

Policy analysis for equitable international research collaborations

Analysis of equitable
partnerships
guidance
documents

Prepared by:

Scientia Scripta Communication Services Ltd

31 March 2025

info@scientiascripta.co.uk



Acknowledgements

This report is the result of a tremendous team effort. We would like to thank all the people who contributed to the study.

Scientia Scripta

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

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.

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

Thanks to all the universities who were part of this study, to the Association for Research Managers and Administrators (ARMA) members and Global South research institutions who shared their views and ideas through the workshops, global survey and case studies. Your perspectives are so important.

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 key findings from the analysis of four guidance documents on equitable international research partnerships and sector-level recommendations derived from a broader policy study 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 the guidance documents. It also incorporates insights from a survey conducted with institutions in the Global South. This summary is intended as a companion to the full report, which is available for download from the British Academy website.

Key findings

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				
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				
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/>.

fundors 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.

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