

Published for The British Academy by
The Association of Commonwealth Universities
Woburn House
20–24 Tavistock Square
London WC1H 9HF
United Kingdom

Telephone: +44 (0)20 7380 6700
Facsimile: +44 (0)20 7387 2655
Email: resman@acu.ac.uk
www.acu.ac.uk

Frameworks for Africa-UK Research Collaboration in the Social Sciences and Humanities

African University Perspectives

A report to **The British Academy**
by **The Association of Commonwealth Universities**

Jonathan Harle

August 2007

**The Association
of Commonwealth
Universities**



The British Academy

THE NATIONAL ACADEMY FOR THE HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

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Preface

A new emphasis upon higher education in Africa was implicit in the 2005 report of the Commission for Africa, the G8 Summit of that year, a number of World Bank papers, and in the report from the Association of African Universities and Association of Commonwealth Universities entitled *Renewing the African University*. One component in such thinking is the reinforcement of North-South collaboration in research. Other major issues are the development and reconstruction of African universities themselves and the fostering of South-South links. Anecdotal evidence would indicate that there is a great desire to forge strong and long-lasting research collaborative relationships between groups and individuals in the UK (in this case) and in African universities. Anecdotal evidence would also suggest that there are many impediments and constraints to establishing and maintaining such relationships.

The British Academy's funding of a survey and report on the experience of African academics in relation to collaboration is one important step on the way to understanding the problems, and formulating mechanisms for strengthening long-term collaborative work. We commend this report to the organisations we represent, and we present it to the broader community of people committed to the 'renewal of the African university'. We hope that further discussion will lead to practical proposals for measures that can be taken by universities, university organisations, individual researchers, donors, research councils, national cultural and academic link organisations, as well as academic publishers and journals.

Steering Committee:

Professor Graham Furniss, British Academy Africa Panel (chair)

Richard Dowden, Director, Royal African Society

Professor Kenneth King, British Academy Africa Panel

Dr John Kirkland, Deputy Secretary General (Development), The Association of Commonwealth Universities

Professor Tunde Zack-Williams, President, African Studies Association of the UK



Executive Summary

This report was commissioned by the British Academy's Africa Panel to examine the challenges facing African universities when undertaking collaborative research with UK and other international partners, particularly in the social sciences and humanities. It draws principally on a consultation undertaken by the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU) between February and March 2007, which invited African academics and staff development and research support managers to offer their views on North-South collaboration, and to explain the challenges, constraints and future priorities of such research partnerships.

The consultation targeted particularly, but not exclusively, those involved in social science and humanities research. From the beginning it did not set out to offer definitive conclusions, but rather to gather the thoughts of colleagues in African universities, to make some suggestions to UK and other funding agencies, and to serve as an agenda for further discussion.

Findings are based on the responses of 90 academics and 62 members of university management and support staff in 72 African higher education institutions from 14 sub-Saharan countries. Based on these responses, and the conclusions drawn from these, we make the following observations and suggestions to the British Academy, UK universities and to other agencies involved in the UK research community.

Better understandings of African university environments, cultures and processes are needed to enable and facilitate research. We suggest a need to:

- Support improvements to internet facilities and access to scholarly publications.
- Understand existing resource capacity by undertaking substantive assessments of the resource base accessible to a researcher or team.
- Improve access to funding information through a central and comprehensive portal.
- Make funding flexible by considering how additional contingency funding could be provided to account for needs that arise during the course of a project.
- Identify existing institutional structures and frameworks and channel opportunities for scholarship or research through these.

Collaboration between donors would increase the overall impact of UK funding. We suggest a need to:

- Establish an inter-agency working group to coordinate Africa activity at a national level within the social sciences and humanities, and to use this to coordinate with European, or other international, funders.
- Recognise each other's schemes to provide a more streamlined application process for further funding
- Establish a common framework which encourages a shared approach amongst donors to identifying needs and strategies.

Developing individual staff is important. We suggest a need to:

- Expand doctoral training by including provision for PhD funding/research where possible in collaboration budgets.
- Bring junior and senior academics together and facilitate opportunities for inter-generational knowledge sharing
- Link research and training and take a longer-term view by considering the structure of African academic careers, awarding scholarships in line with this, and investigating other mechanisms of career development funding
- Reward researchers by working with HR managers to review the conditions attached to grants and consider financial mechanisms to encourage research.

To improve efficiency and impact it is advisable to make the most of existing facilities where they exist. We suggest a need to:

- Support existing programmes by documenting current schemes and making this information available to African researchers. Any resource investments should be channelled through these systems as far as possible.
- Share access to UK resources by encouraging UK universities to investigate mechanisms to facilitate this throughout the period of collaboration (not just when African colleagues are able to visit the UK).

Creating space for interaction and collaboration is important. We suggest a need to:

- Develop networks by encouraging and assisting international events to be held in African institutions.
- Engage African academic associations, professional bodies and other research groups so that programmes are developed in line with African priorities.
- Enable academic mobility by formally registering schemes with the relevant government departments to allow visas to be issued more efficiently, and by engaging with the UK government to ensure that academic mobility is fully incorporated into UK immigration guidelines.
- Connect researchers by developing a facility which enables African and UK academics to identify corresponding interests with counterpart researchers and institutions.
- Promote equal partnerships by ensuring that African colleagues are fully involved at all stages of project design, and that this is reflected in the systems of application and project management and evaluation.

Disseminating knowledge is imperative. We suggest a need to:

- Build cultures of research by supporting social science and humanities researchers, universities and other associations in communicating their work.
- Advance publication by helping to raise the profile, quality and circulation of local African journals and to support African academics in publishing internationally.

Section 7 discusses these suggestions in greater detail and for each it highlights a number of issues which would benefit from further consideration, in order that they might be shaped into a practical response.

1. Introduction

This study was undertaken by the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU), on behalf of the British Academy, and with input and representation from the African Studies Association of the UK (ASAUK) and the Royal African Society. It set out to identify the current challenges faced by African academics seeking to collaborate with UK researchers, and to identify potential frameworks within which these challenges might be coherently addressed.¹

Specifically, the aim was to produce a background report which would enable a conference on these themes to be convened in late 2007. Throughout the project the emphasis was firmly on gathering the views of African university staff directly engaged in research, including academic and non-academic staff. Rather than drawing firm conclusions or making policy recommendations, the desire was to set an agenda for future discussion, identifying key themes and suggesting some possible models of future collaboration. Finally, it was also hoped that by directly consulting with a range of academic and other staff in African higher education institutions (HEIs), it would be possible to identify a number of potential participants for this meeting.

A survey was developed and distributed by the ACU between February and March 2007, using the Association's extensive database of African university contacts, as well as through its professional networks for research and human resource (HR) managers. Research management is a relatively new, but growing, area within African HEIs, as universities come to realise that good institutional level systems are needed to manage research and support academics. HR managers also have an important role to play in taking care of day-to-day and strategic staff development, which is vital to strengthening research. Consulting these groups in addition to academics provided a much richer picture of the challenges for future collaboration.

Neglect and renewal

The fact that African universities face considerable problems is well documented. A 20-year or more period of neglect, during which the international community largely ignored the tertiary sector's role in development, left universities struggling to retain staff, with woefully inadequate infrastructures and with libraries lacking essential books and journals. In recent years there has been cause for cautious optimism that universities across the continent would start to see the investments that they urgently need. Several prominent reports from the Commission for Africa, the G8 and the World Bank have accorded greater significance to higher education, and the African Union has declared higher education a priority for continent-wide development, most recently in its *Plan of Action for the Second Decade of Education in Africa*.

Most tertiary institutions rely on state funding, but all too often this is insufficient to cover day-to-day costs, let alone redevelop crumbling infrastructures and invest in future scholarship. External support is vital to the renewal of African universities, and this is particularly true of research, which often receives relatively little of overall university budgets: some estimate that external money accounts for 70-90% of research funding.² Existing schemes, which have provided pockets of scholarship and research funding for many years, have now been joined by others, with new donors and schemes heeding the call to inject fresh support into African universities. This also means that universities and academics must now negotiate a complex web of funding, disbursed by myriad agencies who seek variously to develop capacity, train scholars, and strengthen international research links.

North-South collaboration

A key element of the renewal response has been the idea of North-South collaboration, with support and funding provided by donor agencies to enable partnerships between African and UK universities. International collaboration allows African researchers to work together with Northern and other Southern colleagues, which is essential if they are to be able to establish themselves within the international academic community. The benefits of this model are clear from anecdotal and documented discussions. It also means African academics could potentially benefit from access to the resources, facilities and expertise of better equipped institutions, enabling research to proceed at levels which would not be possible with the current state of many countries' HE infrastructure.

¹ For the purposes of this report 'Africa' refers to sub-Saharan Africa, and principally to Commonwealth Africa.

² Teferra & Altbach 2003; see also Section 5.1 of this report.

The value of North-South collaboration has been widely acknowledged in several reports, and there have been several attempts to investigate the needs of and strategies for collaboration (see Appendix 2). Many of these have, however, focused on thematic or methodological priorities. The practical constraints have been less well documented, and where they are discussed it is usually in more general terms without specific and feasible suggestions of how these might be met. Collaborations often depend on the energy and commitment of individual academics. If researchers are lucky enough to obtain funding, they must then manage this through the course of the project, take responsibility for other members of their team, including managing other colleagues and research students, and deal with the everyday problems that arise when trying to sustain joint work over long distances. This study therefore sets out to consider the everyday practical, managerial and administrative challenges to collaboration.

Social sciences and humanities

While African research and higher education command significant attention, the focus is often on science and technology. These subjects receive considerable attention and funding, perhaps rightly as it is these which provide expertise in healthcare, or technology developments which improve communications infrastructure, scale up IT skills, or develop the products which potentially have commercial applications. However, the tendency to think of research and universities only in terms of natural and technical sciences risks social sciences and humanities being somewhat forgotten, and may mean that investment is relatively lower. Research in these areas provides the knowledge which is essential to understanding the social and cultural context in which development takes place. But it is also important that there is support for African research which falls outside of the general development agenda, but which nevertheless may also offer important lessons; questions about history, identity and cultural expression all need to be explored. While responses were therefore encouraged from all fields, since many of the challenges of research will be common to all, a particular effort was made to gather the thoughts of researchers in the humanities and social sciences.

2. The consultation process

2.1 Development of surveys

The consultative nature of this report is a reflection of the priority attached to gathering the thoughts of African university staff, rather than assuming knowledge of the challenges they face. It is these which form the basis of the discussion which follows. A consultation document was therefore developed in the form of a survey which highlighted key themes, asked individuals for their views on a number of points, and invited them to make their own comments on any further issues related to research. Broadly, questions addressed existing levels of research activity, how this was supported institutionally, the challenges facing research, and what priorities for future support might be.

While academic researchers were the principal focus of the survey, it was also felt that useful insights into the wider context of research could be gained by including some input from research managers and human resource managers, two groups of university staff who play – or could potentially play – a significant role in the management and promotion of collaborative research. Three distinct surveys were therefore developed enabling the questions to be tailored to each group. A small focus group of current Commonwealth scholars was also held at the ACU, to review a draft of the survey and gather some initial thoughts.

2.2 Survey distribution

Surveys were distributed to ACU African member institutions, which gave access to HEIs in 16 countries, covering some 65 individual institutions.³ Where possible, contact was made with the deans and heads of social science and humanities faculties or departments, as well as a number of deputy vice-chancellors. Surveys were also distributed through the ACU's Research Management Network and Human Resource Management Network, and to current and former recipients of Commonwealth Scholarships, which provided a useful way of capturing the thoughts of early career researchers. Between 2002 and 2006, social sciences and humanities accounted for 44% of scholarships awarded by the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission in the United Kingdom.

Recent applicants to the British Academy's UK-Africa Academic Partnership scheme, which included a number of countries outside the Commonwealth, were contacted, in addition to the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA), the Organization for Social Science Research in Eastern and Southern Africa (OSSREA) and the Association of African Universities (AAU). Acknowledging Ethiopia as a major Anglophone country outside the Commonwealth, effort was also made to contact Addis Ababa University, although no response was forthcoming. In all cases the survey was distributed initially via email, but, due to a large number of bouncing email addresses, and to include those for whom email addresses were not available, additional copies were sent by post to increase rates of return. In total, around 1200 surveys were distributed, although this includes some overlap, with an additional 2100 scholars and alumni invited to submit general comments on the key issues by email, or download the survey from the ACU website.

From the outset, the considerable limitations of undertaking such a consultation within a relative short period of time were acknowledged, and the intention was instead to gain a broad, rather than statistically representative, sample. Although postal copies of the survey were sent, time constraints meant that the bulk of distribution relied on email contact, which proved difficult. In many ways the problems encountered at this stage reflected the wider obstacles to international collaboration, as many respondents pointed out in their emails. It also accounts for the uneven spread of responses across countries. Results should therefore not be taken as fully representative, but rather as a snapshot of general trends.

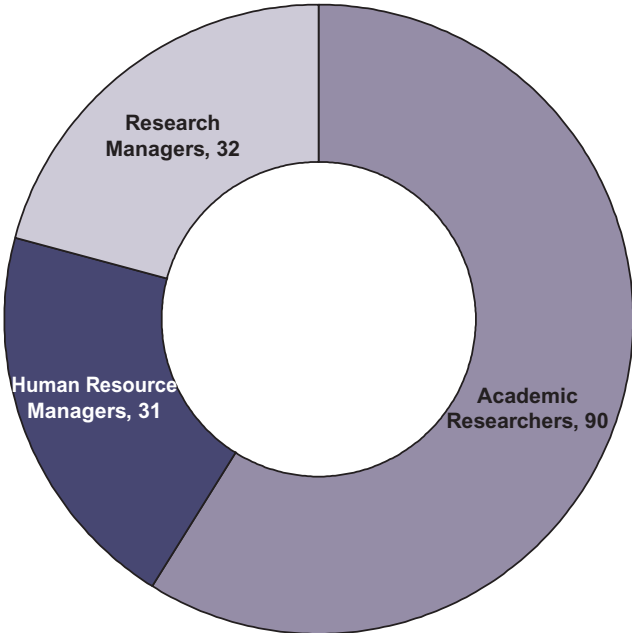
³ In countries including: Botswana, Cameroon, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe (although no longer a Commonwealth member state, Zimbabwean HEIs are still ACU members).

2.3 Responses to the consultation

In total 153 survey responses were received, with a further 10 emails from contacts who chose to send general comments without completing the full survey. With such a wide distribution a relatively low return rate was expected; instead the intention was to capture a wide-ranging response drawing on very varied experiences of collaboration. The figures quoted throughout the report should be taken as illustrative of general trends.

Those who submitted a response were later invited to engage in further discussion about the issues raised, and with other respondents, through an online forum. Although all respondents were invited to participate in this, limited internet access, and for many a lack of further time to devote to the consultation, meant that only 18 added additional thoughts. Nevertheless, it proved a useful tool to clarify some of the ideas that had been raised, and to provide a means of continuing discussion.

