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RESEARCH MANAGEMENT IN THE ENGLISH-SPEAKING CARIBBEAN: PRELIMINARY RESULTS ON PRACTITIONER PROFILES, ROLES, AND PROFESSIONALISATION

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ABSTRACT

What is new?	This research study represents the first empirical investigation of Research Management and Administration (RMA) practitioners in the English-speaking Caribbean. It provides a baseline profile of the demographic, educational and occupational characteristics of research managers in the region, and presents evidence of the development of a professional class of research management practitioners within Caribbean research systems.
What was the approach?	A cross-sectional descriptive survey was used to map the research management population in the English-speaking Caribbean. As the first phase of a multi-phase regional investigation, the survey examined the demographics of the practitioners, the characteristics of work, their organisational contexts, and the extent of professionalisation within the field.
What is the academic impact?	The results indicate a highly educated workforce with 94.3% of respondents holding a postgraduate qualification and 68.5% working within higher education institutions. Furthermore, the findings present early empirical evidence to the RMA scholarship by not only helping to identify workforce characteristics, but also outlining the priorities for professionalisation, competency development, leadership, and career advancement.

What is the wider impact?	The results may also prove helpful for workforce planning, professional development and succession planning within the institutions as well as for the development of a clear career path for research management professionals. Additionally, they provide evidence to support the professionalisation agenda of the Caribbean Research and Innovation Management Association (CabRIMA) at the regional level, while considering the resources available within Caribbean institutions.
Keywords	Caribbean Research and Innovation Management Association; Research management and administration; Higher Education Institutions; English-speaking Caribbean.

INTRODUCTION

The profession of research management encompasses a complementary portfolio of pre-and post-award activities, governance and knowledge mobilisation that enable researchers and institutions to produce valuable, high-quality, and ethically sound impactful research. The profession has developed around the world in higher education institutions (HEIs) and public research organisations where research has become increasingly competitive, collaborative, and regulated (Kirkland & Ajai-Ajagbe, 2013; Ivey, 2023).

In the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), research management and administration developed over the past two decades and, as is the case elsewhere, is becoming a pivotal value-adding function supporting the institutional missions and national and regional development agendas. Regional analysis shows the development of the RM profession, often in small research management offices with few staff, contributing to increased grant acquisition, project execution, research information management, and opportunities to create societal impact (Ivey, 2023; Streete et al., 2013). An example of this added value is illustrated by research managers at the University of Technology, Jamaica (Jamaica's national STEM University) who managed and widely disseminated research output for solutioning climate change impacts in Small Island Developing States (SIDS) to highlight the way that research information management and deliberate curation of evidence can support an institution in fostering climate change resilience and shaping policy (Ivey et al., 2025). Additional work demonstrated how internal research funding, managed by the University's research management office, catalysed research initiatives aligned with national priorities (Ivey & Henry, 2015).

With the rising prominence of research management and administration (RMA) in Caribbean higher education and research institutions, there is a paucity of empirical evidence on the demographics, profiles, roles, and professionalisation of practitioners in the region, evidence that is critical to workforce planning, professional development, succession management, and continued professionalisation of the profession. Consequently, this study was undertaken by the secretariat of the Caribbean Research

and Innovation Management Association (CabRIMA) to establish a baseline profile of research management practitioners who are members of the Association. Often, research management is under-resourced and under-valued, especially in developing countries such as those in the Caribbean (Zippia, 2025; Ivey, 2023; Streete et al., 2013). Although research is a growing sector, there is insufficient data on the characteristics of research managers, the skills required of them, and their training needs (Oliveira et al., 2023). The preliminary demographic and professional information reported in this paper provides details about the sex, age, qualifications, and institutional affiliations of research managers in the English-speaking Caribbean. This information is useful for formulating effective institutional policies, developing capacity-building strategies, and promoting inclusive research leadership.

For the purposes of this study, the English-speaking Caribbean refers to the sovereign states and territories of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) in which English is the official language. These include Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, St Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago, and several associated territories.

