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Chapter 5.36

The Profession of Research Management and Administration in Norway

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Abstract

This chapter focuses on the Norwegian research system and the Norwegian Research Management and Administration (RMA) community. The first section presents the overall Norwegian system of research and innovation, and the most important actors. In the second section of the chapter, our attention turns to the Norwegian RMA community, which is described through available data. We will look further into the evolution of the profession in Norway, who takes part in the current RMA community and lastly give an insight into what we know about Norwegian RMAs. Where do RMAs work, what is their background, what are their tasks and skills, and where is the development of Norwegian RMAs headed?

Keywords: Norway; RMA; NARMA; RAAAP; demographics; RMA tasks; NARMA Professional Development Program

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The Norwegian System of Research and Innovation

According to the [Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research \(2022\)](#),¹ the Norwegian research system can be divided into three parts, at the policy level, at the strategic level and at the operational level.

The Norwegian system of education, research and innovation includes a large number of actors and funding instruments. The following is a simplified illustration of this system, provided by the Norwegian Research Council (RCN, 2022).²

In the upper part of the illustration in [Fig. 5.36.1](#), we can see the *political level* represented by parliament and the ministries, while the *strategic level* consists of agencies that are important for Norwegian research and innovation policy, such as the RCN. At the *performing level*, we find universities, research institutes and other actors carrying out research.

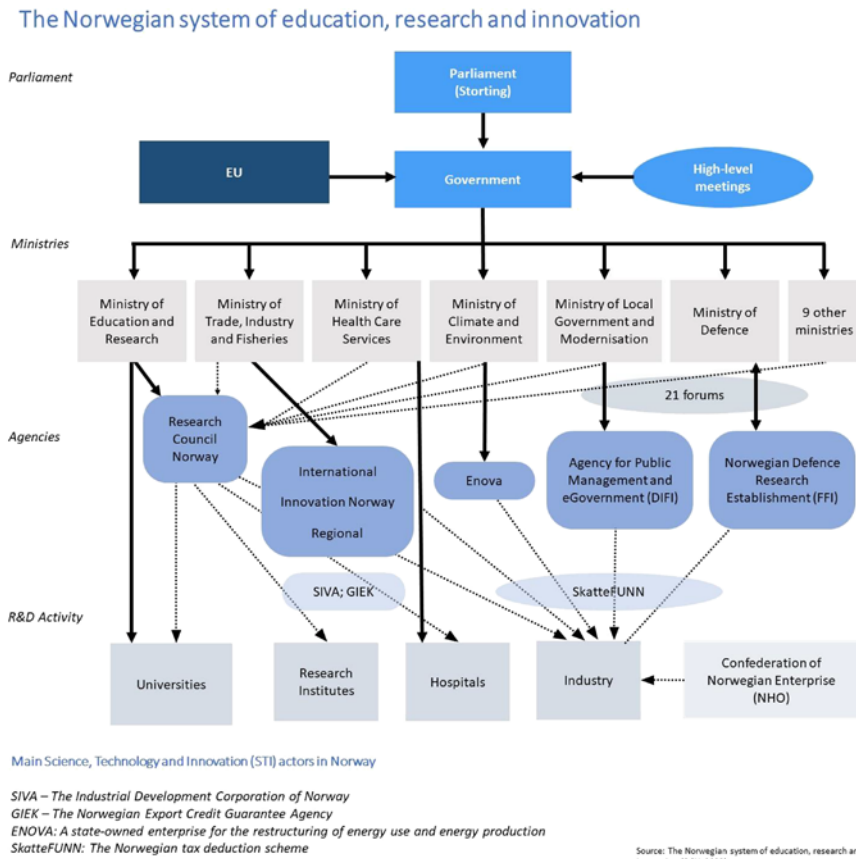


Fig. 5.36.1. The Norwegian System of Education, Research and Innovation (RCN, 2022).

¹ <https://www.regjeringen.no/no/tema/forskning/innsiktsartikler/forskningssystemet/id2000708/>

² <https://www.forskningsradet.no/globalassets/sti-report-2021.pdf>

Research in Norway is mainly funded by public funding sources (47%). A further 40% is funded by the business sector and a lesser part is funded by either foreign funding sources (9%) or other national funding sources, such as private foundations.

In the following sections, we will explore the most important policies and actors within this system.