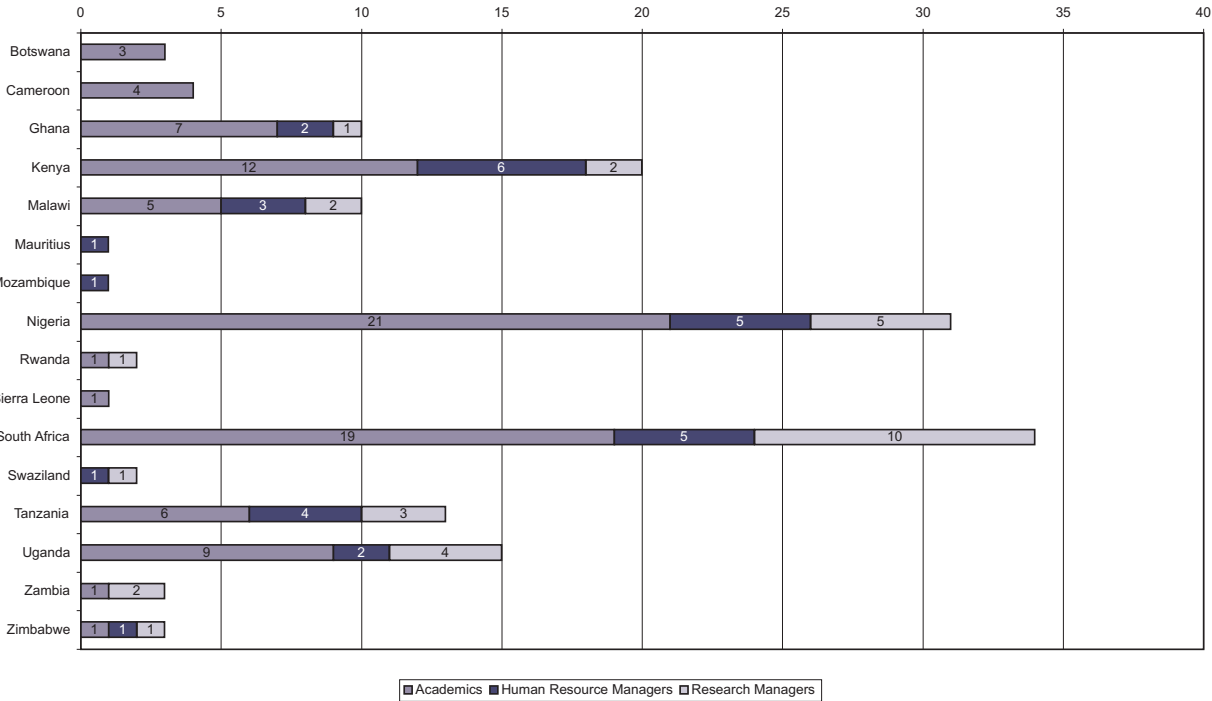
Figure 2.1 Number of responses received



2.3.1 Regional and country breakdown

90 responses were received to the academic survey, 31 to the human resource manager survey, and 32 to the research manager survey. 59% of responses therefore came from those directly involved in academic research, whilst 41% came from those providing various degrees of support and institutional management services. 72 individual higher education or research institutions are represented from 14 countries. A full list of responding institutions and the number of submissions received from each is included in Appendix 1. Divided regionally (East, Southern and West Africa) there is a near-even split in responses to the academic survey. West Africa is under-represented in the research manager group, where all but one of the West African responses were Nigerian, and in the human resource manager group. Responses to the academic survey are weighted in favour of Nigeria and South Africa, representing 23% and 21% respectively. South Africa also represents 31% and 16% of the research manager and human resource surveys respectively, although responses from other countries are more evenly spread, and in the HR survey more responses actually came from Kenya.

Figure 2.2 Number of responses by country



These country biases are influenced partly by the number and level of tertiary institutions, both in South Africa and Nigeria (in the case of the academic survey), but predominantly by the greater reliability of email communication with South Africa. In the case of the research management survey, the South African weighting also reflects the much better developed systems that have been established in many HEIs, but which are still beginning to develop in HEIs in other regions. Of the 72 institutions covered, 15 were South African. While it might have been desirable to remove South Africa from the overall analysis and consider it as a case in its own right, the constraints of time meant this was not possible. Because country weightings are insufficiently representative in a survey of this size, a regional analysis has been used which also allows any bias resulting from a higher number of South African and Nigeria to be identified, whilst enabling these responses to still be included in wider comparisons. It may also be useful to consider that if the categories of the UNDP’s Human Development Index were followed, South Africa could be considered alongside Botswana, Cameroon, Ghana, Swaziland and Uganda as a country of Medium Human Development, while Nigeria could be considered alongside Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe as a country of Low Human Development. Mauritius is the only country represented in the survey (one human resource manager response) rated as a country of High Human Development.

2.3.2 Disciplinary focus

Responses are weighted in favour of the social sciences and humanities (64%). This is, however, partly due to the high proportion responding from South Africa who were either social science or humanities researchers; East and West Africa still generated a higher level of social science and humanities responses, but also many more from the natural and technical sciences. Although all responses were welcomed, regardless of discipline, a particular effort was made to target social scientists. Greater social science representation from Southern Africa therefore reflects the more targeted contact that was possible there, but in general terms the large number of other responses received fits the initial observation that the challenges facing researchers are very similar regardless of field of study, and that in many cases the researchers who replied did not feel this distinction mattered and saw a useful opportunity to stress common concerns. That it was not possible to gather input from more academics in the social sciences and humanities may also reflect a general bias in funding and collaboration towards research in science and technology, where ‘developmental’ benefits are often easier to trace.

2.3.3 Background to respondents

Academics

Of the 90 responses to the academic survey, the majority came from lecturers of various levels (assistant to senior), 10 from professors or associate professors, and 17 from those with more senior management responsibilities (including heads of department, deans and directors of centres). 2 responses were also received from vice-chancellors, while the remainder came from others involved in research in some capacity. Of these just under half (42) held a doctorate, while 39 had a master's degree (including 8 MPhil), 4 a bachelor's degree, and 5 did not indicate their qualifications.

Human Resource Managers

Of 31 responses to the human resource survey, 13 came from various grades of staff within university registrar or human resource departments and the rest from senior management figures including 8 from directors of human resource departments, 1 from a faculty dean, and 5 from deputy vice-chancellors and vice-chancellors. Where 'human resource manager' is used in this report, it is taken to refer to this group as a whole, regardless of actual role or position.

Research Managers

Of the 32 responses to the research managers survey, 22 came from those with senior positions (deans and heads or directors of research), and a further 4 were from deputy and pro-vice-chancellors. 2 came from academic researchers, while the remainder had other responsibilities relating to research support. Again, where the term 'research manager' is used in this report, it will be taken as referring to this group as a whole.

3. International links and donor support: the current picture

3.1 Recent international activity

To establish the level of current collaboration, respondents were asked to estimate the extent to which links with other international HEIs had increased or decreased in recent years.⁴ An overall rise in international activity was noted, with 71% of academics reporting an increase and 19% reporting a decrease (a net increase of 52%). Research managers largely agreed, but were more positive overall – 70% noting an increase, and just 10% a drop, in support. Regionally, Southern Africa had seen the greatest rise, while West Africa had seen a substantial decrease in international activity.

Positively, the greatest increase in collaboration had taken place within Africa (academic 54%, research management 62%), with most of this activity reported by Southern Africa, while West Africa had seen much lower levels of intra-African activity. The majority reported an increase in links with the UK (academic 47%, research management 51%); slightly fewer academics (44%) indicated that other European links had increased, but research managers were more positive (54%). In both cases, academics noted that East Africa had seen greater increases in activity than had other regions. Academics saw a much lower level of activity with the US, where 37% reported that links had increased, while in contrast research managers thought this had been one of the greatest areas of activity, with 58% noting an increase. Where they were able to comment, research managers noted that the bulk of these links (51%) had been in science and technology, while fewer (39%) had been in the social sciences and humanities.⁵

There are a few notable changes in activity in specific countries. Botswana reported a substantial drop in international links (based on 3 responses from the University of Botswana, and all from educational departments), perhaps due to less of a perceived need for donor support. Cameroon (from 4 responses and 2 HEIs) reported that links had declined absolutely. In East Africa the lowest level of increase and a significant decline were observed in Tanzania. In addition to South Africa, Uganda noted substantial increases. The few responses from Rwanda and Zimbabwe reported significant, if marginal, increases, as did Malawi and Ghana.

3.2 Trends in donor support: increases and decreases in funding to HEIs

The observed increase in international links is, however, at odds with a reported decrease in specific instances of support (see Figure 3.1). Ignoring responses which indicated no support was available, or which not did indicate whether support was increasing or decreasing, a net fall of 6% in support to researchers was reported, while 27% reported no international support at all. This compares to the 52% net increase in international activity reported above. While contact between African HEIs and other international HEIs/donors has increased, no doubt linked to recent G8 commitments, this renewed interest would appear to be taking much longer to be translated into actual financial support accessible to individual academics.

In the context of this survey there are several possible explanations for the mismatch between international links and actual donor support. Firstly, the definition of a link was deliberately left very open, but it may be that links exist that are not actually related to particular support schemes or do not lead directly to great increases in funding. There is thus a need to question the quality of links and identify those that actually have quantifiable benefit for African HEIs. Individual observations are recorded here, and there may be different trends observed at an institutional level. For example, while 32% of academics reported a decrease in support (more than indicating any other trend), the majority of research managers, better placed to observe shifts at broader institutional levels, noted an overall increase in support (41%).

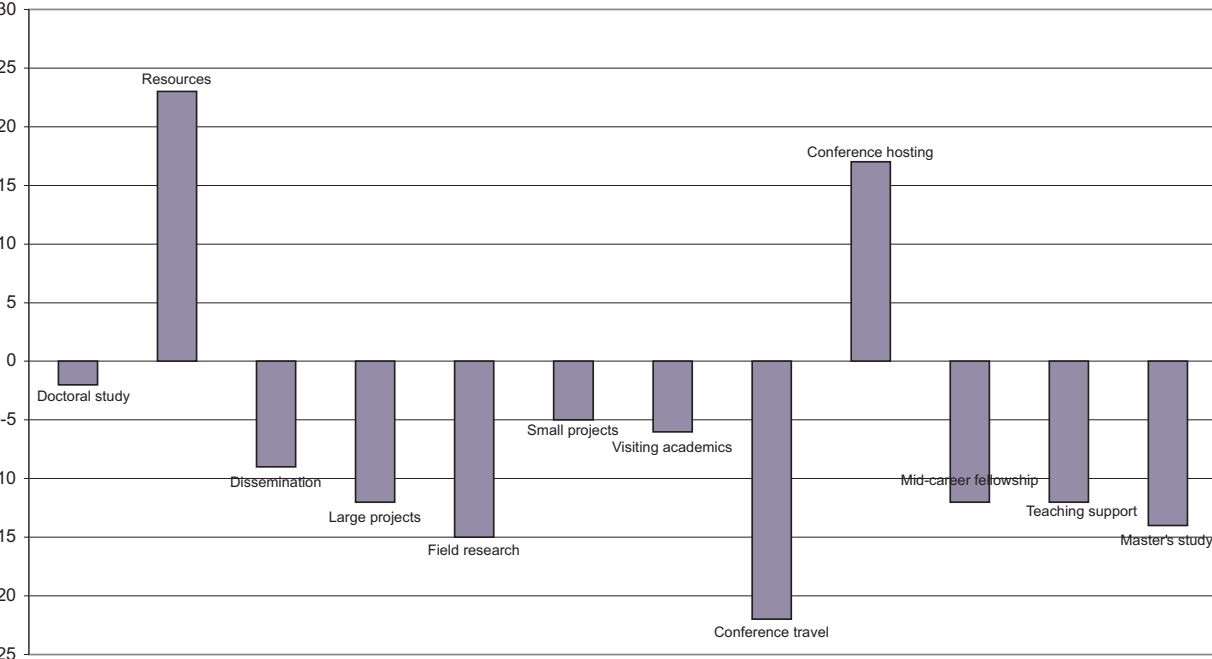
Research managers also noted a more marked increase in internal research budgets than did academics, and in fact they reported that budgets had risen in twice as many cases (78% and 35% respectively).

⁴ The word 'link' was used to be as general as possible about potential forms of partnership and collaboration between HEIs.

⁵ Some respondents only gave figures for one of the two disciplinary areas, and because some support may be multidisciplinary or to general institutional needs, the balance could not be attributed to the second disciplinary category.

It may also be that support, where it is given, is very concentrated and so only a limited few within a supported institution will have observed any benefit. There may, of course, simply be a time-lag in the process, from when links are developed to the negotiation and implementation of support, or to the point at which perceptions of support begin to change.

Figure 3.1 Net direction of existing donor support (academic responses)



Of 12 types of support suggested to respondents, support for 7 was said to have decreased overall, 3 were said to have been predominantly unsupported, and only 2 were said to have shown an overall increase. An imperfect, but illustrative, analysis of the net direction of support flows (Figure 3.1 above) gives a useful picture of donor activity: significant increases in resource and conference hosting support, with all other instances of support decreasing at various rates.

3.3 Increasing international links but declining donor support

The fact that increased links are not matched by increased support – actual or perceived – is clearly important, and illustrates a theme that was raised by many respondents through the survey: the frequent delays and bottlenecks experienced in accessing and receiving funding. There is a very real need to address the mechanisms and systems through which support is disbursed. Several respondents talked of having to wait for considerable periods until the first – or subsequent – instalments of funding arrived, and stressed that with such low existing resource levels, a project could simply not be started until the money was received. Beyond simply delaying a project, this was noted as causing researchers to lose motivation, or to move onto other work, so that the team, on the basis of which funding was granted, was no longer intact by the time money actually appeared. In the case of collaborative research it effectively means that the Northern partner is able to start, because an existing resource base or other funding can carry them forward until new money arrives, whilst an African researcher or research team cannot. The difficulties that this poses to creating strong and successful partnerships are clear.

4. Challenges to research and priorities for future support

4.1 How views were gathered

Through a number of questions the consultation asked about the major challenges facing researchers and the priority areas for future support. Some questions presented a list of possible responses, while others provided space for respondents to record comments at greater length. Respondents were also asked about the activities for which support was currently provided (Figure 4.2), allowing needs to be considered in the context of existing donor support. Unless otherwise noted, the figures in this section draw principally on responses to the academic survey.

Respondents were asked to indicate the 5 most significant challenges that they faced in planning or undertaking research, grading these from 1 ('most challenging') to 5 ('least challenging'). In practice, many chose to score the full range of possible challenges using the 1-5 scale. Although the question was not answered entirely as anticipated, the results are nevertheless useful. In addition to scoring the relative importance of each area listed, there was also an opportunity for respondents to note additional challenges. Only two respondents chose to do so (noting fieldwork needs and basic training in research) and this general willingness to fit within the categories already provided, also true of answers to other questions, suggests that most of the key problems encountered by researchers were fairly well encapsulated. Figure 4.1 below shows the average (mean) result for each area of support relative to the 1-5 scale, arranged in order of significance – where a lower figure indicates a greater challenge.

Respondents were also asked to indicate their greatest priorities for any future research support (Figure 4.3), as well as indicating whether they agreed or disagreed – and to what extent – with a series of statements. According to the way in which instructions were interpreted, some chose to indicate that a single activity was 'most important', while others rated several or most areas this way. 'Most important' and 'high priority' figures are therefore presented together to allow for an overall comparison.

4.2 General impressions

Perhaps as was to be expected, all of the areas suggested in the survey were noted as posing a significant challenge to research and all were considered to be high priority. Greatest challenges included: resources; the balance between teaching and research; access to funding information; the development of an adequate profile; and donor alignment. Greatest priorities for future support included: doctoral study support (93%); resource needs (93%); assistance with publishing and dissemination (93%); large project funding (91%); support for field research (91%); and small project funding (90%).

In only a few instances was support rated as 'low priority' or 'not a priority'. Because research environments vary significantly across institutions, it is difficult to generalise, but relative differences highlight some interesting points. The fact that no challenge achieves an average of below 2.5, and that all challenges and priorities are rated within a fairly narrow range, would suggest that respondents were generally reluctant to identify any one aspect as especially challenging or of greatest priority above all others. One respondent noted: 'all the factors in your list are important but until we have staff competent to engage in research and a basic infrastructure to support them it will be difficult to even get started'. Rather than seeking to identify a limited number of priority needs, it is most useful to consider how these figures illustrate degrees of need and how they might therefore be placed within an overall framework of assistance.