This study is the initial phase of a broader regional study on Research Management and Administration in the English-Speaking Caribbean. The follow-up phases will include a more extensive participant base throughout the CARICOM countries and will include exploring the kinds of expertise and professional identity being developed among those involved, professional career paths, institutional architecture, and organisational and leadership structures for and by those involved in research, as well as strategies to build workforce development to enhance the profession across the region.

Aim of the Study

The scarcity of empirical data in Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and research systems in countries at an early stage of development warrants the collection of pertinent data to inform workforce development, capacity-building initiatives and institutional development as well as region-wide research management policy. Therefore, the aim of this aspect of the broader study was to ascertain the demographic, educational, occupational, and professional characteristics of research management practitioners in the English-speaking Caribbean, with a view to understanding the emerging professionalisation of research management and informing regional workforce development and human-resource planning.

Research Questions

The study was driven by the following research questions:

1. What are the demographic and educational characteristics of research management practitioners in the English-speaking Caribbean?
2. What are the occupational profiles and roles of research management practitioners across higher education institutions, government, private research institutes, and non-governmental organisations in the region?

3. What patterns of experience, career progression, and professionalisation exist among research management practitioners in the English-speaking Caribbean?
4. What are the implications of the demographic, occupational, and professional characteristics of research management practitioners for the development of the research management profession and human-resource planning in the region?

About CabRIMA

Established in Kingston, Jamaica, in October 2010, the Caribbean Research and Innovation Management Association (CabRIMA) is one of the main outcomes for the Caribbean of the European Union African, Caribbean and Pacific (EU ACP) Science and Technology Programme-funded project, 'The Improvement of Research and Innovation Management Capacity in Africa and the Caribbean for the Successful Stimulation and Dissemination of Research Results (RIMI4AC)'. The RIMI4AC project consortium consisted of nine institutional partners spanning Africa, the Caribbean, and Europe:

International / Network Organisations

- Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU - lead)
- Research Africa, South Africa
- Research and Innovation Management Services, Belgium
- Southern African Research and Innovation Management Association (SARIMA)

African Universities

- Stellenbosch University
- University of Botswana
- University of Buea
- University of Dar es Salaam

Caribbean Partner

- University of Technology Jamaica (UTech, Ja.)

The project was implemented between March 2010 and November 2013 and aimed to "Strengthen the institutional capacity of research organisations to sustainably manage research and innovation, enhance dialogue between research scientists and policymakers, and promote policy development for national and regional policy implementation and use of research results" (Henry et al., 2020; Ivey et al., 2013).

It was within the framework of the RIMI4AC project that the University of Technology, Jamaica, through its School of Graduate Studies, Research and Entrepreneurship (SGSRE), played a key role as the Caribbean partner and Secretariat for CabRIMA and, thereby, positioned itself at the forefront of structured research and innovation management in the Caribbean. During the implementation of the RIMI4AC project, several capacity-building activities were conducted; these included regional workshops, short courses, and provision of professional development materials to research managers while enabling the integration of Caribbean research institutions into international research management communities such as the International Network of

Research Management Societies (INORMS). One key outcome of the RIMI4AC project, specific to the Caribbean, was not only an improvement in individual and institutional competencies in research management but also the establishment of a formal professional organisation, CabRIMA, to ensure sustainability beyond the project's duration (Henry et al., 2020; Ivey et al., 2013; Streete et al., 2013).

CabRIMA aims to "promote, enhance and systematically improve the effectiveness of research and innovation management systems, structures, institutions, practices and processes" within research and innovation institutions in the Caribbean region through capacity building, professional networking, and comparison with best practice internationally as well as policy advocacy. It hopes to "Professionalise research and innovation management in the Caribbean; to be a forum for exchange, knowledge sharing and networking; to strengthen mechanisms for benchmarking and continuously enhance professional development; and to influence policy making at both national and regional levels for supportive research and innovation policy frameworks that enable sustainable development in the CARICOM region" (University of Technology, Jamaica, n.d.). Among its activities is a variety of training and workshops on grant proposal development, research project formulation and budgeting, policy discourse and best practices in research governance, in addition to its regular provision of information via newsletters and engagement activities throughout the region (Henry et al., 2020; Ivey et al., 2013; Streete et al., 2013).

