

Policy analysis for equitable international research collaborations

Final report

Prepared by:
Scientia Scripta Communication Services Ltd
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info@scientiascripta.co.uk

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Scientia Scripta

Alice Chadwick El-Ali, Allen Muyaama Mukhwana, Eva Kagiri-Kalanzi

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www.scientiascripta.co.uk.

Editing and data visualisation

Edwin Colyer and Rasa Žakevičiūtė

Graphic design

Anthony Lewis <https://anthony-lewis.com>

British Academy

Alex Lewis, Silke Blohm, Stephanie Appleton

Other contributors

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Disclaimer

The higher education institutions featured as case studies in the report are not necessarily those that participated in this study.

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Executive summary

This report, commissioned by the British Academy and prepared by Scientia Scripta, provides a gap analysis of sample policies and terms and conditions documents from UK funders and higher education institutions (HEIs), against recommendations from four guidance documents on equitable partnerships. It also includes findings from a survey distributed to institutions from the Global South. It draws on the findings to provide specific actionable

recommendations for Universities, Funders, and the wider sector acting collaboratively for improving equity in research partnerships. To maximise the utility of this report this section provides four executive summaries: 1) Analysis of equitable partnership guidance documents; 2) Sector-Level recommendations; 3) Funder analysis and recommendations; 4) University analysis and recommendations.

Analysis of equitable partnerships guidance documents

Recommendations on equitable partnerships

The review synthesised recommendations from four equitable partnerships guidance documents: [Africa Charter for Transformative Research Collaborations](#), [Cape Town Statement on Fostering Research Integrity through Fairness and Equity](#), [Four Approaches to Supporting Equitable Partnerships](#), and [Envisioning an Equitable Future for Research across the North-South Divide](#). Their recommendations were grouped into six thematic areas, with 11 common recommendations identified across the documents. The most prevalent recommendations were **directly fund Global South researchers** and **enable Global South-led research priority setting**. Many recommendations were broad visions for systemic change rather than actionable policies, highlighting the need for further work to implement these recommendations in practice.

Figure 1 on the following page shows the 11 recommendations out of the 31 extracted that were common across more than one guidance document. Only specific recommendations for change at funder or HEI level are included; broad visions for change were excluded from the analysis. Of the 11 recommendations that appeared in at least two guidance documents, only two were found in all four documents: 1) funding Global South researchers directly; and 2) Global South-led research priority setting.

Figure 1. Frequency of common recommendations across the four equitable research partnerships guidance documents

Thematic area	Common recommendation	Included in guidance documents?			
Attitudes towards other cultures, peoples and contexts	No common recommendations in this thematic area	○	○	○	○
Building and maintaining partnerships	Two-stage funding calls	○	○	●	●
	Funding LMIC researchers directly	●	●	●	●
LMIC leadership and ownership	Engaging with Southern-led agendas for research priority setting	●	●	●	●
	Addressing power imbalances in research planning	○	●	●	●
Research capacity strengthening	Assess capacity of partners and develop measures to address and monitor	○	●	●	●
	Support for research management capacity within project funding	●	●	●	○
	Support individual, institutional and ecosystem levels of capacity	○	●	●	○
Research budgets, contracts and due diligence	Fair indirect cost calculations	●	○	●	○
	Use standards to streamline contracting processes	○	○	●	●
Research dissemination and impact	Ensure appropriate benefit sharing through Fair authorship and data sharing policies and practices	○	●	●	●
	Budget for research dissemination and impact work including covering open-access fees and journal subscriptions	○	●	●	○

Key

Recommendations included in...

- Africa Charter for Transformative Research Collaborations
- Cape Town Statement on Fostering Research Integrity through Fairness and Equity
- Four Approaches to Supporting Equitable Partnerships
- Envisioning an Equitable Future for Research across the North-South Divide.

Key insights

- The guidance documents were created with different audiences in mind and operate at different levels. The Africa Charter and Cape Town Statement provide visions for a transformed research system and do not contain many detailed recommendations on how to implement change. *Four Approaches to Supporting Equitable Research Partnerships* offers many targeted recommendations while *Envisioning an Equitable Future* is a research report with some concrete recommendations for change.
- Many of the recommendations, especially those in the more vision-focused guidance documents, consider systemic change, requiring actions beyond an individual funder or HEI.
- Overall, the guidance documents do not contain many actionable recommendations that could be interpreted at the level of policy. Instead they suggest a desired state for the future of a more equitable research system. Whilst this is not an exhaustive study this piece of work provides a series of practical suggestions for key stakeholders to implement these recommendations with the aim to create a more enabling environment for equity in international collaboration.

Sector-level recommendations

This section provides recommendations that require collaborative action across the sector as well as recommendations that are relevant to key stakeholders.

A concordat outlining shared expectations to mainstream equity in international collaboration - there is a need for coordination across the research system to ensure a coherent approach to implementing changes that support equity in international collaboration. This action will also provide clarity for Global South institutions and avoid them having to navigate the different approaches of different funders and HEIs. A concordat, which sets out agreed expectations for the conditions under which research and innovation happen¹, could be a useful

mechanism for supporting a systems-wide shift and creating an enabling environment and incentive structure for individual institutions to make policy and practice changes. For it to be effective, a concordat would require wide representation and co-development across funders and HEIs from both the Global North and South. The concordat could possibly be hosted within an existing mechanism such as the UK Research Integrity Office (UKRIO)² or Vitae³.

Building awareness of the importance of equity in international collaboration and the benefits of equity for all parties - funder and HEIs interviewees acknowledged that awareness raising on the value and importance of equity in partnerships was needed to drive institutional change.

1 Universities UK, Research and Innovation – Concordats and Agreements <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/topics/research-and-innovation/concordats-and-agreements>

2 The UK Research Integrity Office (UKRIO) is an independent charity, offering support to the public, researchers and organisations to further good practice in academic, scientific and medical research <https://ukrio.org/about-ukrio/>.

3 Vitae is a non-profit programme run by the charity the Careers Research and Advisory Centre (CRAC), which provides research, intelligence and innovation services to those who support career development <https://vitae.ac.uk/about/>.

This action would involve bringing the equitable partnerships conversation to new audiences including those who are not directly involved in Global South research collaboration. It would be necessary to develop clear messaging around the benefits of supporting equity in terms of enhancing research excellence and reaching new types of international collaborators. Cooperation with organisations such as ARMA UK⁴ and Vitae to facilitate targeted activities is key. Practical steps to advance this recommendation include:

- **Training programmes for research leaders and research support teams** on the context and requirements for Global South partnerships, as well as the benefits of equity around mutual knowledge exchange and a global perspective that prioritising international collaboration can bring.
- **Creating a repository of knowledge and guidance** that is accessible across institutions, to document and share best practices on successful approaches to supporting equity in collaboration with the Global South. This can help standardise and improve practice as those with less experience working in this space can draw on the knowledge of institutions with extensive experience and institutional knowledge.
- **Consideration of different data management needs** is key to addressing equity challenges posed by the diverse rules across national and institutional settings. Such considerations should begin with building awareness of data management processes in different contexts and how they can be reconciled equitably within collaborative research. This

action should be followed by its inclusion within data management policies across funder and institutional policies.

- **Showcasing examples of policy and process changes** to address the disparity in awareness and incentives between academic and professional staff, including the lack of knowledge on best practice across the research and innovation landscape. As part of targeted action in this area, funders should support a showcase of pilot projects that have successfully revised policies to support equitable international research partnerships. These initiatives will serve as models for systemic change.

Strategy and high-level leadership to support equity in international collaboration - for funders, there are competing agendas and a lack of a coordinated view on what equity in partnership means in practice. For HEIs, there are institutional barriers to change especially when collaboration with the Global South is a small part of a much wider research profile. However, when equity in international collaboration forms part of organisational strategy or a wider approach towards international engagement this can create the incentives and rationale for change.

Monitoring and evaluation of equity across funders and institutions - to advance equitable partnerships, it is essential for funders and HEIs to establish and embed accountability mechanisms within their policies. While current efforts focus on sensitisation through dialogue and guideline development, there is a critical need to integrate these principles into institutional and system-level practices. Specifically,

⁴ ARMA (UK) is the professional association for research management in the UK, representing research leaders, managers and administrators <https://arma.ac.uk/about-arma/about-us/>.

fundere should mandate that researchers not only demonstrate equitability within their projects but also engage in follow-up activities to monitor and evaluate the application and impact of these principles. This action will ensure that equitable partnerships are systematically supported, and their effectiveness is continually assessed.

Consistent review of policies, terms, conditions across the sector - to ensure policies, terms, and conditions remain relevant and effective, the sector should establish a regular review cycle (for instance every 2–3 years), supported by a dedicated and representative review committee/working group. The review process should

incorporate evidence-based practices from across different funders and HEIs who are actively embedding equitability within institutional policies and practices.

Review longevity of funding mechanisms - short-term and project-based funding models limit capacity development possibilities in the Global South. Lessons need to be learned from long-term funding approaches (e.g., the Medical Research Council's (MRC) long-term support for research units based in the Global South, and Wellcome's major international programmes) to inform best practice in funding approaches⁵.

Funder analysis and recommendations

The analysis of policies from five UK research funders (AHRC, British Academy, EPSRC, UKRI, and Wellcome) revealed a complex landscape of enablers and barriers to equity. While there is growing recognition of the importance of equitable partnerships, gaps remain in areas such as direct funding for Global South researchers, alignment of ethical standards with local practices, and administrative burdens for Global South

partners. The strongest alignment with the recommendations from the guidance documents was found in relation to research dissemination and impact (i.e. encouraging equitable sharing of IP benefits with international partners and promoting open access to research outputs); the weakest alignment was related to Global South leadership and ownership.

⁵ See UKCDR report on funding mechanisms for development impact: <https://ukcdr.org.uk/publication/funding-mechanisms-for-international-development-research-ukcdr-case-studies/>

Table 1. Key gaps, barriers and enablers for equitable partnerships identified in funder policies

Gaps

- Lack of context-specific research engagement approaches
- Intellectual Property (IP) frameworks that favour UK institutions
- Impact metrics focused on UK outcomes, neglecting local relevance
- Insufficient integration of Global South partners in impact pathways
- Inadequate support for context-sensitive communication and dissemination
- Underfunding of dissemination and stakeholder engagement activities
- Weak or absent post-award structures to sustain equitable partnerships
- Ethical and linguistic frameworks misaligned with local norms and diversity
- Absence of clear policies for research capacity strengthening
- Limited investment in institutional capacity development in the Global South
- No systematic monitoring or evaluation of capacity-strengthening outcomes
- Lack of safeguards for currency exchange rate fluctuations
- Minimal engagement with Global South-led research agendas and priorities
- Restricted access to direct funding for Global South researchers

Barriers

- Persistent power asymmetries that limit meaningful co-leadership and shared decision-making
- Inadequate consideration of local languages, reducing accessibility and inclusivity
- Limited cultural competency in programme design and evaluation
- Insufficient flexibility to accommodate diverse institutional and contextual capacity needs
- Absence of dedicated budget lines or guidance for capacity strengthening within projects
- Capacity-building often framed as one-directional, undervaluing Global South expertise
- Onerous due diligence processes that disproportionately burden Global South institutions
- Overly rigid application of fraud prevention and export controls, impeding timely disbursement and collaboration
- Complex financial and compliance requirements misaligned with Global South systems

- Leadership criteria that favour UK-based researchers, restricting Global South leadership
- Institutional eligibility rules that limit the autonomy of Global South partners
- Administrative and application processes that are resource-intensive and UK-centric
- Short-term, project-based funding models that inhibit long-term collaboration and sustainability

Enablers

- Promotion of open access to research outputs to enhance global knowledge sharing
- Responsive and tailored guidance to support Global South applicants
- Increasing encouragement of collaborative and co-designed research proposals
- Availability of guidelines that promote equitable collaboration with the Global South
- Growing commitment to Global South partnerships reflected in some funder policies
- Support for interdisciplinary and cross-cultural collaboration to enrich research perspectives
- Emphasis on culturally sensitive and ethically grounded research practices
- Promotion of participatory and community-engaged research methodologies
- Inclusion of explicit capacity-strengthening components in some funding schemes
- Introduction of more flexible funding structures, including advance payments
- Emerging examples of direct funding mechanisms for Global South institutions
- Provision of workshops and information sessions to build funding literacy
- Support for training and development to strengthen research leadership and skills in the Global South.

Funder recommendations

Table 2. Quick wins: recommendations for funder policies and practice

Thematic area	Recommendations
Attitudes towards other cultures, peoples, and contexts	<p>Policy - Expand allowable costs to support language diversity: allocate and allow flexibility in funding to support costs related to project needs associated with language diversity. This should include funds for professional translation services (both written and spoken communication), translating research outputs into multiple languages to ensure accessibility and inclusivity. The support should extend beyond researchers to incorporate research support staff.</p>
Building and maintaining partnerships	<p>Policy - Assess equity as funding criteria: assess equity of partnerships in grant applications as a prerequisite for funding. This should be accompanied by guidance for peer review committees on how to assess equity.</p> <p>Policy - Build accountability into policy: include mechanisms by which research stakeholders can check or flag equity concerns throughout the research process.</p> <p>Practice and Processes - Utilise two-stage funding calls or networking grants: support and resource partnership building processes, giving researchers time to co-develop research ideas and develop equitable ways of working.</p>
Global South leadership and ownership	<p>Policy - Direct funding of Global South institutions: funders should establish dedicated grant programmes aimed at Global South institutions and researchers. These programmes should address the unique challenges faced by the Global South and ensure that Global South researchers can lead projects based on locally defined priorities. Additionally, the programmes should include streamlined and accessible application procedures for Global South institutions, such as clear guidelines and support to reduce bureaucratic hurdles.</p> <p>Practice and Processes - Establish advisory groups: initiate Global South advisory groups, or groups more specific to the contexts of where funding is being directed to ensure research priorities and application processes are supportive of Global South applicants.</p> <p>Practice and Processes - Share learning on direct funding: funders should share learning on policy and processes to support direct funding to the Global South. Those who have experience of direct funding can provide guidance to others (Case study 2: including global south researchers in decision-making).</p>

Research capacity strengthening

Policy - Require assessment of partner capacities and plans for development: require grantees to assess each partner's relative capacity and plans for sharing knowledge and resources. This assessment should look at partner needs and strengths and should consider the research management and administration support available to each partner.

Practice and Processes - Invest in mentoring and research development support in the Global South: support initiatives that provide mentoring and research development support within the Global South to strengthen research capacity. This supports the translation of eligibility for research funding into successful applications.

Practice and Processes - Directly fund research management capacity: include research management support as a direct cost in funding initiatives, moving away from the current model of overheads and allow specific funds within project budgets to cover the costs associated with research management activities. This approach promotes better resource allocation and accountability and enables partners to address capacity discrepancies across research support teams.