Figure 4.1 Challenges facing researchers (academic responses)

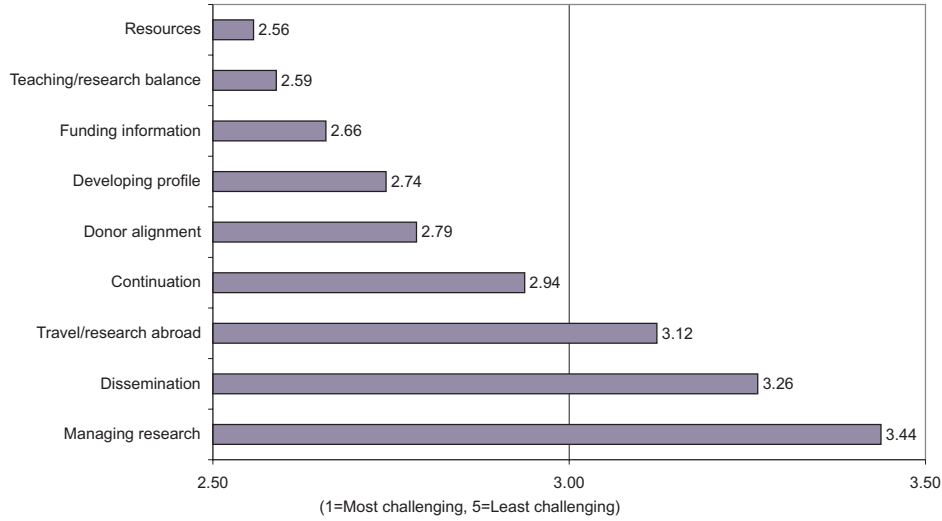


Figure 4.2 Increases and decreases in support (academic responses)

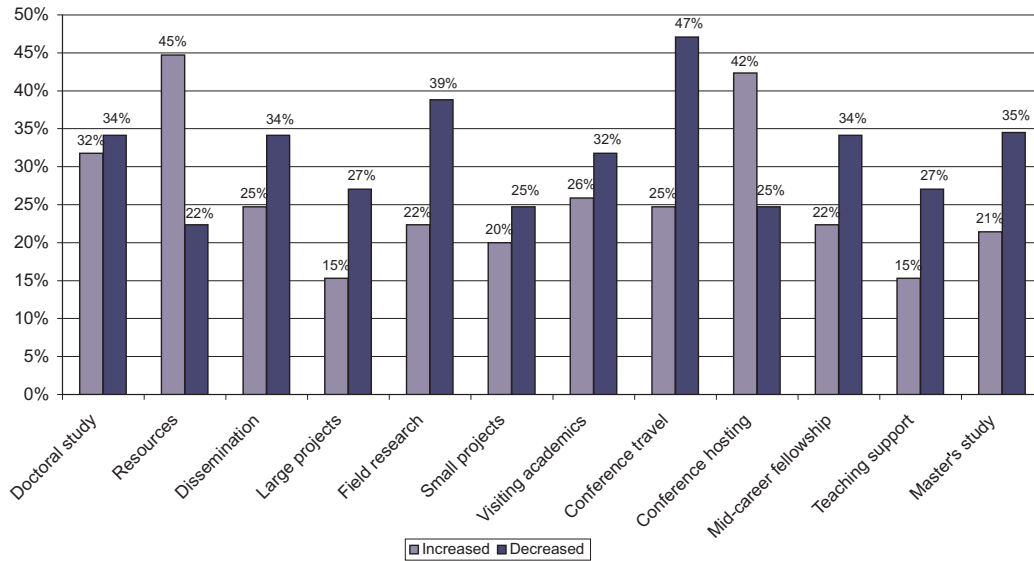
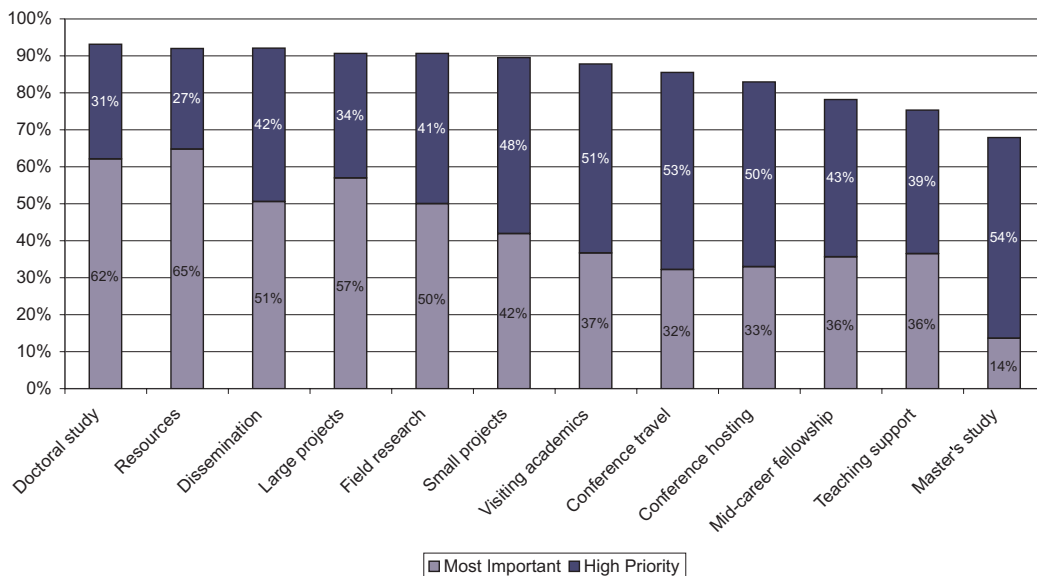


Figure 4.3 Future priorities (academic responses)



4.3 Institutional resource capacity

‘Funders and researchers from the North do not fully understand the constraints that researchers in the South work under...we have a DFID funded research project in partnership with two top UK universities and a number of other African ones. The grant includes funding for computers for two research assistants...but none for the principal researchers who...share one with about 20 other members of academic staff.’

‘Most books and journals in our library are old and outdated. The institution does not provide enough ICT. Some departments do not even have a simple piece [of computer equipment]. Our department has one piece that has to be shared by all four members of staff and a secretary.’

‘The ability to cope with self sponsored communication e.g having to expend your little personal resources in sending and receiving information via e-mails and surface mails, coupled with delays and queues in cyber cafes may lead to breakdown in communication and [delay] in the research process.’

Institutional resource capacity – in particular the provision of fundamental facilities such as reliable electricity supplies, adequate access to computers and the internet, and up-to-date libraries – will be the basis on which any substantial increase in African research output will be achieved. The current lack of resources in many universities severely impedes all aspects of research. Resource levels underpin all activities, and without sufficient resource capacity other forms of support can neither be accessed nor fully utilised. Inadequate resources mean that researchers cannot access support, develop relationships, or keep in touch with other academics – and hence with prospective partners. Projects can stall or even collapse when basic resources are not available, results cannot be properly disseminated, and it proves difficult to carry any work forward into new funding phases. An urgent need for vastly improved resources was emphasised by almost all respondents – frequently in terms of internet and library access. Several highlighted the personal expenses that they incurred in trying to develop research, spending time and money in internet cafes for example. One even spoke of paying to rent generating units and buying fuel in order to run a computer during the regular power failures that interrupted their work, explaining: ‘as I do this my laptop power has just 15% and regrettably I must shut down’. Unsurprisingly support for resources was rated as the greatest challenge that researchers faced (2.56). All groups surveyed rated it as a major concern for future support: 93% of academics and 96% of HR staff felt it to be most important or of high priority; 87% of research managers also saw it as a top concern, although relative to other areas it was less of a concern to this group.

The issue becomes particularly acute in collaboration, since partners must cooperate on the basis of differential access to basic facilities. Collaborative projects can, of course, act to raise resource investments, and some gave particular examples of this, but there are also dangers that this is assumed to be a benefit of collaboration without properly considering how it might be achieved. One respondent argued that: ‘collaborative links would be beneficial if the gap in resources is not too large. While [collaboration] is beneficial in pulling together resources, where the gap in resources is too large it becomes meaningless’. These needs can be, and are, addressed through support delivered for other activities, but without explicit attention to resources other improvements will struggle to be realised.

Encouragingly, resources have also seen the greatest level of donor investment in recent years, with 45% of respondents indicating an increase. In particular, East Africa has enjoyed a major boost to resource support (especially Uganda; in contrast Tanzanian responses indicated poor funding levels) as has West Africa. This is encouraging and a positive development; however it is clear that need vastly outstrips existing support. While resource development will be an issue on a larger scale for some donors, it is clear that the limitations of resources cannot be ignored in any funding scheme: 75% agreed that ‘participation in research collaborations is limited by the resources available at this institution’, and only 15% felt resources were not a restrictive factor.

4.4 Access to information and disbursement of funding

‘The major challenges experienced during prior or existing research mostly borders on access to information.’

‘There is generally a lack of information on funding opportunities. If this were made available, maybe significant projects would be developed and joint collaboration sought...the lack of information creates a lag in research endeavour.’

‘Research ideas abound among African researchers. What is most challenging is gaining collaboration and funding for these projects. Also necessary training on costing, and legal matters concerning funding is not available.’

4.4.1 Awareness of opportunity

Many academics responded that they struggled even to find out about opportunities for funding and collaboration, and when they did it was often too late to put together credible proposals, least of all secure a collaborating partner. With websites and electronic networks widely used to alert researchers to potential funding – and to keep in touch with contacts and colleagues in other institutions – reliable internet access is vital, as discussed in the preceding section. But when access and time are limited, it is also vital that information be provided through easily accessible and centralised sources. Accordingly, accessing funding information was rated as a major challenge (2.66; third greatest challenge) and 76% felt that finding international partners for collaboration was not straightforward. 73% access information via external websites, 67% through personal contacts, 53% through printed newsletters from external organisations, and just 31% benefit from an institutional database or other internal information source.⁶ One respondent requested more information on possible funding sources, such as the establishment of an international database, saying: ‘it is often by accident that we find out about funding opportunities’, while another struggled in ‘getting information about funding bodies on time so as to meet the deadline for submission of proposals’. Timely access to information was raised in the context of the England-Africa Partnerships scheme for example, one respondent noting that the problem was ‘pinning down a UK academic from his busy schedule to collaborate with you and submit a proposal within the indicated time’. Other responses noted similar problems; one saying: ‘information on possible collaborators is most needed as it is difficult to identify in the foreign institutions who is most likely to be interested in your project ideas’.

4.4.2 Applications

As well as simply accessing information, several felt that the application process was in many cases obstructive and time-consuming, which discouraged academics from undertaking research. One respondent was keen to point out that this was not a request that donors lower their standards, but an acknowledgment that academics would benefit from workshops which helped them to identify suitable agencies and write strong proposals which would meet international standards. One respondent who had benefited from such training during an overseas scholarship explained: ‘many academics in Africa require training in accessing funds and in writing competitive proposals. I benefited from such and I know the difference it made’.

4.4.3 Allocation of funding

Flexibility in the design of funding schemes was urged by many, who noted that the particular requirements imposed on beneficiaries, restrictions on what funding could be used for, and lack of room for additional unforeseen expenditure created particular problems in the context of African HE – one respondent complained: ‘donors specify what funds should be used for and the expenses initially quoted in the research may not be enough if the research is not completed on time because of rising costs of living and unstable economy’. Many also felt that donors were too

⁶ Respondents could indicate multiple sources, and therefore figures do not total 100%.

prescriptive in the thematic areas they were willing to fund, which meant African researchers who relied largely on donor funding did not have the freedom to define agendas and priorities, and hence lacked motivation to undertake research. 73% of respondents felt that ‘collaborations are generally directed according to the research interests of international partners’; only 6% felt this was not the case. One academic urged a ‘bottom up approach where there is more leeway on the topics and areas to research’. This, they felt, would subsequently ‘motivate more research and thereby raise the level of collaborative work’.

4.4.4 Selection and disbursement of awards

A common complaint was that mechanisms for the disbursement of funds did not allow all researchers equal access. Several felt that donor money was often taken by ‘the same old names’, denying access to junior academics and concentrating opportunity in the hands of the few: ‘based on personal and shared experiences of colleagues...donor agencies should be careful not to award research funds to academic opportunists, i.e. awarding funds to the same old names who monopolize research funds, underpay/overuse junior academics, and eventually claim the credit of the “lead author” on publication. In such situations, the junior academics are never known... Funding agencies should have a way of selecting awardees/beneficiaries based on the capacity to perform, [rather] than placing too much emphasis on academic seniority’.

Several suggested that in this regard heads of department did not always make the best contact points, and the following comment was typical of many: ‘the older generation of lecturers is mostly after maintaining the status quo...the younger lecturers are therefore unable to access information on scholarships and research funding opportunities, hence, they do not compete for them’. The same respondent explained that heads of department in their institution had kept details of funding to themselves ‘only to put them up on the notice board at the last minute when it is too late for the other members to apply’. Of course, this is not to suggest that all heads or senior staff handle funding opportunities this way, but it does highlight the need to ensure that calls are advertised as widely as possible to ensure information cannot be monopolised in this way.

4.5 Managing collaborations and donor alignment

‘Only specific people are chosen to be exposed to the practical aspects of developing or managing research projects (e.g costing, budgets, legal issues, reporting to donors). As a result people who would like to be involved are not given the opportunity to develop these valuable skills.’

‘Personally, in order to be an effective researcher, I need training in research project management.’

4.5.1 Managing research

The practical aspects of managing research (costing, budgets, legal issues, reporting etc) were rated as least challenging of all areas. It is unlikely that this is because researchers are particularly well-skilled at managing projects – or have substantial institutional support in doing so – as when discussing the difficulties that they encountered, many commented that training was needed in these areas (see Section 4.3). It is more likely a reflection that these are later stage concerns, since when funding is so hard to obtain in the first place, its management is a concern only for those few projects successful in securing support.

4.5.2 Alignment

That African HEIs are able to set and follow their own research priorities, rather than respond to externally designed agendas, is vital to developing a strong and distinct research culture in Africa, and the sustainable infrastructure which will enable it to progress. This is made much harder when funding is predominantly accessed externally, and when

projects must therefore be tuned to the different requirements of each donor. One researcher commented: ‘aligning project ideas with requirements of donors is sometimes not practical because donors do not understand the underlying factors on the ground’. Similar comments were made in relation to partnerships with Northern institutions, for example it is of concern that 73% of academics, and 66% of research managers, felt that collaborations were ‘generally directed according to the research interests of international partners’. One respondent commented that it was difficult ‘getting research partners to understand the needs of my immediate environment’, while another said that for future collaborations to be successful Northern partners needed to demonstrate greater ‘willingness...to work with inexperienced colleagues [in the South] and build their capacity’. Some felt that African researchers were not fully included in research on equal terms, and a few felt that they were involved in gathering the data but not in subsequent stages of analysis (see 4.3.3. below). The issues are therefore of managing expectations, and being clear from the start what the collaboration will encompass, what the divisions of responsibility are, and how the relationship is to be defined.

4.5.3 Field research

Responses indicated that funding to allow greater field research was a particular priority, and rated it as a significantly higher priority than some traditional forms of support. This tallies with other comments recorded elsewhere which indicated that African researchers should have a greater ownership and control over the capturing of the original data, particularly in relation to some of the major ‘African issues’ which are widely debated. Supporting field research elements within funding schemes, or in addition (i.e. a separately available grant or fund) would assist in developing a stronger African research base and ensuring African researchers had access to the key problems or issues of research within Africa (rather than allowing this to be controlled by better-resourced Northern researchers who can ironically travel further than those already based in a country). Despite some negative accounts from African researchers who felt they were used simply as ‘data-gatherers’ (4.3.2), others felt that more use should be made of local researchers to undertake fieldwork, thus reducing costs incurred by Northern academics flying out for this purpose. For junior researchers, a chance to undertake fieldwork and gather basic data is of great value in providing practical methodological training, as long as it is also complemented by some element of formal supervision or teaching. Support has declined at almost twice the level of its increase, and a fifth of respondents saw no support at all. It is in fact the second greatest instance of declining support (behind travel to conferences and workshops), and support has declined particularly in East and West Africa.