CabRIMA, led by the University of Technology, Jamaica, has successfully drawn members largely from the main higher education and research institutions in Jamaica and has further extended its reach throughout the Caribbean, working collaboratively with The University of the West Indies, despite the geographically dispersed nature of the region, through the establishment of various communication channels and use of web-based technologies. Through its various initiatives, CabRIMA has contributed to enhancing the overall strength of the Caribbean research and innovation ecosystem by raising the profile of the research and innovation management profession, improving the performance of research institutions in the region, influencing the dissemination of research findings into practice and policy, and helping Caribbean researchers engage in wider international research management communities. Its long-term goal is to become a principal entity within the Caribbean in advocating for effective practices in research and innovation management as well as ensuring research development policy is in place to foster this end (Henry et al., 2020; University of Technology, Jamaica, n.d.).

Literature Review

Global Professionalisation of Research Management

Internationally, research management and administration is increasingly recognised as a profession defined not merely by particular job titles or academic qualifications, but also by shared competencies, recognised career pathways, professional associations, standards of practice and communities of practice (Kerridge et al., 2024; Oliveira et al., 2023). The International Network of Research Management Societies (INORMS) offers a

comparative international context through their Research Administration as a Profession (RAAAP) project. RAAAP addresses ongoing international workforce data collection around: demographic variables, entry pathways, skills, attitudes and behaviours, and professional identity (INORMS, n.d.). The longitudinal approach of RAAAP is particularly relevant to this study, because it shows how a descriptive workforce profile can support understanding careers, competencies and professionalisation.

Competency-Based Frameworks

A relevant European development is RM Comp, the European Competence Framework for Research Managers, which was developed through the European Union-funded CARDEA and RM ROADMAP projects in consultation with the European Commission and relevant stakeholders (European Commission, 2025). RM Comp identifies seven competence areas and provides learning outcomes across four proficiency levels, offering a structured basis for professional development, competency assessment and career progression. The seven competence areas are: general professional skills and personal competencies; technical skills; conducting research; stakeholder engagement; line management and developing talent; communication skills; and domain knowledge or expertise. For each of these competence areas, competence and learning stages are identified from basic competence to area expert (European Commission, 2025). RM Comp is not intended as a direct model to be simply adopted and scaled in the Caribbean, but a demonstration of how research management of research systems can be positioned by institutions as distinct from formal qualifications, identifying and responding to training needs, enabling progression, and making research management as a profession visible.

Relevance for English-Speaking Caribbean Contexts

The Caribbean context is significantly different from the larger and generally better resourced systems where many international frameworks have been formulated. Research management functions in Small Island Developing States may be housed in small offices, adopted in an academic-administrative hybrid role and/or be located at institutions with limited specialist capacity and access to professional development opportunities. Geography, institutional size, funding levels and distinctions in national research and innovation infrastructure may all influence the flexibility of working conditions and identify the priorities for competency development. For these reasons, international frameworks here serve as benchmarks and points of comparison rather than standards of practice. The Phase 1 profile of Caribbean research management practitioners reported in this paper maps the existing distribution of research management work and who is engaged in it; later phases will consider the applicability of typical competency domains to Caribbean practice, identify adaptations needed and design a regionally appropriate framework to align with the CabRIMA professionalisation and workforce development ambitions.

METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH DESIGN

A cross-sectional descriptive survey design was employed. The study sought to characterise demographic and occupational features of research management practitioners rather than test causal relationships or evaluate interventions.

STUDY POPULATION

The study population consisted of individuals engaged in research management and research administration functions who were members of, affiliated with, or connected to the Caribbean Research and Innovation Management Association (CabRIMA).

SAMPLING STRATEGY

A non-probability convenience sampling technique was employed. Survey distribution was facilitated through CabRIMA's communication networks and professional groups identified from CabRIMA secretariat networks. Survey participation was entirely voluntary. Data were collected from a survey of 35 Caribbean RM practitioners in HEIs, government, private research institutes, and non-governmental organisations. The survey was conducted by the School of Graduate Studies, Research & Entrepreneurship at UTech, Jamaica, which is the secretariat for the Caribbean Research and Innovation Management Association (CabRIMA). Due to the research management field being small and a comparatively nascent professional group within the Caribbean, the aim was to receive a response from as many qualified practitioners as possible, not to establish a statistically representative sample of the field.