Norwegian Research Policy and Actors

The Norwegian research policy is characterised by the government's long-term plan for research and higher education. The plan has a 10-year perspective and is revised every four years and outlines the areas that will be focused on and which goals for the coming period that will be prioritised. The very first plan for research was published in 1974. Initially, there was no fixed structure for when the research report was published, causing a growing demand for long-term planning and leading to the current schedule for revising every four years.³

The various ministries in Norway are responsible for funding research within their own sector, this is called the sector principle. The Ministry of Education and Research has the responsibility for coordinating the research policy across ministers at the national level as well as the implementation of the research policy (regjeringen.no).

Based on the EEA Agreement in 1994,⁴ Norway fully participates in European cooperation on research and innovation. The former Government in Norway put out high ambitions for Norway's participation in Horizon Europe and in the European Research Area (ERA) and developed a strategy⁵ outlining expected objectives and goals. The government's ambition is for Norwegian actors to receive 2.8% of the competition-based funding in Horizon Europe.

At the strategic level, the Research Council of Norway (RCN)⁶ is the key advisory to the government regarding research policy issues. The RCN ensures that policies and guidelines from the Norwegian parliament and government are implemented through thematic areas where research funding is allocated. The RCN is responsible for all subject areas within both basic research and innovation-oriented research. The RCN provides funding both at the national level, and also has a regional funding initiative through their Regional Research Funds (RFF).⁷

The RCN was founded in 1993 and was established from five already existing councils that were merged into one. Currently, the RCN has 16 portfolio boards, where each board is responsible for a discipline or thematic area and is in charge of a portfolio of programs and activities. The RCN is a significant actor contributing to internationalisation. Their activity is connected to EUs Framework Programme for Research and Innovation,⁸ mainly through the goals and priorities in each portfolio plan which contain their own sections on how the portfolio plan connects to the current EU framework program. The RCN also promotes international research and innovation cooperation and mobilisation among the operational research actors to participate in various research programs.

³ <https://www.regjeringen.no/no/dokumenter/meld.-st.-5-20222023/id2931400/>

⁴ <https://www.regjeringen.no/no/tema/europapolitikk/eos1/hva-avtalen-omfatter/id685024/>

⁵ Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research. (2021). Strategy for Norway's participation in Horizon Europe and the European Research Area.

⁶ The Research Council of Norway (2019).

⁷ <https://www.regionaleforskningsfond.no/>

⁸ <https://www.scienceurope.org/our-priorities/eu-framework-programmes/>

Another important actor at the strategic level is Innovation Norway,⁹ the agency has strategic tasks regarding research, innovation and development and works mainly to increase innovation in businesses.

Innovation Norway is a hybrid state-owned company established by law. Its prime owners are The Ministry of Trade, Industry and Fisheries,¹⁰ and the county municipalities, but they are also provided with funds from the other ministries. In addition, Innovation Norway is the Norwegian government's official trade representative abroad.

There are also other actors in the Norwegian research system of research and innovation that provide research funding. Some actors provide funding through commissioned research according to their current priorities (e.g. The Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities (KS)¹¹ and The Nordic Council of Ministers¹²). Another set of actors that also provide research funding are the larger foundations in Norway (e.g. The Dam Foundation¹³ and Trond Mohn Foundation¹⁴) and other organisations (e.g. The Norwegian Cancer Society¹⁵).

Types of Research Performing Institutions

The operational level of research in Norway and where most of the research is conducted is dominated by the business and industry sector, higher education institutions (HEIs) (including university hospitals) and research institutes.

In 2014, Erna Solberg's government began a restructuring program in the higher education sector. This work resulted in a white paper called 'Concentration for quality – structural reform in the higher education sector'.¹⁶ The point of the structural reform was to advance general goal setting for high quality in education and research. The reform led to several mergers of universities and colleges. As of 2023, there are now 10 universities, 5 colleges and 6 scientific colleges. In addition, there are 17 private HEIs who receive government subsidies. All universities and colleges conduct both research and provide education, and there is also ongoing research in hospitals and other public institutions. Norway's oldest university is the University of Oslo (UiO). It was founded in 1811 by King Fredrik VI of Denmark-Norway. The University was named the Royal Fredriks University until it changed its name in 1939 to the University of Oslo. Norway's newest universities are Oslo Metropolitan University and the University of South-Eastern Norway. Both are founded in May 2018 as a result of the Solbergs governments structural reform.