4.6 Sharing knowledge and developing relationships

‘Publication outlets for tertiary level research-based books are very limited. We also have very limited access to marketing our publications abroad. This is one factor that discourages us.’

‘The public has generally lost faith in the quality of research coming from institutions in developing countries, hence the lukewarm attitude towards the use of such research results in the public domain. When research is known to be jointly undertaken by an institution in collaboration a UK or US institution, the public has more interest in its outcomes.’

4.6.1 Publishing and dissemination

Published papers are the expected outputs of most academic research; they are the means by which new knowledge and developments in research are communicated within and beyond the academic community. Without publications it is hard to demonstrate the results and achievements of a project, and because attracting future support will depend on a researcher’s profile, dissemination not only represents the conclusion, or partial conclusion, of a piece of work, but also a starting point for other projects. Collaboration was seen to be particularly positive in this regard, one respondent noting that ‘external collaborators usually will ensure that research results are disseminated as quickly as

possible for application by the end users. Any developing opportunities or interesting results are pursued in future proposals/projects’.

Dissemination and publishing were rated as slightly lesser challenges overall, compared to other issues, but the problems encountered at this stage of a project were noted frequently in other parts of the survey. 72% agreed that dissemination of research into the public domain was poor, 31% of these strongly so. Additionally, when asked to rate the quality of support available in this area, 30% said it was poor, while 22% said none was available at all. This was particularly true of West Africa. That dissemination was not perceived to be as challenging as other areas is likely to reflect the fact that when projects are hard to establish in the first place, thinking about how eventual outcomes will be communicated is relatively less of a concern. It was certainly seen as a high priority for future assistance amongst respondents – equal to resource and doctoral support (93%, although with fewer placing it as ‘most important’).

Many expressed frustrations at not being able to get their work published, and thus not read and appreciated by the wider academic community. One commented: ‘in most cases our papers do not go past the editors or reviewers. As a result, [the] majority of our research work has remained on our shelves without being utilized for furtherance of academic inquiry’. Publishing is undoubtedly difficult, but there may also be issues of quality to be addressed here, in order to ensure that submissions to international journals are of a high enough standard for publication, and that local, national or regional journals maintain comparable standards to ensure credibility. Several requested training in writing and publishing, and one respondent commented that this had been a major benefit of his UK fellowship: ‘it was from this experience that I got more skills to write international standard academic papers’. Given that this area was indicated as a significant priority, it is of concern that those reporting a decline in donor support (34%) outnumbered those indicating an increase (28%); it is in fact one of a number of areas which demonstrate a fairly significant decline.

4.6.2 Conferences and networks

Attendance and presentation of work at conferences and other meetings makes academics and their work visible. Conferences offer important opportunities for researchers to network, share ideas, build contacts, and develop the relationships and profile that may ultimately form the basis of successful collaboration. Significantly, one of the areas that respondents reported to be most challenging was developing enough of a profile amongst peers and colleagues to enable them to tap into or be ‘eligible’ for collaborative work. This tallies with the number who identified how important networks and personal relationships had been in establishing existing collaborations (for further discussion see Section 6).

Respondents were asked about the importance of both attending and hosting conferences. The priorities accorded to attending international conferences and to hosting conferences at home institutions were practically equal (85% and 83% respectively), suggesting that respondents felt that any opportunity to network and develop relationships with researchers was valuable. International travel has its attractions, and obviously allows greater contact with Northern academics. Prioritisation of support to attend meetings abroad might therefore have been anticipated. Conversely, the fact that there was no greater enthusiasm for international above local opportunities is positive, and would seem to demonstrate a strong interest in building local forums. This observation is emphasised by responses to other parts of the survey, and particularly some of the longer comments received, which argued that networks should be developed or strengthened within individual institutions, and between institutions nationally, regionally, and continentally. One respondent from South Africa noted that ‘while research collaboration is fairly easy with regards to institutions abroad, it is ironically difficult nationally. This is however overcome through effective networking’. Another commented: ‘at the moment, there is no networking, no sharing of information, no collaborative links, no research relationships amongst Nigeria’s 80 universities. This is tragic... One is more likely to encounter an academic from another African country in London than on the African continent itself’. A South African research manager explained: ‘researchers are increasingly expected to collaborate with institutions elsewhere in Africa (south-south partnerships) but funding for this is very limited’.

Where funding from universities or donors was limited this was often met with considerable personal effort and commitment, showing the potential that increased support might open up. A Cameroonian researcher commented:

'I have organised two international conferences thus creating room for researchers from several parts of the world to meet and share ideas and research experiences, and possibly develop joint projects. The university has not supported me in any way and I have had to use my meagre personal funds. This is discouraging and I am organising yet another international conference... Maybe for the last time as I do not have the funds to keep doing this'.

If these observations are correct, then existing donor practice is well directed, but clearly requires a boost. Support for hosting conferences in an African institution has increased significantly (42%) and Figure 4.3 above suggests it is a recognisable priority for funders (it was the second highest increase in support recorded, after resource support). In parallel, support for attending overseas conferences has decreased, suggesting positively that donors too may have recognised the need for strong Africa-based networks. If such Africa-based conferences could encourage and sustain intra-Africa relationships, a need stressed by many respondents, while also bringing international academics into an African HE context, the benefits would be twofold. In addition to the strengthening of local and regional networks, Northern academics would have a chance to appreciate better the research environments (and challenges) of potential collaborators, and this would then encourage engagement on African terms. One respondent noted that past collaboration had been positive in this regard, making collaborators aware of the constraints under which their African partners worked: 'through collaborative research, external partners realized that my institution had no access to internet facility...there was the urge to have one installed and gratefully the EU provided funds'.

4.6.3 National research cultures

A final point relating to dissemination, discussed by several respondents, was the need to create a national sense of the value of research. In order to guarantee adequate future funding for research, and ensure that national and institutional research cultures were developed, policymakers and governments need to be convinced of the value of research. One respondent explained: 'there is the need for raising the consciousness of the Nigerian public and policy makers, both with respect to the value that the disciplines of arts and humanities bring to the Nigerian society and the facilities required to underpin their roles in socio-economic resuscitation and development'. Another noted: 'governments rarely have a cohesive research policy and rarely acknowledge the potential of academicians in providing research results that could be used in policy development'. This was noted particularly with respect to the social sciences, since governments tended to see more immediate value in the technical solutions emerging from research, but less in the outcomes of social science or humanities research. The wider public too needed to be informed about the outcomes of university-level research in order to understand the benefits accruing to the country as a whole or to local communities. One scholar remembered that 'in the recent data collection that I did for my PhD work, the discussants asked me, at the end of every interview: so how are we going to benefit from all this information that we have given you?' Clearly such research must be seen to be legitimate, if it is to receive wider support and the necessary level of public participation.

4.7 Training researchers

'What most African academics need today is high level of exposure to standard practices of research and academic activities. This could be achieved through mid-career and postdoctoral fellowship as well as doctoral studies abroad.'

'Research collaboration should also include the element of staff training. Many junior staff lack the opportunity for further studies and it would have been good for any collaboration research project to include this.'

'Most often lecturers in Kenya are overworked in terms of teaching and therefore very few excel in research areas to be internationally recognized especially those from social sciences.'

4.7.1 Maintaining staff capacity

The single most important element in an institution's capacity for research must surely be the quality and experience of its academic staff. Key to developing this, as one respondent put it, was '[creating] space for researchers to become more productive'. While limited resources can be a major obstacle, the most well-equipped institution is nothing without talented researchers. Support for all activities concerned with staff development – master's study, doctoral study, fellowships – had decreased by roughly the same level. In all cases just over a third indicated a drop in support. Notably respondents rated master's study as the lowest priority of all (68% indicating high priority/'most important'), while in contrast doctoral study was most important of all. This contrast may be because African HEIs feel better able to educate students to master's level themselves, but rely on external assistance and scholarships abroad to enable PhD candidates to access the extensive resources that doctoral study requires. The differences may also be partly explained by the profile of respondents, all of whom except four held a master's or above – and therefore either aspired to a gain a PhD, or had already qualified and so recognised its value. Interestingly the often-discussed issue of brain drain did not overly concern researchers. 25% felt that it was a danger posed by increasing collaboration, but the majority (54%) disagreed. Some comments indicated that collaboration could actually mitigate the loss of academic staff, since it gave researchers a viable way of developing their careers within their home countries and many indicated that this was preferable to being forced to leave homes and families for the sake of their careers.

4.7.2 Doctoral training

The number of non-PhD-qualified staff in most African institutions is relatively high, by global standards. As the responses to this survey show, PhDs are generally clustered at the higher staff levels, leaving a cohort of younger but less-qualified academics to do the bulk of teaching. One respondent estimated that of the 274 academic staff below the level of professor, less than half held PhDs. As the professoriate steadily 'greys', it will be this group of researchers, currently without doctoral-level qualifications, who will fill the gaps that are created as senior colleagues retire. Boosting the numbers of doctorates within African HEIs was correspondingly felt to be a major priority by almost all academics responding – the highest priority overall in fact, with 93% indicating that it was most important or a high priority; 96% of HR staff also agreed. In the words of one respondent: 'greater support is required to facilitate doctoral research programs. It enhances, among others, uptake of up-to-date learning skills, better research and teacher trainings, networking and general exposure'. Actual donor support has remained largely unchanged in recent years (34% reported a decline, 32% an increase), although the actual numbers reporting a rise were greater than in most other areas. A greater proportion reported an increase than in most other areas (only conference hosting and resources had enjoyed higher increases), suggesting that substantial donor support continues, but given that doctorates are effectively the academic bedrock of a university, this still-significant decrease – or at best stasis – in support is nevertheless more of a concern. Explored regionally, the relationship between increasing and decreasing support also indicates that in relative terms, West Africa is in greater need of support here while East Africa has fared slightly better.

Several highlighted the advantages of co-supervision for doctoral study, which established a wider relationship and potential for partnership around the PhD. One respondent commented: 'researchers in my institution should be made co-supervisors with their counterpart researchers in developed countries... This will boost the confidence of our researchers.' Additionally split-site PhDs, with the time and supervision divided between two institutions (such as those introduced by the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission in the United Kingdom), could, where home country resources are sufficient, potentially enable more PhDs to be funded.

4.7.3 Postdoctoral training

A warning note was sounded on doctoral funding, with several pointing out that much more attention needed to be given to the problem of returning doctoral students. Many felt that despite the level of training they had received abroad, they were unable to make use of these skills on their return, and thus their talents were wasted, and institutions were unable to benefit from the investments made in their staff: 'The greatest challenge is what to do next after achieving a PhD... In most cases the research ends with the degree because funding is not feasible and infrastructure

in home institutions is usually pathetic'. Respondents were asked about the importance of mid-career fellowships, opportunities for postdoctoral academics to take a period of time away from normal duties to enable them to undertake a more substantial piece of research. Interestingly, fellowships were not ranked as highly as other areas of support. 79% of respondents rated them as a high priority (a relatively low rating), and far fewer considered it to be the 'most important' area for support (36%). Donor support was also reported to have declined overall. These results are, however, at odds with the frequency of comments emphasising the need to provide opportunities for junior researchers and those at more senior levels. In the case of the former, opportunities were needed to allow research careers to be continued beyond the PhD, whilst in the latter case they could help to reinvigorate careers often characterised by relative isolation and infrequent opportunities for scholarship. One respondent, thinking about support for junior researchers, noted that fellowships were 'important for staff retention and job satisfaction'. Another commented that fellowships were helpful in 'opening up research avenues; mitigating the challenges of ICT and library resources; keeping track of state of the art in a discipline; placing the beneficiary in the mainstream of current researches'. Others stressed that opportunities should focus on continued development and interaction, with one respondent commenting: 'donor programmes should not be once in the lifetime of staff' and that short but regular visits would help to sustain research. Another noted that 'the rare opportunity to experience ideal university life and culture in other developed parts of the world is usually a turning point for those who experience it. They become far more focused and more serious in their work [than is typical of] academics brought up in an atmosphere of decayed or non-existent teaching and research infrastructure'.

4.7.4 Balance of support

Respondents were asked whether support should be provided for junior researchers above senior colleagues. 52% reported that there was no particular effort made to support junior researchers, and of those that indicated that some effort was made, only 22% said this was actually covered within institutional policy. Lack of support was particularly acute in East Africa (64% indicated none being available). Just over half (53%) agreed that the emphasis of support should be on junior colleagues, possibly reflecting the demographic of respondents, although experienced researchers did make supportive comments in this regard. Despite strong calls for greater support for those at early stages in their careers, there was also a sense that favouring one group above another would ultimately not be beneficial, with a recognition that training for junior staff relied on the support and cooperation of senior colleagues. One respondent commented: 'It's a good idea to train young staff because they keep on replacing older staff on retirement, but the danger is when the older staff are not trained further they become dead wood and may not offer any training to the younger staff. A balance is needed'. Another recognised that assistance to both could be effectively linked, by supporting senior staff and encouraging them to use their skills to mentor their colleagues: 'if senior academics are getting support they will be able to affect the junior ones in terms of research'.

4.7.5 Teaching demands

Few academics in any country have the luxury of focussing entirely on research, and in any case teaching is not only a key part of an academic career, but is also vital to developing future talent for research. Throughout the survey, responses indicated that the demands of teaching were a major obstacle, and rated it as the second greatest challenge to research (mean 2.59). One commented: 'due to inadequate staff, especially academic staff in our institutions, lecturers are normally overloaded with teaching work, and therefore have little or no time for research'. Another scholar reported that while a reasonable balance between the two was contractually stipulated, in practice infrequent opportunities for research meant that academics' teaching commitments tended to be increased. The few who had secured funding, or who had a higher profile within the institution, were able to pass their duties on to others to make time for research, who in turn were then increasingly less able to free up time to investigate possibilities for research.⁷ Some indicated that the demands of work more generally – but with an emphasis on teaching duties – made any additional commitment difficult, and one respondent apologised for the delay in returning the survey, explaining: 'take the reasons as some of the factors you are addressing in the questionnaire. Balancing of teaching load and research is key'.

⁷ Focus group discussion, held at the ACU, 7th February 2007.

Although a major obstacle to research, teaching support scores as a relatively low priority in Figure 4.3 above, perhaps because it was not perceived as an area where donor support was possible or useful (donor support was certainly lowest in this area, and 48% indicated that no support was available). Staffing levels clearly depend on institutional salary budgets, and this is less likely to be an area where donors direct support unless it comes as part of a wider package of assistance. UK researchers are often able to access grants which provide for replacement teaching costs, allowing leave from normal duties.⁸ African institutions must instead typically find this additional money from their own funds, or simply pass duties to other colleagues. Building these considerations into other funding mechanisms might enable a greater take-up of existing opportunities, and ensure that where money is disbursed for research there are not competing claims on an academic's time. Increased teaching capacity will be essential to opening up access to higher education, and will, of course, provide the talent needed for future research. Care must be taken to ensure that research capacity is not raised at the expense of teaching – as one respondent put it: 'the primary duty of academic staff is to teach, but also carrying out research is crucial because promotion is related to research output. So one is tempted to get involved more in research, and balancing it with teaching is sometimes tricky. The students could suffer if one is not careful'.

4.8 Mobility in research

'The collaboration received very strong institutional support from my host university and that of the British Academy. However...the immigration formalities proved very difficult and delayed travelling from Nigeria to the UK, as the British visa office in Nigeria often refused visa applications...leading to cancellation of a booked flight and shifting the visitation period.'

'Applying for a UK visa can sometimes be described as a humiliating experience. One is forced to queue under the hot sun for hours (sometimes the whole day), pay a huge amount of money, spend a full day just submitting applications, another full day if they require to interrogate you, and another full day to collect the passport with or without the visa. Such experiences discourage many from attending conferences.'