Research budgets, contracts, and due diligence

Policy - Share due diligence: funders need to find a way to share due diligence information to avoid duplicated efforts.

Practice and Processes - Support payments in advance: funders should clearly communicate to HEIs that advance payments, or initial funding can be provided to Global South partners in funding guiding notes or terms and conditions, when certain criteria are met. Clear guidelines and transparent processes for advance payments can enhance trust and cooperation between funders, HEIs, and Global South partners and are especially useful in providing clarity for institutions concerned with how such practices impact auditing outcomes.

Research dissemination and impact

Promote fair authorship: within researcher codes of conduct and guidance there should be clear expectations around fair authorship practices and sharing of credit with collaborators. Beyond this, funders should implement mechanisms to monitor compliance with authorship policies, including periodic audits of published work and requiring detailed accounts on each contributor's role.

Table 3. Long-term goals: recommendations for funder policies and practice

Thematic area	Recommendations
Attitudes towards other cultures, peoples, and contexts	<p>Policy - Support language diversity: address different linguistic needs, not just for research outputs but also provide guidelines or codes of conduct on the need for global research to consider the language in which knowledge is produced. Codes of conduct on international collaboration and ethical processes should mandate that research be conducted in the local language of the region where it is being carried out.</p> <p>Practice and Processes - Invest in North/South research: fund more research that addresses both Global North and Global South challenges, allowing researchers from the Global South to analyse and interrogate UK/Global North problems and challenges as well as those in their own context. This will support mutual learning and act to decentre the ‘development gaze’ of UK researchers addressing Global South problems.</p> <p>Practice and Processes - Address bias in funding application processes: consider how biases are built into funding review processes and make efforts to address how inequity may be perpetuated, for example by using institutional and researcher blind reviews (Case study 3: proactive approach to reduce inequity and bias in funding application processes).</p>
Building and maintaining partnerships	<p>Practice and Processes - Two-stage funding calls or networking grants: these mechanisms support and resource partnership building processes, giving researchers time to co-develop research ideas and develop equitable ways of working.</p> <p>Practice and Processes - Make it easier for Global South researchers to apply for funding: where calls are open to Global South researchers, funders need to have processes in place that ensure wide awareness of calls beyond existing participant institutions. Actions could include sharing guidance on the process of applying for funding and what a successful application looks like (Case study 1: Wellcome’s committee observer initiative).</p>

Global South leadership and ownership

Policy - Expand eligibility criteria: eligibility criteria should be revised to accommodate the realities of Global South contexts. This includes recognising how career trajectories often differ across regions due to varying local circumstances and adjusting criteria accordingly to ensure inclusivity and fairness.

Practice and Processes - Early engagement on research priority setting: engage as early as possible when scoping research calls. Partnering with Global South-based funders or institutions can be a means of bringing in expertise and knowledge that UK funders do not have.

Practice and Processes - Develop joint calls with Global South funders: these types of partnerships can allow for dual language applications, joint ownership and ensure contextual and cultural awareness is built into funding calls.

University analysis and recommendations

University policies often lack specific detail relevant to working with Global South partners, influenced by factors such as institutional priorities and the extent of collaboration with the Global South. Policies analysed were found to be most aligned with recommendations related to

research dissemination and impact. They had less alignment on issues regarding Global South leadership and ownership. Informal practices and interrelationships play a critical role in supporting equity, even where formal policies are lacking.

Table 4. Gaps, barriers and enablers for equitable partnerships identified in HEI policies

Gaps

- Lack of dedicated budgets for dissemination and impact work in projects
- Failure to centre the languages of the regions where research is conducted
- Absence of formal recognition of indigenous and community researchers
- Lack of formalised processes for supporting co-development
- Insufficient policies on currency fluctuations
- No consistent guidance on addressing due diligence challenges
- Failure to address power imbalances in policies

Barriers

- Use of UK repositories
- Language barriers
- Lack of dedicated support for collaborative decision-making
- Inflexible payment terms
- Misalignment of institutional policies with Global South research contexts
- Disparity in awareness and incentives across university staff and academics
- Dominance of UK processes

Enablers

- Coverage of open access fees
- Fair authorship policies
- Inclusive approach to language
- Strategic focus on global and contextual relevance in research
- Advocacy for collaborative decision-making
- Currency buffers in project budgets
- Continuous learning measures
- Ensuring inclusive authorship from project inception

Higher education institutions recommendations

Table 5. Quick wins: recommendations for HEI policies and practice

Thematic area	Recommendations
Attitudes towards other cultures, peoples, and contexts	Policy - Support language diversity: it is crucial for research plans and budgets to include provisions for addressing linguistic diversity. During project planning and budgeting, institutions should collaboratively identify areas in which funding for language needs (e.g. translation, extra administrative support, localisation of knowledge production processes and results dissemination) can be accommodated. Additionally, publication guidelines should require that findings be presented in the relevant local language.

<p>Building and maintaining partnerships</p>	<p>Practice and processes - Gather feedback and input from Global South partners: develop an inclusive mechanism for gathering feedback from Global South partners on the challenges they face when collaborating to inform changes to policies and processes (Case study 5: addressing bottlenecks through a co-creation approach)</p> <p>Practice and processes - Change expectations of collaborating institutions: remove expectations and accommodate within policies the diversity and contexts of different partners, for instance, recognising differences between structures, standards and processes between those of the Global South and UK HEIs. This will make it easier to partner with a range of institutions in the UK and internationally.</p>
<p>Research capacity strengthening</p>	<p>Practice and processes - Understand different research support systems: ensure research management, contracting and finance colleagues are aware of the different research systems of all the partners and how they function. This will build awareness of what are reasonable requests within different partnership arrangements (Case study 6: enhancing understanding of research systems and norms between UK and global south partners).</p>
<p>Global South leadership and ownership</p>	<p>Policy - Formalise processes for co-development: establish comprehensive guidelines that outline the steps and criteria for co-developing collaboration agreements with Global South partners. These guidelines should detail the roles and responsibilities of all parties involved, ensuring transparency and mutual understanding.</p> <p>Practice and processes - Provide clear guidance and support: to help Global South partners understand and navigate collaboration agreements, HEIs should provide concrete guidance on expectations and requirements (e.g., financial reporting, due diligence). Better transparency and early, continuous communication can help to avoid misunderstandings and disputes.</p>

Research budgets, contracts, and due diligence

Policy - Simplify due diligence: UKRI/ARMA guidelines for due diligence are widely used but often partner organisations do not fit into the prescribed template. HEIs need to consider whether the types of documentation they are asking partners to provide are reasonable in their context. A mechanism to share due diligence information across UK HEIs would also avoid duplication of efforts (e.g., use of Good Financial Grant Practice).

Policy - Support payments in advance: develop processes that allow advance payments if certain criteria are met to support partners to start working and avoid going into deficit
(Case study 4: institutionalising advance payments to reduce barriers)

Practice and processes - Be transparent about resources: sharing budgets with partners is a minimum requirement for trusted working. This should start from the earliest stages of co-creation and the co-development of budgets.

Practice and processes – Institutionalise best practice: institutions should develop and implement specific procedures to address challenges that occur (whether consistently or irregularly) across various processes related to collaboration with international partners. These procedures should be integrated and institutionalised into existing research policies to enhance assurance and compliance across all international projects **(Case study 7: streamlining international payment processes).**

Research dissemination and impact

Policy - Promote fair authorship: develop and normalise equitable publication policies as a standard approach. This should be emphasised via institutional guidelines and should include equitability information such as defining and agreeing on authorship criteria, disseminating research findings in ways that are accessible and beneficial to local communities (e.g., translating findings into local languages), using culturally appropriate formats, data ownership, how to resolve authorship disputes, and acknowledging all contributions.

Policy - Collaborative repository policies: Develop clear guidelines on how publications should be deposited in open access repositories in collaborative research contexts, including information on how to access the same. Specify the roles and responsibilities of each partner in the publication process.

Table 6. Long-term goals: recommendations for HEI policies and practice

Thematic area	Recommendations
<p>Attitudes towards other cultures, peoples, and contexts</p>	<p>Policy - Consider comparative North/South research: prioritise activities that support visiting researchers from the Global South to come and interrogate UK challenges. This can support two-way knowledge exchange and decentre the ‘development gaze’ or Global North researchers addressing Global South challenges.</p> <p>Policy - Prioritise equitability in international cooperation: to transform cooperation culture with the Global South, HEI leaders need to buy in to the importance of embedding equitability in practice and processes. This should be demonstrated by clear actions such as investment in understanding different research norms and contexts; building awareness across HEI staff, researchers and research managers; reviewing existing ways of working; and developing policies and making adjustments collaboratively with partners.</p> <p>Practice and processes - Consider comparative North-South research: HEIs should prioritise activities that support visiting researchers from the Global South to come and interrogate UK challenges. This can support two-way knowledge exchange and decentre the ‘development gaze’ of Global North researchers addressing Global South challenges.</p> <p>Practice and processes - Prioritise equitability in international cooperation: To transform cooperation culture with the Global South, HEI leaders need to buy in to the importance of embedding equitability in practice and processes. Commitment should be demonstrated by clear actions such as investment in understanding different research norms and contexts by building awareness across HEI staff, researchers and research managers; reviewing existing ways of working and policies; and making adjustments collaboratively with partners.</p>
<p>Building and maintaining partnerships</p>	<p>Practice and processes - Invest in networks and relationship building: use institutional funding to invest in long-term research partnerships, for example, through networking and travel grants to develop relationships outside of project funding.</p> <p>Practice and processes - Address power imbalances in partnerships: as part of research development processes, and researcher and research management staff training, use power imbalance layers of the Africa Charter or The Equity Tool (EQT) for valuing Global Health Partnerships to assess power imbalances in research partnerships and identify areas for change.</p>

Research capacity strengthening

Policy - Integrate continuous learning as part of project lifecycle process: HEIs should regularly document and share successes and failures in research collaborations across research support teams, academics and Global South partners. This action helps to inform future policies, practices and strengthens capacity. Incorporating this into existing policies on research support can reinforce the practice.

Research dissemination and impact

Policy - Monitor and evaluate compliance and experiences: Establish mechanisms to monitor and evaluate compliance with data management policies, including gathering feedback from Global South partners. This should be in the form of regular reviews to identify areas for improvement and ensure that policies are being effectively implemented.

Policy - Implement standardised protocols: Implement standardised data management protocols that can be adapted to different contexts. This includes using common data formats, metadata standards, and data sharing agreements that ensure compatibility and compliance across UK and Global South partner institutions.

The results from this analysis indicate that UK funder and HEI policies partially address recommendations for equitable international research collaborations prescribed in the four guidance documents, but have significant gaps in supporting Global South leadership, research capacity strengthening, and due diligence. Where guidance exists, there remain significant challenges to translate recommendations into practice; funders and UK HEIs need further support to integrate equitable partnership principles into their policies and processes.

Key drivers for systemic change will require targeted actions in areas such as achieving consensus on the dimensions of equitability, securing leadership buy-in, incentivising HEIs to prioritise equity, promoting learning and sharing of good practices, and providing resources for HEIs to implement changes. A sector-wide approach is essential to foster truly equitable partnerships, ensuring fair sharing of research benefits and valuing all voices.

1 Introduction

Equitable international research collaborations are integral to addressing global challenges and ensuring mutual benefits. These collaborations not only advance scientific knowledge but also strengthen the global research ecosystem. Equity in research partnerships has been a concern for those working on international collaboration for decades. However, the topic has recently garnered further scrutiny amongst researchers, research funders and HEIs. UK research funders have committed to supporting equitable partnerships between UK and Low- and Middle-income country (LMIC, also referred throughout this report as Global South) research teams; they have shared their principles for equitable partnerships¹. Progress has been bolstered by a plethora of guidance documents and statements². However, a major challenge with existing guidance is their focus at the project-level. More recent initiatives have recognised that systems-level change is needed to support a more equitable global research system that ultimately reduces the resource and power imbalances that currently inhibit equity in research relationships (Ordóñez Llanos *et al.*, 2024).

Existing work on equitable partnerships has produced good evidence on how the current research system inhibits equitable collaboration (Fransman *et al.*, 2019; Grieve and Mitchell, 2020; Fekadu *et al.*, 2021; Aboderin *et al.*, 2023). However, as research funders and HEIs themselves acknowledge, it has

been hard to move from broad acceptance on the principles of equitable partnerships to changing policy and practice to create a more enabling environment so that equity in international research collaborations can flourish.

As part of its own commitment to implement equitable partnership principles the British Academy commissioned Scientia Scripta to conduct this policy analysis to understand and evidence how UK funder and HEI policies and terms and conditions enhance or inhibit equitable international research collaborations in the context of Official Development Assistance (ODA). As part of this work, the British Academy asked the research team to review four recent equitable partnerships guidance documents and assess the extent to which a sample of UK funders and HEI policies and terms and conditions documents are complying with their recommendations. The four guidance documents reviewed were:

- Africa Charter for Transformative Research Collaborations;
- Cape Town Statement on Fostering Research Integrity through Fairness and Equity;
- Four Approaches to Supporting Equitable Partnerships; and
- Envisioning an Equitable Future for Research across the North-South Divide.

¹ For example, National Institute of Health Research's (NIHR) equitable partnerships guide: <https://www.nihr.ac.uk/equitable-partnerships-guide> and the British Academy's workshop series and conference bringing stakeholders together to discuss equitable partnerships: <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/international/equitable-partnership-in-international-collaboration/>

² KPFE's Guide for Transboundary Research Partnerships: https://kfpe.scnat.ch/en/11_principles_7_questions. ACU's Equitable Research Partnerships Toolkit: <https://www.acu.ac.uk/our-work/projects-and-programmes/equitable-research-partnerships-toolkit/>

This report presents the findings of this policy analysis alongside recommendations for quick wins and long-term goals. These recommendations are informed by the gaps, barriers and enablers identified in the policy analysis, interviews with funders, workshops with HEIs, and a survey of Global South partners. These recommendations aim to support the British Academy, other funders and UK HEIs to advance their implementation of policies and practices that enable equitable international research

collaborations. Although this policy analysis has focused on the ODA context and partnerships between the UK and the Global South, the equitable research partnerships agenda is supportive of any research collaboration where there are power and resource imbalances. Therefore, changes made to funder and HEI practices to enhance equity are also likely to support other forms of academic collaboration, for example with civil society organisations or communities.

1.1 Methodology

To address the British Academy's objectives the research methodology was guided by the following research questions:

RQ1 What are the main recommendations at funder and HEI-level for supporting equitable international research collaboration within the listed initiatives³?

RQ2a What are the enablers and barriers to equitable international research collaboration within UK funder policies, terms and conditions?

RQ2b To what extent are UK funders complying with existing recommendations on equitable international research collaboration?

RQ3a What are the enablers and barriers to equitable international research collaboration within UK HEI policies?

