for Departments' *Research Units* and Departments' autonomous administrative staff for matters concerning the implementation of research projects, such as: advice on international agreements in case of disputes or negotiation needs, financial reporting procedures and/or doubts about compliance with national and international regulations, etc.

However, the central administration *Research Area office* (*ARIC*) is the core entry point and main reference entity regarding policies, long-term strategies, supervision and operational management connected with research funding and research-related projects.

ARIC includes a range of Units, each focusing on different areas of research management and financing schemes (at national, European and international level), mostly focusing on pre-award activities. Those units also provide post-award project management backup support and supervision, as well as technology transfer and research results valorization consultancy services. As a matter of fact, within the project lifecycle ARIC units primarily focus on pre-award activities, which include:

- Scouting: support in identifying and disseminating potential funding opportunities.
- Budgeting and Planning: Assisting with the financial planning and allocation of resources necessary for project proposals.
- Application Support: Providing guidance and resources for the preparation and submission of research proposals.
- Research Project Management Support: Definition and harmonization of administrative and management procedures in line with internal regulations, national legislation and rules of funding programs for funds management. In

particular, the Research Project Management support unit is in charge of the *Research Management Community* operational administration.

There are 33 ARIC staff strictly dedicated to research grants, distributed as indicated in Figure 2. This information can be found at the organizational chart web page of Ca' Foscari University website (UNIVE, nd1).
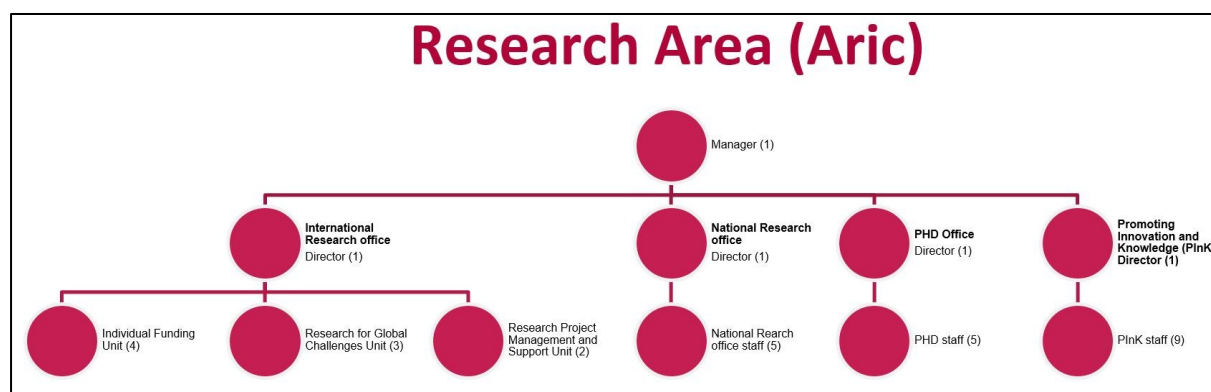

Figure 2. ARIC structure and staff distribution

ARIC staff are specialized both by activity, particularly in pre-award consultancy services, and by topic, for example by supporting the Ca' Foscari Research Hub for Global Challenges (UNIVE, nd2), which brings together six research topic institutes focused on societal, economic, and environmental challenges under one structure to foster synergies, optimize resources, and enhance research impact. The office structure also reflects another distinction, based on the nature of funding schemes: national or international, individual or collaborative funding, and an intersectoral unit dedicated to supporting post-award activities, developing management tools, and establishing standard procedures to ensure that all research-related structures are aligned both with national legislation and international funders' rules and guidelines.

DEPARTMENTS' RESEARCH UNITS (POST-AWARD SUPPORT)

Daily management of funded national, European and international research projects is carried out by and within the Departments, notably by the *Research Units* in which approximately 50 staff members work, notably research managers. Those are responsible for the day-to-day management of research projects once funding has been secured, e.g. from Grant Agreements signature onwards. These units handle the daily contact with researchers (professors, PhD students, international research fellows, etc.) and post-award activities related to project implementation. Among those, they oversee the execution of research projects by ensuring planning and delivery timelines are smoothly respected by researchers. They also provide researchers with support on financial management and reporting activities, ensuring adherence to reporting requirements and compliance with relevant regulations. Because of this, *Research Units* have daily direct contact with the researchers, helping them with the activity's implementation, budget monitoring and ensuring all tasks are constantly in line with the planning and project scopes. They are on the front line and guarantee the

administrative side of projects is smoothly carried out, taking care of relations with project partners and/or coordinators, external purchase services, researchers' contracts and overall project reporting. Newly assigned staff are usually instructed by senior research managers and occasionally undergo training sessions provided by ARIC on internal procedures, tools and guidelines implemented by the institution.

Departments' *Research Units* and ARIC staff members are constantly in contact with each other as they cooperate daily in order to respond to researchers' questions and issues in terms of management, reporting, staff cost calculation, and so on.

RECRUITMENT AND STAFF ALLOCATION - AN OPEN CHALLENGE

Considering the current lack of national definition for the role of "Research manager", this professional position is nowadays included within the definition of generic "Technical-Administrative Staff (PTA-Personale Tecnico Amministrativo)". According to the implemented national Regulation related to staff recruitment these staff are classified into different categories (*Operatori, Collaboratori, Funzionari, Elevata professionalità*) (UNIVE, nd3), in addition to executive positions. Each category entails a specific salary level, degree of autonomy and responsibility, and opportunities for professional development.

The recruitment of technical-administrative staff in universities is regulated by strict national regulation frameworks. It takes place through public competitions, based on principles of impartiality, transparency, and publicity leading to specific selection committee assessments, which are launched by the University HR office following the Institute staffing needs.