The mobility of researchers clearly impinges on their potential to collaborate. Although the finances of many universities limit travel to an extent, the struggle to obtain visas prevented many from travelling even when the money had been made available. Several respondents related stories of costly repeated trips to foreign embassies to apply for visas, including 'shabby and discriminatory treatment', and in one case delays and obstructions which actually prevented an academic from taking up a particular fellowship: 'after fulfilling all conditions and obtaining placement as a fellow at the Rockefeller's Bellagio Centre in Italy for September 2006, I was unable to obtain an Italian visa. This was after travelling over 1,000 kilometres to Lagos, incurring hotel expenses, sending countless e-mails, making many phone calls and spending four gruelling days queuing at the Italian Consulate'. While the challenge of arranging travel abroad was not rated as highly as other areas, this is likely to have been influenced by the relative fortunes of respondents, many of whom had travelled under the Commonwealth Scholarship schemes, and thus had had these matters – particularly the issue of visas – handled for them. Comments certainly demonstrated that much needed to be done here, with researchers often enduring lengthy processes and additional expenses in order to gain the necessary visas – and even when the trip was at the invitation of a well-known institution, as in the above case.

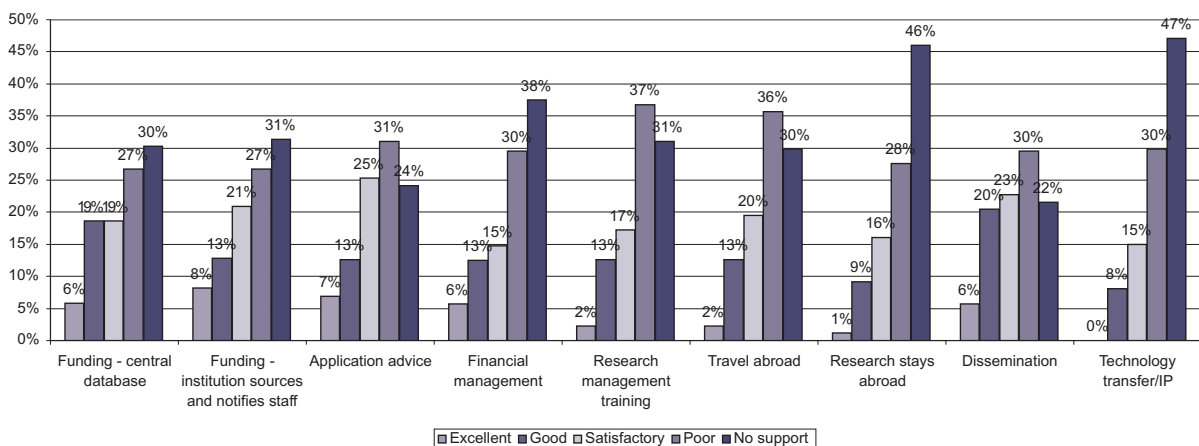
⁸ e.g. those offered by the British Academy which provide for replacement teaching costs.

5. How researchers are supported within institutions

In addition to gathering the views of academics directly involved in research, it is also important to understand the institutional context within which research takes place, and the mechanisms and structures of support that exist to assist it. Academics, as Figure 5.1 below suggests, generally felt that support was lacking or of poor quality.⁹ Overall, 33% noted that no support was available and 30% that some support was available but of poor quality. 19% felt that the support available was satisfactory, while just 13% and 4% respectively noted instances of good or excellent support. Levels were perceived to be worse in West Africa, slightly better in East Africa, and best of all in Southern Africa. Only Uganda, South Africa and Nigeria noted any levels of excellence, and this was generally low. While this undeniably negative picture points to weak support structures, it should not be read as a criticism of human resource or research management offices, where they exist; instead it should be seen as an indication of the huge constraints that they face in delivering much-needed services from limited budgets, with few staff and with institutional structures which frustrate rather than enable the coherent delivery of academic support.

The perspectives of human resource and research managers help to understand the problem at institutional, rather than simply individual, levels. Two points should be noted; firstly that contacts were generated largely from professional networks, membership of which indicates a certain level of activity in these areas, and, secondly, that some undertook these duties as part of a portfolio of administrative roles and were not dedicated research or human resource support officers.

Figure 5.1 Academic perspectives on the quality of support available



5.1 Budgets for research

Most respondents were not in a position to supply comprehensive details of institutional research budgets, and certainly not to represent these as a proportion of overall expenditure. Of those academics who answered questions about money available to them for research, several indicated that they only had access to a few hundred dollars each year. Research managers were better placed to comment on university research budgets as a whole. 24 institutions answered this question; South African budgets ranged from USD 800,000 to USD 8,000,000, while the richest research budget reported outside of South Africa was USD 1 million annually at a Nigerian HEL. 5 universities received USD 150,000 or more, and 9 received between USD 500 and USD 50,000.

⁹ Some categories relating to non-social science/humanities support were included, such as technology transfer and intellectual property, to gauge whether energy was being directed particularly to supporting science and technology research.

5.2 Systems and structures of support

74% of respondents indicated that they had a human resource manager, and 94% that there was someone responsible for research management. For the reasons noted above this may not be entirely reflective of the 300 or so universities within Africa as a whole – although with 24 institutions covered for human resources (20 outside of South Africa) and 31 for research management (9 outside of South Africa), it nevertheless offers a useful snapshot.

5.2.1 Research management

Centralised research management systems are often relatively new to African universities, and while in this sample there is usually someone who takes this responsibility, there is less often a dedicated office or system built around it. 34% indicated that research support was centralised within one office, compared to 90% who said they had a central human resource office. Most indicated provision was spread across a number of departments or units, and 55% of academics reported that they did not have access to a central office. While 78% had a research strategy in place, only 17% in West Africa did, revealing how varied the experience can be across countries, and between institutions. Even where a range of support is provided, the lack of a central office to oversee this is likely to make it harder to develop comprehensive institutional strategies, and make it less easy for academics to access this support – particularly if the number of support staff available is low.

5.2.2 Human resource management

Although the extension of human resource systems, beyond normal functions of personnel and payroll into issues of staff development, is often relatively recent in many African universities, human resource systems are generally better established and better developed than those providing research support. Human resource offices had strategies in place in 84% of cases; however, only 23% reported that they had total control over staff development matters, with 71% indicating that they shared this responsibility with other offices. 74% said that support was accessed from multiple sources, rather than through a central office, which will make it much harder for them to effectively track and monitor staff development. The consultation made it clear that there were ideas, energy and commitment within HR departments to expand the support they could offer, but the potential to achieve this was limited by both finances and by their positions within university decision making.

5.2.3 Management of scholarship awards

The vast majority of human resource staff (71%) felt that decisions on who benefited from externally-funded scholarships were taken largely by academics. 60% felt this was true of internally-funded opportunities. Academic departments must retain a degree of responsibility for the development of their staff, and functions will therefore inevitably be shared to an extent between offices. That said, these responses suggest many human resource departments lack the level of oversight that would be desirable – and even necessary – to ensure that the developmental needs of academic staff are recognised and supported at the institutional level, and to ensure that scholarships and fellowships, vital in giving academics opportunities for further study or research, are firmly integrated as part of overall staff development strategies.

In the case of nomination for study abroad, this was most often done by a combination of HR and academic department staff (65%) which is encouraging; less so is the 35% who reported that academic departments maintained sole responsibility without HR input. Conversely, in no cases was this managed entirely by HR departments. There are also notable regional differences here, suggesting that sharing of responsibility is greatest in East Africa (92%), whilst in West Africa academic departments exert greater sole control (57% shared responsibility). Donors offering scholarships also have a role to play here: when asked whether external agencies did a good job in selecting candidates that they would have also chosen themselves very few disagreed (9%), but the remaining response was split between those who agreed (52%) and those with no opinion (39%).

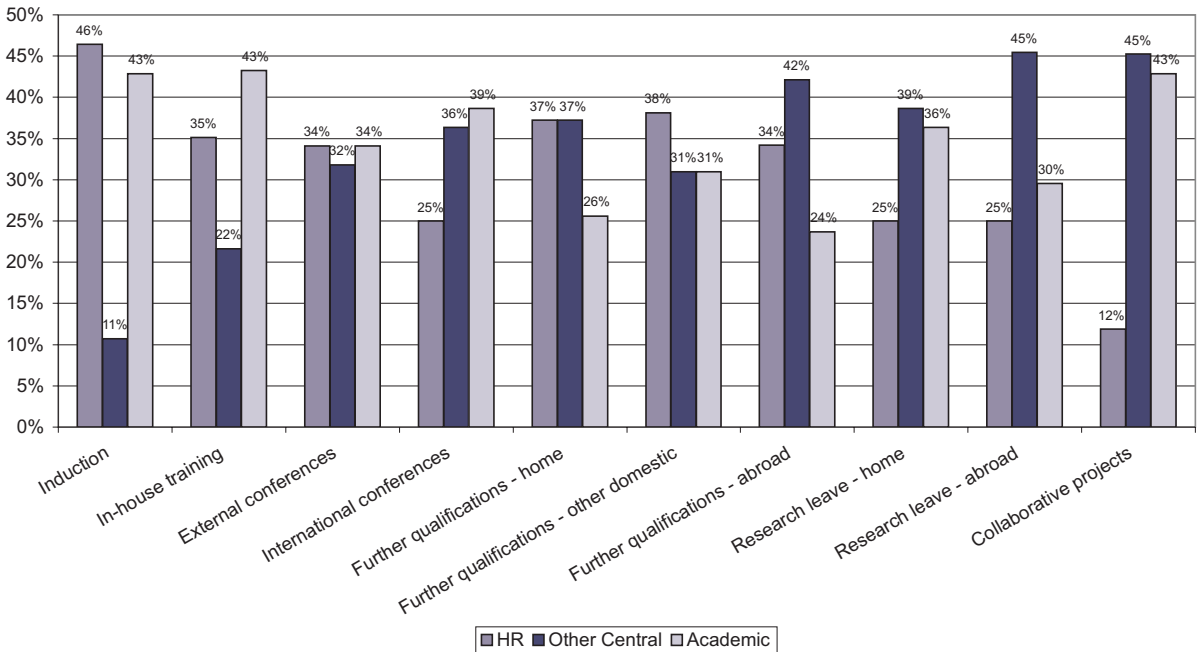
5.3 Where support is provided and how it is accessed

As already noted, academics felt largely unsupported, while human resource and research management responses were at odds with this – research managers indicated support to be available in 91% of cases across 6 different areas; human resources provided support in 87% of cases, across 10 possible areas. Clearly the question therefore focuses on the way this is delivered and how well it is organised.

5.3.1 Staff development support

In the area of staff development, respondents were asked to indicate which department or office within the institution offered each form of support. Because in some cases more than one source was indicated, calculating the relative role played by each office is difficult, but taking total mentions of each, responses suggest that staff access support from a range of sources. HR units provide support in 40% of cases, but are sole providers in just 16% of these. Overall the balance of activity between departments is relatively even; HR accounts for 31% of provision, other central offices for 35% and academic departments for 34%. At a regional level, fewer instances of support in West Africa were channelled through a HR office, in favour of other central units; this may indicate less coherent and centralised staff development systems.

Figure 5.2 Where staff development support is accessed



Human resources provide the most support proportionally for staff inductions (46%), a natural HR function, but least for collaborative projects (12%), where 45% of support is accessed from other central offices. In all other cases HR provides between 25% and 38% of support. While HR is particularly active in enabling scholarships, as would be expected, other departments have a greater involvement in international schemes. HR also appears to have lower levels of involvement in supporting research leave at home and abroad, where other central departments play more of a role.

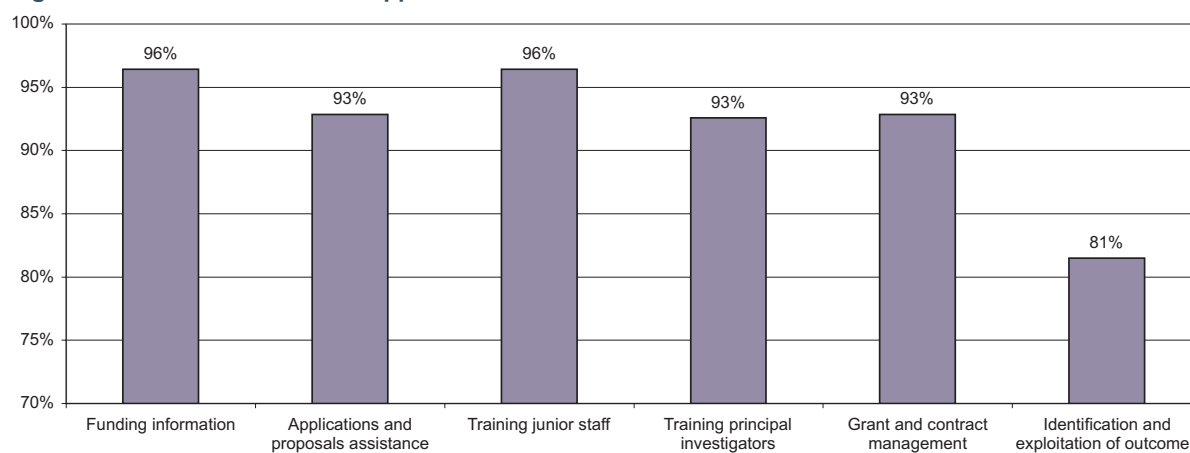
These areas of support were chosen on the basis that they were felt to reflect areas where human resource or staff development units had a potential, and often important, role to play. That HR is relatively more involved in supporting academics to gain qualifications and less so in supporting research suggests that HR focuses more on ‘traditional’ training routes and is less well-placed to manage the implications for staff development of other areas of academic activity. Not only is HR involvement limited – to just 40% of cases – but it is often involved alongside other departments. Since research is clearly dependent on staff, the lower levels of HR involvement here may frustrate their overall ability to manage the complex process – and numerous opportunities – of staff development.

5.3.2 Staff development policies

Given the discussion of support priorities in previous sections, it is worth considering how established institutional policies may enable or potentially frustrate these. HR staff commented both on general staff development policies, and on policies covering nomination for external scholarship awards, since the latter may be their principal experience of international links. Most felt that actual practice reflected their criteria well, and this was particularly true in West and East Africa. Concerns over how opportunities were divided between junior and senior staff were expressed, and this is an area where an effective human resource unit could play an important management role. When asked whether opportunities were focussed on too small a number of staff, almost half (45%) felt this was the case, but the response was mixed and sizeable numbers disagreed (29%) or had no opinion (26%). It would seem that, while HR was concerned to some extent with the level of opportunity for junior staff, they also recognised that this should not be at the expense of other staff and careful oversight is clearly needed. Encouragingly respondents suggested that on the whole existing service records (i.e. a proxy for seniority) were not of great importance in nominating staff for scholarships or fellowships, compared to their academic record and wider institutional priorities; service was 'considered' by 57%, and highly rated by 25%, while academic ability and strategic importance of study were rated as sole or major factors by 93% and 90% respectively. Given the attention paid to the issues it is also interesting that brain drain was also relatively less of a concern. Most said it was considered (63%) but only 33% said it was a sole or major factor. This may perhaps be because candidates are often bonded to return on completion of an award, but also suggests that the positive benefits of collaboration and international mobility are seen to outweigh the risk of losing staff to overseas institutions.¹⁰ Several comments from academics suggested that in fact they would be reluctant to spend long periods abroad.

5.3.3 Research support

Figure 5.3 Access to research support



Research management functions are relatively new to most African universities – one respondent from Ghana commented: 'research management is a newly established area in my institution and therefore support tends to be piecemeal and on an ad hoc basis'. Recognising, therefore, that this is often an emerging concern, respondents were asked simply whether provision existed rather than where this was accessed; unsurprisingly regional activity is very varied. Support was available in 81% to 96% of cases, and was interestingly provided more frequently in West Africa than in East Africa. Respondents were asked, however, the priority attached to providing support in each area. Perhaps reflecting a more recent exposure to research management ideas, or less financial provision to provide support, East and West African universities tended to feel support was of less importance. Least support was provided for the identification and exploitation of research outcomes – indicating that the dissemination of knowledge, an area in which researchers identified difficulties, is also the area where provision is particularly lacking. This was also seen to be much less important, with just 52% rating it as a high priority area for support. Helping to train junior research staff was the highest priority (79%), although in contrast training principal investigators was seen to be much less important (a high priority for just 37%).

