

Policy analysis for equitable international research collaborations

University analysis
and recommendations

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Scientia Scripta is a creative research and innovation support agency, specialising in strategic science communication and engagement services that democratise research and innovation, for good.

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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.

This summary document presents the key findings and recommendations relevant to universities, drawn from a broader policy analysis on equitable international research collaborations commissioned by the British Academy. The full report, prepared by Scientia Scripta, includes a gap analysis of selected policies and terms and conditions from UK funders and higher education institutions (HEIs), benchmarked against four guidance documents on equitable

partnerships. It also incorporates insights from a survey conducted with institutions in the Global South. The wider report offers actionable recommendations for universities, funders, and the broader research sector to support more equitable research partnerships. This summary is intended as a standalone resource for universities, with the full report available for download from the British Academy website.

Key findings

Analysis across university policies indicates they 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.

Figure 1. Overview on the level of HEI policies compatibility against the equity recommendations.



Table 1. 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

Recommendations

The tables below outline practical steps HEIs can take to adapt their policies and processes in support of more equitable research practices. They aim to help institutions enhance their governance structures, research management, and partnership approaches—particularly in fostering inclusive and sustainable collaborations with partners in the Global South.

Table 2. 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.
Building and maintaining partnerships	<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 (see Case study 5: addressing bottlenecks through a co-creation approach in the main report)</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>
Research capacity strengthening	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 (see Case study 6: enhancing understanding of research systems and norms between UK and global south partners in the main report)

Global South leadership and ownership	<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	<p>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).</p> <p>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 (see Case study 4: institutionalising advance payments to reduce barriers in the main report)</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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 (see Case study 7: streamlining international payment processes in the main report)</p>

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

Thematic area	Recommendations
Attitudes towards other cultures, peoples, and contexts	<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>
Building and maintaining partnerships	<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	<p>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.</p>
Research dissemination and impact	<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>