RQ3b To what extent are UK universities complying with existing recommendations on equitable international research collaboration?

The research team sampled policies, terms and conditions from five funders (Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC),





British Academy, Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC), UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), and Wellcome) and five UK HEIs (anonymised). For each funder and HEI, a corpus of policy documents was put together (see Annex 7). These policy documents were then reviewed against a matrix developed from the recommendations contained within the four guidance documents initially reviewed (see Annex 6). The research team looked for compliance with the recommendations and identified additional gaps, enablers and barriers to equity within the sampled policies. To add depth to the policy review and develop recommendations and case studies, the research team conducted interviews with funders (five participants); held two validation workshops with HEI stakeholders (29 participants); and surveyed Global South partners (16 participants) to understand their perspectives. Full methodological details are elaborated in Annex 8.

3 Africa Charter for Transformative Research Collaborations; Cape Town Statement on Fostering Research Integrity through Fairness and Equity; Four Approaches to Supporting Equitable Partnerships; and Envisioning an Equitable Future for Research across the North-South Divide.

2 Key findings

2.1 Analysis of equitable partnerships guidance documents

Recommendations were extracted from four equitable partnerships guidance documents, as follows:

































-  Africa Charter for Transformative Research Collaborations;
-  Cape Town Statement on Fostering Research Integrity through Fairness and Equity;
-  Four Approaches to Supporting Equitable Partnerships; and
-  Envisioning an Equitable Future for Research across the North-South Divide.

Similar recommendations were synthesised whilst all unique recommendations were

preserved. This led to a review matrix, containing 31 recommendations grouped into six thematic areas (see Annex 6.1, page 62):

Figure 2 shows the 11 recommendations out of the 31 extracted that were common across more than one guidance document. Only specific recommendations for change at funder or HEI level are included; broad visions for change were excluded from the analysis. Of the 11 recommendations that appeared in at least two guidance documents, only two were found in all four documents: 1) funding Global South researchers directly; and 2) Global South-led research priority setting.

Figure 2. Frequency of common recommendations across the four equitable research partnerships guidance documents

Thematic area	Common recommendation	Included in guidance documents?			
Attitudes towards other cultures, peoples and contexts	No common recommendations in this thematic area				
Building and maintaining partnerships	Two-stage funding calls				
LMIC leadership and ownership	Funding LMIC researchers directly				
	Engaging with Southern-led agendas for research priority setting				
	Addressing power imbalances in research planning				
Research capacity strengthening	Assess capacity of partners and develop measures to address and monitor				
	Support for research management capacity within project funding				
	Support individual, institutional and ecosystem levels of capacity				

cont...

Research budgets, contracts and due diligence	Fair indirect cost calculations	●	●	●	●
	Use standards to streamline contracting processes	●	●	●	●
Research dissemination and impact	Ensure appropriate benefit sharing through Fair authorship and data sharing policies and practices	●	●	●	●
	Budget for research dissemination and impact work including covering open-access fees and journal subscriptions	●	●	●	●

Key

Recommendations included in...

- Africa Charter for Transformative Research Collaborations
- Cape Town Statement on Fostering Research Integrity through Fairness and Equity
- Four Approaches to Supporting Equitable Partnerships
- Envisioning an Equitable Future for Research across the North-South Divide.

2.1.1 Key insights

- The guidance documents were created with different audiences in mind and operate at different levels. The Africa Charter and Cape Town Statement provide visions for a transformed research system and do not contain many detailed recommendations on how to implement change. *Four Approaches to Supporting Equitable Research Partnerships* offers many targeted recommendations while *Envisioning an Equitable Future* is a research report with some concrete recommendations for change.
- Many of the recommendations, especially those in the more vision-focused guidance documents, consider systemic change, requiring actions beyond an individual funder or HEI.
- Overall, the guidance documents do not contain many actionable recommendations that could be interpreted at the level of policy. Instead they suggest a desired state for the future of a more equitable research system. Whilst this is not an exhaustive study this piece of work provides a series of practical suggestions for key stakeholders to implement these recommendations with the aim to create a more enabling environment for equity in international collaboration.

2.2 Funder analysis and recommendations

This section provides a comprehensive overview of the findings from the analysis of the policies, terms and conditions (see 7.1) of five UK research funders (AHRC, British Academy, EPSRC, UKRI, and Wellcome). To provide further context, a qualitative analysis of the interviews with representatives of these funders has been included. The analysis highlights gaps, enablers, and barriers identified against the recommendations derived from the guidance documents.

The analysis revealed a complex landscape of enablers and barriers to equity in international research collaboration, particularly with the Global South. While there is a growing recognition of the importance of equitable partnerships, many policies still fall short in explicitly defining and supporting such collaborations. The UK funders have achieved significant progress in advancing ethical research standards, fostering capacity building, and establishing more inclusive and equitable partnerships. However, gaps remain in areas such as direct funding for Global South researchers, the alignment of ethical standards with local practices, and the administrative burdens imposed by stringent compliance requirements.

The compatibility ranking (Figure 2) highlights that UK funders' policies show the strongest alignment with the following identified recommendation themes: **Research dissemination and impact** (ranked 1st), **Building and maintaining partnerships** (2nd), and **Attitudes towards other cultures, peoples, and contexts** (3rd). There is moderate alignment with **Research capacity strengthening** (4th), and a significant drop in alignment

Figure 2. Overview on the level of funder policies' compatibility against the equitability recommendations.



with the theme **Research budgets, contracts and due diligence** (5th), and **Global South leadership and ownership** (ranked 6th). Notably, the poor alignment with this latter theme reflects persistent gaps in effective action to many areas including: directly funding Global South researchers and institutions; supporting Global South-led proposals; engaging with research agendas set by Global South stakeholders; addressing power asymmetries through co-leadership models; embedding mechanisms for equitable governance; and ensuring Global South perspectives inform funding decisions.

2.21 Key insights

1. Research dissemination and impact

Gaps

- **Lack of context-specific research engagement approaches:** funder guidance rarely requires or supports the development of engagement strategies tailored to local cultural, linguistic, or political contexts which limits uptake of research. More creative and inclusive dissemination methods (e.g., community forums, radio, local-language materials, or visual storytelling) can enhance research uptake among diverse audiences in the Global South.
- **Intellectual Property (IP) rules prioritise UK institutions:** Current frameworks often assign intellectual property rights to UK institutions, limiting equitable benefit-sharing with Global South partners. While open access is encouraged, expectations around sharing are not enforceable, and local IP management needs are often overlooked. This may constrain Global South institutions from using research outputs to support commercialisation, policy engagement, or development priorities. Such imbalances can perpetuate unequal control over knowledge and diminish the long-term value of collaboration for Global South partners.
- **Impact metrics skewed towards UK outcomes:** assessment of research impact is frequently framed through UK-based or global policy lenses, with little emphasis on measuring impact at the local or national level in Global South contexts. This can marginalise local relevance and reduce the

perceived value of Global South-led impact pathways.

Enablers

- **Promoting open access to research outputs:** Open access requirements, as promoted by funders such as Wellcome, enhance equitable access to research outputs and support global knowledge sharing.
- **Encouragement of inclusive dissemination practices:** Some funders are beginning to support context-specific and community-centred dissemination, although this is not yet widespread.

Barriers

- **Minimal integration of Global South partners in impact pathways:** policies often do not require the co-development of impact pathways or knowledge translation plans with Global South partners. This limits their ability to influence how findings are communicated and used locally, weakening ownership and the sustainability of research impact.
- **Lack of context-sensitive communication strategies:** Funder guidance rarely requires or supports the development of dissemination strategies that are tailored to local cultural, linguistic, or political contexts. This can result in outputs that are misaligned with the needs of Global South audiences, reducing uptake and impact.
- **Insufficient funding for dissemination activities:** dissemination is

often treated as an end-stage activity with limited allocation of funding. This can constrain meaningful engagement with non-academic stakeholders,

particularly in the Global South where additional resources may be needed for translation, localisation, or inclusive formats.

2. Building and maintaining partnerships

Gaps

- **Avoiding funding disruption:** there is little evidence that UK funders ensure funding continuity in the event of external disruptions, such as changes in government policies or ODA support. Many policies allow for awards to be terminated with minimal notice, which can lead to instability in research partnerships. If ODA funding is suddenly withdrawn, research projects can be terminated at short notice which impacts on long-term research relationships and trust.
- **Weak post-award partnership structures:** funder policies and grant conditions can contribute to the breakdown of collaboration after awards are made. Institutional agreements, shaped primarily by funder policies and requirements, frequently favour UK-based institutions, imposing disproportionate administrative and compliance burdens on Global South partners. These imbalances can undermine trust, strain relationships, and lead to reduced engagement from Global South institutions. For example, funders such as Wellcome require all award holders to comply with UK financial and regulatory standards, regardless of local context.

Enablers

- **Responsive approach to queries and tailored guidance:** a proactive

and open approach by funders can help Global South institutions navigate the funding process and successfully engage in research collaborations.

- **Encouragement of collaborative and co-designed proposals:** UK funders are increasingly encouraging the co-design of research proposals, which helps build a sense of shared ownership and responsibility among collaborators, particularly those from the Global South. The British Academy's scheme notes on ODA Research Management Capacity Strengthening for instance, encourage the co-design of research proposals and has resulted in more inclusive research projects.
- **Guidelines on collaboration with the Global South:** guidelines can encourage capacity building, knowledge exchange, and inclusion of local perspectives. Some funders like the British Academy have guidelines on collaboration with the Global South, which promote equitable partnerships and capacity building.
- **Policy commitment to Global South partnerships:** funders' commitment to Global South partnerships through their policies and guidelines can support equity in collaborations. For example, Wellcome's guidelines prioritise collaboration with the Global South, emphasising equitable partnerships, capacity building, and support for locally led research.

Barriers

- **Power asymmetries in partnerships:** funding mechanisms often reinforce unequal power dynamics, with UK institutions typically in the lead and Global South partners in subordinate roles. This limits genuine collaboration and mutual learning and reinforces a hierarchy of knowledge production.

“Over the past decade, we’ve emphasised the importance of equitable partnerships by incorporating them into scheme notes and assessment criteria. This emphasis has led to a noticeable change in the type of applications we receive. When I review applications, I see a significant shift towards more collaborative activities compared to before.”

- British Academy representative

3. University analysis and recommendations

Gaps

- **Linguistic diversity:** most funder policies stipulate that applications must be in English, yet they provide minimal or no support for translation costs. This can exclude non-English speaking researchers from the Global South who may not have the resources to translate documents or submit applications in English.
- **Ethical standards and frameworks:** ethical standards can be UK-centric, which can lead to misunderstandings or misalignment with local practices and norms. For example, the British Academy follows ethical standards that emphasise compliance with UK norms, such as the UKRI Research Ethics Framework. UK standards may not fully capture the cultural nuances of ethical research practices in the Global South, particularly when dealing with consent and indigenous knowledge, potentially leading to ethical friction or the exclusion of local practices.

Enablers

- **Encouragement of interdisciplinary and cross-cultural collaboration:** UK funders often support interdisciplinary programmes and South-North partnerships, which naturally bring together diverse perspectives and foster greater appreciation for different cultural, institutional, and research contexts.
- **Promotion of culturally sensitive practice:** emphasis on ethical research ensures respect for cultural and contextual differences, promoting responsible and fair practices that value diverse contributions. Wellcome’s ethical guidelines encourage culturally sensitive and locally relevant practices, allowing ethical frameworks to adapt to different contexts.
- **Support for participatory and community-engaged research:** Some funding schemes encourage co-production of knowledge and participatory approaches, which require researchers to engage meaningfully with local communities and

stakeholders—helping to build mutual respect and contextual awareness.

Barriers

- **Lack of focus on or neglect of local languages:** many funders do not consider the use of local languages in research contexts, potentially undermining the quality of research conducted in non-English-speaking regions. In many countries, research conducted in English may be less

accessible to local communities, diminishing the impact of the research.

- **Lack of cultural competency:** funders may have limited understanding of the socio-cultural, historical, and political contexts of the countries or communities they fund. This can result in inappropriate or ineffective programme design, implementation, or evaluation approaches that fail to resonate with or benefit local populations.

4, Research capacity strengthening

Gaps

- **Lack of specific policies on research capacity strengthening:** many UK funders do not have policies that explicitly support the development of research capacity in the Global South, nor do they prioritise training or knowledge transfer. Research funding may not include provisions for training researchers in the Global South or building local infrastructure.
- **Insufficient support for institutional capacity development:** funding schemes tend to focus on individual-level training (e.g., fellowships, workshops) while neglecting institutional capacity such as research governance systems, infrastructure, or administrative capabilities. This gap limits the sustainability of capacity gains and leaves institutions reliant on external support.
- **Lack of monitoring and evaluation of capacity outcomes:** UK funders rarely track or assess the impact of funded projects on research capacity. Without clear metrics, indicators or reporting requirements, there is limited

learning on how research investments contribute to strengthening Global South research ecosystems.

Enablers

- **Explicit capacity-strengthening support:** investment in training and skills development for Global South researchers and technical support can promote leadership roles within projects and ensure they are well managed. Wellcome's HR policies highlight investment in training and skills development for Global South researchers, empowering local talent and promoting leadership roles within projects.

Barriers

- **Limited flexibility for contextual capacity needs:** UK funders' policies often apply standardised templates or expectations that do not accommodate the specific capacity needs of Global South institutions. As a result, proposals may be assessed without due consideration of local priorities, institutional maturity, or systemic constraints.

- **Lack of dedicated budget lines or incentives:** funding calls often do not explicitly require or incentivise capacity-strengthening activities. Without dedicated budget lines or guidance, research teams may underprioritise training, mentorship, infrastructure development, or institutional strengthening, viewing these activities as peripheral rather than integral to project success.
- **Capacity strengthening framed as a one-way process:** there is often an implicit assumption that capacity strengthening involves transferring skills and knowledge from UK institutions to Global South partners. This overlooks mutual learning, undervalues Global South expertise, and fails to recognise the importance of co-developing approaches that are locally led and contextually relevant.

5. Research budgets, contracts, and due diligence

Gaps:

- **Lack of allowance for exchange rate fluctuation:** currency exchange rates can impact Global South partners if the local currency devalues against the British pound. Funder financial policies do not all include provisions for currency exchange rate fluctuations. For example, the British Academy does not provide explicit allowances for fluctuating exchange rates.

Enablers

- **Flexible funding and financial structures:** direct funding to Global South partners, advance payments, and flexible budgeting can help reduce

financial strain and support effective project management. These structures enable Global South institutions to allocate resources in line with local priorities and operational realities. For example, Wellcome's finance policies allow for flexible budgeting and expenditure tailored to partner contexts.

- **Accommodation of international payment terms:** flexibility in the timing of payments helps to accommodate project needs. Wellcome's guidelines acknowledge the impact of currency fluctuations, and they allow adjustments to budgets to reflect significant exchange rate changes, offering some financial stability for international partners.