¹⁰ Return home may be enforced by the awarding agency, as in the case of Commonwealth Scholarships, or by the home institution. Also indicated by an earlier survey of Commonwealth Scholars which considered the relationship between highly skilled mobility and development (Day 2005).

5.3.4 Research management policies

The level of policy development within research support may indicate the extent to which research support is codified within an institution, the commitment to research, and how robust university structures for facilitating and encouraging research are. It may also illustrate whether particular fields – e.g. science and technology – are prioritised above others. Overall figures are influenced considerably by the level of policy development seen in South Africa; in East Africa levels of policy activity are generally much lower, and as noted only slight levels of activity were reported in West Africa. Most of the policies in place were of a general nature and applicable to any field of research; 8% maintained distinct policies for science and technology, 7% for the social sciences and humanities, and 8% had policies which specifically acknowledged both areas. In at least half of responding institutions, policies are in place in 4 of the 9 policy areas suggested (dissemination, ethics and conduct, recognition and reward, and consultancy); in the other 5 areas (collaborations, costing, harmonisation, intellectual property and internationalisation) policies exist in fewer than half of institutions. No West African institutions reported any specific policies to be in place; in 2 institutions they were reported to be in development. Policies are most evident in the area of ethics and conduct (60%) and external dissemination (54%) – the latter is notable given the low priority and low level of support in this area. Looking more broadly at developing research at a regional and international level, and at increasing international collaboration, it is perhaps worth noting that only 27% had policies in place which linked institutional priorities to those at a regional and international level, and only 35% to cover internationalisation. Collaboration is covered by policies in 46% of institutions, which is more promising, although a lot of these are in East Africa (which recorded 58%) and other areas had made less provision.

5.4 Institutional priorities and their implications

It goes without saying that universities individually, and as part of national and regional associations, must be able to articulate their own goals, and to receive support to pursue these. 78% of institutions had a research strategy – all HEIs in East Africa did, 86% did in Southern Africa, but only 17% in West Africa. The picture is positive overall, but with West Africa noticeably lagging behind. The test is, however, the extent to which HEIs can transform these goals into actual research activity, and the extent to which they can secure external support that meets these, rather than modifying goals to fit what donors offer. When so much university funding – particularly in research – is accessed externally, it is inevitable that they will be influenced by the priorities of international agencies. The recent re-acknowledgement of the value of higher education to development is thoroughly positive, but it also means that universities and their research objectives are increasingly linked to global development agendas. These place a strong emphasis on developing capacity in science and technology and often articulate academic and scientific research in terms of the natural or technical sciences. If individual university priorities in turn shift to follow this agenda, and if funding is accordingly allocated, humanities and social sciences may find themselves relatively worse off. The survey provides some useful information on how funding from internal budgets is allocated, and this may be useful in giving a sense of institutional priorities – particularly since the allocation of *external* funding may be largely according to donor prescription. 73% of research managers said that the strategic importance of a department to institutional objectives was significant in the allocation of funds (rated most or very important), and 67% felt that publications and profile were important. 19 respondents indicated that their strategy prioritised certain areas, but it is difficult to gain a full picture of priorities from this survey, as many did not give full responses to these sections, or made general statements which did not indicate disciplinary foci. General comments certainly gave the impression however, as might be expected, that science and technology were significant priorities and likely to become more so as international funding bolsters these areas. In the social sciences the concerns of Northern and international donors may mean that priorities are likely to follow the development agenda, with issues such as peace and conflict and good governance featuring. While this focus is understandable and no bad thing, it means that humanities with less clear ‘development’ benefits may do less well, and many require more support. Effective dissemination, to raise the profile of social science and humanities research, and to remind universities and donors of the value of these disciplines, will certainly be imperative.

5.5 The challenges for support units

Supporting academics to do research will require supporting HR, research management, and other university staff to deliver the services that researchers need. Addressing the challenges that they face will in turn mean they are better able to alleviate the problems encountered by researchers. Both human resource and research managers concurred that, in terms of fulfilling their goals within the institution, staff capacity posed the greatest challenge. This reflects academics' concerns that they were prevented from undertaking research because they were overburdened by other duties, and the fact that balancing teaching and research duties was considered to be such a significant challenge. Research managers also felt that identifying suitable funding opportunities and developing the resource capacity needed for research were considerable challenges. Human resource managers encountered difficulties in defining institutional needs and aligning these with donor requirements, although this was of least concern to research managers. HR felt reasonably well able to reintegrate returning staff and to utilise their skills, although they did note a challenge in making sure participation in various scholarship or fellowship schemes was matched with the priorities that they had identified for staff development. Research managers felt that exploiting outcomes was a lesser challenge – interesting given the frustrations that academics encountered in trying to publish and disseminate their research. It may be that where research does not have commercial value, outcomes are seen as less critical for research managers, but, as other indications of support in this area show, it could be an area for much greater involvement.

5.6 Priorities for the future

There are strong matches between the priorities identified by those tasked with supporting research, and those engaged in research itself. Doctoral support, institutional resources, publishing and dissemination and field research were all regarded as areas of highest priority by human resource managers; with the exception of resources which was placed lower down the list, research managers largely agreed. Interestingly, research managers felt that attracting visiting international academics was important, while this was rated less highly by the other two groups. All accorded a relatively low priority to supporting master's level study – perhaps because this was felt to be manageable within institutions, and thus did not require outside assistance. Perhaps more surprisingly, fellowships were rated as relatively lower priorities by all groups. Given that the needs identified by respondents in all groups could possibly be well met by an expansion in opportunities for academic mobility – and the boost to collaboration that such fellowships could provide – this may indicate that the potential benefits of such schemes are not well articulated or understood, or that they could be better configured in support of these needs.

6. The development of partnerships: lessons for future initiatives

While some aspects of this study focussed on issues facing research as a whole, the principal concern was to understand how this intersects with potential for international collaboration. Many respondents commented on how hard it was to establish partnerships with particular academics or institutions, and so considering the way in which existing or prior links were developed therefore offers useful insights. Academics and research managers both provided information here.

Figure 6.1 Academic perspectives on developing international links

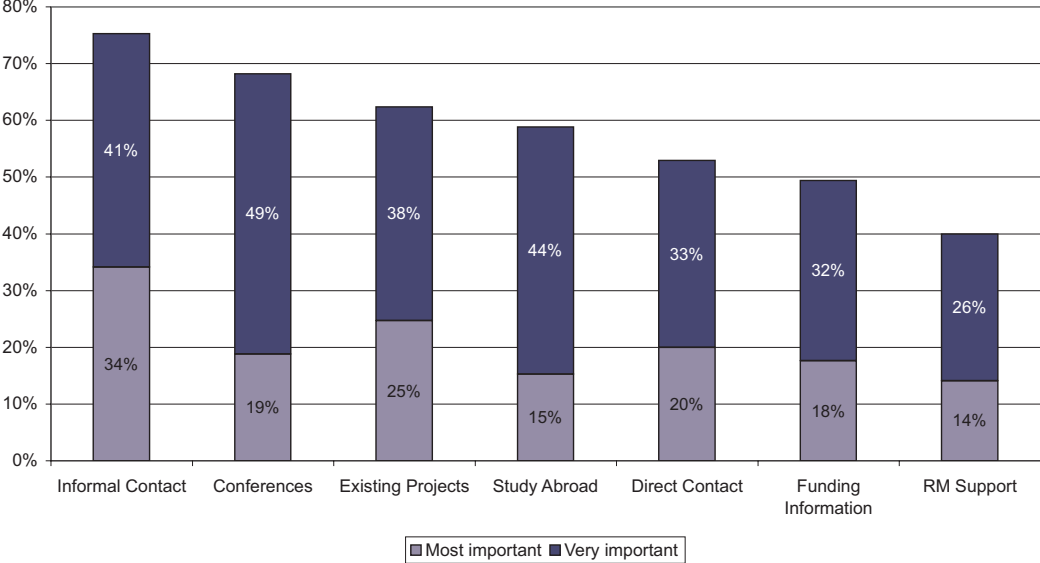
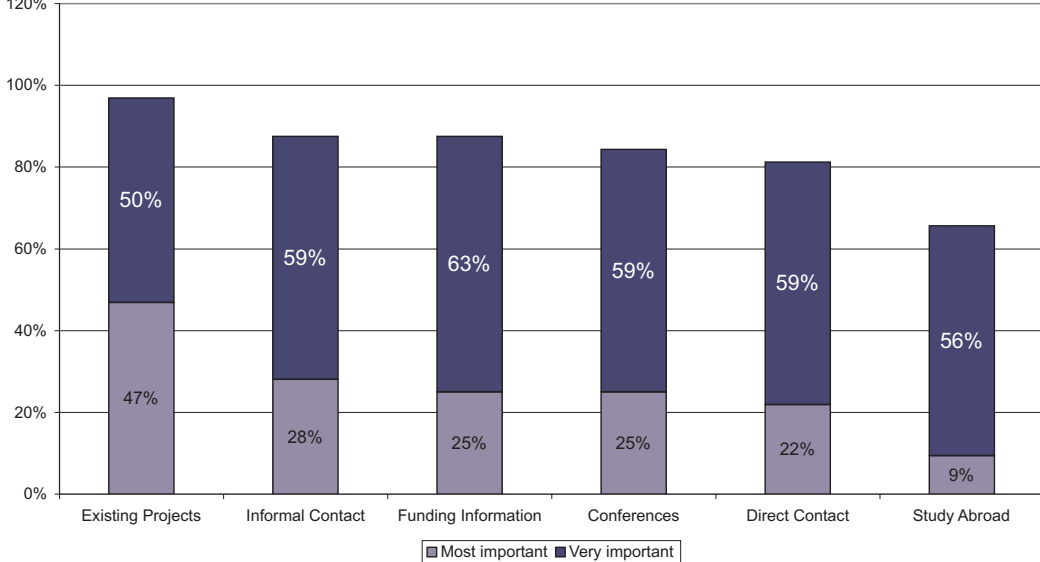


Figure 6.2 Research Manager perspectives on developing international links



6.1 How relationships are built

Academics felt, unsurprisingly perhaps, that opportunities which allowed them to build personal relationships with colleagues were by far the most important factors in developing future collaboration, and research managers largely agreed; the higher importance given to existing projects may reflect the way personal contact is noticed at this level. The most robust research partnerships are, as these figures acknowledge, highly specific individual relationships which develop on the basis of mutual trust; the same opportunity for informal ‘scoping’ of potential collaborators is also an

important feature of conference attendance. As well as giving access to the latest research and scholarship, conferences act to convene groups of researchers with shared interests, and in a field where mutual respect and trust are crucial, they allow academics to meet each other face to face and to position themselves within wider networks of expertise. All regions answered similarly, although responses from West and Southern Africa suggested greater mobility (attending conferences) and greater opportunities for informal contact.

Previous experience – gained through participation in existing projects or periods spent studying abroad – is also important, although given that these opportunities are likely to be relatively restricted amongst academics as a whole, they take a slightly lower precedence in the figures above. East Africa saw a particular benefit in existing links for the development of new partnerships, while in Southern Africa lower levels of support for studying abroad mean that its importance in developing links is also much lower. What these figures do suggest is that a relationship, once developed, can lead to sustained collaboration and partnership, and mechanisms to harness these will be invaluable. It further emphasises the wider benefits accruing through opportunities for individuals to study abroad, as these researchers are then well placed to act as conduits of future collaboration. Where this is well managed it could harness significant institutional benefit from an initial investment in just one individual.

It is notable that more structured and open means of developing international links – through the use of databases of current funding opportunities, or through support at an institutional level from a dedicated research support office – have played much less of a role. Access to funding information was stressed as one of the major obstacles to collaboration (see Section 4) and its relative role in existing or previous links is unsurprising. While no database or information portal can circumvent the need for strong personal relationships, improved access would nevertheless make establishing research a much more open process, less dependent on researcher mobility, and would also grant researchers greater control of their research careers and a greater sense of equal access to support. Assistance from research management or other support offices is very institutionally specific, and this is reflected in the responses here. Its importance was noted by fewer in West Africa (24%) than in East (47%) and Southern Africa (45%). Even East Africa, where only 4% answering the question did not report some level of support, identified it as being a low importance activity. This may reflect that even where support is theoretically available, practically it is of low quality and greater development of these functions is needed.

6.2 The North's role

Proactive contact from a prospective partner institution was placed significantly lower down the list; it assumed much more importance for East Africans, perhaps suggesting more instances of a Northern partner initiating contact, while West Africans saw fewer instances. Researchers need much better information on their peers, and on departments and institutions that hold similar interests internationally, in order to make such direct approaches. While information on the research interests of Northern academics might be readily available through the internet, this is likely to be much harder for academics in African institutions, without regular or reliable internet access, or time, to find. The same is true of Northern academics seeking to establish contact with their African counterparts. University websites in most African countries are not the comprehensive and up-to-date information resources that they are in countries like the UK. Institutional email addresses (where they exist) often fail or are no longer current, and even directories such as the ACU's *Commonwealth Universities Yearbook* which attempt to collect such information struggle to maintain up-to-date records. The problems encountered during this study, where electronic contact with certain departments or individuals – where actual names could be identified – was often impossible, emphasised a very basic but fundamental problem. Better information on the international research community within particular disciplines would clearly be beneficial, but there may also be a role for researchers in countries such as the UK to make greater efforts to solicit the involvement of African colleagues in areas of joint relevance, or where a collaborative approach would be beneficial.

7. Frameworks for future support: questions to consider

This section summarises the major issues that have been raised in previous sections and considers what could be done to address the problems that have been identified. Rather than making specific recommendations to donors, it instead offers a series of suggestions on how these challenges could be approached, and frames key questions for further consideration. Implicit in the nature of collaborative research are the various connections which exist between partner universities and donor agencies. Funders and partner universities both have constructive roles to play and issues are presented for each to consider.

Large-scale infrastructural development is essential to the renewal of African higher education. This is well understood at the highest levels, needs have been well documented in a series of reports over recent years, and there is evidence that investments are beginning to be made. The huge constraints that academics and students face on a day-to-day basis are well reported, and were clear from the numerous comments received from frustrated researchers who were unable to gain regular access to the internet or to scholarly publications.

Donors funding specific research projects, and attempting to measure the relative success of their programmes, often focus on the initial and end stages of research – the quality and number of applications received and the outcomes that a project delivers. Yet for long-term research capacity to be developed it is clear that donors need to take a much greater interest in the processes and mechanics of the research process itself, to understand why things do and do not happen, and the things that get in the way.

Tackling these problems will take time and considerable and sustained effort at much higher levels. Large-scale infrastructural support, along the lines of the US Foundation Partnership programme, is vital, but this level of investment will require a financial commitment that many research funders are unable to make. Recognising this, this section will therefore attempt to highlight things that could be done with more modest levels of funding to advance research and to improve collaboration, but with an eye to longer-term capacity and sustainability. Many problems apply to African higher education as a whole, but are considered here specifically in relation to the needs of research and collaboration.

The suggestions made below are grouped by broad themes. The challenges facing research are such that many are not easily separated into discrete points. There is considerable overlap in both problems and possible solutions, so that addressing a particular area will often depend on dealing with another, and a suggestion made in one context will help resolve the problems in a second.

7.1 Understanding, enabling and facilitating African research

7.1.1 Understand existing capacity

Donors may wish to direct funding to specific elements of research, or may have limited funding to offer, but in practice these projects will fail if basic resources are not already in place. Central to this is the issue of access to the internet and scholarly publications (see also Section 7.4.1). These are fundamental to research, will underpin all advances in research and capacity development, and will have an impact on all other recommendations of this report. Many respondents felt that donors or partners were not fully aware of African university research environments, and this meant that projects were often under- or inappropriately resourced. **We suggest firstly that access to the internet and scholarly publications should be a concern of all research funders. We further suggest that donors undertake substantive assessments of the resource base accessible to researchers and develop a stronger understanding of the cultures and processes of research in African universities.** This would be most usefully achieved through direct conversation with the researchers and research managers (or equivalent) involved, to ensure that specific rather than generic assessments are achieved. This would allow funding to be deployed more effectively, and would provide a way to acknowledge those areas requiring additional support. Agencies might then be able to advise researchers on how this could be obtained.