Selection procedures for staff within the Departments' *Research Units* could also be launched following the award of research projects backing the need to include project managers among the existing permanent staff. In this case fixed-term contracts would be put in place.

The assignment of research managers to the Departments' *Research Units* and the *ARIC* office tends to follow a "first come first served" human resources allocation scheme. The recruitment process is quite long and complicated and tends to be a barrier to entrance leading to a limited number of external candidates and an even lower number of international applications.

Efforts are in place to move to a model where soft skills, attitude and background of short-listed research managers are valued in order to rationalize staff allocation. In parallel, several attempts are being made to promote the vacancies at both national and international levels, including through platforms such as LinkedIn and the EURAXESS portal. The selection panel may conduct a written test and interview partly in English to facilitate the participation of international applicants and, more broadly, to enhance the overall standard of internationalization.

BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES OF THIS SYSTEM

As mentioned, this organizational model ensures that researchers receive continuous support throughout the entire project lifecycle by a range of specialized units. The centralized pre-award support (*ARIC*) facilitates the initial stages of project development and funding acquisition, while the decentralized Departments' *Research Units* provide detailed, hands-on management during the post-award phases. Additionally, *ARIC* offers backup support to the *Research Units*, ensuring seamless coordination and addressing any arising management challenges or setbacks, as shown in Figure 3.
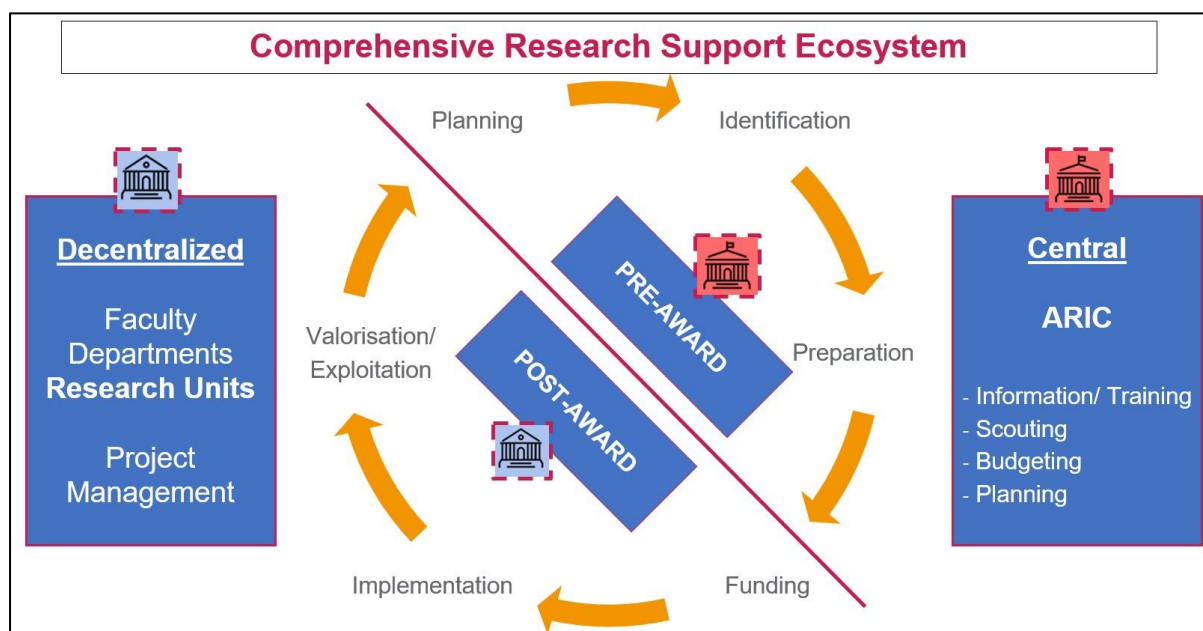

Figure 3. Ca' Foscari University Research support ecosystem

This model presents several significant benefits: in the pre-award phase, a major advantage is the specialization of staff on specific funding streams, as reflected in the clear distinction between offices dedicated to individual funding opportunities, such as European Research Council and Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions grants, and those focused on collaborative projects, for instance through the *Global Challenges Unit* addressing Horizon Europe programs. This specialization enables a deeper understanding of funding mechanisms and fosters the development of tailored support strategies. Another key strength in the pre-award phase is the ability of ARIC staff to anticipate emerging funding opportunities well in advance, often years before the official publication of calls. This capacity for foresight positions the institution advantageously in an increasingly competitive funding landscape.

In the post-award phase, decentralization offers the significant advantage of bringing dedicated administrative support closer to the researchers and the projects' operational environments. Staff embedded within Departments' *Research Units* or specific research structures ensure more direct and responsive assistance during project implementation. At the same time, centralized services guarantee consistency and quality standards across the institution. They provide critical functions such as the management of

reporting portals, the development and maintenance of management tools like timesheet platforms, the centralized collection of pay slips, and the enforcement of harmonized rules for participation in research projects. This dual system ensures a unified and compliant approach to the increasingly complex requirements set by both national legislation and international funders.

Furthermore, the separation between pre-award and post-award activities protects pre-award services from the daily operational pressures of project management. Once a proposal is submitted, pre-award staff can immediately refocus on identifying new funding opportunities and supporting researchers (either "new" or already structured ones) with the preparation of subsequent applications. This uninterrupted cycle of proposal development maximizes the institution's chances of securing continuous research funding.