DATA COLLECTION: SURVEY INSTRUMENT

Data were collected by means of a specially constructed questionnaire, largely comprising closed-ended questions related to respondents' demographic and employment details, information on sex, age, maximum educational attainment level, country represented, sector of employment, length of employment with the institution, post of employment, and the number of years spent in research management activities. The questionnaire was pilot-tested for relevance and ease of understanding. The data were collected online via an online survey software between June 2024 and April 2026.

VARIABLES ANALYSED

Eight variables were analysed within this study:

- sex;
- age;
- the highest formal level of education achieved;
- country, referring to the identified national origin of the respondents

- sector of employment, describing where the respondents worked (higher education, government, NGO, non-governmental or a government regulatory, or private research institution);
- the number of years that a respondent had worked in their current organisation, this was referred to as institutional tenure;
- the respondent's role, referring to their post within an institution; and
- research management tenure, indicating how many years a respondent had worked as a research manager.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistical analysis (frequencies and percentages) was used to describe the demographic and professional characteristics of the research managers. Descriptive statistics were chosen for this study because the objective was to provide insights into a clearly identified, small population rather than drawing statistical inferences or for the identification of relationships among variables or hypothesis testing. Descriptive statistics are recommended for exploratory studies and descriptive analyses that are aimed at describing the characteristics of populations or an under-explored area of research (Cooksey, 2020; Taherdoost, 2022).

The data were analysed and summarised according to the variables enumerated above (sex, age, qualification, country represented, sector of employment, tenure at current institution, institutional role, and tenure in research management).

Ethical Considerations

Non-sensitive demographic and occupational data were collected from the study's sample of professional adults. Participation was completely voluntary and informed consent was secured before participants completed the questionnaire. All responses remained anonymous for analysis and reporting purposes, and no identifying data were released. As per the university guidelines, the research was treated as a low-risk workplace profiling project, and was therefore exempted from full ethics review.

Results

A demographic profile of the respondents is provided in Table 1. Women constituted a substantial majority of the sample, accounting for 74.3%, while men accounted for 25.7%. Slightly more than one-half of the participants, 51.4%, were between the ages of 31 and 44 years, and two-fifths (40.0%) were between 45 and 64 years old.

Education levels were generally high, with 94.3% holding at least a postgraduate qualification, and nearly one-half of respondents (48.6%), holding doctoral degrees.

Most participants were resident in Jamaica (88.6%), with lesser proportions from Dominica, the Bahamas, and Barbados.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Research Management Practitioners (N = 35)

Variable	Category	n	%
Sex	Female	26	74.3
	Male	9	25.7
Age Range (years)	18-30	1	2.9
	31-44	18	51.4
	45-54	7	20
	55-64	7	20
	65+	1	2.9
	Not indicated	1	2.9
Highest Qualification	Doctoral degree	17	48.6
	Master's degree	16	45.7
	Bachelor's degree	2	5.7
Country Represented	Jamaica	31	88.6
	Dominica	2	5.7
	The Bahamas	1	2.9
	Barbados	1	2.9

As shown in Table 2, research managers working in government organisations were represented in the sample; however, the majority of them worked in higher education institutions. Of all organisations in the sample, colleges/university colleges and universities were together 68.5%. Another 20.0% belonged to a government organisation. The experience in the organisation by respondent was relatively long, with almost a third of all sampled respondents working more than 15 years in their institutions (37.1%).