Discussion points

- The existing programmes and mechanisms in place for increasing access to the internet and to academic journals, how these might be improved, the gaps or problems with these, and what else could be done (see also 7.4.1).
- How to undertake such an assessment of the research base, the issues that researchers and agencies would need to discuss, and whether there might be common models that could be applied across agencies.
- How to ensure that low-capacity institutions are not simply overlooked for funding where existing resources are inadequate.
- Whether structured mechanisms of assessment are needed, or whether this could be encouraged on the basis of good practice by donors.
- Whether information gathered from such assessments might somehow be usefully pooled to be shared between donors.
- Ways in which donors might be able to offer advice on other funding available on referral.

7.1.2 Improve access to funding information

The first step to enabling research is to make researchers aware of the opportunities available to them. While donors may advertise new calls widely, on databases, through newsletters and through relevant academic networks, unreliable internet connections mean that many African academics are unable to access these. This is particularly true when limited internet time must be spent trawling through many different sources. **We suggest that researchers, particularly in the social sciences and humanities, need a central and comprehensive portal providing details of funding and further information on how to establish collaborative projects with the UK.** The British Academy's Africa Desk initiative, currently being developed, will be a positive step in this direction and offers significant potential as a central researcher resource. The recently established Research Africa also provides an extensive database of funding opportunities and a research news service.¹¹

Discussion points

- How portals such as the Africa Desk can be developed and sustained as comprehensive sources of information, and the type of information that researchers would find useful here.
- How access to existing information sources could be improved, for example, through supporting services such as Research Africa.
- The areas where existing information sources are still inadequate, and what might be done to address these gaps.

7.1.3 Make funding flexible

Donors need to make funding flexible, and ensure that it is delivered through systems which help to maintain flows of funding. This is vital in an environment where there is often little or no existing resource base. Such a system of funding would allow problems to be addressed swiftly, and ought to therefore reduce the risk of projects stalling or folding unnecessarily. **We suggest that donors consider how additional contingency funding could be provided, to account for needs that arise during the course of a project, but which may reasonably have been unforeseen at the outset.** At the University of Cape Town, South Africa, for example, extra funding is available to retain postgraduate students for the additional time needed to produce papers based on their research for publication in peer-reviewed journals. Where money is limited, funding fewer projects, but doing so in such a way that there is a greater chance of them being completed, may be preferable to funding more projects but without any flexibility for additional assistance.

¹¹ Although there is a discernable science and technology flavour to the service, funding encompasses all disciplines and there is considerable scope for the expansion of its social science and humanities related information.
See: <http://www.research-africa.net>.

Discussion points

- How a system of contingency funding might be established, funded and maintained.
- Whether resource accounts could be attached to every project, to be requested as needed, or whether there should be additional centrally-held grants.
- Whether this would be best achieved on an individual or joint agency basis.
- Mechanisms to ensure any such monies could be rapidly released without additional application processes, to ensure project continuity.

7.1.4 Work with institutional structures

Universities need to develop the right talent as they see it, and to follow priorities that they themselves define. Donors therefore need to work with and not against or around university structures, so that universities are involved in the management of funding, and can count on donor support as they build appropriate and long-term strategies for staff development and research. The selection process for scholarships, fellowships and other funding also merits attention. Many complained that notices that went to heads of departments did not reach the attention of junior researchers, while others said that the nomination process within their institutions or departments lacked transparency. **We suggest that where possible existing institutional structures or frameworks should be identified and that opportunities for scholarship or research be channelled through these.** The same is true of the disbursement of research funding. This will also ensure that institutions are able to develop effective strategies to meet their future needs, and that collaboration is institutional rather than individualised.

Discussion points

- How donors might identify and establish relationships with the relevant departments within universities, and how they might reconfigure funding to work with and through these.
- How funding can be managed in such a way that African universities are able to identify training needs, and use external awards as a means of delivering them.
- What scope there might be for working with regional associations and networks, such as the recently established research management associations for Southern and West Africa, SARIMA and WARIMA.¹² Participating in a forthcoming WARIMA event, to be held in Sierra Leone in March 2008, might be beneficial, for example.

7.2 Donor collaboration

7.2.1 Establish an inter-agency working group

With a number of funding agencies in the UK seeking to support African research, it is inevitable that there will be shared goals and also shared challenges. Where several agencies are trying to do similar things this can also lead to a relatively piecemeal approach. African academics are faced with a plethora of internationally-funded schemes, originating from a variety of donors, and offering a range of funding. Within donor organisations international, and sometimes Africa-specific, working groups already exist to ensure this support is well organised. **We suggest that a joint donor working group or panel be established to coordinate agencies' Africa activity at a national level within social science and humanities, and to use this potentially to coordinate with European or other international funders.** This would also help to connect larger and smaller funders, and enable funders to identify where they may be best placed to assist.

Discussion points

- How such a working group might best be organised, and whether this would need to be a formal panel or a more informal network communicating regularly to share current practice and explore possibilities for joint activity.

¹² Southern African Research and Innovation Management Association: <http://www.sarima.co.za>; West Africa Research and Innovation Management Association: <http://www.warima.org>

- At what level this should operate, and how it might connect with funders supporting science and technology to share experience and expertise.
- How this could help to develop stronger relationships with African associations such as CODESRIA and OSSREA, and how such organisations might be usefully involved. This might include taking responsibility for the African side, but would also help to develop capacity here.

7.2.2 Recognise each other's schemes

A major problem for academics trying to sustain their research is maintaining a flow of funding between projects or phases of support. **We suggest that UK donors could also assist each other by recognising each other's schemes, in such a way that a researcher funded principally – or previously – by one agency might have access to the funding of another through a more streamlined application process.** This would improve flows and prevent bottlenecks where a project stalls because additional funding is needed, or where its scope or impact is limited because money is not available to extend particular elements, access additional resources or disseminate results.

Discussion points

- Whether recognition of schemes would need to be formalised, or whether it could be achieved through a more informal process of mutual consensus.
- How this could be managed from year to year, as funding schemes change.
- How openness and fairness could be ensured so that a system is not created which favours already successful researchers at the expense of new talent.

7.2.3 Establish a common framework

There is considerable scope for donors to strengthen their individual impacts by collaborating in the allocation of funding. This could save donor time, and save researchers from repeatedly reconfiguring proposals to meet the requirements of different schemes. In the case of smaller donors, with less money to spend, they might identify where their funding might have greater impact if aligned with that of another agency. For example, a donor might design a staff development programme in concert with another's funding for resources, or identify where a relatively small amount of money might offer a specific service or fund a particular element of research (publishing, travel, an additional postdoctoral award etc) in the context of another's larger programme of support.

The Commonwealth Scholarship Commission in the United Kingdom has explored a similar idea in the context of the Carnegie Corporation's funding in West Africa, inviting Carnegie to nominate candidates to the scheme, and also offering an increased number of nominations to Obafemi Awolowo University in Nigeria to help strengthen its central science laboratory, which also receives substantial Carnegie support. **We suggest that a possible framework be explored which encourages a shared approach amongst donors to identifying needs and strategies.** The US Partnership for Higher Education in Africa has demonstrated the potential of such collaboration.¹³

Discussion points

- How a common framework for funding might be conceived, taking into account the needs of researchers and the priorities, limitations and obligations of donors
- Whether this might usefully include a central clearing house or forum for agencies to jointly receive and review applications and identify which scheme or agency might take it further.¹⁴ How this might practically be organised and what this might mean for the timetabling of calls and applications.

¹³ A consortium of seven foundations to 'build core capacity and support special initiatives to further the development of higher education'. See: <http://www.foundation-partnership.org>

¹⁴ Also suggested by Graham Furniss' September 2006 presidential address to ASAUk, 'The future of UK-Africa collaboration in Humanities and Social Science research': http://www.asauk.net/downloads/asauk_pres_add_06.pdf

- The Environment Funders Research Forum serves such a role in the UK and the Roll Back Malaria Partnership recently announced the launch of a ‘Harmonization Working Group’ which will deliver training workshops on proposal writing and hold mock review panels – all before actual submission deadline – to improve the quality of applications and increase the likelihood that they will receive funding¹⁵
- Although its remit and purpose are different, the recently announced UK Collaborative on Development Sciences (UK-CDS) is of particular note. A strategic partnership between major UK funders, it will create a joint framework for development research in the UK. Initial members will be the Office of Science and Innovation, DFID, the Research Councils and the Wellcome Trust, although learned societies including the British Academy are noted as possible future partners.¹⁶

7.3 Staff development

7.3.1 Expand doctoral training

PhD-qualified staff are essential for research and individuals must therefore be developed through training, study and research involvement. It is also important to consider the stages that lead to and from a PhD, to allow students to develop research ideas worthy of a PhD, and so that a PhD takes them forward into a research career. Academic training must also be matched by practical skills training in how to manage research projects. **We suggest that provision for PhD students be included where possible in collaboration budgets.** Where home universities have sufficient capacity to deliver a PhD programme, the split-site doctoral model might be usefully employed.¹⁷ This could usefully link African and UK PhD students, give the former access to new facilities and knowledge, and potentially develop the relationships on which future partnerships could be built. Practically, split-site programmes may make PhDs more accessible to those with families and other responsibilities, and the cost savings (compared to awards taken entirely abroad) may enable more students to be funded. Where home universities do not have sufficient capacity, PhDs could be offered in conjunction with other national or regional universities as part of multi-institution partnerships, in the manner of the African Economic Research Consortium (AERC) PhD programme.¹⁸

Discussion points

- The split-site doctoral model, how this could be effectively employed, and what might need to be considered to do this.
- The role of supervisors and how co-supervision between Africa and the UK might be used for both UK and African PhD students. The report of a USHEPIA workshop, ‘The Research Degree and the Role of the Supervisor: Best Practice’, may offer useful considerations here from an African perspective, drawing on the lessons of a successful multi-institution partnership.¹⁹
- The need to offer PhD opportunities in situations where the home institution lacks the capacity to sponsor this level of training. Where this involves PhDs being undertaken abroad, how these can be harnessed to provide a foundation for future collaboration, and what donors or partner/host institutions might need to do to allow this.

¹⁵ Environment Funders Research Forum: <http://www.erff.org.uk>; Roll Back Malaria Partnership: http://www.rollbackmalaria.org/amd2007/pr/pr_rbmAMD2007-e.pdf or <http://go.worldbank.org/8UI8KPZ5M0>

¹⁶ Further information available at: <http://www.dfid.gov.uk/news/files/pressreleases/boost-research.asp>; a full position paper describing the Collaborative is available at: http://www.bbsrc.ac.uk/international/news/0703_ukcds.pdf

¹⁷ As offered by the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission in the United Kingdom: <http://www.cscuk.org.uk>

¹⁸ African Economic Research Consortium: <http://www.aercafrica.org>

¹⁹ See: <http://web.uct.ac.za/misc/iapo/ushepia/benchmarking.pdf>

7.3.2 Bring junior and senior academics together

Cultures of mentoring are needed to bring junior and senior academics together and to encourage intergenerational learning. African universities lack proper career structures for junior academics with no clear postdoctoral route. Without opportunities to gain research experience at the early stages of their careers – as an assistant to a senior academic, or as a research fellow in a larger team – junior staff will simply remain teachers and frustrated researchers. **We suggest that donors work to encourage and facilitate opportunities which enable junior researchers to benefit from the experience of senior colleagues while also providing experienced staff with a way of reinvesting their knowledge and skills for the future.** Mentoring has many benefits beyond research training; it can help to induct researchers into academic networks and provide access to new collaborators, assist junior researchers to publish their work, and develop skills in establishing and managing projects and securing funding.

Discussion points

- Incentives which would encourage senior academics to mentor junior staff and how these might be delivered.
- The potential of awards which funded senior and junior academics to work together, alongside international partners, and how these schemes might be designed. For example, a senior researcher might be granted research funding on the condition that a position for a junior researcher is included, and with money provided to pay for this.

7.3.3 Link research and training and take a longer-term view

A planned structure of staff development is needed, which understands both institutional needs and the trajectories of individual academic careers, and facilitates career development in the longer term. Opportunities for scholarship abroad should not remain the ‘islands in a career’ that they often are. There should be a realistic expectation that these will open up further opportunities and punctuate, rather than be exceptional instances in otherwise static, careers. There is a dual need to nurture junior talent and to continue to develop senior academics. **We suggest that the structure of an academic career, particularly within the likely constraints of an African university environment, be considered in detail, that scholarships and fellowships be awarded in line with this, and that other forms of funding be investigated to assist the proper development of a research career.** Unrealistic age limits, derived from a UK model of career progression, which prevent older academics from accessing certain opportunities should also be removed.

Discussion points

- How existing schemes might be coordinated and where additional fellowships could be offered to create an overall system of training which serves the needs of academics at all career stages, and which explicitly links to the needs of research and research skills development.
- How these might be formulated to take into account researchers’ other commitments, including university and personal/family responsibilities.
- Ways in which these could be built into and around collaborative projects to become strands of established partnerships, or to act as exploratory visits to help develop future projects.
- The development of clearer postdoctoral career routes, and how funding might be directed to enable this. An example might be the provision of funding to recent PhD students which would help them advance to the next stage. USHEPiA’s small grants scheme provides graduates with USD 7,000 renewable annually for three years to be used ‘to carry out research activities, build research infrastructure, attend conferences and support academic advancement of the graduates’.²⁰
- Making funding available to allow academics to spend time developing research ideas, as well as to undertake research itself. The US Social Science Research Council (SSRC), for example, runs a Dissertation Proposal Development Programme to enable prospective PhD students to develop research questions, and includes a series of workshops, before commencing doctoral study.²¹

²⁰ See: <http://web.uct.ac.za/misc/iapo/ushepia/aboutsgs.htm>

²¹ See: <http://programs.ssrc.org/dpdf>

7.3.4 Reward research

Research presents numerous obstacles and in many countries salaries are so low that academics, like other staff, must find ways to generate additional income. If universities are to encourage academics to channel their energies into research and work to overcome these numerous challenges, then incentives are needed. Research endeavour, if it is to be sustained, must be rewarded. This is particularly true in the case of collaborative work with relatively well-paid Northern counterparts, and to avoid diversion of effort towards the more financially attractive options of private consultancy. **We suggest that donors should work with university HR managers to review the conditions currently attached to research grants and consider financial mechanisms such as awards or honoraria which would reward and encourage research.**

Discussion points

- The respective roles of donors and universities in rewarding staff and the potential involvement of each.
- Possible funding mechanisms which might provide room for individual reward without compromising standards of accountability and fairness.

7.4 Making the most of existing facilities

7.4.1 Support existing programmes

Numerous schemes and donor programmes already exist which aim to improve infrastructure and resources in African universities. Where these are proven to be successful it is important that new initiatives do not bypass them, to ensure that they are sustainable as support mechanisms, and that donors do not simply reinvent existing systems. **We firstly suggest that existing schemes are well documented, and that this information be made available to African researchers, donors, and UK universities.** This will help all parties to be aware of what is currently provided, where specific gaps in provision exist, and what access researchers might potentially have (e.g. whether or not they can be accessed by individuals directly or if this needs to be coordinated by donors and institutions, and in which case the likely lead time this would involve). **Secondly we suggest that where donors are in a position to invest in resources, even while this may be at a relatively low level, these investments should be channelled through existing systems as far as possible.** A salient example is providing access to academic literature, in particular journals. A number of schemes exist which provide various levels of access to print and electronic publications, such as the programmes of the International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications and the ACU's Protecting the African Library scheme.²² Donors should investigate how these existing schemes might be used to best effect. This would also make access more sustainable in the long term, beyond the lifespan of an individual collaboration, and allow resources to be channelled through central structures (i.e. a university library) rather than through individual researchers. Projects might therefore make modest contributions to overall institutional capacity development.