However, this model is not without its challenges. At the central level, the decentralization of post-award activities can result in a diminished connection of the central governance with funded projects, as day-to-day management occurs in different locations, potentially limiting the central offices' direct insight into project progress. Differences in priorities between offices may also arise, particularly between those emphasizing strict compliance with regulations and those adopting a more results-oriented approach. Additionally, the organizational hierarchy presents complexities: while *ARIC* and centralized units share the University's General Manager as a common point of governance, the decentralized Departments have their own governance system with parallel hierarchy, which can sometimes hinder coordination. A further risk lies in the potential shift of focus away from strategic pre-award activities. As more projects are successfully funded, the growing burden of post-award management may draw resources and attention away from fostering project design, promoting funding opportunities, and maintaining a long-term strategic vision for institutional research development. If not carefully managed, this dynamic could weaken the pre-award support system, diminishing the institution's capacity to proactively engage researchers and sustain high levels of competitive funding acquisition.

STRUCTURAL GROWING CHALLENGES

Over the past decade, the University has achieved excellent results regarding awarded competitive grants, ranking among the best performing European universities. Since 2014, more than 400 European and International projects have been granted (mostly within Horizon 2020, Horizon Europe and European Research Council (ERC) funding programs), and the outstanding results for Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) Individual Fellowships make the university rank amongst the top 10 in Europe (188 MSCA fellowships) (UNIVE, 2025). More than 300 research and cooperation grants have also been acquired from national funders, and European Structural and Social funds. This increasing trend in terms of awarded grants is shown in Figure 4.
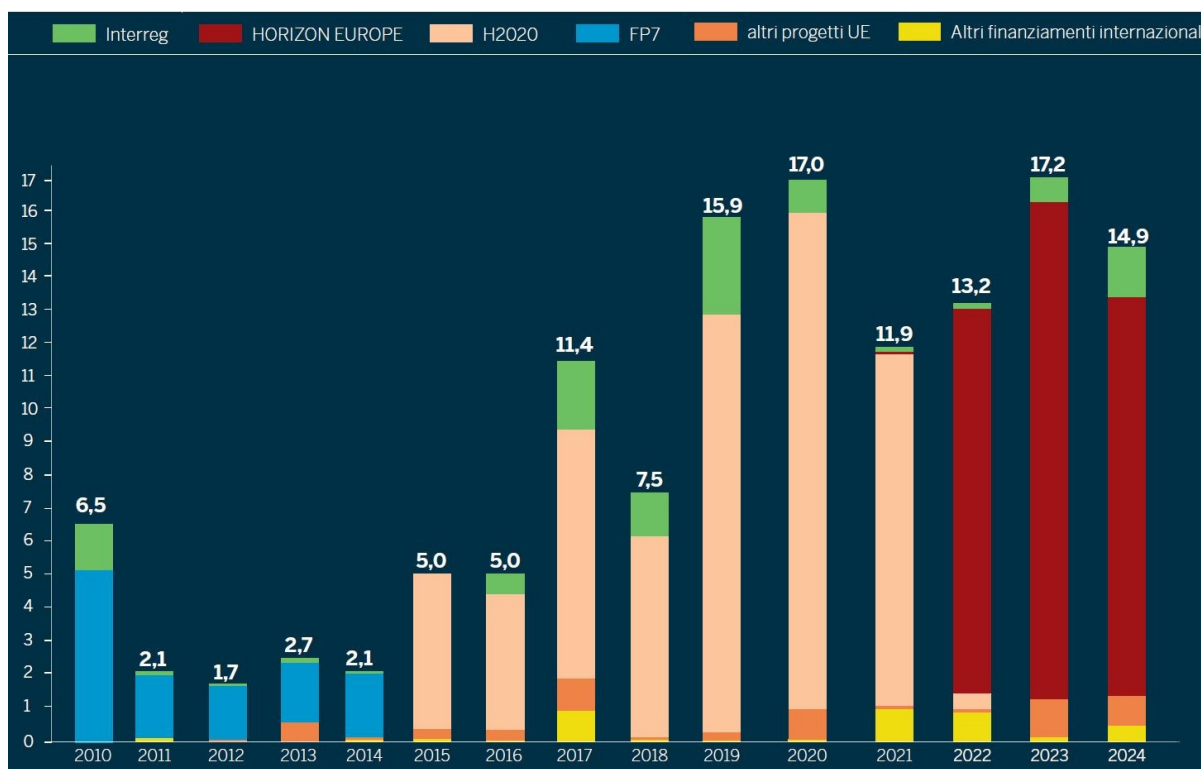
Figure 4. EU/International competitive grants awarded 2010-2024

Due to such a success rate, Ca' Foscari has also seen a significant increase in academic staff, from 875 (in 2020) to 1120 in (2025), and in technical and administrative staff, from 618 (in 2020) to 760 (in 2025). This growth, combined with high turnover, has changed the staff composition: by the end of 2022, 34% of the technical and administrative staff and 41% of the academic and research staff had been with the University for less than five years. Administrative roles have not been actually affected by this growth, but the increased numbers of research managers and the growing organizational fragmentation jeopardized the coordination and communication flow.