There are approximately 120 research institutes in Norway, 32 of these are partially state-funded research institutes and the rest are private and public institutes such as private hospitals and museums. The business and industry sector in Norway conducts most research and development work (R&D) out of all aforementioned sectors. This includes businesses within different industries such as the fishing industry, oil and gas, transportation and logistics, financial and insurance services, and more.

⁹<https://www.innovasjon Norge.no/>

¹⁰<https://www.regjeringen.no/no/dep/nfd/id709/>

¹¹<https://www.ks.no/om-ks/ks-in-english/>

¹²<https://www.norden.org/en/nordic-council-ministers>

¹³<https://dam.no/>

¹⁴<https://mohnfoundation.no/en/>

¹⁵<https://kreftforeningen.no/en/>

¹⁶<https://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/aee30e4b7d3241d5bd89db69fe38f7ba/en-gb/pdfs/stm201620170016000engpdfs.pdf>

According to the 2022 *Report on Science and Technology Indicators for Norway*,¹⁷ Norway's total expenditure on R&D within these institutions amounted to NOK 77 billion in 2020. The business and industry sector had 47% share of the expenditures on R&D, HEIs (including university hospitals) had 38% and the institute sector had 20% in 2020.

The development towards a more complex research and innovation system in Norway, as shown in [Fig. 5.36.1](#) earlier, contributes to the increase of expectations and demands in organisations and institutions that conduct research. This, in turn, affects the demands and needs for professional support at the operational level.

Evolution of the Profession

The RMA profession in Norway has undoubtedly been affected by and formed by the developments in the research system. The increasing complexity in the research system, both nationally and internationally, has driven forward the need for more professionalised research support systems particularly in HEIs. It has become vital for researchers to seek out professional research administrative support to be able to manoeuvre the complexity of demands and expectations within the research system and particularly within external funding. The establishment of the Norwegian Association of RMAs (NARMA)¹⁸ reflects the notion that the professional administrative support that is provided is essential in today's research environment, and that researchers and administrative support staff should work collaboratively in order to succeed in funding applications and the fulfilment of projects once these are funded.

Universities Norway (UHR)¹⁹ has played a key part in the establishment of NARMA and thus the development of the profession in Norway in the last 10–15 years. The establishment of NARMA started as an invitation by Universities Norway to a seminar in 2012. Delegates from Norwegian HEIs attended the seminar and discussed issues concerning the RMA community in Norway. It was expected that the seminar would have about 60 participants, however, it had 250 attendees and reflects the interest in the RMA community that also has continued ever since then. The most prevalent issues in the seminar were whether there was a need for sharing experiences and best practices in research administration for the institutions, whether or not there was a need for a joint and collaborative learning community in Norway and also in connection to the international RMA community. As a result, NARMA was established in 2013 as a network-based association within UHR. The association's main goal is to contribute to the professional development of RMAs and elevate the quality of research administration services in Norwegian HEIs. NARMAs mission is to enhance the profession of RMA and give access to professional networks.

Current Community

NARMAs members consist of all accredited universities and universities colleges in Norway, as well as the Norwegian Research Council. This means, by extension, that all research administrative staff within these institutions have full access to all activities provided by NARMA. Each member institution pays an annual fee to UHR

¹⁷The Research Council of Norway (2021).

¹⁸NARMA (2022).

¹⁹Universities Norway (UHR) is the cooperative body for 32 accredited universities and university colleges in Norway.

which includes the funding of NARMA which means that NARMA has no individual membership.

NARMA has its own board with elected representatives from HEIs, the board coordinates and carries out activities in NARMA.

The network provides different activities to promote professional development for RMAs. The main activities are²⁰: (1) The *Annual NARMA conference*, with plenary and parallel sessions; and (2) The *NARMA Professional Development Program* (NPDP) which targets three groups: early-career, experienced and managers in RMA. The program emphasises professional and practical skills development for RMAs, raising awareness and unpacking the roles of the profession and sharing best practices. The program has its own admission criteria and a limited number of places for each course, it also has its own professional team that carries out and develops the courses in the program. The program does not provide a formal certification, but it provides an acknowledgement of participation for its participants.

