Managing Assets

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What are your assets?

1. People
   - Lindsay Hall’s talk
2. Lab Space
   - This talk (briefly)
3. Equipment
   - Lindsay Murray’s talk
4. Funding
   - This talk
Who am I to advise you?

- Postdoc, MRC Lab Molec Biol, Cambridge
- Lecturer in Biochemistry, U Bristol
- Royal Soc Research Fellow, U Bristol
- Visiting Fellow in Genetics, U Melbourne
- Prof of Molecular Genetics & Microbiology, U Birmingham
  - Head of Biological Sciences
  - Head of Chemistry
- Director of Science and Technology, BBSRC
- Head of College of Science & Engineering, U Edinburgh
  - 7 academic departments
- Senior Vice-Principal, U Edinburgh
  - Planning, Resources and Research Policy
Experience counts for something

But even with experience you get things wrong.

Hopefully it comes good in the end!
Asset 1: The research team

- Principal investigator
- Postdoc(s)
- Student(s)
- Technicians
- Other support staff
  - Technical services, Estates, Finance, HR, etc.
The PI’s role

• Running a research team is like running a small company
• You are the:
  – CEO
  – Senior Research Officer
  – Company Finance Officer
  – Company HR Manager
  – Press Officer
  – etc. etc.
The Postdoc’s role

• You head a division of the company
• You are the:
  – Deputy Chief Executive
  – Research Officer
  – Finance Manager
  – Deputy Press Officer
  – Mediator (and possibly Deputy HR officer)
  – etc. etc.
The PG Student’s role

• You are a self-motivating employee
  – Manage your own time
  – Manage your own expenses
  – Write reports
  – Work in a team
Asset 2: Lab Space

- This is often in the gift of a Head of Department
- Historic precedence can cause problems
- Encourage shared use of lab space and facilities
  - Reduces individual costs
  - Leads to collaboration
  - People learn from each other
  - Can provide safer working (e.g. out-of-hours)
- It is an asset to use wisely with sensible rules
Asset 3: Equipment

- Often the most expensive individual asset
- Bought on grants, charitable donations or institution funding
- Needs looking after properly
  - Make an individual responsible
  - Train the users
  - Maintain according to manufacturer’s recommendations
  - Use for the purpose it is intended!
Asset 4: Funding

• Several types:
  – Research Council / Charity project grants
  – Government bodies
  – International grants
  – Individual fellowship grants
  – Contract research
  – Donations

• All require some form of accountability
"I am going to visit Dr Richardson [...] he being a person of experience is going to tell me the best means of extracting funds from Government."

Charles Darwin to his sister, Caroline, 1837

In an institutional context:
- Experienced researchers
- Research Office
- Research Funder
- Read the grant conditions
What makes a successful grant application?

• Is it high quality research?
• Is it really high quality research?
• Are you absolutely sure it is high quality research?
• Is the case for support clearly written and not overloaded with detail?
• Has someone read it who is reasonably expert in the area?
• Have you had someone read it who doesn’t know the area in detail?
• Have you properly justified the resources?
• Have you indicated where it matches the Funder’s priorities?
• Are there opportunities to improve chances of success (commercial partner; New investigator scheme)?
• Have you answered any referees’ comments robustly and sensibly?
• Have you received feedback on failed applications?
You’ve got the grant – what next?

• Do what you said you were going to do
• Applying for money and then working on something completely different is fraud
• Nobody expects your ideas always to work out – that’s research
• So, if you then need to do something different to the proposal, consult the funder
• If you can’t hire to a position in time – don’t start the grant; ask the funder for a no-cost extension
Contract research

- There is often a perceived outcome
- The proposal will frequently be drawn up jointly by the PI and the funder
- There is usually a series of meetings ensuring the research is on track
- Resources may be changed during the project
- Be careful that positions (for postdocs, students, technicians) are protected
Maintaining resources

• Stay within budget
• Ensure your people know what they are allowed to spend. Train them.
  – Beware the kit-happy student
  – Beware the go-it-alone postdoc
• In a busy lab, there will be project cross-funding. It is expected, but needs to be managed
• Be clear what funding is allowed (e.g. animals)
• Some funders (EU, industry, charities) may audit
Can Postdocs hold grants?

- Yes, for a Fellowship grant (may require current or future institutional commitment)
- For many funders, only a permanent employee can hold a Project grant
- But PIs do not have a premium on ideas
- A postdoc can be a Recognised Researcher (some funders allow Co-investigator) on a grant held by a member of staff
  - Recognised that they contributed to the ideas
  - Must be employed on the grant
Budget sensibly

- What is allowed?
- Is there a normal amount? (e.g. for consumables)
- What about overheads?
- Are the staff posts correctly costed?
- Have you costed central technical services?
- Can the research be completed in the time requested?
- Is there co-funding available?
BBSRC considerations

- BBSRC can fund:
  - Salaries for postdocs, technicians, etc.
  - Part of PI’s salary (hours *pro rata*)
  - Consumables
  - Equipment (with caveats!)
  - Central services
  - Travel and subsistence
  - Estates costs
- ≥10% funding from industry may promote your grant in committee
- 20% of FEC comes from Institution
Other funders

- Other UK Research Councils – similar to BBSRC
- Wellcome grants – overheads and other on-casts are different
- Science Foundation Ireland – different again
- Government Departments and industry should fund 100% FEC
Reporting and outputs

• UK Research Council and Wellcome grant outputs reported through Researchfish for 5 years beyond grant
• An end-of grant report form may be required
• SfI outputs are reported through the SESAME system for up to 10 years beyond grant
• IP rests with institution not funder
• Contract research often requires frequent reporting and IP arrangements differ

• Details vary between grant schemes
So why all this reporting?

• Research funders get their money from other sources
  – Wellcome from the investment income
    • Supposed to align with Henry Wellcome’s will!
  – Research Councils from BEIS which gets its money from HM Treasury
  – SfI from Dept Business Enterprise & Innovation
  – Industry from its own resources
But remember…

Science is a wonderful thing if one does not have to earn one’s living at it.

- Albert Einstein
Thank you.

Good luck!