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FindAScienceBerth: connecting underrepresented groups in marine science with available berths on scientific research vessels

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Scientific research vessels are highly specialist resources in constant demand, often scheduled many years in advance of a research cruise and typically awarded to a narrow selection of permanently employed eligible investigators. The ability to access vessels is essential for a wide range of geoscientific research from paleoenvironmental sedimentary studies through to understanding modern day marine biodiversity. The high demand and low supply problem of accessing cruises means that participation can often be limited to small networks within the awarded discipline. This can present a barrier to marine scientists who wish to gain offshore experience, despite the fact that research vessels may have greater capacity than is required by any one scientific party. This is particularly true for early career scientists who usually work on timelines shorter than those required for cruise planning, and those from non-traditional academic backgrounds who may be less well connected to funded networks.

FindAScienceBerth is a project aiming to match those who wish to partake in a scientific cruise with spare capacity through identifying available berths on scheduled cruises. The long term goal of FindAScienceBerth is to provide opportunities to those who would otherwise be excluded from conducting offshore research to gain experience essential for career development, and in turn better utilise available ship capacity. Here, we will present our background research, quantifying unused berths on UK research vessels, demonstrating the potential of our initiative. Additionally, we will introduce the interface of FindAScienceBerth, showing how we have adapted the existing pan-European Marine Facilities Planning tool for cruise scheduling in order to identify and advertise spare capacity. We will demonstrate how principal scientific officers can advertise spare berths and how prospective participants can identify and apply for these roles. Finally, we will give an overview of the process we have developed to ensure an EDI compliant recruitment practice for filling ship berth vacancies and our EDI monitoring work throughout the application process.

Such a process could be applicable to similar schemes across the geosciences which seek to increase equality, diversity and inclusivity by creating opportunities for the development of practical skills.

For further information please see our project site: findascienceberth.wordpress.com