Other activities in NARMA consist of supporting other relevant workshops for RMAs and providing international networking through NARMAs collaboration with other associations such as INORMS,²¹ EARMA,²² ARMA,²³ etc. There are also some informal or loosely based networks and seminars for RMAs within specific fields. These networks run seminars or meetings when needed by the participants' own initiatives. Some examples of such initiatives are the EU-adviser network for EU-funding advisers in HEIs, a legal adviser network and a research communication staff seminar.

In addition, some institutions provide or have provided in-house courses, programs and forums for its RMA staff (e.g. University of Bergen,²⁴ University of Oslo,²⁵ and NTNU²⁶).

Demographics

The demographics of the RMA community in Norway described in this case study is on the basis of different data sources made available by NARMA and the RAAAP-2 survey from 2019 (Kerridge, Ajai-Ajagbe, et al., 2022). The datasets have been analysed separately, but the results from both datasets will be commented on comparatively throughout this section.

Data Sources on Norwegian RMAs

The main data provided by NARMA comes from the NPDP. The (unpublished) data has been obtained as part of surveys carried out in the program from 2018 to 2022 (NARMA, 2023) among its RMA participants in the early career and advanced RMA courses ($n = 77$). The surveys' main purpose is to get to know the participants as a group once they attend the program, all data have been anonymised and only aggregated data forms the basis for further data analysis. The data from the surveys have been gathered digitally through the SurveyXact questionnaire tool and all analysis has been carried out in SPSS. The analyses in SPSS are mainly descriptive.

²⁰ <https://narma.no/om-narma/vedtekter/>

²¹ <https://inorms.net/>

²² <https://earma.org/>

²³ <https://arma.ac.uk/>

²⁴ <https://www.uib.no/boa/129204/uib-opp-kompetanseutvikling-eksternfinansiering-og-forskningss%C3%B8tte>

²⁵ <https://www.uio.no/for-ansatte/arbeidssotte/prosjekter/uio-forskerstotte/>

²⁶ <https://www.ntnu.no/forskning>

The NPDP survey includes questions about the participant's educational level and background, the number of years they have worked in research administration, their motives for starting working as RMAs, where their position is situated within their institutions and their main areas of responsibilities at their job. As mentioned earlier, the program targets RMAs at the operational level and in particular early-career RMAs, more experienced RMAs, and RMAs at the management and leadership level. The data at the leadership/management level have not been included in this section as they derive from a different set of questions than the RMA courses, and thus prevents any comparative analysis.

In the 2019 RAAAP-2 survey, the number of respondents that stated their membership as being with NARMA was $n = 94$ (Kerridge, Ajai-Ajagbe, et al., 2022). NARMA reported a number of 700 members as a basis for their population for the RAAAP-2 survey. The population number came from two sources, one being the number of former participants at previous NARMA conferences and the other being the number of people that had subscribed to NARMAs e-mailing list. The final list was deduplicated so that people were not counted twice. The SPSS dataset made available from RAAAP-2 results forms the basis for the analysis in this case. More information on the methods, analysis and results from the previous RAAAP survey that RAAAP-2 was based on can be found in Kerridge and Scott (2018a).

The Norwegian RMA Community

NARMA has no individual membership due to how it is organised, this means that it is not possible to provide a definite number of RMAs in Norway. If we take into account the number of participants at the NARMA conferences from 2017 to 2021, the total number of participants has ranged from approximately 160 to 500 depending on the year (the 2020 conference was cancelled due to COVID and 2021 was a digital conference). If we are to make an estimate based on this information and the information provided in the RAAAP-2 survey, the RMA community in Norway is probably somewhere in 500–700s, however, because this number is an estimate, the number might indicate the lower bounds.

To define Research Administration and Management in Norway, NARMA has used well-known and established definitions of RMAs roles, context and service areas in the profession. The following definition proposed by Tauginienė (2009, p. 54) may be the most appropriate to describe RMAs in Norway.

[...] a person, not necessarily a scientist, with some specific administrative skills and human qualities necessary in carrying out the university's mission in the field of research by acting as a mediator among various actors in research management.

This definition may be broad, but in this section, we'll break the definition down into smaller parts to provide a presentation of Norwegian RMAs.