Table 2. Professional Characteristics of Research Management Practitioners (N = 35)

Variable	Category	n	%
Type of Institution	College/University College	13	37.1
	University	11	31.4
	Government Ministry/Agency/Department	7	20
	NGO/Community-Based Organisation	2	5.7
	Private Research Organisation	1	2.9
	Regulatory Agency	1	2.9
Length of Time at Current Institution	Less than 1 year	1	2.9
	2-5 years	10	28.6
	5-10 years	9	25.7
	11-15 years	2	5.7
	More than 15 years	13	37.1
Role Within Organisation	Academic (with R&I responsibilities)	16	45.7
	Senior-Level Administrator	8	22.9
	Manager (with R&I responsibilities)	7	20
	Research Officer	1	2.9
	Administrative Officer (RIM specialist)	1	2.9
	Principal	1	2.9
	Other	1	2.9
Years in Research and Innovation Management	Less than 1 year	3	8.6
	2-5 years	17	48.6
	5-10 years	8	22.9
	11-15 years	1	2.9
	More than 15 years	6	17.1

Regarding the respondents' role in their organisations, respondents working as academics accounted for the highest proportion (45.7%), followed by those in administrative roles at senior level (22.9%) and those in management positions with research and innovation responsibilities (20.0%).

In respect of respondents' experience in research management, about a half (48.6%) have been working in this sector for 2-5 years and 17.1% had experience in research management sector for more than 15 years.

DISCUSSION

SEX

The sample was predominantly female. Women constituted nearly three-quarters of the population (74.3%), while men accounted for 25.7% (Table 1). This ratio aligns with global trends in research management and related professional, managerial, and support roles within the research and higher education sector, where women are disproportionately represented (Oliveira et al., 2023; Zippia, 2025). Evidence on workforce diversity implies that sex composition may impact organisational cultures and leadership practices as a consequence of differing experiences in role socialisation, communication norms, and approaches to compliance and coordination in professional service settings (professional roles requiring social interaction, relationship maintenance, process rules rather than command authority) (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Oliveira et al., 2023). Within the profession of research and innovation management, similar processes may influence how decisions are taken, the way interaction is performed with researchers and how leadership is practised conceptually without asserting a specific/essentialised behaviour for individuals.

This imbalance can potentially be explained by the historical development of the role of research management at the intersection between academic management/ administration and organisation coordination/research support. Several studies have explored the emergent organisational pathways associated with these professional functions that derive predominantly from traditional career paths more frequented by women that were (and continue to be in certain domains) associated with roles that facilitate, support and/or coordinate. Some practitioners suggest that women are more likely than men to occupy roles associated with these types of administrative, support, coordinating and compliance-focused functions (Oliveira et al., 2023) more broadly. However, some of these professional development considerations are currently focused on the principles of equity, career opportunities and career progression, rather than demographics, which means it needs to be further interrogated as to what extent gender is represented within research management structures across leadership, decision-making and strategic governance levels throughout the Caribbean region as the profession matures (Kerridge et al., 2024).

Age

As shown in Table 1, more than half of the research managers were in the 31-44 age range (51.4%), revealing a concentration of mid-career professionals within the profession. Coupled with the next two age ranges (45-54 and 55-64), which accounted for another 40.0% of the population, the profession appears to be peopled by mature individuals with experience and institutional memory. The age profile shows a large cohort of mid-career/senior practitioners. This pattern is consistent with international findings highlighting that research management and administration is frequently entered into as a second profession by people who have experienced academic/research backgrounds or have previously worked as programme/project managers or academic administrators (Oliveira et al., 2023), so this finding in the Caribbean sample is unsurprising. The high prevalence of participants in the 31 to 64 age groups will reflect the mix of competencies required for Research Management, which often draws on prior experience in academic and support, process-based settings and may be particularly relevant for those involved in research policy/ management, compliance and project management support.

International evidence suggests that research management and administration (RMA) is often a career entered after individuals have acquired professional experience in other fields, rather than directly upon completing their education. Oliveira et al. (2023) found that research managers commonly bring at least two to five years of professional experience to the role, with backgrounds that include academic research, programme or project management, and research administration. These findings suggest that RMA frequently develops as a subsequent career, drawing on skills and experience acquired in academia or other professional settings. While recruiting experienced personnel can help institutions retain organisational knowledge and benefit from established expertise, an overreliance on experienced recruits may limit the development of a sustainable talent pipeline. As Kerridge et al. (2024) suggest, strengthening the profession therefore requires deliberate investment in training pathways, internships, traineeships, and succession planning to attract and prepare early-career professionals for research management roles.