Figure 5 describes the composition of research support staff among ARIC and Departments' *Research Units*.
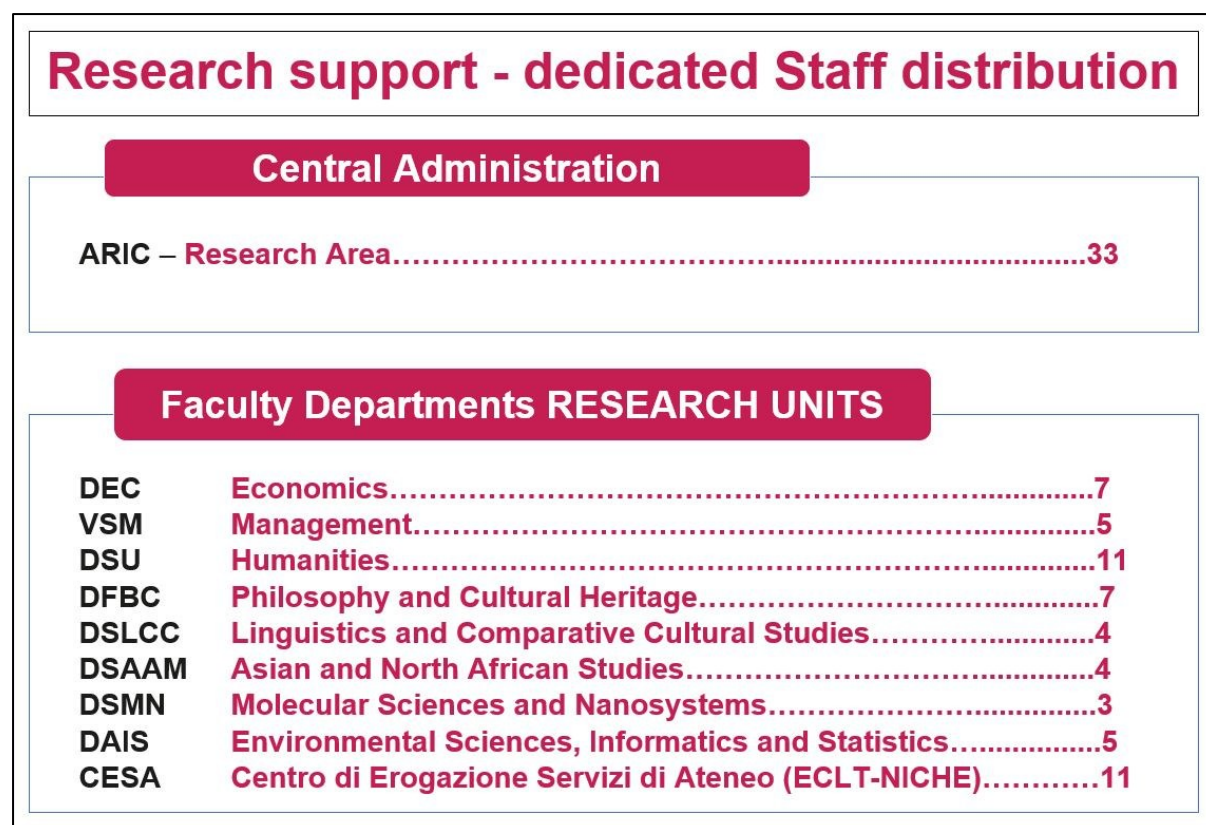
Research support - dedicated Staff distribution

Central Administration

ARIC – Research Area...33

Faculty Departments RESEARCH UNITS

DEC	Economics	7
VSM	Management	5
DSU	Humanities	11
DFBC	Philosophy and Cultural Heritage	7
DSLCC	Linguistics and Comparative Cultural Studies	4
DSAAM	Asian and North African Studies	4
DSMN	Molecular Sciences and Nanosystems	3
DAIS	Environmental Sciences, Informatics and Statistics	5
CESA	Centro di Erogazione Servizi di Ateneo (ECLT-NICHE)	11

Figure 5. Research Support Staff distribution among ARIC and Departments' *Research Units* in 2025

The impact of staff growth and generational turnover (see Figure 6), combined with the pandemic, regulatory changes, and ample resources deriving from awarded projects have greatly impacted a community of individuals who were not well-acquainted, often creating coordination bottlenecks. In particular, the tacit "non-codified" knowledge of the work struggled to be updated and shared. This also had effects on the management of trade-offs between centralization and decentralization and the effectiveness of interdependencies, thus a lack of alignment between central and local units. The existing governance model required a new mechanism for shared understanding and agile responsiveness. Coordination mechanisms needed to be rethought.

Research Management Staff Increase
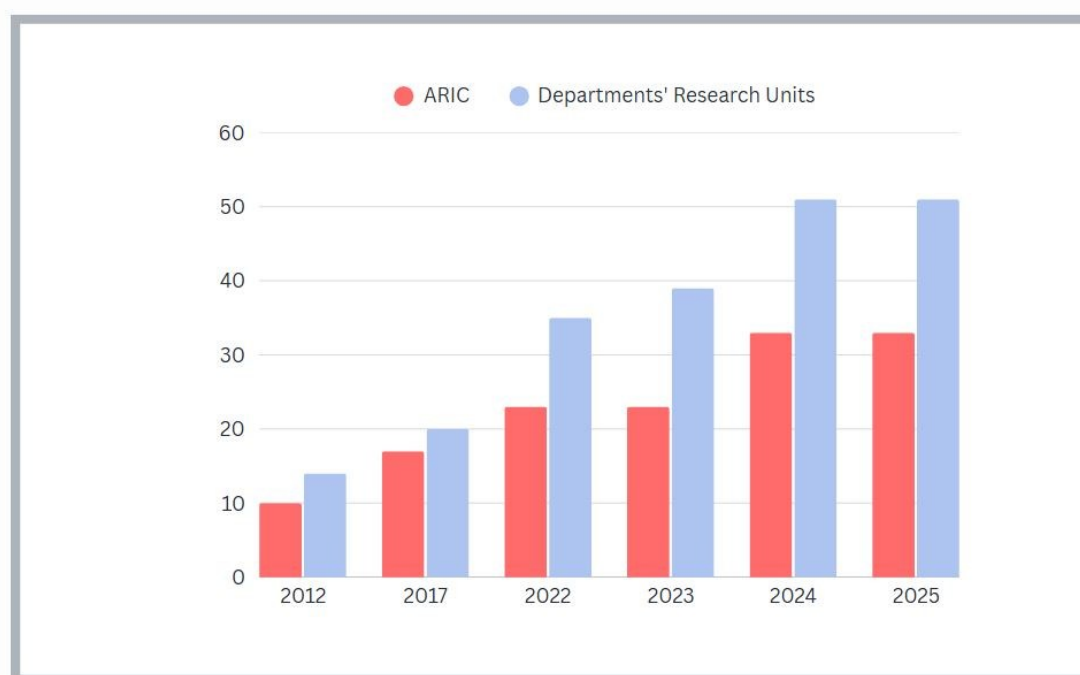**2012-2025**

