

IS RESEARCH MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATION (RMA) A PROFESSION?

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With the recent launch of a new academic journal it is timely to reflect on the content and scope of the subject that the journal will serve. JoRMA is the Journal of Research Management and Administration – but what is Research Management and Administration (RMA) and why might it deserve your attention?

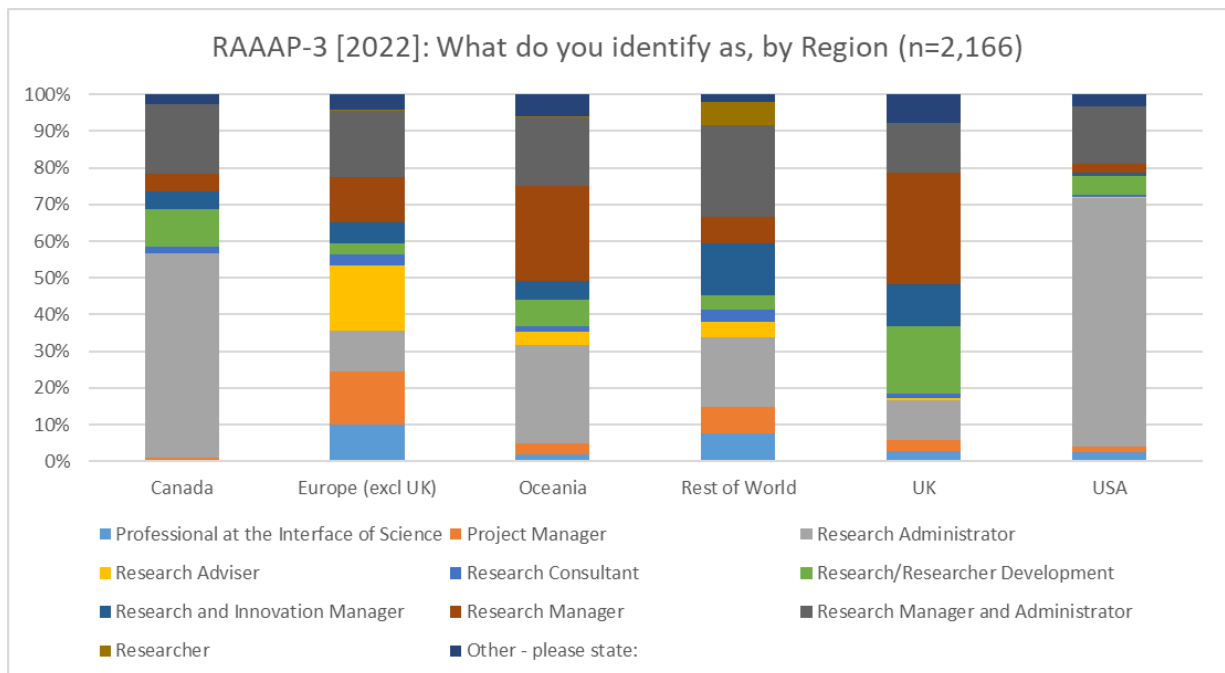


Figure 1: Identity of RMAs

Firstly, RMA is by no means a universal term. As I pointed out in my doctoral thesis (Kerridge, 2012), and in another recent editorial (Kerridge, 2021), the terms Research Administrator, Research Manager, Research and Innovation Manager are also used in different parts of the world. Other terms such as Research Adviser, and the more recent Professionals at the Interface of Science, have also been used. Figure 1 shows data from the RAAAP-3 survey (Kerridge, Dutta, et al., 2023) illustrating by region, for those who broadly identify as an RMA, what their preferred professional identity is. While Canada and the USA have a propensity for Research Administrator, almost every term (from the

options in the questionnaire) is used in every region. However, in terms of what RMAs do, while some of the definitions of these terms (Beasley, 2006; Chronister and Killoren, 2006; Kirkland, 2008; Stackhouse, 2008; Carter & Langley, 2009; Agostinho et al, 2020) deviate from each other in places, there is undoubtedly a common core – and to my mind, a common goal. As I postulated in my thesis, the role of RMAs, as I will refer to us, is the “leadership, management or support of research activities”; which also indicates the spectrum of responsibility of RMAs.

RMA is a broad field and there are certain sub-areas that have their own identities; for example, research development, pre-award, post-award, ethics, compliance, knowledge exchange, and so on; and indeed many of these have their own identity.

We would welcome contributions to the debate around both the nomenclature and definition of RMA, as this will assist in developing a universal understanding of RMA. Similarly, articles debating the scope of RMA are also sought; for example are innovation, technology transfer, scholarly communication, and research student administration deemed to be within the purview of RMA?

Secondly, I would like to reflect a little on RMA practitioners. Undoubtedly there are communities of practice, but are we recognised as RMAs – distinct from other functions – and can we be considered a profession? The short answer is “no”, RMA is not a profession. According to Etzioni (1969), RMA would, at best, qualify as a semi-profession as, for example, we do not need a license to practice. Similarly, for Perkin (1989), a more modern definition of a profession would include the ability for practitioners to set their own market value and have exclusive education and certification. However, the longer answer to whether RMA can claim to be a profession is “maybe”, or possibly “not yet”, and certainly there are parts of the world that are more advanced than others.

