

Dr Sam Wrighton

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PROFESSIONAL SUMMARY

Operational leader who has progressed from Research Assistant to COO across three organisations in seven years. Currently running five leadership functions simultaneously (operations, logistics, compliance, HR, and business development) for an international development research consultancy, having doubled revenue and achieved ISO 27001 and ISO 9001 certification with zero non-conformances. Built bespoke internal tools using AI-assisted development, saving over 200 hours in a single process redesign and eliminating £35,000 in external contractor costs. Established European subsidiaries for two organisations. DPhil from Oxford in International Relations. Experienced working in government and security-sensitive environments.

EDUCATION

DPhil International Relations (ESRC Scholar), University of Oxford
MSc International Relations (Cum Laude), University of Amsterdam
BA International Studies (First Class Honours), Leiden University

EXPERIENCE

Chief Operating Officer, International Development Research Consultancy | November 2025 - present

- Consolidated five leadership functions (operations, logistics, compliance, HR, business development) under a single role following three senior departures, maintaining and improving performance across all areas
- Achieved ISO 9001 and ISO 27001 certification with zero comments and zero non-conformances by rebuilding the compliance framework from scratch: single document register, consistent naming conventions, clear policy ownership
- Saved approximately 200 hours per cycle by rebuilding the performance review process using Google Apps Script, Forms, and Sheets, with scripts built through AI-assisted development
- Rebuilt the company website using AI-assisted development, saving approximately £35,000 in external agency fees
- Built custom internal workflow and dashboard tools using AI-assisted development, enabling non-technical operational management at scale
- Leading recruitment, performance management, staff development, resource planning, and operational KPIs for an organisation of approximately 30 people
- Significantly improved the companies financial resilience by increase profit margins and efficiencies

Business Development Consultant, Independent | May 2025 – November 2025

- Established and operated an independent consultancy serving clients in the security, defence, and international development sectors
- Implemented AI-powered bidding tools and professionalised pipeline management systems for clients
- Developed LaTeX-based templating system using Overleaf for efficient proposal production
- Provided systems, process improvements, and technical bid support, including on ISF proposals
- Won clients and delivered engagements independently before being recruited into a COO role

Head of Business Development, International Development Research Consultancy | May 2024 – May 2025

- Doubled the company's annual revenue
- Won 57 contracts with 40 new clients, accounting for 98.7% of the company's annual revenue
- Secured 8 framework and LTAS contracts providing long-term revenue stability
- Led a team of 6 across business development, proposal writing, and client management
- **Opened and directed European subsidiary in The Hague:** managed incorporation, established financial systems, enabled EU contract eligibility

- Built relationships with senior government stakeholders in defence and security domains
- Managed client relationships across MENA including FCDO, IOM, UN Women, UNICEF

Research Director, Market Research Consultancy | May 2023 - April 2024

- Led business development through public procurement, achieving 40% win rate on government tenders
- Secured government framework agreements and generated 15% of company revenue in new sectors
- Managed cross-functional bid teams developing proposals for government research programmes
- Built relationships with senior government stakeholders in defence and security domains

Programme Manager, International Research and Consultancy Firm | May 2020 – May 2023

- Progressed from Researcher to Senior Researcher to Programme Manager over three years
- Won and delivered projects worth over £500,000 for UNESCO, UN Women, British Council, and EU agencies
- Led team of 24 researchers; achieved 40% tender win rate contributing 27% of annual revenue
- Designed methodologies for 85% of company projects including sensitive political and security research
- Authored "Trust in International Relations" report for British Council, read by UK government officials and diplomats
- **Co-created company's EU subsidiary in The Hague:** supported incorporation and setup to service EU agency clients

Researcher, International Migration Institute, University of Amsterdam | March 2017 - Sept 2017

- Conducted fieldwork on authoritarian regime strategies in Hungary, Serbia, and Slovakia
- Coordinated data for European Research Council projects on "Authoritarianism in a Global Age" (€2.4m funding)

RELEVANT EXPERTISE, SKILLS & INTERESTS

Operations & Systems Management:

- Established European subsidiaries, including legal incorporation, recruitment, financial systems and company structure
- Implemented CRM systems, pipeline management, and AI-powered operational tools
- Developed systematic capture processes and quality assurance frameworks

Business Development:

- Success across multiple LTAS and framework applications delivering revenue stability
- Pipeline management and systematic BD processes delivering consistent revenue generation

Stakeholder Management:

- Senior government and UN agency relationships: UK, Ukraine, Georgia, Baltic states, Netherlands

Team Leadership:

- Managed teams up to 9 direct reports, 24 total team members

Interests:

- Cooking, cricket, sailing, and travelling (I have travelled to 106 countries)

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

- Wrighton, S. (2022) Trust in international relations: A Review of the literature, data, and metrics - British Council
- Wrighton, S. (2021) The annexation of populations: a new state strategy? (Doctoral dissertation, University of Oxford)
- Wrighton, S. (2018) Authoritarian regime stabilization through legitimation, popular co-optation, and exclusion: Russian *pasportizatsiya* strategies in Crimea. *Globalizations*, 15(2), 283-300