ARIC ● Departments' Research Units ●

Figure 6. Research Support Staff growth in ARIC and Departments' *Research Units*

RESPONSE AND METHODS

In March 2022, Ca' Foscari University established the *Research Management Community*, a cross-functional and permanent working group involving 20 staff members from ARIC, Departments' *Research Units* and other Central Administration offices (see Figure 7). The group was formally instituted by a Rectoral Decree, following strategic objectives outlined in the University's 2021–2026 Strategic Plan (UNIVE, nd4). Members are nominated by the University General Director, following the indication provided by the Head of Research Area and Departments' secretaries, based on role and expertise, basically Research Unit Senior Managers. A mix of senior and junior staff have been selected, ensuring that all the key competencies involved throughout the project lifecycle are represented. The chosen functioning methodology is a "blended" one, including both online and in-presence modalities, in order to increase the opportunities for informal communication methods. Moreover, the General Director, the Head of Research Area and Department's secretaries are not involved but meant to be internal stakeholders: members of the *Research Management Community* are peers who share best practices, co-develop solutions, and contribute to procedural innovation, fostering a spontaneous environment where everyone can feel free to speak out about everyday problems. They regularly meet to share best practices, address common issues, and propose new management tools.
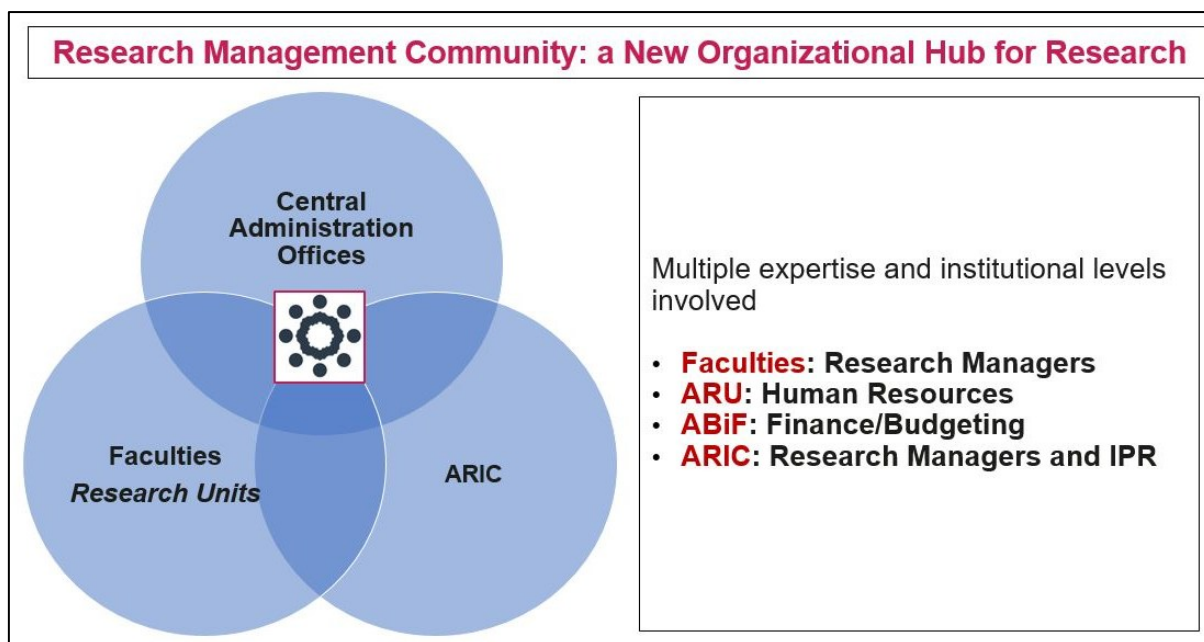
Figure 7. The Research Management Community (RMC) acting as a connecting, integrative force across the system: cross-sectoral connection, knowledge sharing, management tool development

It is important to underline that the *Research Management Community* does not involve hierarchy nor middle managers: participants are peers—research officers who identify specific cases and critical issues, promote the use of existing management tools, and propose new ones. Work is conducted remotely and in person through monthly meetings and collaborative document drafting. Meeting agendas encompass topics related to regular management, and minutes are distributed to participants.

Outcomes are shared within participants' "home offices", ensuring alignment and coherence among facilities' procedures. In-person meetings are held at different locations on a rotating basis to foster collaboration and inclusivity. Tangible outcomes have been delivered, such as models of measurements, specifications, and guidelines, making the *Research Management Community* a platform for analysis, problem-solving, and proposing solutions.

