

ARMA Protagonist April 2021

The Future of RMA

That's quite a subject title I've been given! What to include; or more necessarily, what not to include.

The end of a REF submission cycle, and now a review of research assessment. A funding crisis created by a change in priorities, while government policy continues to commit to an increase in R&D funding. The Industrial Strategy to be replaced by an Innovation Strategy.

Post-REF submission is the best time to review and consolidate. The submission, and its production, provides the best understanding of an organisation's research and is a far richer source than institutional strategies and faculty or departmental planning statements.

An increase in R&D funds is clearly welcome, but we should expect it to be directed, rather than simply added to existing funding streams.

The Innovation Strategy will be more focused than the Industrial Strategy and will provide detail on the spending of the public R&D budget. This suggests likely concentration on the later stages of the R&D lifecycle, to encourage business to invest to help meet the 2.4% R&D spend target.

Are we ready to respond? Do we understand our markets (demand side) as well as our capabilities and capacity (supply side)?

Appropriate relationships and partnerships are essential, but we also need the right internal policies and processes; the conventions that determine behaviours (resource, recruitment, development, promotion, reward). How can we influence these and the wider ecosystem?

A key area to develop is that of connecting research to the skills agenda. Most knowledge is transferred through people, not patents. How can research expertise be translated into lifelong learning and development opportunities?

Adam Tickell (Vice-Chancellor of the University of Sussex) is right that some areas of regulation have lost their value. But which is most important? A trick question, of course. One must integrate and balance, not focus in isolation. Engage actively with this review. Effect change in your institution as well as in UKRI.

So, how should we respond to this context? Seek to understand more than your specific area(s) of responsibility. Do not say that assessment, funding, impact or integrity is nothing to do with me. Build and maintain your networks, up, down and sideways. Try to be adaptive, whether in formal management roles or in the leadership and influence that we all exert, one way or another.

Ian Carter is Director of Carter Research Navigation and a former Chair of ARMA