Qualification

Almost half of respondents (48.6%) hold a doctoral degree, with an additional 45.7% holding a master's-level degree. Similar research on the research manager role, particularly in support of higher education research activities, indicates that a high percentage of these workers, who support and manage academic/research processes, often hold postgraduate degrees. International research in the area suggests that the professional and expertise base which supports research management roles is underpinned by advanced academic qualifications, which facilitate effective interaction with researchers, interpretation of funding bodies' requirements and regulations, and engagement with complex institutional governance structures, as well as research strategy (Oliveira et al., 2023). The highly qualified sample size might reflect the current

professionalisation of research management, with many researchers moving to more dedicated roles in support of academic research in an increasingly complex environment, or perhaps those that traditionally support research administration were more likely to be educated to post-graduate level, or it reflects the 'academic' nature of support for the role, especially when associated with the 'scholar profession' (Oliveira et al., 2023). Furthermore, increasingly accepted international perspectives argue for evidence-based approaches supported by professional competencies that demonstrate capability to undertake professional research management roles. Such competency frameworks, which go beyond formal qualifications, recognise skills such as: research project and portfolio management; research ethics and integrity; grant development and management; commercialisation and technology transfer; leadership; knowledge exchange and commercialisation; and engagement and collaboration (Kerridge et al., 2024). Future research could more specifically explore the intersection of educational qualifications, professional accreditations, and individual-reported success in research management positions in the Caribbean region.

Country of Representation

The majority of the research managers were from Jamaica, this being due to historical institutional development of RMA capacity and proximity of the CabRIMA secretariat at the University of Technology, Jamaica. This, in and of itself, highlights that research management capability has, in many instances, developed in alignment with funding availability and capacity-building initiatives at national levels, thereby contributing to differences in scale across the English-speaking Caribbean research systems. Kerridge et al. (2024), mentioned that RMA capability often has a tendency to rise with increased investment levels or intensity; this must then influence staffing structure, staff expertise, and availability of support roles and systems. These are critical caveats and need consideration when extrapolating the characteristics of this sample beyond the context of Jamaica. The authors intend to include more institutions across the Caribbean and CARICOM countries in subsequent phases of this study to identify differences and commonalities in role structures and requirements.

Type of Institution

Most of the research managers operated in higher education institutions (HEIs); colleges, university colleges and universities together accounted for 68.5% (Table 2). This is generally the case internationally with higher education institutions typically being the locus of a significant proportion of research and innovation activities. Universities may also have large programmes of research activity (including many graduate students), manage large amounts of external funding in, for instance, the field of science funding, be responsible for research ethics committees and associated activities relating to the impact of research, all of which demand dedicated structures of RMA support within this sector (Kerridge et al., 2024). Research management practitioners from other sectors, including government bodies and departments, regulatory agencies, private companies and NGOs were represented, reflecting the

increasing cross-sector nature of research and development and therefore the need for support in all organisation types engaged in research (Poli et al., 2024; Kerridge et al., 2024).

Tenure at Current Institution

Research managers' tenure at the institutions where they worked showed a large, long-tenured group of 15+ years being the largest single grouping (37.1%), followed by a group with between 2-10 years of service (54.3% of respondents). The minuscule presence of new hires (<1 year) suggests there may not have been a recent infusion of staff. These data align with some international data, which identified the workforce in research management and administration as highly experienced, or as an advanced career, or as the second career of practitioners (Poli et al., 2024; Kerridge et al., 2024; Oliveira et al., 2023). As with older workforces overall, there is risk of losing organisational knowledge through retirement or employee movement. Consequently, many research-intensive organisations have a strategy to retain their organisational memory through documentation, coaching, mentoring, and succession planning arrangements (Oliveira et al., 2023). A career in RMA is a specialist position, requiring in-depth knowledge of organisational policy, its governance, compliance, its reporting functions, funding streams, and ethics processes, etc. So, it would stand to reason that employers may want to retain expertise for longer. However, with significant numbers leaving, ensuring sustainability will require more systematic processes of planning for succession and providing pathways into RMA roles and opportunities for promotion in a more structured way (Poli et al., 2024; Kerridge et al., 2024).