Barriers

- **Onerous due diligence processes:** many UK funders impose stringent due diligence requirements that are ill-suited to many financial systems in the Global South. The Global South institutions may struggle with the extensive paperwork required for compliance, especially when they lack the administrative capacity to meet these standards. UKRI's due diligence

“Recently, UKRI has lifted the cap on how much funding can go to an LMIC partner (was initially 30%), with no limit set, left at the discretion of the UK partner. There's also been some changes in how AHRC runs some programmes, e.g., one of our recent programmes allowed up to 50% of the funding to go to the LMIC partner.”

- AHRC Representative

“One of the benefits of Wellcome is the funding itself is incredibly flexible. It's like, if you have the idea, if the idea is deemed as fundable, it's about what you can do with the money itself.”

-Wellcome representative

requires comprehensive risk assessments, covering financial stability, governance, and compliance with UK standards. This includes checking for anti-corruption measures and audit capabilities, which can be a barrier for smaller Global South institutions or those with less formalised compliance systems. While flexibility is welcomed, its benefit is limited if access is hindered by excessive compliance burdens.

- **Adherence to export controls and fraud prevention measures:** While these measures are essential for safeguarding the integrity of research funding, overly rigid interpretation or implementation can introduce excessive bureaucracy. This may delay funding disbursement or create

administrative hurdles for Global South partners, particularly those with limited capacity to navigate complex compliance systems. For example, UKRI's due diligence requirements include strict adherence to export controls and fraud prevention protocols, which, without contextual flexibility, may hinder collaboration and slow project initiation. The need to comply with these regulations often results in increased bureaucracy, which can delay funding disbursement or create unnecessary administrative hurdles for Global South partners. For example, UKRI's due diligence requirements include compliance with export controls and fraud prevention measures, which can increase bureaucracy and hinder flexibility.

- **Detailed financial management and compliance requirements:** The funders specify that award holders must submit financial reports that comply with UK financial standards, which can be difficult for some Global South partners without comparable administrative systems.

6. Global South leadership and ownership

Gaps

- **Limited engagement with Global South-led agendas:** there is limited inclusion of approaches for understanding Global South-led research priorities in UK funder policies. This often results in Global South needs and knowledge being sidelined. For example, a programme focused on climate change might fund research that addresses Global North perspectives on adaptation strategies, without considering the needs or existing knowledge in the Global South.

- **Restricted access to direct funding for Global South researchers:** many funders' policies restrict direct funding to Global South-based researchers and institutions, instead routing funds through UK institutions. This model limits the autonomy of Global South partners, as they often receive only a portion of the grant through sub-awards, with limited control over budgets or project management. The absence of direct funding mechanisms undermines Global South researchers' ability to lead research, shape agendas,

and build institutional capacity. This reinforces unequal power dynamics within partnerships. For example, in the UKRI policy covering international project co-leads, funding flows through the UK institution rather than going to the international partner directly.

Enablers

- **Growing support for direct funding to Global South partners:** some funders can provide direct funding to Global South partners, which empowers these institutions and researchers to lead projects, develop local solutions, and manage their budgets independently. Furthermore, some funders have lifted the cap on the amount of funding that can go to Global South partners, allowing for more flexibility in supporting these institutions. Wellcome's Collaborative Awards in Science guidelines state that funding is available for Global South institutions to be the lead applicant, demonstrating support for Global South-led initiatives.
- **Workshops and information sessions:** funders have begun offering practical workshops to help institutions in both the Global North and South navigate the complexities of international collaborations. For example, the British Academy has held workshops specifically aimed at addressing the challenges faced by Global South partners in research collaborations. The British Academy scheme notes include provisions for workshops and information sessions to support Global South partners.
- **Training and development:** HR policies advocate for training and development opportunities,

facilitating skills enhancement and empowering researchers in the Global South to take leadership roles. For example, Wellcome's HR policies highlight investment in training and skills development for Global South researchers, empowering local talent and promoting leadership roles within projects. The policies include provisions for capacity-building support for Global South researchers.

Barriers

- **Leadership requirements:** UK funder policies often favour UK-based researchers or institutions, limiting decision-making power for Global South partners. Several UK research funding schemes require that the lead applicant be based at a UK institution, which can centralise decision-making authority and disadvantage partners from the Global South. For example, EPSRC applicants must be employed by an eligible UK institution.
- **Centralised decision-making:** often remains with UK-based researchers or institutions, limiting the autonomy and leadership capacity of Global South partners. Wellcome's grant conditions specify that award holders must submit financial reports that comply with UK financial standards, which can be difficult for some Global South partners without comparable administrative systems.
- **Administrative and eligibility barriers:** complex application processes, eligibility criteria, and compliance requirements are often tailored to UK systems and capabilities. This creates hurdles for Global South institutions that may lack the same levels of administrative capacity or

infrastructure, effectively excluding them from leading roles.

- **Short-term and project-based funding models:** funding mechanisms typically support short-term projects with limited investment in institutional strengthening or long-term capacity building in the Global South. This restricts opportunities for sustained leadership, strategic autonomy, and the development of robust local research ecosystems.

The analysis reveals a complex and often contradictory landscape across UK funders' policies and practices when it comes to supporting equitable research partnerships with the Global South. While important strides have been made—particularly in promoting open access, encouraging co-designed proposals, and supporting cross-cultural collaboration—significant structural and procedural gaps persist. These include rigid administrative systems, limited direct funding mechanisms, and insufficient attention to local contexts, languages, and leadership.

Barriers such as power asymmetries,

“ We are trying to be realistic in we're not going to achieve this golden standard of equity within kind of a really short amount of time. This takes, you know, a while. There are different appetites towards changing policy and process across the organisation.

- UKRI Representative

narrow impact metrics, and inflexible compliance requirements continue to undermine efforts towards more inclusive and sustainable collaboration. Addressing these challenges will require a deliberate shift towards context-responsive, locally led, and mutually beneficial models of partnership that centre Global South priorities, capacities, and leadership. The findings underscore the need for UK funders to align operational practices with their stated commitments to equity, embedding these principles across all stages of the research funding lifecycle—from policy design to implementation and evaluation.

2.3 University analysis and recommendations

This section provides a comprehensive overview of the findings from the analysis conducted across various HEI policies (see 7.2). To provide further context, validation workshops were held with the participating universities and members from the Association for Research Managers and Administrators. Qualitative analysis of discussions from these workshops has been included. The analysis highlights emergent gaps, enablers, and barriers identified against the recommendations derived from the guidance documents.

Notably, the document analysis revealed that in many instances, existing policies did not specifically address areas that could significantly enhance equitability within ODA-related research cooperation, a key point validated in both workshops. By their nature, existing policies are generalist and often lack specific detail relevant to working with partners from the Global South. This is influenced by various factors such as:

- **Existing focus of international research cooperation:** the extent to which institutions are involved in

research collaborations with partners from the Global South as opposed to those from the Global North significantly affects the extent to which guidance documents, policies, and practices support equitability. Institutions with more partnerships from these regions had policies most aligned with the recommendations.

- **Institutional priorities and drivers:** Leadership buy-in and focus on equitability or fair research cooperation emerged as a key driver for institutions to develop policies and practice that support equitability. This was also evident in how different institutions interpreted funder policies and embedded them into their practices. In instances where there was considerable interest to accommodate and consider Global South contexts, institutions took pro-active approaches to find a consensus between funder policies and their own.

A combined analysis across all policies from the five participating HEIs assessed their alignment to the identified recommendation themes from the four guidance documents analysed. Strongest alignment was with the theme on Research dissemination and impact. Least alignment was related to the theme Global South leadership and ownership. It is worth mentioning that the subcategories of this latter theme are: funding Global South researchers

and Global South-led proposals directly; engaging with Global South-led agendas for research priority setting; addressing power imbalances in research planning (e.g., through co-leadership between the Global South and the UK); mechanisms for equitable governance; and ensuring funding decisions include Global South perspectives (e.g., through representation on review boards). Some of these subcategory recommendations fall out of the remit of HEIs.

Figure 3. Overview on the level of HEI policies' compatibility against the equitability recommendations.



The HEI policies were analysed on the extent to which they allow for input from their Global South partners around research planning, co-leadership and addressing any power imbalances. The results indicate the degree to which the UK HEI processes dominate, limiting the extent

“Funder policy always drives due diligence, finance and contract policies. We are always told that things must flow down to protect our HEI.”

- ARMA workshop participant

to which Global South partners can be equitably engaged in research planning and implementation.

From the two workshops, it emerged that many institutions aim to support equitability in practice, even where policy or guidance on contentious issues such as payment in advance does not exist or is not supported. The role of interrelationships

(e.g., between academics and research support staff, and between UK academics and their counterparts in the Global South) in addressing issues missed by policies was clearly a critical factor in supporting equity. As such, there is a considerable level of practice around equitability that takes place informally, especially within research support teams.

2.3.1 Key insights

1 Research dissemination and impact

Gaps

- **Lack of dedicated budgets for dissemination:** many institutions do not mandate that budget for dissemination and impact work is included in the initial project planning and budgeting stages (e.g., activities such as open access publishing, conference presentations, community engagement). University E and University B from the analysis show some evidence of compliance, but this is limited.

Enablers

- **Coverage of open access fees:** to promote the dissemination of research findings and ensure that publicly funded research is accessible to all, a policy that covers fees for open access publishing and/or journal subscriptions is crucial (e.g., University E publication policy). In the context of ODA-funded research, open access supports transparency and accountability in the use of public funds. Covering these costs also ensures that research publications are freely available online, thereby enhancing the visibility and scope for impact from international collaborative research.

- **Fair authorship policies:** some of the existing HEI policies clearly mandate inclusion of all contributors as authors, ensuring that every individual who has contributed to the research is appropriately recognised. This fosters a culture of inclusivity and collaboration, highlighting the importance of acknowledging the efforts of all team members, including community contributors. By recognising all contributors, an institution promotes a sense of shared ownership

“It is important to acknowledge everyone who has contributed to a piece of work or a publication. Be inclusive yet concise. As you are writing keep a note of all the people who have helped in any way. It may be appropriate to mention one or more of the following: field assistants, key respondents, institutions and communities who have contributed to the data collection.”

- Data Management Protocol (DMP), University B.

and responsibility for the research outcomes. This approach not only ensures compliance with ethical standards but also enhances the overall quality and integrity of the research process.

Barriers

- **Use of UK repositories:** policies mandating that all publications

be made available to the public via institutional open access repositories could act as a barrier to equity. Across analysed policies, it remains unclear how policies work in collaboration contexts, such as determining who gets to deposit the publication—the institution or the collaborating partner.

2 Attitudes towards other cultures, peoples, and contexts

Gaps

- **Centring the languages of the regions where research is conducted:** analysed policies fail to explicitly address the need to decentre the ‘development gaze’ of research. While some of the institutions mention a focus on cross-disciplinary collaborations that address societal problems in the context of their global collaboration, there is a lack of substantial evidence showing active efforts to shift the focus away from a Global North-centred perspective in such work.
- **Actively considering indigenous and community researchers:** there was an absence of formal recognition of indigenous and community researchers (e.g., within policies on research ethics and integrity) which can lead to the exploitation of indigenous knowledge and negative impact on local communities. This gap highlights the need for institutions to develop and implement policies (or include guidance) that recognises and values the contributions of local researchers and indigenous communities, fostering more equitable and impactful research partnerships.

Enablers

- **Inclusive approach to language:** a key enabler found in policies was the prioritisation of inclusivity and the accurate representation of local contexts. A notable example is the data management protocol from one of the participating universities (University B), which mandates that qualitative data be uploaded in the language in which it is collected. This approach aligns with the HEI’s aspiration to decolonise research, recognising the critical role of language in ensuring that research is both inclusive and reflective of the local context. By preserving the original language of the data, this policy not only honours the cultural and linguistic diversity of research subjects but also enhances the authenticity and integrity of the research findings.
- **Strategic focus on global and contextual relevance in research:** institutions that have strategically prioritised global cooperation were most likely to place emphasis on producing learning and scholarship that addresses global challenges while respecting local contexts and maintaining relevance and benefit

to both the Global North and South. University D's Global Engagement Strategy for instance encapsulates this vision by advocating for scholarship that transcends boundaries and tackles issues of global significance and impact.

Barriers

- **Language barriers:** when managing projects with multiple overseas partners, particularly in the Global South, language differences were

mentioned as a source of significant challenges. These barriers arise from variations in fluency (of English) among project members, which can lead to misunderstandings, miscommunications, and delays. Recognising and acknowledging these language barriers through open discussions, embedding policies which incorporate assessing partner capacities as part of pre-and post-award processes is crucial for ensuring effective collaboration.

3 Building and maintaining partnerships

Gaps

- **Formalised processes for supporting co-development:** many institutions lack formalised processes for co-developing collaboration agreements. The main challenge especially lies in the lack of guidance for Global South partners in interpreting and forming understanding of collaborative agreements and requirements. Recognising that many of these are UK-centric and understood among UK funders and UK HEIs, Global South partners find themselves at a disadvantage both in terms of knowledge and capacity to respond to some of the demands—or even challenge them.

“ There are some common barriers you may encounter when managing a project with multiple overseas partners in LMICs. Language differences: there may be differences in fluency among project members or language barriers to overcome.”

–Participating university workshop attendee

Enablers

- **Advocacy for collaborative decision-making:** examples from the analysis include policies that advocate for collaborative approaches to decision-making, although these were more common across issues related to authorship than project management. Additionally, some policies advocated for early and transparent

communication and maintaining written records to avoid misunderstandings and disputes. This approach helps to ensure that all partners are involved in decision-making processes and that their contributions are recognised and valued. However, for such advocacy to be effective, there is a need to formalise these processes (see gap analysis above).

Barriers

- **Dedicated support for collaborative decision-making:** research support

teams face the barrier of balancing their own workloads and adhering to institutional and funder policies while still maintaining trust with their Global South partners. These teams need resources that allow them to extend more support to Global South partners during pre- and post-award processes. They also need to co-develop with their Global South partners clear

guidance documents and processes that can facilitate better cooperation. Without clear guidelines and support, Global South applicants may struggle to navigate the funding process and secure the resources they need to participate in research collaborations. This can cause delays in kicking-off funded projects.

4 Research budgets, contracts, and due diligence

Gaps

- **Insufficient policies on currency fluctuations:** there is limited evidence of policies addressing currency fluctuations and using standards to streamline contracting processes beyond a few institutions.
- **Consistent guidance:** there is no consistent guidance on how to address regularly emerging problems, especially regarding challenges related to due diligence processes. The absence of detailed, context-specific procedures means that research support teams rely on ad hoc solutions to address the unique challenges and requirements of Global South partnerships. Instead of having a systematic and standardised approach, each situation is handled on a case-by-case basis, which can lead to inconsistencies and inefficiencies. This ad hoc approach can also result in varying levels of support and effectiveness, depending on the experience and knowledge of the individuals involved.