A new, searchable organizational hub has been created, which procedural methodology includes:

- Review of internal workflows and shared documentation
- Mapping interdependencies and standardizing procedures
- Outcome tracking and feedback via governance reports
- Cross-functional peer learning with on-call expert consultations

Specific generated outcomes during the *Research Management Community*'s operational lifetime have been:

- *Official Ca' Foscari Procedure:* practical handbook thoroughly describing all necessary steps for allowing the University's participation in European funded

programs within the 2021-2027 framework period and the specific rules governing such participation (e.g. equivalent days calculation method) as well as Proposal Submission / Projects management overall guidelines. (UNIVE, nd5)

- *Operational Workflow:* a detailed manual providing pivotal reference to the research management support staff on Consortium Agreements preparation and negotiation (DESCA model adopted as primary reference model), *Agreements between Beneficiaries and Third Parties and Partnership Agreements* management and negotiation/signature procedure. (UNIVE, nd5)
- *Internal Implementation Vademecum:* Step-by-step operational management handbook on Research Funded Projects, from funding notification to reporting methods and audit procedures.

RESULTS

The above-mentioned outputs led to tangible quantitative impact, as evidenced by the results of the Service Level Agreement (SLA) questionnaire and the Good Practice (GP) information. (UNIVE, nd6) These tools are part of a national project designed to measure and compare the performance of administrative and support services in Italian universities. Now in its 20th edition (GP2023–24), the project involves, on a voluntary basis, 51 public universities, 7 private universities, and 4 higher education institutions.

Performance is assessed across four key dimensions, grouped into two traditional areas and two annual in-depth "vertical" analyses: Perceived Effectiveness (Customer Satisfaction), Efficiency and Costs, the Laboratory on the Impacts of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan, and the Analysis of Financial Statements 2017–2022. Customer satisfaction is evaluated through targeted questionnaires submitted to three main stakeholder groups—academic staff, doctoral candidates and research fellows; technical-administrative staff; and students—while efficiency and cost are assessed by analyzing the resources allocated to administrative services in terms of total costs, unit costs, and full-time equivalents.

According to this institutional customer satisfaction survey (see Appendix), which gathers responses from researchers across all career levels (From R1: First Stage Researcher to R4: Leading Researcher, see project MORE4 for reference), satisfaction with the research support services provided by the University remains above the Italian national average, with a score of 4.94 out of 6 compared to the national mean of 4.36 (see Figure 8 and Figure 9).

Quantitative data in Figures 8 and Figure 9 demonstrate the benefit of this system.
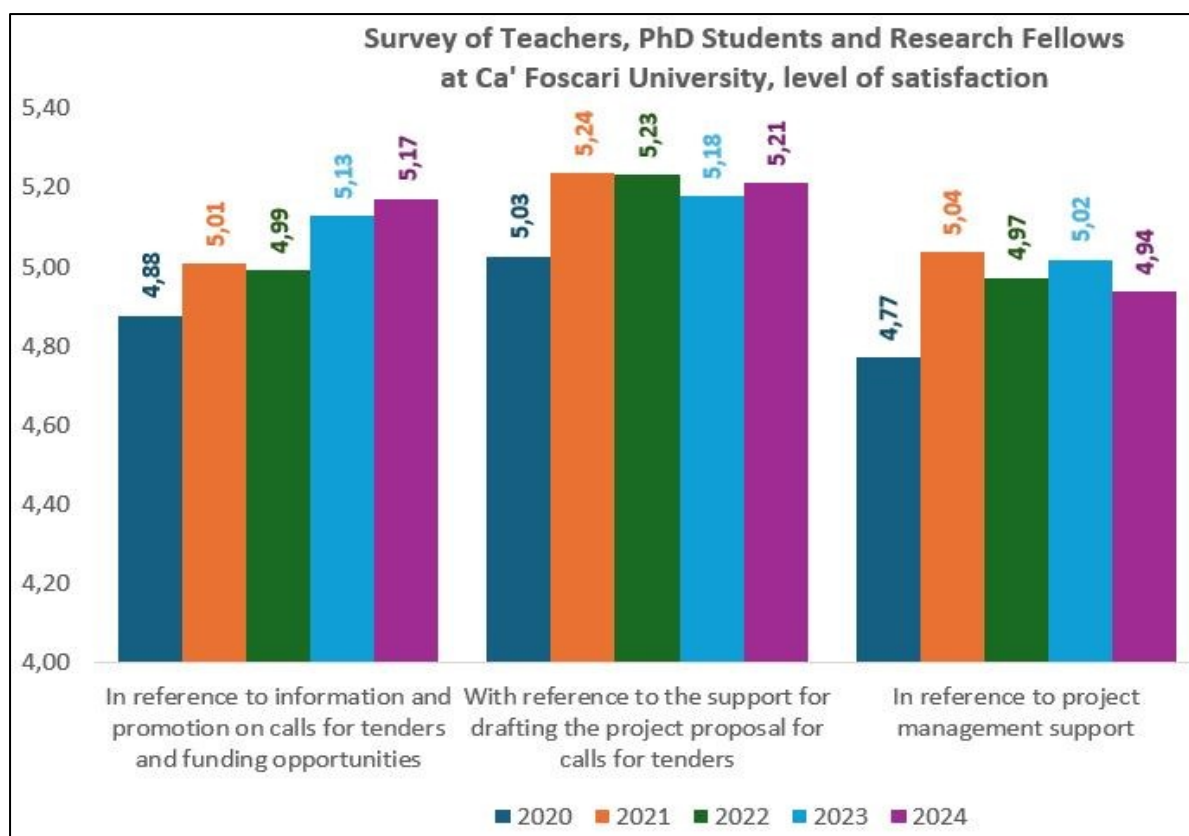
Figure 8. Service Level Agreement questionnaire and Good Practice information (GP) survey results – part 1
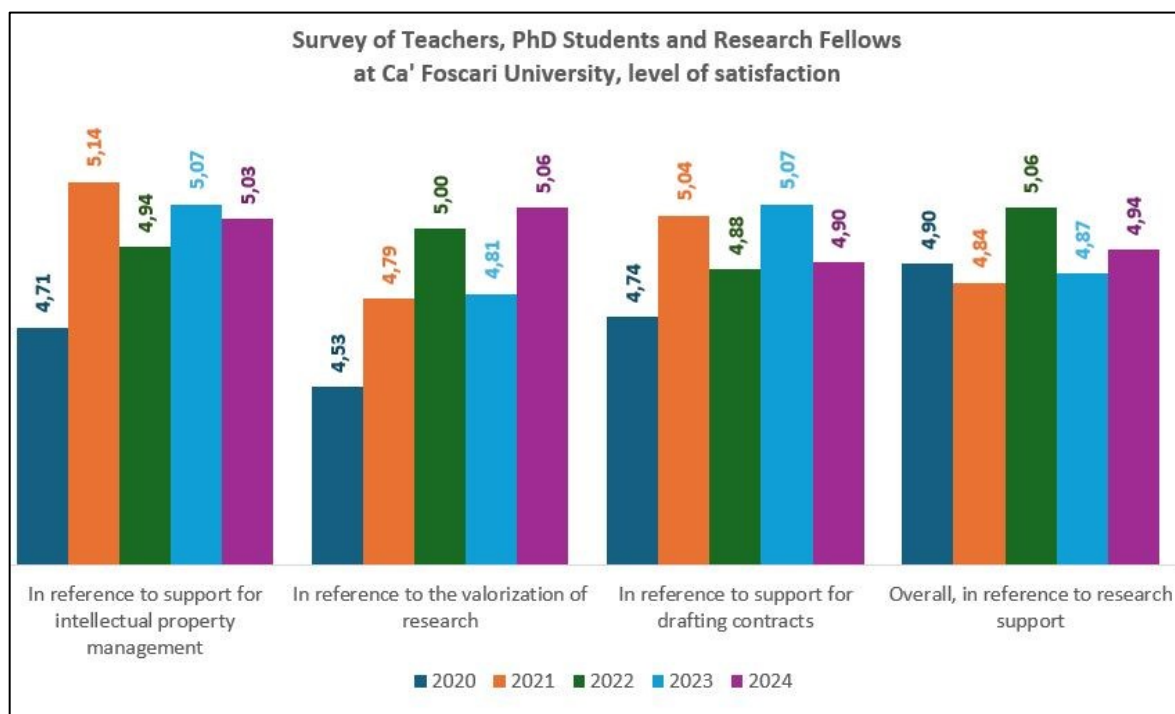