Role Within Organisation

The largest group of research managers comprised those who held academic posts with research management and administration (RMA) responsibilities (45.7%, n = 16), followed by those in senior positions such as vice-presidents, directors, and institutional leaders (22.9%, n = 8), and those who had managerial responsibilities related to RIM (20.0%, n = 7). Other positions included those of a specialist or general nature, research officers, administrative officers with RMA duties, principals, and so on, all of which were represented by 2.9% (n = 1) in the survey sample. These findings on role distribution reveal that research management responsibilities at institutions in the region were being performed by individuals across a wide range of academic, administrative, and managerial positions.

This pattern is also evident internationally. Research management and administration has frequently evolved through non-linear career pathways, with individuals transitioning from academic, research, and other administrative roles rather than entering the field through a clearly defined professional route (Kerridge et al., 2024; Poli et al., 2024). In some cases, too, research management responsibilities may also be undertaken alongside an academic or research role, illustrating the historically blurred boundaries between academic work and the emerging profession of research management (Oliveira et al., 2023).

Tenure in Research Management

Professionalisation literature frequently identifies career pathways, professional associations, competency frameworks, communities of practice, and mentoring systems as indicators of occupational maturity (Kerridge et al., 2024; Oliveira et al., 2023). Therefore, the presence of both newer and highly experienced practitioners within the current sample may be interpreted as evidence of a profession undergoing gradual institutionalisation and professionalisation. The continued work of CabRIMA, together with regional and international professional networks, may contribute significantly to strengthening career development opportunities, promoting professional identity, and supporting workforce sustainability within Caribbean research management.

Taken collectively, the demographic and occupational characteristics identified in this interim study suggest that research management in the Caribbean exhibits several markers associated with professionalisation as described in the international literature. These include the presence of a dedicated professional association (CabRIMA), a highly educated workforce, evidence of specialised roles and responsibilities, an emerging pipeline of practitioners, and increasing engagement with international research management communities. Kerridge et al. (2024) argue that professionalisation involves the progressive institutionalisation of professional competencies, career pathways, standards of practice, and communities of practice. Although research management within the Caribbean remains comparatively young and unevenly distributed across countries, the findings suggest that similar processes of professionalisation are emerging within the region. Further phases of the present research will explore these processes in greater depth through wider regional sampling and qualitative investigation of professional identity, competencies, and workforce development needs.

Implications for the Regional Professionalisation Roadmap

These patterns matter because they point to specific focal issues for the next step in professionalisation. To begin with, women make up 74.3% of the Phase 1 sample. This cannot be taken as proof that women have fair access to authority or opportunity for advancement; instead, Phase 2 can look at variation between the organisational tier, decision-making mandate, pay-scale, promotional history, access to mentoring and desire for leadership, thereby differentiating between the numeric majority and significance of authority and leadership opportunity, and helping to shape the leadership development approach to CabRIMA's regional plan.

A second point is that 94.3% of the respondents are postgraduate-qualified. While postgraduate qualifications might enhance credibility and communication with researchers, they do not necessarily enable competent practice across the full spectrum of research management. Accordingly, a regional approach to this roadmap should integrate recognition of prior academic learning with competency-based assessment and development. RM Comp provides a helpful template for such a comparison, and the Caribbean study can identify which aspects of competence, learning outcomes, and

proficiency levels need to be adapted for small institutions, multipurpose roles, and lean research systems.

Another consideration is the notable concentration of more than half of the sample in the 31-to-44-year age range, combined with the sizeable older and long-tenured groups and the very small number of younger entrants to the profession. The data show no impending crisis, but would seem to invite much further attention to situations of retirement, sharing of accumulated knowledge, 18-to-30-year placements, internships, mentoring and transparent career ladders. Deliberate targeting of new recruits and capturing of age and career-focused expertise may help mitigate future vulnerability.

Finally, by recognising that the jobs of academic, administrative, managerial and specialist roles are often combined in the distribution of research management tasks, regional professionalisation should be a system that is open to the hybrid and de facto practitioner. Rather than have one job family, the roadmap should identify broad areas of shared competency, offer modular routes to development and facilitate movement across employers. These implications translate the Phase 1 profile into actionable priorities for the survey, interview, benchmarking and competency analysis of Phases 2 to 5.