While RMA certification is becoming more available it is not yet a requirement in order to be able to practice. In some geographic areas it is common to see certification mentioned in role profiles for jobs and even as a mandatory requirement, however this is far from universal. This and the related theme of professional development for RMAs is explored by others such as Williamson et al. (2020).

In some respects, even where RMA has existed for many years, as can perhaps be judged from the rise of professional associations, it is still in its fledgling phases. The U.S. boasts the two oldest associations – the National Council of University Administrators (NCURA) and the Society of Research Administrators International (SRAI) which were formed in 1959 and 1967 respectively. Certification, through the Research Administrators Certification Council (RACC) has existed since 1993, and so we see from analysis of the 2016 RAAAP Main Dataset (Kerridge & Scott, 2018a) that, when compared to other regions of the world, a relatively high proportion (38.0%; n=358 of 941) of U.S. RMAs have a professional certification (see Figure 2). In some other parts of the world

certification has only become available in the past ten years, and relatively few RMAs have so far taken advantage of this.

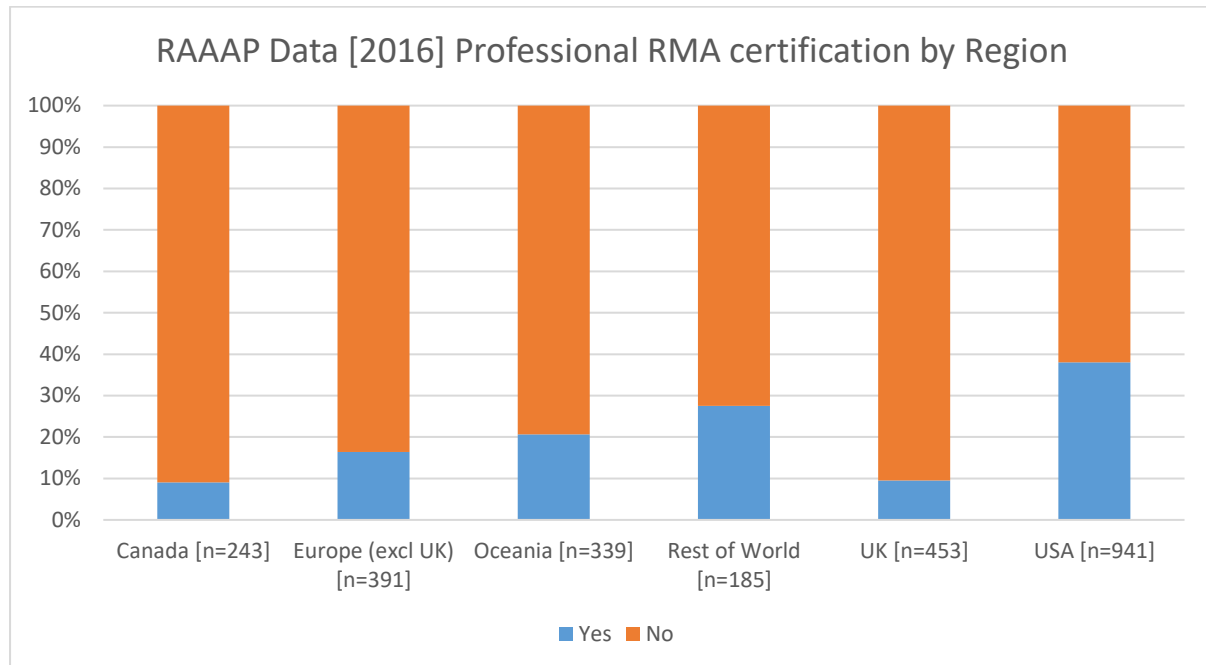


Figure 2: Proportion of RMAs with a professional RMA certification

For those interested in finding out more about the make-up of the profession, the work of Kerridge & Scott (2018b), Roberts & House (2005), Shambrook & Roberts (2015), and Shelley (2010) contain many interesting insights into this predominantly female profession.

Prospective authors might wish to make use of the various existing RMA data sets, such as RAAAP (Kerridge & Scott, 2018a), RAAAP-2 (Kerridge, Ajai-Ajagbe, et al., 2022), RAAAP-3 (Kerridge, Dutta, et al., 2023), and RASPerS (Shambrook & Roberts, 2015) to compliment or contrast with their own findings, or to contextualise reflections on their own practice.

Of course the professionalisation of Research Management and Administration is just one aspect of the RMA arena that the journal covers, read on to explore further.

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BIOGRAPHY

Simon is the Founder of Kerridge Research Consulting and honorary staff at the University of Kent with over 30 years' experience as an RMA and has a passion for the profession. He is past chair of the UK association of research managers and administrators (ARMA), serves on the board of the European association (EARMA), and has previously held committee positions for NCURA in the US. Simon has led the various RAAAP projects and was given the 2022 Innovation Award from CARA the Canadian Association of Research Administrators for his leadership on RAAAP. He is an editor for *JoRMA* the Journal of Research Management and Administration, holds a professional doctorate in electronic research administration, and has taught on the Johns Hopkins' masters in research administration. He is also co-chair of the NISO Standing Committee for CRediT the contributor role taxonomy for journal article authorship, and was an author of *Metric Tide* report.

CONTRIBUTION INFORMATION

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