Figure 9. Service Level Agreement questionnaire and Good Practice information (GP) survey results – part 2

Furthermore, the positive effects of the *Research Management Community* organizational innovation can be demonstrated by the continuous increase in the number of successful project applications, providing clear evidence that the system is functioning effectively. It is also noteworthy that there has been a diversification in the number of Principal Investigators engaged in the design and management of competitive research funding, indicating that early-career researchers have successfully accessed support services that have guided them through the complex landscape of research funding. From a quantitative perspective, the benefits are clear: an increase in funding, a broader range of Principal Investigators involved, and diversification of the funding streams accessed. From a qualitative standpoint, the impact is confirmed by a significant decrease in ad hoc support requests both from researchers to the faculty-based *Research Units* and, by consequence, from the latter to ARIC's central research office regarding procedural issues and administrative compliance. This improvement is largely attributable to the guiding instruments, standardized procedures, and methodologies co-created by the research management community, which have provided a clear and consistent framework for navigating administrative requirements.

The *Research Management Community* has facilitated better communication and alignment across different *Research Management* units within the University. The whole support system has benefited as demonstrated by factors such as decreased number of requests, decreased response times for research-related queries, enhanced clarity in the roles and responsibilities within the *Research Management* workflow, development of new tools and guidelines that support efficient research management practices.

CONCLUSION

The *Research Management Community*'s approach has proven effective in mitigating the challenges of fragmentation and turnover. By promoting a culture of shared knowledge and continuous improvement, the *Research Management Community* has strengthened the University's research support infrastructure. However, ongoing challenges include maintaining engagement and adapting to evolving Research Managers' needs.

A key aspect of the model's success lies in its ability to reconnect individuals working in different locations and under different administrative heads, reinforcing the awareness that all research support staff, regardless of their specific positions, contribute to the same institutional value chain.

In complex governance systems characterized by a mixture of centralized and decentralized structures, the *Research Management Community* model offers an effective means of overcoming fragmentation. It fosters a shared identity and common purpose among staff who might otherwise remain isolated within their respective units.

The model is not only effective but also highly scalable and adaptable to other institutional contexts. For institutions considering replicating this approach, several methodological elements are critical: formal institutional backing (ideally through an official decree or equivalent act), a clear strategic alignment with broader

organizational goals, a selection process based on expertise and operational role rather than hierarchy, a blended modality of work to facilitate both formal and informal exchanges, and a governance structure that positions leadership as a supportive but non-intrusive stakeholder. Furthermore, allowing the group to define its own working agenda, priorities, and outputs enhances ownership and commitment among participants.

In summary, the *Research Management Community* at Ca' Foscari shows that, when properly designed and implemented, a non-hierarchical, cross-functional working group can significantly enhance research management practices. It provides a replicable model that can be adapted to other universities or research institutions seeking to strengthen internal collaboration, standardize procedures, and foster a shared institutional culture among their research support staff.