First, we can pose the question; is it so that RMAs in Norway are people working in universities like the definition states? The answer is yes (but not exclusively), RMAs in Norway mainly hold positions at HEIs. This is reflected both in the RAAAP-2 (2019) data and the NPDP data. The results from the RAAAP-2 survey show that 87% of the NARMA/Norwegian respondents worked at universities (or university colleges). This is also supported by the NPDP data shows that the majority of the respondents (90%) hold positions at HEIs in Norway, and a minority of the respondents (10%) hold

positions at other institutions such as regional health authorities, university hospitals or research institutes. In the NDPD data, results show that 24.7% of the respondents work at a research administration office in their institutions, 19.5% state that the institution does not have a research administration office, but that their position is within another central office, while 50.6% have a position at a 'local' level in the institution (e.g. department, faculty and research centre).

When it comes to the gender profile of RMAs in Norway, there is an imbalance between genders.

The majority, between 75% and 80% identify as females and 20–25% identify as male according to data from both the RAAAP-2 and NDPD data, both datasets coincide when it comes to the gender profile. This profile and imbalance between genders among RMAs is also supported by the overall results of the RAAAP-2 survey where, globally, 76.6% identified as female. This imbalance is however not limited to RMAs in HEIs, the overall trend is that men have been under-represented in administrative positions at Norwegian HEIs institutions for almost 20 years from 2002 to 2021 (*Forsterforbundet – The Norwegian Association of Researchers, 2021*).

The highest academic qualification for RMAs in Norway is either a Master's or Doctoral degree. Of ($n = 114$) respondents from Norway to the RAAAP-2 survey, 62.5% held a Master's degree, with a further 29.2% having a Doctoral degree. Only a small number held only a bachelor's degree (6.3%) or a high school degree (2.1%) as their highest academic attainment level. A qualitative review of the requirements in vacant RMA positions in Norway in June 2022 confirms that in all vacant positions, there was a formal requirement of academic qualifications. A total of 13 vacant positions were reviewed and 7 of those had a requirement of a Master's degree, 6 had requirements of a Bachelor's degree, while 2 stated a Doctoral degree to be desirable – but not a *requirement*. Moreover, in 6 of the vacant positions, it was stated that prior learning and work experience might replace the educational qualification requirements. This review supports the status from the RAAAP-2 and NDPD results.

In the qualitative review, there were no specific requirements to a particular subject of the educational qualification for the RMA positions, it is only stated that the subject should be 'relevant' without further specifications. This diversity in different subject areas in RMAs academic qualifications are also reflected in both the NDPD and RAAAP-2 data, where in the latter the results show that NARMA members had attained their highest academic qualifications within Social Sciences (36.5%), 24.7% in Natural Sciences, 13.9% in Business and Humanities, 6.4% in Medicine, 1.0% in Engineering and 3.2% in *Other*.

The majority of the respondents in both the RAAAP-2 and NDPD surveys had 0–5 years of experience in research administration. This may reflect the maturity of the profession in Norway, which has developed steadily for the last 10–15 years, according to *NARMA (2021)*.

If we continue to follow the definition from *Tauginienė (2009)*, it also specifies that the person carrying out the work in research administration must have some specific administrative skills and human qualities and acting as a mediator when carrying out the institution's research mission in their work. This set of skills, often called technical and soft skills in research administration (Andersen et al., 2017) are also reflected in an overview of competence areas in research administration²⁷ developed by NARMA for Norwegian RMAs. This overview gives an insight into what an RMA working in

²⁷ <https://narma.no/kompetanseutvikling/kompetanseutvikling-oversikt/om-forskningsadministrasjon/>

Table 5.36.1. Competence Areas in Research Administration, NARMA.

External funding	Proactive advisory service in external funding, from pre-proposal to post-grant phase
Financial and legal	Preparation and quality assurance of legal and financial terms and conditions in proposals and research projects
Ethics and privacy protection	Assist in the quality assurance of research ethics guidelines and issues regarding ethics and privacy protection
Information and communications	Communicate, interpret, and adjust information to the intended target group through interactions, knowledge exchange and communication
Postgraduate researchers	Coordination and administration of postgraduate researchers and PhD programs
Policy, management, strategy and innovation	Assist in the preparation of research policy and strategies, and in the administration of research and innovation at the institution
Systems and information	Assist in the assurance of input and output quality of data in the institutions IT systems
Service	Contribute to the continuous development of research support services, both at the individual and organisational levels

