

EqPICurious – Fostering principles of equity within research support services

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Advance payments

Frequently (for various reasons), collaborators in LMICs may not be able to work with the usual practice of payments in arrears. This could create power imbalances and inequities. A solution was needed to allow funds to reach the collaborators in advance of activities and did not create/hinder on bureaucracy.

New process at the University of Reading

- Internal buy-in for the necessity of advance payments, in certain situations (this is not the default position).
- Secured funders approval.
- Collaborated internally with contracts, finance and senior management, to find a solution that adhered to funders and accounting rules.
- A streamlined process on a case-by-case basis, including:
 - Eligibility checks
 - Approvals from senior finance management
 - Clauses in the collaboration agreement

Outcomes and reflections

- Integrated into the application process.
- Is part of the Due Diligence checks.
- Starts at application stage, so everyone is aware and approvals are in place from the start.
- Compliant with funders and accounting terms.
- Allows all collaborators to use the available funding, without putting strain on resources or be hindered by institutional practices (EqPIC principle - 6).
- The process creates equity in that stage of the project lifecycle (EqPIC principle – 1, 7).

Research Managers Network for LMIC Partnerships

We are a network of research managers from over 50 UK universities aiming to enhance research partnerships with Low- or Middle-Income Country (LMICs)

<https://www.equitablepartnerships.org/>

Aims:

- Supporting more equitable research partnerships with LMICs.
- Maximising the impact of research funding.

What we do:

- We create a space for discussion and sharing good practice in research management.
- We generate a supportive environment to better understand the funding landscape.
- We connect and engage with other University Networks to achieve our aims.

Risk, incentives and equity

Negotiating and supporting initiatives that facilitate equity in budgeting, assurance and contracting

Internal cultures and knowledge gaps that work against equity

UK institutions have knowledge gaps and working cultures that can exacerbate inequity in global South partnerships across the project lifecycle.

- At the University of Bristol (UoB), the TEPSO project (led by Dr Anthony Manyara) developed evidence-based principles and values to underpin a toolkit to help researchers co-develop equitable budgets.
- Professional services staff and academics made concerted efforts to advocate for change in in Research Assurance and Research Contracts processes.

Outcomes and reflections

- TEPSO Budget Equity Toolkit: <https://inclusive-research.org/section/budgeting-for-inclusion/>
- UoB now offers a simplified contract that seeks to demystify our requirements.
- By reassessing risk levels, due diligence processes have been simplified. This still remains a divisive administrative process for our overseas partnerships.

Reflecting on the journey so far:

- To raise awareness and address inequities across the project lifecycle professional services staff are fundamental in driving change. (EqPIC principles - 1, 7)
- Respect and trust are necessary across roles to achieve advances in equitable practices. (EqPIC principle - 2)
- Without dedicated resources for professional services staff, practical barriers to equity will remain. (EqPIC principle - 6)

Preventing Harm (Safeguarding) in R&I

Traditionally, safeguarding policies in Higher Education Institutions, are focussed on students with research considerations focussing on participants and vulnerable groups.

Training and guidance

At the University of Reading we want to ensure a positive environment for research activities, acknowledging risks due to the physical environment and the emotionally demanding nature of the research and also that some research environments may have power imbalances or poor working cultures, which may also lead to harm to researchers, including abuse, bullying, harassment and sexual misconduct.

- Analysed the policies and procedures already in place
- Created guidance and behaviour expectations
- Commissioned a training package
- Set up a two-stage process to identify high risk projects and put monitoring in place
 - Stage 1 – application: discussion with PI, mitigations, costs
 - Stage 2 – post award: update risk register

Outcomes and reflections

We want to effect a cultural change that creates a safe environment built on respect, trust and open communication (EqPIC principle - 2) conducive to equitable research. All members of staff have access to the training package. This includes academic and research professional colleagues, as well as external collaborators. six default colour schemes. We want to harness the power of diversity and acknowledge power diversity to foster innovation (EqPIC principle – 4).

Culture Club

Creating a community to realise equitable partnerships (EP), moving from principles to action

The University of Bristol (UoB) is a founding signatory of the Africa Charter (<https://parc.bristol.ac.uk/africa-charter/>). UoB has expressed commitment to the Charter, but barriers remain to embed the principles.

Professional development project

- Online training module for all staff with the aim to change internal culture, providing common resources, accessible training, spaces for reflection/exchange.
- Co-produced research and outputs between academic staff and Research development, governance, compliance, contracts, as well as Finance and HR.

Outcomes and reflections

As well as the online module a virtual hub will connect staff to increase visibility and strengthen the community of practice around EP. An evaluation process will evidence impact and institutional progress against equitable principles. Reflecting on the journey so far:

- Equity across the research lifecycle requires co-creation and engagement with all actors, including professional services (EqPIC principles 1, 3)
- Without specific funding this initiative would never have happened. Funders must recognise that directed, consistent support to improve equity within the research ecosystem is non-negotiable. (EqPIC principles 5, 6)
- Initiatives should not be reliant on individuals. A pragmatic as well as normative rationale for equitable partnerships must be agreed, embedded and championed by institutional leaders, both academic and professional. (EqPIC principle 7)

Equitable Partnership in International Collaboration (EqPIC) – Principles for equity

1. Equity should feature at all stages of the research and innovation lifecycle across the knowledge and evidence ecosystem.
2. Respect, trust and open communication must be fundamental principles of any collaboration, taking into consideration the diversity of languages.
3. Collaborative research should be driven by reciprocity, by seeking mutual benefits and by recognising the expertise and value of all stakeholders.
4. Diversity fosters innovation, and so cultural differences should be recognised as an enabler rather than seen as an obstacle.
5. Enabling mobility of stakeholders and investment in partnership development is crucial and requires funding, based on recognition that greater awareness of each partner's environment and objectives is conducive to more effective and impactful research.
6. Equitable partnerships should be underpinned by forms of funding that enable institutions to become more resilient, supporting researchers and research managers in research collaborations that lead to the strengthening and flourishing of their respective research and innovation environments.
7. Stakeholders (funders, researchers, research managers, institutions etc) should ensure that equitable partnership principles are demonstrably embedded throughout the research lifecycle, in evidenced ways that support accountability and mutual learning.
8. Joint research endeavours should serve all stakeholders' needs, while recognising that their objectives might be different.
9. Recognise the continuous evolution of concepts and practices of research excellence, to embrace scientific rigor and validity, and societal relevance, purpose, value and application.

These are a summarised version of the principles taken from "Equitable Partnership in International Collaboration EqPIC – a Call to Action"

<https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/international/equitable-partnership-in-international-collaboration/equitable-partnership-in-international-collaboration-eqpic-a-call-to-action/>

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