Enablers

- **Currency buffers in project budgets:** to mitigate the financial risks associated with currency fluctuations in international research collaborations, it is essential to implement strategies that provide a buffer against potential exchange rate volatility. One effective approach is to apply a currency buffer to project budgets. This involves adding a percentage buffer to the mid-rate exchange rate on the day of conversion to account for possible fluctuations. For example, University E has provided advice on applying a 10% currency buffer when converting to currencies other than the Euro or US Dollar. This precaution helps ensure that the project budget remains stable despite changes in exchange rates, protects the financial integrity of the project and fosters transparent communication between collaborating partners.

Barriers

- **Inflexible payment terms:** many institutions do not provide flexible

payment terms or have policies that permit payment in advance. In instances where this has been applied, it is on a case-by-case basis or restricted to specific partners.

“By exception, and with due justification, advance payment (i.e. payment in advance of activity) can be agreed when underwritten by the relevant Head of Department. Each request will be assessed on a case-by-case basis. Generally, advance payments should only be made to not-for-profit organisations and may be tied to specific project milestones or deliverables.”

–Financial Regulations 2024, University E

- **Misalignment of institutional policies with Global South research contexts:** with funders and institutions often having specific terms and conditions that are tailored to partnerships with established academic institutions (e.g., from the Global North), there is a barrier for Global South academics to incorporate contextual models of research collaboration into such agreements. When research projects in the Global South are managed through NGOs for instance, funders may require extra verification steps to ensure compliance with their guidelines. This can result in prolonged approval times, increased administrative burden, and potential disruptions to the research timeline. The lack of understanding and flexibility in accommodating the specific operational contexts of Global South countries and institutions can thus hinder the efficiency and effectiveness of research collaborations.

“As I mentioned orally - awareness high, incentives to change low. Too much division between how research and professional services staff operate and are incentivised - what is the reward for university legal or finance teams in stripping back layers of guidance or policy to lower barriers to access? Arguably nil at present. The temptation is always to add, rather than take away, to all of the barriers you mentioned in collaborating - unmaking that system is really hard.”

–ARMA workshop participant.

- **Disparity in awareness and incentives:** disparity in awareness on equity and incentives among academic colleagues and those in professional support roles (particularly in finance and contracts teams) was commonly cited in the validation workshops. While academic staff may be more attuned to the nuances and importance of equitable partnerships, professional staff often view issues related to Global South collaborations as anomalies. This is because Global South collaborations constitute a relatively small portion of their overall workload. Consequently, the challenges and issues that arise in these collaborations are not seen as systemic problems that need addressing but rather as isolated incidents. This lack of systemic recognition and the differing incentives between these groups can hinder the

effective implementation and support of equitable international research

partnerships.

5 Research capacity strengthening

Gaps

- **Comprehensive support for capacity building:** many institutions do not address discrepancies in research management support or document successes and failures. In some instances, there was indication of support in capacitating the UK institutions research management staff, especially in project management, which was not evident as being extended to Global South partners. Additionally, where training on various processes was supported, it was primarily one-sided and focused on the UK research support staff. For instance, one HEI due diligence and assurance policy includes provision for training, support and guidance on the institution's expectations and completion process of due diligence and assurance for their own staff.

Enablers

- **Continuous learning:** findings from the workshop indicate that some

“ Depending on the size, scale and complexity of your project, and with increasing funder obligations for [University E] ... to manage Third Party relationships, some full or part-time professional support throughout the duration of the project is highly advisable.”

– University E Policy.

HEIs have adopted and put in place measures to build capacity for research support teams in their partner institutions by providing detailed guidance and maintaining regular communication, following assessment and learning from previous collaborative projects. This has included providing detailed step-by-step guidance and regular presentations to partners, ensuring they understand both funder and HEI processes and requirements.

6 Global South leadership and ownership

Gaps

- **Failure to address power imbalances in policies:** many institutions do not address power imbalances in their policies, which are primarily generalist in nature. They fail to provide clear guidelines on how to

recognise power imbalances (e.g., in decision-making, conflict resolution, etc.) and how to manage power dynamics. This gap can result in prioritising the needs and perspectives of the UK institution across various functions, while neglecting those of their Global South partners.

Enablers

- Ensuring inclusive authorship from project inception: authorship policies are crucial for fostering inclusive research environments. By being attentive to the fair recognition of all research contributors—especially those who might be marginalised such as early career researchers, collaborators from low-income regions, and women—these policies can promote equitable collaboration. This approach ensures that all participants’ contributions are properly acknowledged from the outset.

Barriers

- **Dominance of UK processes:** across policies, there was an expectation that

“All researchers should consider authorship at an early stage of the project and be mindful of groups that may be marginalised in authorship attributions (e.g., early career researchers, collaborators from low-income countries, women).”

University C

all collaborators follow the procedures established by the lead institution, often leading to an imbalance in collaborative efforts. This was particularly evident when UK HEIs acted as lead partners. For example, in due diligence processes, collaborators were expected to adhere to the lead institution’s own procedures.

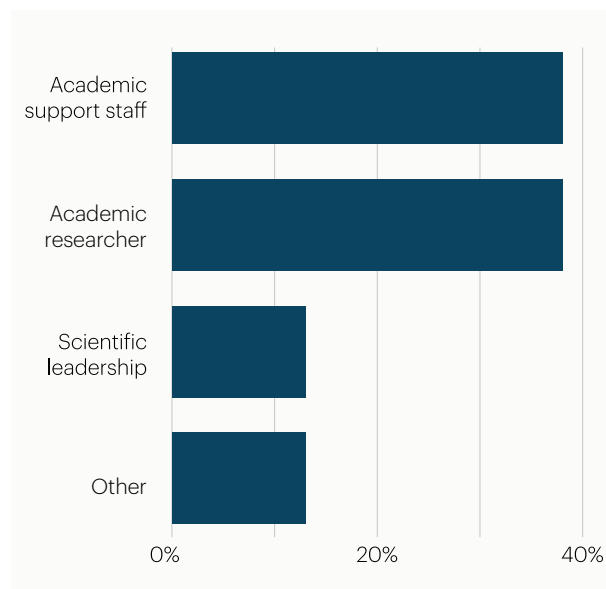
2.4 Global South survey

The survey was conducted among Global South research partners of UK universities participating in this policy analysis. Each institution was tasked with identifying 5 partners and inviting them to complete the online questionnaire. The survey received responses from 16 participants, who held various roles within their institutions, including academic support staff, researchers, and senior leadership. Respondents provided insights based on their experiences with single or multiple projects, and in some cases, on behalf of their entire institution. Respondents reported having anywhere between one and more than 10 UK partners.

2.4.1 Key insights

Responses from the quantitative questions indicated varying levels of perception on how well UK institutions adhere to

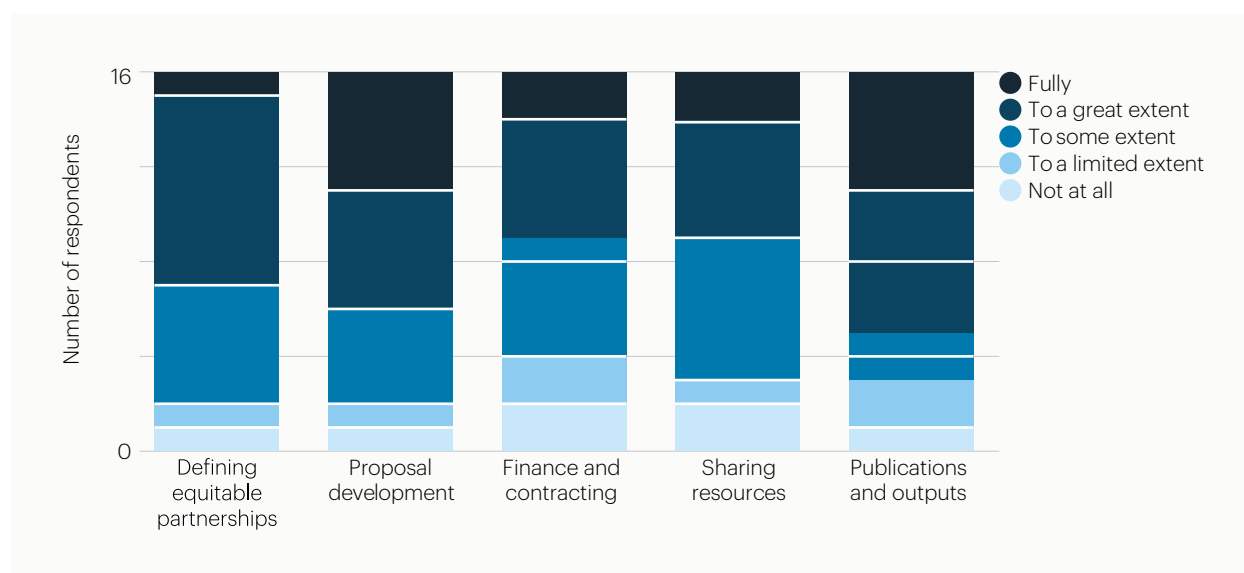
Figure 4. Roles held by respondents to the survey (percentage of total respondents)



recommendations and principles of equitability, and experiences across various functions that govern research collaboration. Participants were asked to respond to questions on adherence to equitable principles, inclusion in proposal development, finance and contracting processes, sharing of resource and publication outputs. While not statistically robust, the responses provided some basic information on the experiences of the specific respondents. The questions included:

- **Equitable partnerships:** defining equitable partnerships as those where there is mutual respect, shared decision-making, transparency, benefits for all partners and equal value placed on each partner’s contribution, to what extent do the UK universities you collaborate with adhere to the principles of equitable partnerships?
- **Proposal development:** to what extent do UK universities engage with local contexts, needs, and priorities when designing research projects with you?
- **Finance and contracting:** in your experience, to what extent do UK universities’ contracting and due diligence processes support collaboration?
- **Sharing resources:** to what extent do UK universities ensure fair allocation of resources (e.g., funding, equipment, or capacity-building opportunities) in research collaborations?
- **Publications and outputs:** to what extent do UK universities adequately recognise and value contributions of partners in research outputs, such as authorship and intellectual property rights?

Figure 5. Clustered graph indicating responses on the five questions on adherence to equitable principles



They were also asked to provide examples, if any, of ways in which UK universities support capacity strengthening. Examples such as through training, infrastructure development, and mentorship (some pairing

students with local and UK-based mentors, providing opportunities for exchange visits, and facilitating access to modern facilities and resources) were given. The effectiveness of these efforts was rated highly by some

respondents, while others felt there was room for improvement.

On monitoring and evaluation in collaborative projects, awareness of mechanisms to assess the equity of partnerships varied. Some respondents were aware of effective mechanisms, while others were not aware of any. Of those who cited awareness, the examples provided were primarily at funding application phase (requirements by some funders to provide statements on how the projects have considered equitability). The effectiveness of these mechanisms was however not articulated. It was also stated that mechanisms for assessing equitability should typically be embedded in contracting agreements, e.g provisions on publications, intellectual property, and other collaborative terms.

The qualitative data provided more nuance and context to the responses and highlighted key areas where Global South partners experience inequity in practice and policy.

Research capacity strengthening

- **Systemic and structural issues:** a significant concern raised was the ineffectiveness of capacity strengthening when it is approached at an individual level rather than addressing systemic and structural issues.
- **Reciprocal capacity-building model:** survey respondents consistently highlighted the importance of a two-way exchange as the most effective

“Capacity strengthening is often ineffective because it is an individual approach to systemic and/or structural issues.”

—survey respondent

means for UK institutions to support research capacity. Respondents advocated for a shift from a one-directional capacity-building model to a more reciprocal approach. This involves recognising the expertise and contextual knowledge of Global South partners, fostering co-learning opportunities, and ensuring that training, mentorship, and research exchanges benefit both sides equally.

“Shift from a one-directional capacity-building model to a more reciprocal approach, where both UK and southern institutions actively learn from each other.”

—survey respondent

Mechanisms for assessing equity

- **Embedding equitability in contractual mechanisms:** the mechanisms in place to assess the equity of partnerships with UK HEIs are typically embedded in contracting agreements. These may include provisions on publications, intellectual property, and other collaborative terms. However, it was noted that their effectiveness depends on the extent to which all parties understand, prioritise, and actively implement them.

“Equity in partnerships is only achieved when there is a shared commitment to upholding these mechanisms in practice.”

—survey respondent

- **Monitoring and evaluation:** respondents called for periodic monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of partnership equity in international research projects. This would allow for corrective measures to be undertaken to improve collaboration between Global North and South partners. Some respondents mentioned that funders require statements on how projects support equitable partnerships, which can help in assessing equity. However, it is not clear how these sections in funding applications are currently assessed.

Need for long-term thinking

- **Sustained partnerships:** respondents highlighted the need for mechanisms to ensure that partnerships remain in place with or without funding and that efforts are made to sustain relationships.

“The partnerships are based on grant funding and once the funding runs out the relationship ends. We need a mechanism to ensure that the partnerships are in place with or without funding.”

—survey respondent

“UK universities that engage in sustained partnerships rather than short-term, project-based collaborations tend to foster stronger relationships, trust, and meaningful capacity exchange. These long-term engagements create opportunities for joint grant applications, continuous mentorship, and shared infrastructure development, ultimately leading to more equitable and impactful research collaborations.”

—survey respondent

Factors supporting equity

- **Personal and professional relationships:** equitable research collaborations were seen as primarily being fostered through strong existing personal and professional connections with UK colleagues, rather than being driven by formal policies.

“Equitable research collaborations are largely achieved through excellent personal/professional relationships already in place with UK colleagues.”

— survey respondent

- **Transparency and fair distribution:** transparency and fair distribution of funding resources, along with clear authorship guidelines for the dissemination of research findings, were identified as critical factors supporting equity in partnerships.
- **Effective communication:** effective communication and institutional partnership empowerment were also noted as important factors. Regular meetings, clear communication channels, and joint decision-making processes contribute to more equitable collaborations.

Challenges experienced when partnering with UK institutions

- **Decision-making power:** a key challenge in collaborating with UK HEIs is the imbalance in decision-making power. UK institutions often take the lead in setting research agendas, managing funds, and defining project priorities, which limits the

autonomy of Global South partners. Differences in institutional priorities can also create misalignment, as UK HEIs may focus on academic outputs and funder requirements rather than the local impact goals of Global South institutions.

- **Financial reporting and agreements:** respondents highlighted challenges with financial reporting and agreements. The detailed financial reporting requirements were described as time-consuming, and the funding mechanisms often reinforce the power imbalance, with UK institutions serving as the lead entity.

“We were tasked to provide details about each and every expenditure which was time-consuming. Despite this we had to undergo a detailed audit process after the grant close out where we again had to provide details about particular transactions. The salary that were given to the local faculty was extremely little compared to the time they put in yet the salary levels at our institutions are extremely low.”