a Norwegian institution must encompass in their job, what areas they operate in and what skills and qualities are required to support researcher's activities at their institutions. The overview, called *Competence areas in research administration*, has been heavily influenced by the prior work done by other associations such as the ARMA Professional Development Framework (2011) and the [BESTPRAC Wiki \(2017\)](#), both detailing areas of expertise in research support services and required skills for RMAs. This overview is actively used in the NPDP²⁸ as a starting point for a common understanding of research administration and for raising awareness of what research administration entails and encompasses. The experiences with the competence overview in the NPDP is that the participants recognise the areas of expertise and qualities in their own RMA positions. Some RMAs might operate within one or a couple of the areas in [Table 5.36.1](#) in their day-to-day work, while others operate in most of them, depending on what part of the organisation they work in.

The variety of tasks and areas Norwegian RMAs operate in is also supported by the results in the RAAAP-2 and NPDP surveys. In the NPDP surveys, respondents were asked what they considered to be their most important tasks/responsibilities in research administration; they had the option to choose more than one option in their response.

Column *N* in [Table 5.36.2](#) shows the number of times the option was chosen, while the Per cent column shows the distribution in percentages. The results show that the

²⁸ <https://narma.no/kompetanseutvikling/kompetanseportal/narmas-kompetanseprogram/>

Table 5.36.2. What Are Your Most Important Responsibilities/Tasks in Research Administration?

Responsibilities/Tasks in Research Administration	Per cent	N
Research policy and strategies	5.7	28
Organisational development	4.5	22
Provide courses	3.2	16
Identifying sources of funding	10.3	51
Proposal support (pre-grant support)	13.0	64
Impact and implementation in proposal development	9.1	45
Budgeting	6.7	33
Contracts and arrangements (legal)	9.9	49
Financial follow-up	4.7	23
Employment/hiring	2.6	13
Operations and reporting	8.7	43
IPR	1.4	7
Reporting academic publications (CRISTIN) and bibliometrics	4.3	21
Ethics	4.5	22
Communications	7.5	37
Accounting and auditing	1.8	9
Other	2.2	11
Total	100	494

respondents mostly work within the areas of pre-grant and proposal development support, as shown in bold in Table 5.36.2 (Identifying sources of funding, proposal support, impact and implementation in proposal development, operations and reporting, communications). Although working with external funding, either pre-award or post-award, is one of the criteria for participating in the NPDP, similar results can be found in the RAAAP-2 survey where 72% of the NARMA respondents answered yes to the question of whether they worked in the area of Proposal Development, 52% confirmed that they worked in the area of pre-funding and 54% worked in the area of pre-application support.

In addition to mainly working with pre-grant support and proposal development, the respondents in the NPDP surveys also state that their most important responsibilities/tasks are within Contracts and arrangements (legal) (49), Operations and reporting (43) and Communications (37).

In the definition by [Tauginienė \(2009\)](#), a research administrator is a *mediator among various actors in research management*. The results from the data of Norwegian RMAs show that they are not only mediators that have to balance between different tasks and responsibilities. They are also RMAs that have a wide set of skills and knowledge within different areas of research administration. These skills and knowledge must in turn be managed, nurtured and developed, often simultaneously in order to provide good support for researchers, the institutions and other actors involved in various parts and stages of research activities.

Directions/Future

The future directions for the profession in Norway points towards a continued need for professional development for RMAs as they are important actors providing support in a complex research system. The question is whether professional development is moving towards more specialised areas in research administration, or whether there will be a need for more generalist knowledge and skills among RMAs.

However, as the results provided in this case show that there will undoubtedly still exist a variation in the type of RMA positions that exist in the institutions. The variation between RMA positions will be affected by the overall changes in both the international and national research systems and how research institutions react to changes or demands. They will also be affected by the type of organisation they exist within and at what level in the organisation the RMA operates in, as of now most RMAs are found in HEIs but we might see an increase in RMAs in business and other parts of the public sector or at least we will experience increased visibility and recognition that they actually are RMAs. There are also a variety of different names for RMA positions at the institutions, such as research adviser, project adviser, R&D coordinator, R&D adviser, research coordinator, to mention a few. Hopefully, one can at least achieve some kind of consensus as to what RMAs in Norway should be called in the future.

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