APPLICABILITY TO OTHER SECTORS

Beyond research management, the *Research Management Community* model offers a versatile framework that could be successfully extended to other strategic sectors within universities and research institutions. Its core principles—non-hierarchical collaboration, cross-functional engagement, peer-to-peer knowledge exchange, and procedural co-development—can be adapted to areas such as:

- Open Science and Open Access,
- Research Ethics and Integrity,
- International researcher support and onboarding,
- Doctoral programs coordination and quality assurance.

In the field of Open Access and Open Science, for instance, the creation of a cross-functional community involving library services, research support offices, IT departments, and faculty representatives could foster a more integrated and proactive approach to policy implementation and researcher engagement. By working together in a non-hierarchical structure, participants could co-develop guidelines, tools, and advocacy strategies to enhance compliance with funder mandates and promote a culture of open scholarship throughout the institution.

Similarly, in the area of research ethics, establishing a community of practice involving ethics committee members, legal advisors, research administrators, and principal investigators could strengthen the institution's capacity to manage complex ethical challenges. Such a group would be well-positioned to update policies, design training programs, and ensure that ethical considerations are embedded in all stages of the research lifecycle, fostering a shared understanding of institutional values and responsibilities.

The model could also be effectively employed to improve services aimed at welcoming international students and researchers. A cross-functional working group composed of staff from international offices, human resources, research support, and academic departments could collaboratively design procedures, develop informational materials,

and implement support systems to ease administrative burdens and facilitate integration into the academic community. By promoting regular dialogue and co-creation, institutions could significantly enhance the international experience and their overall attractiveness to global talent.

In the domain of quality assurance, this approach could help overcome silos by bringing together quality managers, academic program directors, administrative staff, and students. Such a group could collaboratively design monitoring tools, co-develop evaluation criteria, and share best practices, ensuring that quality assurance processes are not only compliant with external standards but also deeply rooted in the everyday realities of teaching and research.

Finally, in educational programming and doctoral management, the model could foster closer coordination between graduate schools, faculty offices, research support services, and career development units. By working collaboratively, stakeholders could develop more coherent and researcher-centered doctoral programs, harmonize administrative procedures, and create integrated career support pathways for early-stage researchers. This collaborative approach would be particularly valuable in addressing the growing complexity of doctoral education in a globalized research environment.

Overall, the strength of the *Research Management Community* model lies in its ability to create horizontal, trust-based spaces where operational innovation emerges organically through the collective intelligence of those who are closest to the processes. By exporting this approach to other strategic sectors, institutions can foster a culture of collaboration, mutual learning, and shared responsibility, ultimately enhancing their capacity for sustainable innovation and institutional resilience. In an increasingly complex and dynamic higher education landscape, models that emphasize participation, co-creation, and non-hierarchical governance will be essential to ensure that universities remain adaptive, responsive, and forward-looking.

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APPENDIX

The Appendix provides details of additional and background material.

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ASSOCIATIONS

EARMA - European Association of Research Managers and Administrators https://earma.org

INORMS - International Network of Research Management Societies https://inorms.net/

PROJECTS

RM Roadmap – Research Management Initiative: https://www.rmroadmap.eu/

CARDEA - Career Acknowledgement for Research (Managers) Delivering for the European Area https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101058572

MORE4 - Mobility Patterns and Career Paths of EU Researchers https://www.more-4.eu/indicator-tool/career-stages-r1-to-r4

BIOGRAPHIES

Matteo Giarraffa – Current position: Ca' Foscari University of Venice, Italy, *ARIC - Research Area* International Research Office, Research Project Management Support Unit he provides comprehensive assistance for the design and execution of research projects financed by the European Commission (both direct access programs and territorial cooperation programs) as well as other international entities. His specific focus involves defining and aligning administrative and managerial procedures in strict adherence to EU and national regulations, monitoring management methodologies, identifying

transferable best practices and developing management techniques alongside reporting instruments.

Margherita Chiarot – Current position: Ca' Foscari University of Venice, Italy, *ARIC - Research Area* International Research Office, Research Project Management Support Unit (Unit Coordinator). her primary responsibility is to support the management of projects funded by the European Commission and other financing programs, including direct access and territorial cooperation initiatives, with a particular focus on the post-award phase, which includes project implementation, financial management, and reporting. She works closely with internal departments and centers throughout the entire project lifecycle, from the initial negotiation and launch phases to ongoing management, financial reporting, and final closure. A key aspect of her responsibilities involves defining and harmonizing administrative procedures to ensure full compliance with funder regulations, national laws, and internal policies. This includes developing new management tools, monitoring performance to identify best practices and mitigate risks, and providing critical support in preparing for external audits and implementing any resulting corrective actions.

Sara Zortea – Current position: Ca' Foscari University of Venice, Italy, *ARIC - Research Area*, National Research Office, National and Regional Funding Unit (Unit coordinator). She provides specialized support for the management and reporting of research projects funded by national, regional, and local bodies. Her responsibilities include internal auditing, regulatory and financial analysis, risk assessment, and development of administrative procedures. She also supports researchers in identifying funding opportunities, drafting project proposals, and building partnerships, while contributing to institutional coordination and strategic programming at regional level.

Dario Pellizzon - Head of Research and Libraries at Ca' Foscari University of Venice, Italy. He has broad experience in research management, the Human Resources Strategy for Researchers (HRS4R), and in designing and implementing initiatives to support researchers' career development. He also oversees high-performance research support services, ensuring quality assistance throughout the research lifecycle.

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Fostering Collaboration in Research Management