–survey respondent

- **Resource allocation:** respondents noted that inequity is sometimes driven by strict funding caps placed on their institutions in collaborative projects (e.g., some funders only allow 30–50% of overall budgets to be allocated to Global South partners), which can adversely affect project ownership, longevity, and implementation.

“Project-wise, only 30 percent of project budgets are allocated to the South. True equal partnerships mean 50/50.”

–survey respondent

- **Due diligence processes:** the repeated completion of due diligence exercises was also cited as a challenge, and especially where institutions have multiple UK partners. Respondents expressed frustration with the redundancy of these processes and called for greater recognition of existing standards, such as those provided by the Global Grant Community (GFGP – see 6, page 61). Though given as an example, adoption of such standards should be assessed against cost, funding mechanisms and how well they align to both funder and institutional risk appetites across the research and innovation landscape.
- **Institutional practices:** negative experiences around institutional practices and bureaucratic processes were seen as causing delays in project implementation and creating additional challenges.
- **Development gaze:** there were also concerns about the neo-colonial undertones (even among proponents of decolonising knowledge/access/etc) in some partnerships, where UK institutions may implicitly or explicitly dominate the collaboration.

3 Recommendations

Changes to policy can support a more enabling environment for equity in research collaboration but it is only one lever of change. There also needs to be institutional prioritisation and high-level leadership to drive culture change for policy to support practices and processes that enhance equity in international collaboration. These efforts will ensure pockets of good practice within

the sector are mainstreamed into standard institutional approaches.

This section contains sector-level recommendations and outlines quick wins and long-term goals for changes to policy, processes and practice that can enhance equity within the six domains of change this review has identified.

3.1 Sector level recommendations

A concordat outlining shared expectations to mainstream equity in international collaboration

There is a need for coordination across the research system to ensure a coherent approach to implementing changes that support equity in international collaboration. This action will also provide clarity for Global South institutions and avoid them having to navigate the different approaches of different funders and HEIs. A concordat, which sets out agreed expectations for the conditions under which research and innovation happen⁴, could be a useful mechanism for supporting a systems-wide shift and creating an enabling environment and incentive structure for individual institutions to make policy and practice changes. For it to be effective, a concordat would require wide representation and co-development across funders and HEIs from both the Global North and South. The concordat could possibly be hosted within an existing mechanism such as the UK Research Integrity Office (UKRIO) or Vitae.

Building awareness of the importance of equity in international collaboration

and the benefits of equity for all parties

Funder and HEIs interviewees acknowledged that awareness raising on the value and importance of equity in partnerships was needed to drive institutional change. This action would involve bringing the equitable partnerships conversation to new audiences including those who are not directly involved in Global South research collaboration. It would be necessary to develop clear messaging around the benefits of supporting equity in terms of enhancing research excellence and reaching new types of international collaborators. Cooperation with organisations such as ARMA UK and Vitae to facilitate targeted activities is key. Practical steps to advance this recommendation include:

- **Training programmes for research leaders and research support teams** on the context and requirements for Global South partnerships, as well as the benefits of equity around mutual knowledge exchange and a global perspective that prioritising international collaboration can bring.

⁴ Universities UK, Research and Innovation – Concordats and Agreements <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/topics/research-and-innovation/concordats-and-agreements>

- **Creating a repository of knowledge and guidance** that is accessible across institutions, to document and share best practices on successful approaches to supporting equity in collaboration with the Global South. This can help standardise and improve practice as those with less experience working in this space can draw on the knowledge of institutions with extensive experience and institutional knowledge.
- **Consideration of different data management needs** is key to addressing equity challenges posed by the diverse rules across national and institutional settings. Such considerations should begin with building awareness of data management processes in different contexts and how they can be reconciled equitably within collaborative research. This action should be followed by its inclusion within data management policies across funder and institutional policies.
- **Showcasing examples of policy and process changes** to address the disparity in awareness and incentives between academic and professional staff, including the lack of knowledge on best practice across the research and innovation landscape. As part of targeted action in this area, funders should support a showcase of pilot projects that have successfully revised policies to support equitable international research partnerships. These initiatives will serve as models for systemic change.

Strategy and high-level leadership to support equity in international collaboration

For funders, there are competing agendas

and a lack of a coordinated view on what equity in partnership means in practice. For HEIs, there are institutional barriers to change especially when collaboration with the Global South is a small part of a much wider research profile. However, when equity in international collaboration forms part of organisational strategy or a wider approach towards international engagement this can create the incentives and rationale for change.

Monitoring and evaluation of equity across funders and institutions

To advance equitable partnerships, it is essential for funders and HEIs to establish and embed accountability mechanisms within their policies. While current efforts focus on sensitisation through dialogue and guideline development, there is a critical need to integrate these principles into institutional and system-level practices. Specifically, funders should mandate that researchers not only demonstrate equitability within their projects but also engage in follow-up activities to monitor and evaluate the application and impact of these principles. This action will ensure that equitable partnerships are systematically supported, and their effectiveness is continually assessed.

Consistent review of policies, terms and conditions across the sector

To ensure policies, terms, and conditions remain relevant and effective, the sector should establish a regular review cycle (for instance every 2–3 years), supported by a dedicated and representative review committee/working group. The review process should incorporate evidence-based practices from across different funders and HEIs who are actively embedding equitability within institutional policies and practices.

Review longevity of funding mechanisms

Short-term and project-based funding models limit capacity development possibilities in the Global South. Lessons need to be learned from long-term funding approaches

(e.g., the Medical Research Council's (MRC) long-term support for research units based in the Global South, and Wellcome's major international programmes) to inform best practice in funding approaches⁵.

3.2 Funders

3.2.1 Changes to policies

Quick Wins

1. Attitudes towards other people, cultures, and contexts

- **Expand allowable costs to support language diversity:** allocate and allow flexibility in funding to support costs related to project needs associated with language diversity. This should include funds for professional translation services (both written and spoken communication), and translating research outputs into multiple languages to ensure accessibility and inclusivity. The support should extend beyond researchers to incorporate research support staff.

2. Building and maintaining partnerships

- **Assess equity as funding criteria:** the assessment of partnership equity in grant applications should be a prerequisite for funding. This action should be accompanied by guidance for peer review committees on how to assess equity rigorously.
- **Build accountability mechanisms:** policies on research conduct should include a mechanism for research stakeholders to check or flag equity

concerns throughout the research process.

3. Global South leadership and ownership

- **Direct funding of Global South institutions:** funders should establish dedicated grant programmes aimed at Global South institutions and researchers. These programmes should address the unique challenges faced by the Global South and ensure that Global South researchers can lead projects based on locally defined priorities. Additionally, the programmes should include streamlined and accessible application procedures for Global South institutions, such as clear guidelines and support to reduce bureaucratic hurdles.

4. Research capacity strengthening

- **Require assessment of partner research capacities and plans for development:** require grantees to assess each partner's relative capacity and plans for sharing knowledge and resources. This action should look at both partner needs and strengths and

⁵ See UKCDR report on funding mechanisms for development impact: <https://ukcdr.org.uk/publication/funding-mechanisms-for-international-development-research-ukcdr-case-studies/>

should consider the research management and administration support available to each partner.

5. Research budgets, contracts and due diligence

- **Share due diligence:** funders need to find a way to share due diligence information to avoid duplicated efforts.

6. Research dissemination and impact

- **Promote fair authorship:** within researcher codes of conduct and guidance there should be clear expectations around fair authorship practices and crediting all collaborators. Beyond this, funders should implement mechanisms to monitor compliance with authorship policies, including periodic audits of published work and requiring detailed accounts on each contributor's role.

Long-term goals

1. Attitudes towards other people, cultures, and contexts

- **Support language diversity:** address different linguistic needs not just for research outputs but also provide guidelines or codes of conduct on the need for global research to consider the language in which knowledge is produced. This action could include codes of conduct on international collaboration and ethical processes that mandate research be conducted in the local language of the region where it is being carried out.

2. Global South leadership and ownership

- **Expand eligibility criteria:** eligibility criteria should be revised to accommodate the specific realities of Global South contexts. This action recognises that career trajectories often differ across regions due to varying local circumstances, and criteria need to be adjusted accordingly to ensure inclusivity and fairness.

3.2.2 Changes to practice and processes

Quick wins

1. Building and maintaining partnerships

- **Two-stage funding calls or networking grants:** these mechanisms support and resource partnership building processes, giving researchers time to co-develop research ideas and develop equitable ways of working.

- **Make it easier for Global South researchers to apply for funding:** where calls are open to Global South researchers, funders need to have processes in place that ensure wide awareness of calls beyond existing participant institutions. Actions could include sharing guidance on the process of applying for funding and what a successful application looks like.

Case Study 1: Wellcome's Committee observer initiative

Wellcome offers researchers the opportunity to observe its funding advisory committees. This initiative is aimed at researchers in the UK, Republic of Ireland, or low- and middle-income countries who plan to apply for Wellcome funding. Observers can gain insights into how grant applications are assessed, including the use of assessment criteria and the consideration of different application aspects. However, observers must not share sensitive information about the applications they observe. Applications to be a committee observer are open once a year for six weeks.

<https://wellcome.org/grant-funding/guidance/prepare-to-apply/apply-observe-Wellcome-funding-advisory-committee>.

2. Global South leadership and ownership

- **Establish advisory groups:** Global South advisory groups, or groups more specific to targeted funding contexts, can help to shape research priorities and application processes and support Global South applicants.

- **Share learning on direct funding:** funders should share learning on policy and processes to support direct funding to the Global South. People who have experience of direct funding can provide guidance to others.

Case Study 2: Including Global South researchers in decision-making

UKRI developed the UKRI International Development Peer Review College to review ODA funding opportunities to ensure Global South researchers and non-academics can contribute to decision-making. The college has 300 members, drawn from academic and non-academic backgrounds. At least 90% are from countries eligible to receive ODA. Members provide expert review of ODA research opportunities and support close working with expert reviewers from the Global South.

<https://www.ukri.org/apply-for-funding/how-we-make-decisions/international-development-peer-review-college/>

3. Research capacity strengthening

- **Invest in mentoring and research development support in the Global South:** initiatives that provide mentoring and research development support within the Global South can strengthen research capacity. This action

- supports the translation of eligibility for research funding into successful applications.
- **Directly fund research management capacity:** the inclusion of research management support as a direct cost in funding initiatives moves systems away from the current model of overheads. It

instead allocates specific funds within project budgets to cover the costs associated with research management activities. This approach promotes better resource allocation and accountability and enables partners to address North-South capacity discrepancies across research support teams.

4. **Research budgets, contracts and due diligence**

- **Support payments in advance:** funders should clearly communicate to

HEIs in their funding guidance notes or terms and conditions that advance payments, or initial funding, can be provided to Global South partners, provided certain criteria are met. Clear guidelines and transparent processes for advance payments would enhance trust and cooperation between funders, HEIs, and Global South partners. This action would provide clarity for institutions concerned with how such practices impact auditing outcomes.

Long-Term Goals

1. **Attitudes towards other people, cultures and contexts**

- **Invest in North-South research:** funders should support more research that addresses shared North-South challenges, allowing researchers from the Global South to analyse and interrogate UK/Global North problems and challenges as well as those in their own context. This would support
- **Address bias in funding application processes:** action is needed to consider how biases are built into funding review processes and to address how this can perpetuate inequity. Example solutions could include institutional and researcher blind reviews.

mutual learning and act to decentre the ‘development gaze’ of UK researchers addressing Global South problems.

Case study 3: Proactive approach to reduce inequity and bias in funding application processes

Funders should do additional work to reduce bias in how funding opportunities are shared, and applications are reviewed. The Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA) Toolkit aims to improve pre-award processes and reduce inequities. It includes checklists on simplifying funding structures, examples of how to improve application processes to reduce bias, and a checklist for how to support evaluators. Improving funder pre-award processes can help address biases against Global South researchers and research institutions.

<https://sfdora.org/2025/01/29/toolkit-to-improve-pre-award-processes-to-reduce-inequality/international-development-peer-review-college/>

2. Global South leadership and ownership

- **Early engagement on research priority setting:** funders should engage as early as possible with Global South partners when scoping research calls. Partnering with Global South-based funders or institutions can be a way to bring additional, relevant

expertise and knowledge that UK funders do not have.

- **Develop joint calls with Global South funders:** these types of partnerships can allow for dual language applications, joint ownership and ensure contextual and cultural awareness is built into funding calls.

3.3 Universities

3.3.1 Changes to policies

Quick Wins

1. Attitudes towards other people cultures and contexts

- **Support language diversity:** it is crucial for research plans and budgets to include provisions for addressing linguistic diversity. During project planning and budgeting, institutions should collaboratively identify areas in which funding for language needs (e.g., translation, extra administrative support, localisation of knowledge production processes and results dissemination) can be accommodated. Additionally, publication guidelines should require that findings be presented in the relevant local language.

with Global South partners. These guidelines should detail the roles and responsibilities of all parties involved, ensuring transparency and mutual understanding.

2. Global South leadership and ownership

- **Formalise processes for co-development:** HEIs should develop comprehensive guidelines that outline the steps and criteria for co-developing collaboration agreements

3. Research budgets, contracts and due diligence

- **Simplify due diligence:** UKRI/ARMA guidelines for due diligence are widely used but often partner organisations do not fit into the prescribed template. HEIs need to consider whether the types of documentation they are asking of partners is reasonable in their context. A mechanism to share due diligence information across UK HEIs would also avoid duplication (e.g., use of Good Financial Grant Practice)⁶.
- **Support payments in advance:** HEIs should develop processes that permit advance payments, if certain criteria are met, to support partners to start working and avoid them going into deficit.

6 The Good Financial Grant Practice (GFGP) (ARS 1651) is an international standard for financial management <https://www.globalgrantcommunity.com/standard>.

Case Study 4: Institutionalising advance payments to reduce barriers

The University of Glasgow (UoG) has had an advance payment policy in place since 2018, however there have been some inherent challenges:

- **Bureaucracy:** approval processes have created bottlenecks by flowing through a single level of authority.
- **Eligibility:** narrow eligibility criteria exclude some partners in genuine need of advance payments.
- **Complexity:** current payment and expenditure review processes are complicated and resource-intensive.

To address these problems, UoG took a collaborative approach to develop a new policy and Standard Operating Procedure (SOP). Priorities for the development of this new approach included:

- **Internal buy-in:** including consultation with various internal stakeholders, such as research support officers, heads of finance, academics, and senior managers.
- **Inclusion of Global South partners:** the university consulted external partners in Tanzania and Malawi to gather feedback.