Discussion points

- How information on existing schemes and initiatives might be catalogued and disseminated.
- How relationships might be developed between these organisations and funding agencies, and how the two might collaborate in support of each other's goals.
- Where it was possible to work through existing schemes, the additional considerations that donors might need to make when designing their research funding schemes in order for this to work.

²² For further details see INASP: <http://www.inasp.info>; and ACU Low Cost Journals: <http://www.acu.ac.uk/lowcostjournals>. Other schemes include the JSTOR African Access Initiative: <http://www.jstor.org/about/africa>; and those specifically for natural and technical sciences such as HINARI (Health InterNetwork Access to Research Initiative): <http://www.who.int/hinari/en>; AGORA (Access to Global Online Research in Agriculture): <http://www.aginternetwork.org/en>; and OARE (Online Access to Research in the Environment): <http://www.oaresciences.org/en>. Book donation and discounted purchasing schemes are also operated by UK charities Book Aid International: <http://www.bookaid.org>; and BookPower: <http://www.bookpower.org>

7.4.2 Share access to UK resources

Resources pose a problem of such magnitude that even with flexible funding arrangements, donors may find the issue beyond the scope of their funding, and even were funds to be available, improvements would take considerable time to achieve. More positively, social sciences and humanities have a relative advantage over natural and technical sciences that require expensive laboratory facilities. **We suggest that as part of collaboration UK universities share access to their own resources.** This undoubtedly already happens to an extent in existing collaborations or scholarships and fellowships held at particular institutions, but the extent to which these are underwritten by formal institutional support is likely to vary. Periods spent at a partner institution enable African researchers to gain invaluable access to materials and facilities, but the time spent abroad is likely to be limited. **We further suggest that mechanisms be investigated to share access throughout the period of collaboration, and not simply when African colleagues are able to visit the UK.**

Discussion points

- How good practice or national standards in resource sharing might be developed.
- The scope for enabling shared access to online resources, including literature and databases for partner researchers, and the agreements that would need to be secured at institutional levels to achieve this.
- Whether scholars and fellows could be granted extended alumni access to their host institution resources, for an agreed duration, after completing their period of study.
- Recognising that online access presents its own problems (including infrastructure and bandwidth), how African academics might be offered more frequent opportunities to visit UK institutions for short periods in order to access libraries and other facilities.
- How access to UK resources could be provided to enable exploratory research and seed future collaboration.
- Whether models developed by distance learning providers offer useful mechanisms, such as the UK Open University's Open Door scheme, the Eldis OnDisc scheme of the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), Sussex, or The Essential Electronic Agricultural Library (TEEAL) initiative of Cornell University.²³

7.5 Creating space for interaction and collaboration

7.5.1 Develop networks

Many, if not most, research partnerships develop from personal acquaintances. Opportunities for academics to meet and to develop and extend relationships must be provided at every opportunity. Electronic communications allow researchers to stay in touch easily but are no substitute for the face-to-face contact that conferences, meetings and workshops provide, particularly at the early stages of a potential partnership. International conferences, however, are expensive to host and to travel to and because there are limited places, and limited bursaries, they are exclusive, rather than inclusive, occasions. **We suggest that donors should encourage and assist international events to be held in African institutions.** This would potentially open them up to a greater number of African researchers, while also meaning that Northern partners gain an insight into the African university environment. Researchers should also be supported to convene other national or regional meetings, and other methods of improving African-centred networks and encouraging South-South links should be explored.

²³ Further details of the Open Door scheme of the OU International Development Centre are available at: <http://www.open.ac.uk/idc/news/current/opendoor.html>. Eldis OnDisc, which offers a facility for Southern partners to receive documentation on CD, launched in 2006. A feasibility study examined such issues as copyright and identified practical solutions: <http://www.eldis.org/cache/cachefeasibilitystudy.pdf>. The Essential Electronic Agricultural Library (TEEAL) initiative of the Albert R Mann Library, Cornell University, is a full-text and bibliographic library, with journals from 1993 onwards and updated annually. It is supplied on CD-ROM or as an external hard drive for use on a local area network: <http://www.teeal.org>. Both of these schemes offer useful models in situations where internet access or bandwidth is insufficient for online journals. Teferra (2003) also discusses the advantages of supplying literature on disc.

Discussion points

- The level of support, financial and otherwise, that researchers or groups of researchers would require to convene meetings.
- The types and scale of meetings which would be most useful (e.g. national level to improve networks within countries, or regional to develop stronger partnerships with neighbouring countries).
- How the development of networks might be explicitly encouraged through funding schemes, such as the USHEPiA programme which joins eight African universities, or the British Academy's own UK-Africa Academic Partnerships which welcomes applications involving multiple African partner institutions.
- The potential for networks aimed specifically at research students and early career researchers, which could help to foster collaboration from the beginning of researchers' careers.
- How networks, once established, can be harnessed to provide the foundations for other projects.

7.5.2 Engage other groups

A number of networks and associations exist, including at a pan-African level the Association of African Universities (AAU) and the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA), and at regional level the Organization for Social Science Research in Eastern and Southern Africa (OSSREA). The US-based Partnership for Higher Education in Africa compiled an Africa Regional Networks Database which lists some 113 active regional networks covering a range of subject areas.²⁴ Networks focussed on particular disciplines (e.g. governance, environment, gender) are also operated for the benefit of Commonwealth Scholarship alumni. Many of these associations will have made their own assessments of need and established their own strategies for development. **We suggest that these groups are involved where appropriate so that programmes are developed in line with African priorities.**

Discussion points

- How UK donors can develop stronger working relationships with African associations. For example, in the context of this consultation, emails sent to CODESRIA and OSSREA did not generate a response.
- Ways in which other existing connections between researchers, drawing on previous collaboration or scholarships abroad, might be harnessed to drive new partnerships.

7.5.3 Enable academic mobility

Researcher mobility must be addressed. Many encountered major difficulties in securing visas for travel, even when they were in receipt of a fellowship from a recognised organisation. **We suggest that donors explore a way of formally registering their schemes with the relevant government departments and with their representatives in overseas embassies to allow visas to be issued more efficiently.** Embassies and immigration directorates would still have a role to play in vetting potential travellers, but where a credible body is offering a scholarship there should be a means of recognising this in the visa process. **We further suggest that universities and funding agencies should engage constructively with the UK government to ensure that the issue of academic mobility is fully incorporated into UK immigration guidelines.**

Discussion points

- How registration of schemes might be achieved and the organisations that would need to be involved. It is likely that UK HEIs will have international offices able to offer useful advice here.
- The function of British Council offices abroad, and whether they might have a role to play in facilitating academic travel.
- The new UK immigration rules effective from 2008 which, as they currently stand, may make travel for non-student academics increasingly difficult.²⁵

²⁴ See <http://www.foundation-partnership.org/networks>

²⁵ Currently a concession in the immigration rules allows for well-established researchers to enter as 'Academic Visitors'; those not well-established in a field must travel as 'Sponsored Researchers' requiring a work permit and formal (although not necessarily financial) sponsorship by their host institution. The system which comes into force in 2008/9 will use a 5 route point-based system. Students have been explicitly recognised but academic visitors have not and it is uncertain how they will be classified within this. See: <http://www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk/6353/aboutus/pointsbasedsystemcommandpap1.pdf>

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- How this relates to other mobility initiatives, such as the African Union’s recent announcement of ‘diplomatic passports for scientists’ and the EU’s academic visa to ease mobility within EU member states for non-EU members.²⁶

7.5.4 Connect researchers

Many researchers find it difficult to locate partners to collaborate. One respondent noted that while the scheme itself was very welcome, this was a problem that they had particularly experienced with the British Council/DFID England-Africa Partnerships. Strong partnerships depend on relationships founded on trust and mutual respect. These develop over time and cannot simply be manufactured to meet funding calls. Unfortunately this means that it is especially difficult for African researchers with limited – or no – international experience to know where to begin. It is also worth noting that there is currently no central way for UK academics to advertise their interest in Africa, and in collaborating with African colleagues. **We suggest that a facility which enables academics and research teams to identify corresponding interests between themselves and other institutions would be extremely valuable.** Encouragingly work is already underway at the British Academy which relates directly to this need, in the form of a new online Africa Desk which will include a database of African researchers visiting the UK, and which will then allow African and UK academics to make contact with each other.

Discussion points

- The type of information that researchers would find useful, and how this could be reliably collected and maintained to ensure currency.
- How this relates to the plans already in place for the British Academy’s Africa Desk.
- Whether there is a role for the British Council, as an agency with in-country offices, to assist in connecting researchers.
- How African and UK academic associations and learned societies might work together by acting as central points for their respective constituents.
- How this relates to the suggestions concerning networks in 7.5.1.

7.5.5 Promote equal partnerships

Collaboration, to be of real value, must be based on a true and equal partnership. This is important within the context of individual projects, and for the long term sustainability of research. UK researchers entering into partnership with African colleagues must fully appreciate the constraints under which they work, and be genuinely prepared to work in support of partner needs and priorities. It is easy for Northern partners to assume lead roles and when money flows from North to South there is also a tendency for decisions to flow the same way. **We suggest that donors and partners ensure that African colleagues are fully involved at all stages of project design, and that this be reflected in the systems of application and opportunities for regular meetings between participants to assess progress and decide common ways forward.**

Discussion points

- How the application process may need to be modified to provide the space and time for joint projects to be developed.
- Other activities which donors might support to assist in the development of collaborative projects, e.g. small grants to allow researchers to meet, and workshops on proposal writing and the application process. Where other university staff might be involved, such as research managers, to enable them to provide future training within their own institutions.

²⁶ See: <http://www.scidev.net/content/news/eng/au-backs-diplomatic-passports-for-scientists.cfm>

7.6 Disseminating knowledge

7.6.1 Build cultures of research

The value of research depends on the extent to which knowledge can be disseminated to those who are ultimately intended to benefit from it. In some fields or at some levels research may be of primary interest only to other academics, but in others areas it may have particular policy implications of interest to government, or valuable messages for the wider public. Knowledge also needs to flow effectively within the academic community so that researchers concentrate on the right areas. The value of research will need to be widely recognised if it is to secure sufficient and continued support from national budgets. While there are good reasons for the focus on science and technology, and issues such as healthcare, IT and agriculture for example, it is also important that understandings of research and its value to society do not overlook social sciences and humanities. Researchers are well placed to communicate knowledge to their peers, but potentially less experienced at communicating with other key groups. **We suggest communication of social science and humanities knowledge is important and that researchers, universities and other associations be supported to do this.**

Discussion points

- How public conversations about the themes tackled by social science/humanities research could be encouraged, developed and maintained.
- What role other professionals such as specialist science journalists might play.
- Whether donors might usefully support the development of research communications professionals within African universities, with support from associations such as the African Federation of Science Journalists, and how social science and humanities might be represented. Of note here may be the World Association of Science Journalists which runs a mentoring programme for African science writers and is developing an online course in conjunction with the Science and Development Network.²⁷

7.6.2 Advance publishing

Publication is a vital part of disseminating knowledge and can be important in legitimising new and emerging research areas. Because promotion and reward typically depend on publication it is also important for the development of individual careers. **We suggest that donors provide support to raise the profile, quality and circulation of local African journals and to support African academics to publish internationally.**

Discussion points

- How international journals can be encouraged to be more receptive to submissions from African researchers, and how African researchers can be helped to produce papers which fit the requirements of international publishers. Collaboration between editors within specific fields may be beneficial and the newly launched AuthorAid@INASP programme is also particularly relevant here.²⁸
- The potential for running workshops – similar to those suggested for research management – on writing for international publication, peer review and journal editing.
- Increasing the published output of collaboration, at all academic levels, and whether additional mechanisms or funding are needed to account for this (for example UCT's support for postgraduate publishing highlighted in 7.1.3 above).
- Parallel publication of cheaper or subsidised editions through African publishers.
- The role of schemes such as the AAU's Database of African Theses and Dissertations (DATAD) programme and African Journals Online, whether these have been successful or not, and the reasons for this.²⁹

²⁷ See: <http://www.scidev.net>

²⁸ AuthorAid@INASP: <http://www.inasp.info/file/413/authoraidinasp.html>. Originally developed by the editors of the Journal of Public Health Policy, this programme aims to build a network of experienced writers and editors to mentor researchers and to support them to prepare manuscripts for international publication.

²⁹ DATAD: <http://www.aau.org/datad>; African Journals Online: <http://www.ajol.info>

7.7 Concluding remarks

This section has attempted to clarify the discussion of preceding sections of the report by consolidating the key problems that have been identified, suggesting what might be done to tackle these, and laying out a series of points for further discussion. The consultation process and this report have demonstrated not only the many challenges facing African researchers, and the things that need to be done to enable collaboration, but also the need to develop a stronger and more consultative relationship between the donor and research communities. To ensure that the lessons of this report can be taken further, and that any new mechanisms developed to assist are sustainable and appropriate, it is suggested that the UK donor community, as a whole, and in its respective disciplinary groupings, put in place mechanisms for regular consultation and dialogue with African universities and academic associations.

8. Appendices

Appendix 1: Survey responses by institution

Figures indicate the number of responses received from an institution through the three surveys; bracketed figures indicate other contributions received by email.

Botswana	University of Botswana	3
Cameroon	University of Dschang	2
	University of Yaoundé I	2
Ghana	Cocoa Research Institute of Ghana	1
	Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology	1
	University of Cape Coast	3
	University for Development Studies	1
	University of Education Winneba	1
	University of Ghana	3
Kenya	Catholic University of Eastern Africa	4
	Egerton University	3
	Eldoret Polytechnic	(1)
	Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology	2
	Kenya Agricultural Research Institute	1
	Maseno University	2
	Moi University	3
	University of Eastern Africa Baraton	1
	University of Nairobi	3
Malawi	Mzuzu University	2
	University of Malawi	8 (1)
Nigeria	Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University	1
	Ambrose Alli University	1
	Bayero University	1
	Federal University of Technology	3
	Gombe State University	(1)
	Ladoke Akintola University of Technology	1
	Lagos State University	2
	Nnamdi Azikiwe University	1
	Obafemi Awolowo University	3
	University of Agriculture, Abeokuta	3
	University of Agriculture, Makurdi	2
	University of Ibadan	2 (1)
	University of Ilorin	1 (1)
	University of Jos	3
	University of Lagos	3
	University of Uyo	3
	Usmanu Danfodiyo University	1

Rwanda	Kigali Institute of Education	1
	National University of Rwanda	1
Sierra Leone	University of Sierra Leone	1
South Africa	Cape Peninsula University of Technology	1
	Central University of Technology	2
	Mangosuthu Technikon	1
	Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University	1
	North-West University	5
	Rhodes University	2
	Stellenbosch University	3
	University of Cape Town	2
	University of Johannesburg	2
	University of KwaZulu-Natal	6
	University of Pretoria	2
	University of the Free State	1
	University of the Western Cape	1
	University of the Witwatersrand	4 (1)
Vaal University of Technology	1	
Swaziland	University of Swaziland	2
Tanzania	Institute of Finance Management	1
	Open University of Tanzania	2
	Mzumbe University	4
	Sokoine University of Agriculture	2
	Tea Research Institute of Tanzania	1
	University of Dar es Salaam	1
Uganda	Islamic University	2
	Makerere University	6
	Mbarara University of Science and Technology	3
	Nkumba University	1
	Uganda Christian University	1
	Uganda Martyrs University	2
Zambia	Central Veterinary Research Institute	1
	Copperbelt University	1
	University of Zambia	1
Zimbabwe	Midlands State University	3
Non-University		
Kenya	NGO – Omega Foundation	1
TOTAL		153

Appendix 2: Selected references

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