Expansion of Future Study

Having successfully obtained responses from 35 researchers and practitioners in the first phase, the next stage of the research will seek to significantly expand participation across CARICOM. To achieve this, the researchers will pursue a multi-pronged recruitment and data-collection strategy. This will include: engaging CabRIMA member institutions to facilitate direct recruitment; partnering with participating universities, government ministries, and research councils across the region; establishing linkages with relevant professional networks; and disseminating the call for participation through regional organisations and internationally-recognised research management networks, such as the International Network of Research Management Societies (INORMS). In addition, the researchers will invite further participation from researchers and practitioners identified during the first phase, using supplementary questionnaires and interviews as appropriate.

Through these complementary approaches, the study aims to engage a larger and more diverse group of research managers across CARICOM, representing a wider range of institutional settings and professional roles. This expanded participation is expected to strengthen the comparative analysis of the regional research management workforce, including its composition, challenges, and emerging practices and innovations.

Project Funding

The first stage was implemented on an institutional basis through the School of Graduate Studies, Research and Entrepreneurship at the University of Technology,

Jamaica as Secretariat of CabRIMA. This was not funded by any research grant; therefore, there were no research grant funds for Phase 1 of this work. All the planned phases are shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Project Phases and Proposed Timeline

Phases	Activity	Timeline
Phase 1	Initial workforce profile survey	Completed
Phase 2	Expanded regional survey	2026-2027
Phase 3	Practitioner interviews	2027
Phase 4	Competency and career pathway analysis	2027-2028
Phase 5	Regional recommendations and benchmarking	2028

LIMITATIONS

Phase 1 was deliberately employed as a 'pilot' baseline using CabRIMA networks to locate an outset accessible cohort in a 'niche' and emerging professional field. Limitations of this approach are a small sample (N = 35); respondent self-selection; convenience sampling; and high geographical clustering of participants in Jamaica. Consequently, self-selection and coverage bias mean results cannot be generalised statistically to the entire English-speaking Caribbean group of research managers.

These are natural limits of an initial mapping exercise and will directly influence construction of Phase 2. The Phase 2 regional survey will employ country- and sector-specific recruitment through CabRIMA member institutions, universities, government ministries and agencies, research councils, professional networks and partner organisations across CARICOM. Recruitment and response monitoring will be employed to address geographic and institutional coverage, and the survey will collect data on competency, professional identity, training, and career pathways. Practitioner interviews will supplement this contextualisation. While these steps will not fully mitigate the risk that the survey will not be a probability sample in areas lacking a complete regional sampling frame, they are designed to move beyond the Jamaica-centricity of Phase 1, diversify the range of roles and agencies, and enable more confident cross-country comparisons.

CONCLUSION

This paper presents preliminary results from the first round of a broader regional study on research management and administration in the English-speaking Caribbean. The study offers insights into both the potential and the constraints of current evidence on the profession in the region.

Initial results indicate a developing profession with very high levels of education, experience and representation from higher education institutions, and a sense of emergence. However, these trends will need to be supplemented by work with larger, more dispersed samples before any overarching statements can be made about the field in the wider Caribbean basin. The next phase of work in the project will examine Competency Frameworks, professional identity, training needs of the workforce, organisational frameworks and careers, and will offer a more comprehensive perspective on the development of the profession across the states of CARICOM and contribute to global research on research management practices in emerging and small island economies.

The management and administration of research has emerged internationally as a recognised profession. Kerridge et al. (2024) examined the increasing institutionalisation of research management systems in research-intensive and research-emerging systems, emphasising professional communities of practice, competence-based approaches and evidence-based workforce development. The importance of gathering demographic and professional occupational information has been illustrated through international studies and programmes such as the global Research Administration as a Profession (RAAAP) Initiative (Oliveira et al., 2023) to gain insight into workforce characteristics, career paths, training and identity amongst research management practitioners; however, evidence for small island developing states and Caribbean research systems has not been extensive. This article presents an initial analysis of descriptive data on practitioners engaged in managing research and innovation in the English-speaking Caribbean.

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