How the process is ensuring compliance and transparency

- The advance payment process aligns with the standard P2P process, ensuring compliance with funder terms.
- The expenditure review process remains robust, with clear documentation of decision-making.
- Awareness of funder requirements underpins the approach, aligning with institutional risk appetite and UKRI Research Assurance principles.
- Ensuring documentation of each decision to articulate the rationale for decisions if queries arise.

Further information and a simplified SOP can be obtained by contacting finance-research-assurance@glasgow.ac.uk

4. Research dissemination and impact

- **Promote fair authorship:** HEIs should develop and normalise equitable publication policies as standard. This should be emphasised in institutional guidelines and should include information on authorship equitability criteria, and approaches

to disseminating research findings in ways that are accessible and beneficial to local communities (e.g., translating findings into local languages), using culturally appropriate formats, data ownership, how to resolve authorship disputes, and acknowledging all contributions.

- **Collaborative repository policies:** Develop clear guidelines on how publications should be deposited in open access repositories in collaborative

research contexts, including information on how to access the same. Specify the roles and responsibilities of each partner in the publication process.

Long-term goals

1. Research capacity strengthening

- **Integrate continuous learning as part of project lifecycle process:** HEIs should regularly document and share successes and failures in research collaborations across research support teams, academics and Global South partners. This action helps to inform future policies, practices and strengthens capacity. Incorporating this into existing policies on research support can reinforce the practice.

mechanisms to monitor and evaluate compliance with data management policies, including gathering feedback from Global South partners. This should be in the form of regular reviews to identify areas for improvement and ensure that policies are being effectively implemented.

- **Implement standardised protocols:** implement standardised data management protocols that can be adapted to different contexts. This includes using common data formats, metadata standards, and data sharing agreements that ensure compatibility and compliance across UK and Global South partner institutions.

2. Research dissemination and impact

- **Monitor and evaluate compliance and experiences:** establish

3.3.2 Changes to practice and processes

Quick Wins

1. Building and maintaining partnerships

- **Gather feedback and input from Global South partners:** an inclusive mechanism is required to gather and learn from feedback from Global South partners on the challenges they face when collaborating. This action should inform changes to policy and processes.
- **Change expectations of**

collaborating institutions: HEIs should develop policies that explicitly accommodate the diversity and contexts of different partners, for instance, by recognising differences between structures, standards and processes between those of the Global South and UK HEIs. Flexible policies can help to manage expectations and make it easier for HEIs to partner with a wide range of institutions in the UK and internationally.

2. Research capacity strengthening

- **Understand different research support systems:** HEIs must ensure that research management, contracting and finance colleagues are aware of the different research systems of all research partners and understand how they function. This action will build awareness of what are reasonable requests within different partnership arrangements.

3. Global South leadership and ownership

- **Provide clear guidance and support:** to help Global South partners understand and navigate collaboration agreements, HEIs should provide concrete guidance on expectations and requirements (e.g., financial reporting, due diligence). Better transparency and early, continuous communication can help to avoid misunderstandings and disputes.

4. Research budgets, contracts and due diligence

- **Be transparent about resources:** sharing budgets with partners is a minimum requirement for trusted working. This should start from the earliest stages of co-creation and the co-development of budgets.
- **Institutionalise best practice:** institutions should develop and implement specific procedures to address challenges that occur (whether consistently or irregularly) across various processes related to collaboration with international partners. These procedures should be integrated and institutionalised into existing research policies to enhance assurance and compliance across all international projects.

Case Study 5: Addressing bottlenecks through a co-creation approach

The University of Edinburgh wanted to improve their approach to equitable partnership building with their partners from the Global South. Areas they were particularly keen to understand were:

- **Practical challenges:** what practical obstacles did research partners experience when interacting and collaborating with the university.
- **Norms, processes and requirements:** where in the research journey did the university's processes and ways of working challenge equity in research partnerships.

To develop solutions to these challenges, the university brought together 13 of their Global South partners for an in-person workshop to interrogate pain points in the collaborative research journey and work with University of Edinburgh staff to identify solutions. The key lessons were:

- Difficulty providing resourced time to develop trust and a shared understanding
- Need to acknowledge and work with indigenous knowledge and different cultural contexts
- The importance for clear communication on processes, requirements, deadlines and time frames across partners.

Outcomes from this approach:

- The value of in-person time to build trust and allow inclusion of quieter voices in the conversation.
- Research-adjacent staff (in contracts and finance) through participation in the workshop became more aware of the different cultural contexts the university's research partners are operating in.
- The university is exploring ways of sharing "best-fit" solutions to persistent collaboration challenges, so that there can be learning and knowledge exchange across the University.

Case Study 6: Enhancing understanding of research systems and norms between UK and Global South Partners

UCL encountered opportunities to refine the alignment between research support systems and practices across their academics, research support staff, and Global South partners. These efforts brought to light important areas for improvement, including:

- **Complexity of research support:** Research to tackle societal challenges requires robust support systems, including policies, processes, and people.
- **Equitable partnerships:** Facilitating equitable partnerships with Global South partners required navigating diverse research management practices and varying funding landscapes.
- **Capacity strengthening:** There was a need for sustained efforts to enhance the ability of individuals and institutions to conduct high-quality research effectively.

UCL implemented several initiatives to support research with Global South Partners:

Research Managers Network:

- Alongside 4 other UK HEI's created a network of over 50 UK universities.
- Facilitated discussions, knowledge exchange, and sharing of good practices.
- Supported understanding of the funding landscape and connected with other networks.

Bi-directional Fellowship Program:

- Implemented work shadowing and knowledge exchange for Professional Services staff
- Facilitated visits between UCL and South African universities.
- Emphasised mutual learning and collaboration.

Research Capacity Strengthening Workshops:

- Organised workshops to address research management challenges.
- Focused on peer-to-peer learning and practical tools.
- Engaged a coalition of universities, research institutes, and organisations.

Outcomes

- **Collaborations:** Strengthened institutional relationships to enable impactful global research.
- **Staff capacity:** Facilitated professional development opportunities for research support staff.
- **Equitable partnerships:** Fostered equitable research partnerships by addressing management disparities.
- **Sustainable management:** Developed a sustainable approach to research management capacity strengthening.

Case Study 7: Streamlining international payment processes

Following the completion of one of its Global Challenge Research Fund (GCRF) projects, Coventry University conducted a review process to draw out lessons. The review identified the following challenges across project management, budgeting, finance, contracts and collaborative working:

- **Project management:** clearly defined roles prevent overlap and duplication. Managers need international experience and cultural sensitivity. Principal Investigators should receive training in financial and project management, as well as leadership coaching. Large projects benefit from a co-director structure.
- **Working with Global South partners:** budget is needed for translation services to aid communication with non-English-speaking finance staff. Provision of regular training and support to finance teams in Global South institutions is essential. Ensuring project managers have international experience and include travel insurance in partners' budgets is important. Advance payments are crucial for research.
- **Finance:** financial support should be fully costed into projects and advance payment processes need simplifying. Consider equity when calculating exchange rates. Provide additional support for evidencing claims and streamline administrative processes for flexible funding.
- **Legal and contracting:** include partner commitments in the Collaboration Agreement to facilitate withdrawals. Provide standard contract terms and conditions to partners in advance.

Following this review, the research support team drafted and put in place a new procedure on international partner payments. The procedure links to and strengthens controls across some of the university's research policies related to assurance and compliance.

Outcome

- Following an audit process and recommendation by UKRI, the process is currently being institutionalised and designed to be applicable across all the university's international projects. To further embed the policy and practice, dissemination will include relevant training to the post-award teams.

Templates for the payment procedure and annex are available from the University of Coventry.

Long-term goals

1. Attitudes towards other people, cultures and contexts

- **Consider comparative North-South research:** HEIs should prioritise activities that support visiting researchers from the Global South to come and interrogate UK challenges. This can support two-way knowledge exchange and decentre the ‘development gaze’ of Global North researchers addressing Global South challenges.
- **Prioritise equitability in international cooperation:** To transform cooperation culture with the Global South, HEI leaders need to buy in to the importance of embedding equitability in practice and processes. Commitment should be demonstrated by clear actions such as investment in understanding different research norms and contexts by building awareness across HEI staff, researchers and research managers; reviewing existing ways of working and policies; and making adjustments collaboratively with partners.

2. Building and maintaining partnerships

- **Invest in networks and relationship building:** institutional funding should invest in long-term research partnerships, for example through networking and travel grants to develop relationships outside of project funding.
- **Address power imbalances in partnerships:** as part of research development processes, and researcher and research management staff training, HEIs should use the power imbalance layers of the Africa Charter or The Equity Tool (EQT) for valuing Global Health Partnerships⁷ to assess power imbalances in research partnerships and identify areas for change.

⁷ The Equity Considerations Tool (EQT) is designed to identify equity aspects based on individual experiences and overall partnership assessments <https://cagh-acsm.org/en/resources/equity-partnership-tool>.

4 Conclusion

This report outlines findings regarding how UK funder and HEI policies, terms, and conditions enhance or inhibit equitable international research collaborations in the ODA context. A sample of UK funder and HEI policies, terms, and conditions has been reviewed against existing recommendations on equitable international research collaboration extracted from four recent guidance documents (Africa Charter for Transformative Research Collaborations; Cape Town Statement on Fostering Research Integrity through Fairness and Equity; Four Approaches to Supporting Equitable Partnerships; and Envisioning an Equitable Future for Research across the North-South Divide). The policy analysis has been enhanced by interviews with funders, workshops with HEI stakeholders and survey of Global South research partners, to identify gaps, enablers and barriers to equitable international collaboration within current funder and HEI policies and processes.

The policy analysis shows that UK funder and HEI policies are to some extent addressing existing recommendations relating to research dissemination and impact. However, there are significant gaps in relation to supporting Global South leadership and ownership; research capacity strengthening; and research budgets, contracts and due diligence. Our review has also shown that UK funders and HEIs also struggle to translate the existing guidance on equitable partnerships into policy and practice. Funders and HEIs require further support to understand how the principles of equitable partnerships can drive policy and process changes and create an enabling

environment for equity in international collaboration.

For the UK funders reviewed, there is evidence of growing recognition of the importance of equitable partnerships. However, many policies still fall short in explicitly defining and enabling equitable collaborations. Greater leadership and coordination are needed to ensure a sector-wide approach on equity. For the HEIs reviewed, policies are typically generalist in nature; they lack specific detail on how equity principles should be practically applied in collaborative contexts. Many policies made little reference to mechanisms to support partnerships with Global South institutions or researchers, reflecting different levels of experience in working with Global South partners and whether HEI strategies prioritise global collaboration.

The identified gaps, barriers and enablers to equity in international collaboration have informed recommendations for changes to funder and HEI policies and processes, including both quick wins and long-term goals.

“For our finance and contracts teams (for example), our LMIC collaboration is a relatively small portion of their work and so issues affecting these collaborations are often seen as anomalies rather than systemic issues that require addressing.”

—Participant, ARMA workshop

These changes to funder and HEI policies and processes are just one pathway to change. The study findings have also highlighted the need for a sector-wide approach and a requirement for targeted actions that drive systemic change.

Proposed actions include:

- Developing consensus across funders on what equitable partnerships mean and how equity is fostered across funding mechanisms, terms, conditions, and practices.
- Leadership buy-in from funders and HEIs to prioritise equity in research collaborations and incentivise changes to policy and processes.
- Funders to incentivise HEIs to prioritise and centre equitable partnerships

in their research collaboration agreements with the Global South.

- Commitment to learn and share across funders and HEIs so that pockets of good practice within the sector are mainstreamed into standard institutional approaches.
- Resourcing and support on piloting, implementation and showcasing ‘what works’.

Fostering truly equitable partnerships will require a concerted effort from all stakeholders, including funders, researchers, and institutions, to ensure that the benefits of research are shared fairly and that all voices are heard and valued.

5 References

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6 Annex review matrix

6.1 Matrix

Table 7. Review matrix

Theme	Recommendation	Africa Charter	Cape Town Statement	Envisioning an Equitable Future	Four Approaches	Funder/ HEI/ Both	Connected policies/documents
Attitudes towards other cultures, peoples and contexts	Centre languages of where research is located	x				Both	Policies on research communication and dissemination
	Decentre the development gaze of research by ensuring research focused on global challenges looks across North and South and includes a critical examination of partners' positions	x				Both	Subjects of research calls and guidance for research teams
	Involve indigenous and community researchers to support research impact and prevent exploitation of indigenous knowledge		x			Both	Policies on IP; authorship and research communication
Building and maintaining partnerships	Two-stage funding calls			x	x	Funder	Funding approaches and design of specific calls
	Avoid funding disruption				x	Funder	Terms and conditions
	Support co-development of collaboration agreements				x	Both	Policies on collaboration or working with external partners
	Develop institutional guidelines to support equity				x	Both	Existence of policies on equity
	Evaluate partnership arrangements when making funding decisions				x	Funder	Funder requirements and evaluation criteria

Theme	Recommendation	Africa Charter	Cape Town Statement	Envisioning an Equitable Future	Four Approaches	Funder/ HEI/ Both	Connected policies/documents
<i>cont...</i>	Incentivise collaborative approaches to research through e.g., partnership building for ECRs, funding travel for in-person relationship building or pre-call workshops			x	x	Funder	Policies on allowed use of grant funding
	Invest in long-term institutional and research relationships and provide follow on or bridge funding to sustain long-term partnerships				x	Both	Policies on collaboration or working with external partners
	Make efforts to make it easier for Global South applicants to apply for funding e.g., pre-call announcements, clear eligibility guidelines, long call windows				x	Funder	Eligibility criteria, call structure and or additional needs policies
Global South leadership and ownership	Funding Global South researchers and Global South-led proposals directly	x	x	x	x	Funder	Call eligibility
	Engage with Global South-led agendas for research priority setting	x	x	x	x	Both	Policies on Global South engagement; specific call requirements
	Addressing power imbalances in research planning e.g., through co-leadership between Low-and Middle-Income Countries and High-Income Countries, mechanisms for equitable governance		x	x	x	Both	Call eligibility; specific call requirements; collaboration policies
	Funding decisions include Global South perspectives e.g., through representation on review boards				x	Funder	Review boards; call specific approaches to funding decisions
Research capacity strengthening	Assess capacity of partners and develop measures to address and monitor		x	x	x	Funder	Policies on Global South engagement; policies on allowed use of funding
	Support for research management capacity within project funding	x	x		x	Funder	Policies on allowed use of funding
	Support individual, institutional and ecosystem levels of capacity building		x		x	Both	Policies on Global South engagement; policies on allowed use of funding
	Address discrepancies in research management support by being clear about timelines and processes				x	Both	Policies on Global South engagement; Contracts and due diligence guidance

Theme	Recommendation	Africa Charter	Cape Town Statement	Envisioning an Equitable Future	Four Approaches	Funder/ HEI/ Both	Connected policies/documents
<i>cont...</i>	Assess capacity of partners in research management and develop measures to address and monitor e.g., supporting learning across UK and Global South and providing direct support to research management teams in Global South institutions				x	Both	Policies on Global South engagement; policies on allowed use of funding
	Document successes and failures				x	Both	Terms and conditions; monitoring and reporting
	Global South leadership of research capacity strengthening				x	Both	Policies on Global South engagement; funding eligibility
	Require equitable sharing of individual capacity development opportunities e.g., training and mentoring of ECRs in the Global South				x	Both	Policies on Global South engagement; funder requirements
Research budgets, contracts and due diligence	Fair indirect cost calculations	x			x	Funder	Terms and conditions; contracts
	Flexible payment terms				x	Both	Terms and conditions; contracts
	Payment in advance				x	Both	Terms and conditions; contracts
	Take steps to avoid impact of currency fluctuations		x			Both	Terms and conditions; contracts
	Use standards to streamline contracting processes, appropriate selection of country of arbitration, outline ways of working in research contracts			x	x	Both	Terms and conditions; contracts; engaging external partners
	Early, transparent discussion on due diligence requirements ensuring due diligence is appropriate for the research being conducted and the context				x	Both	Due diligence policies; engaging external partners
Research dissemination and impact	Ensure appropriate benefit sharing through fair authorship and data sharing policies and practices e.g., accountability mechanisms to communities involved, free preprints, shared ownership of IP		x	x	x	Both	Policies on IP; authorship and research communication
	Budget for research dissemination and impact work including covering open-access fees and journal subscriptions		x		x	Funder	Terms and conditions; allowed use of grant funding

7 Sampled funder and university policies

7.1 Funder policies

Table 8. Analysed funder policies

Organisation	Policies analysed
Wellcome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wellcome Grant Conditions Overheads Policy Intellectual Property Policy Consent and Revenue and Equity Sharing Policy Open Access Policy
AHRC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Research Funding Guide Embedding International Elements into Research Proposals AHRC Terms and Conditions
UKRI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> UKRI fEC grants standard terms and conditions UKRI ISPF Additional grant conditions UKRI project co-lead (international) strategy
British Academy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> British Academy Terms and Conditions Conditions specific to the Research and Innovation International Research 2024 programme Additional Needs funding Guidance Notes 2022 Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation led by or actively involving Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities Scheme Notes for Applicants
EPSRC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policy on Costing for Standard Research Grants & Programmes (Directly Incurred Costs) EPSRC Overseas Travel Grants

7.2 University policies

Table 9. Analysed policies from HEIs

Institution	Research integrity and misconduct	Research publications and open access	Data management	Intellectual property	Ethics in research	Due diligence	Safe-guarding	Finance and contracts	Miscellaneous/ Non-standard policies
University A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research misconduct policy and procedure • Research integrity policy and code of good practice • Research integrity policy and code of good practice (DRAFT) • Research misconduct policy and procedure (DRAFT) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research publications policy • University open access policy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research data management policy • Research data management policy (DRAFT) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intellectual property policy • Work with outside bodies policy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy on ethics in research and scholarship 				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy on the engagement of the public in research
University B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research Integrity Statement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GCRF Hub Operations Manual 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data management protocol 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research Services Due Diligence Procedure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research Ethics Protocol 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research Services Due Diligence Procedure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safeguarding policy and procedures • Code of Conduct whilst undertaking activities overseas 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying National Security Risks in your Research Form - Protocol for ensuring ODA compliance and monitoring

Institution	Research integrity and misconduct	Research publications and open access	Data management	Intellectual property	Ethics in research	Due diligence	Safe-guarding	Finance and contracts	Miscellaneous/ Non-standard policies
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Cont...

- Spending guidelines for partners and evidencing expenditure
- “Value for Money” Policy
- GCRF Hub Policy on claims for costs incurred without a formal or official receipt
- GCRF Hub Operations Manual

Institution	Research integrity and misconduct	Research publications and open access	Data management	Intellectual property	Ethics in research	Due diligence	Safe-guarding	Finance and contracts	Miscellaneous/ Non-standard policies
University C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whistleblowing Policy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Publications Policy 						<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Foreign Exchange Policy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Equality Diversity and Inclusion Policy - Awarding Honorary, Associate and Visiting appointments and Emeritus and Status (Code of Conduct) Global HR Hubs (Terms of Reference) Visa Payment and Loan Policy
University D					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ethical Guidelines for carrying out collaborative research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Due Diligence and Assurance Policy for Research Bids and Awards 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Visiting Researcher Agreement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategic Plan 2030 Global Engagement Strategy Research and Innovation Strategy Equality and Diversity Policy

Institution	Research integrity and misconduct	Research publications and open access	Data management	Intellectual property	Ethics in research	Due diligence	Safe-guarding	Finance and contracts	Miscellaneous/ Non-standard policies
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University
E

- Intellectual Property Policy

- Due Diligence Process

- International Safeguarding Policy and Procedure

- Financial Regulations 2024 (and other addendums)
- Contract Processes

8 Note on methodology

8.1 Research questions

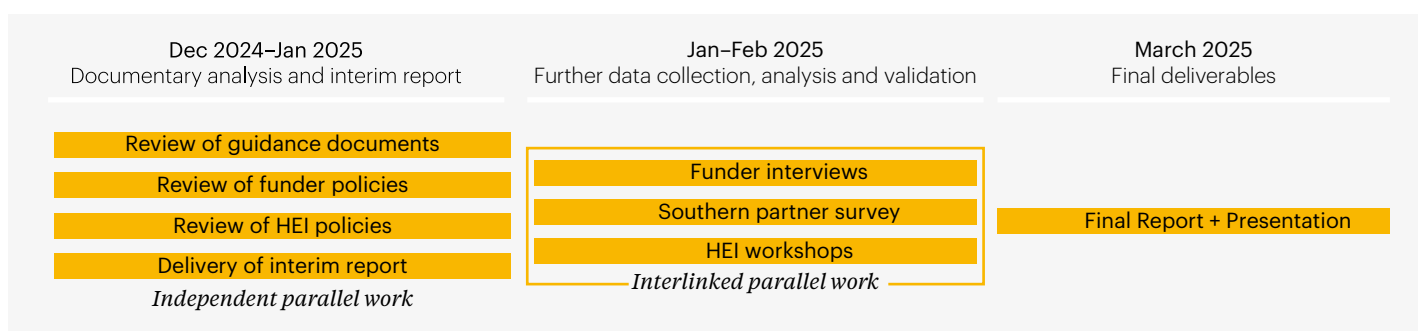
In line with the British Academy’s objective to understand and evidence how UK funder and HEI policies, terms, and conditions enhance or inhibit equitable international research collaborations, the research team formulated research questions to guide the inquiry and support data collection and analyses. The aim was to first understand the key recommendations in the listed guidance initiatives and then use this framework as a review matrix for the policy analysis of funder and HEI policies. The research questions also helped to identify additional enablers and barriers to equity outside of those covered in the guidance documents.

Table 10. Table indicating research questions addressed in the analysis

RQ1	What are the main recommendations at funder and HEI-level for supporting equitable international research collaboration within the listed initiatives?
RQ2a	What are the enablers and barriers to equitable international research collaboration within UK funder policies and terms and conditions?
RQ2b	To what extent are UK funders complying with existing recommendations on equitable international research collaboration?
RQ3a	What are the enablers and barriers to equitable international research collaboration within UK HEI policies?
RQ3b	To what extent are UK HEIs complying with existing recommendations on equitable international research collaboration?

Figure 6 below shows the timeline of the research process and the different components that contributed to this final report.

Figure 6. Project timeline



8.2 Sampling and data access

8.2.1 Funders

In agreement with British Academy, this review focused on the following funders:

- AHRC.
- British Academy.
- EPSRC.
- UKRI.
- Wellcome.

To sample the policies to review for each funder, a list of the types of policies of relevance to international collaboration at the application stage and during funded awards was developed as follows:

- Terms and conditions.
- Codes of practice.
- Guidance for applicants.
- Sample of specific call guidance.
- Recognising that there may be differences in how policies are referred to across organisations, policies were identified that contained the same type of information from each funder. For the full list of policies reviewed, see Annex 8.1.

8.2.2 Higher education institutions (HEIs)

A purposive sample of five HEIs was selected with the aim of including representation from different forms of HEI governance, different levels of engagement with international research, and geographical breadth across the UK. To support data sharing, it was agreed that HEIs would remain anonymous in the final report. For each HEI the following types of policies were accessed and analysed:

- Human resource policies in the context of international cooperation.
- Finance policies: international payments, currency exchange rates, etc.
- Contracts and due diligence: payment terms, IP rules.
- Guidelines on collaboration with the Global South.
- Ethics policies.

For the full anonymised list of policies reviewed, see Annex 8.2.

8.3 Review of recent equitable partnerships initiatives

RQ1: What are the main recommendations at funder and HEI-level for supporting equitable international research collaboration within the listed initiatives?

Recommendations were extracted for funders and HEIs from the following guidance documents identified by the British Academy:

- Africa Charter for Transformative Research Collaborations.
- Cape Town Statement on Fostering Research Integrity through Fairness and Equity.
- Four Approaches to Supporting Equitable Partnerships.
- Envisioning an Equitable Future for Research across the North-South Divide.

The recommendations were then coded to reveal six common themes across the four guidance initiatives which provided a framework for further analysis. Similar recommendations were synthesised within each theme whilst all unique recommendations were preserved. The project team co-developed a policy review matrix based on the six themes and synthesised recommendations. The review matrix was piloted using one set each of funder and HEI policies and refinements were made to the inclusion/exclusion criteria based upon availability of evidence in the policy documents. The following inclusion criteria for recommendations were applied:

- Must relate to a research funder or HEI as opposed to governments or research publishers.
- Must align with one or more of the types of policies made available from funders and HEIs.
- Must include actionable or practical advice regarding implementation.

Using these inclusion criteria, 31 recommendations were identified across the six themes for inclusion in the final review matrix which was used to analyse funder and HEI policies (see Annex 7).

8.4 Funder and HEI policy review

- **RQ2a** What are the enablers and barriers to equitable international research collaboration within UK funder policies and terms and conditions?
- **RQ2b** To what extent are UK funders complying with existing recommendations on equitable international research collaboration?
- **RQ3a** What are the enablers and barriers to equitable international research collaboration within UK HEI policies?
- **RQ3b** To what extent are UK HEIs complying with existing recommendations on equitable international research collaboration?

A document review was completed of selected funder and HEI policies, terms, and conditions against the review matrix of recommendations from the guidance documents, using a categorisation schema to assess the extent to which a policy complies with the recommendations:

- No evidence of compliance.
- Some evidence of compliance with parts of the recommendation.
- Good evidence of compliance with recommendations in full.
- Against recommendation

Regular check-in conversations between the analysts calibrated analyses and formed consensus. Narrative summaries were created for each funder, HEI, and each policy document type, highlighting areas of compliance/non-compliance with the synthesised recommendations, and identifying additional enablers and barriers to equity in international collaboration.

8.5 Data validation

8.5.1 Key informant interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with representatives from the sampled funders (four interviews with five participants⁸). An interview guide was developed informed by weaknesses and gaps identified during the policy review. The interviews explored the identified strengths and weaknesses of funder policies, how existing guidance has informed policy development processes, and any plans for changes to policies and practice to support equity in international collaboration in future.

8.5.2 Global south survey

To provide depth to the analysis and a better understanding of the extent to which the reviewed policies and conditions drive or inhibit equitable partnerships, views were sought from the Global South partners of the selected UK HEIs through a survey. Survey questions were informed by the gaps in policy identified through the policy review. The survey sought partners' feedback on their experiences of partnering with UK HEIs and any policies or practices that supported or inhibited equity. Each HEI was asked to share the survey with five partners, making a total potential sample size of 30 respondents. A total of 16 responses to the survey were received. To encourage participation, survey responses were anonymous.

8.5.3 Validation workshops

Validation workshops (n=2) were conducted with HEI stakeholders. One survey was organised through ARMA Special Interest Groups (20 participants) and the other with participating HEIs (nine participants). The workshops presented preliminary results from the documentary analysis for validation and feedback, sought examples of good practice, and co-developed recommendations.

8.6 Data analysis and reporting

The project team synthesised the different data sources collected:

- Policy reviews for funders and HEIs against the recommendation matrix.
- Key informant interviews with representatives of funders (five participants).

⁸ AHRC and UKRI did a combined interview, EPSRC was not available for interview, 2 representatives from British Academy were interviewed separately.

- Survey responses from partners in the Global South (16 participants).
- Validation workshops with HEI stakeholders (29 participants).

Qualitative coding identified gaps, enablers and barriers to equity from within the policy documents, interviews and workshop reports. Additionally, examples of best practice, model policies and case studies (not necessarily from participating HEIs) were extracted which could illustrate the recommendations for changes to policy and practice.

8.7 Limitations

8.7.1 Sampling

- Time and resource constraints only allowed for the evaluation of policies from five UK research funders. This means the analysis does not provide a complete picture of the UK research funding landscape in relation to international collaboration in the ODA context.
- There is likely a degree of selection bias in the HEIs that responded to the request for access to policies. This means our sample might reflect institutions with a greater degree of interest and experience in international collaboration with Global South partners.

8.7.2 Data

- Funder policies are largely publicly available, but the selected funders do not all have similar types of policies. Furthermore, some funders had specific calls relating to areas of the recommendations (e.g., British Academy ODA Research Management Capacity Strengthening programme) which led to greater alignment with the recommendations' themes than if other call-specific guidance had been selected.
- Although the HEIs were given a list of policy types to guide document selection, the selection of policies provided was led by institution contacts. This may have introduced bias. HEIs may have provided policies that they wanted reviewed or that they thought most relevant to collaboration with the Global South.
- The survey of Global South partners was shared via the UK HEIs, and although anonymity was protected, this may have limited the extent to which partners felt able to openly share challenges with partnering with UK universities.

8.7.3 Analysis

- The purpose of the sampled policy documents was not to speak to the recommendation themes identified in the four guidance documents. Many policy documents were analysed where alignment with multiple recommendations was not expected because the documents addressed very specific areas, for example data management policies. To address this limitation, the analysis looked holistically across the entire body of policy documents to provide an overall assessment of gaps, enablers and barriers in relation to equitable international collaboration.
- There were significant differences in the level of detail between HEI policies and the extent to

which collaboration was referred to within them. This meant it was not always clear how a particular policy would apply in a collaborative or partnership context, so comparison between the sampled HEIs was challenging. The analysis has therefore identified gaps, enablers and barriers across the entire sample, whilst pulling out specific examples to provide context.

- There were differences in interpretation regarding the extent of compliance with recommendations between the three analysts reviewing the policies. This was mitigated against by creating clear criteria and guidance for analysts to follow during the policy review process. Regular check-ins were used to calibrate analyses, assure consistency and create consensus. However, there was insufficient time to conduct a granular cross-check for each analyst and each policy.