



## REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

### ACU Member Toolkit:

## Equitable partnerships in international higher education Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU)

### 1. Introduction and purpose

The Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU) is seeking a higher education professional(s) to develop a toolkit that provides both theoretical grounding and actionable frameworks and tools to support our members in the development, delivery, and sustainability of equitable partnerships in international higher education.

The ACU is an international membership organisation dedicated to working with its 500+ member universities across 50 countries to build a better world through higher education; we believe it is essential to support and foreground universities' societal and research roles in tackling global issues in order to build a more equal society for all. Supporting equitable partnerships between our global network of members is at the heart of this mission and is fundamental to our organisational strategy, [The Road to 2030](#).

Throughout 2021 the ACU has been supporting the Research Fairness Initiative's (RFI) '[Year of Equitable Research Partnerships](#)', during which we are calling for the prioritisation of equitable partnership principles amongst all stakeholders in the research-to-action pathway. A toolkit, utilised by ACU members to inform their ways of working as well as embedded within relevant ACU programmes, will support the application of these principles.

The post-holder will design and deliver the development of this toolkit, engaging with best practice and key literature, whilst also working in partnership with the ACU's Membership, Programmes, and Research & Insight units, and Supporting Research Community (SRC) Steering Committee to engage and solicit input from the ACU's diverse membership. The toolkit will be finalised by 30 June 2022.

### 2. Scope of work

This toolkit will be available to all ACU Members and should be able to be utilised in a variety of ways, for example:

- To inform the development of internationalisation strategies
- To inform senior leadership discussions about mainstreaming best practices that ensure equity in partnership working between institutions both within and beyond the HE sector

- To provide practical tools and frameworks that support academics and administrators working in collaborative research projects, including community-based participatory research and working with indigenous communities
- To inform plans for joint applications to ACU Grants and Awards
- As an introduction and guide for undergraduate and postgraduate students and staff on key principles of equitable partnership working

The toolkit should represent international perspectives and include theoretical grounding, as well as examples of actionable frameworks and tools to support ACU Members in the development, delivery, and sustainability of partnerships that are equitable. The toolkit should be accessible and translatable to different contexts across the Commonwealth.

The development of the toolkit will be conducted between April-September 2022 and build on the work of the ACU and our partners.

### **3. Key stakeholders**

The primary recipient of the work will be the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU), who will make the toolkit available for use by ACU members and within relevant ACU programmes and other activities.

### **4. Objectives**

The purpose of the toolkit is to support staff and students at ACU members in the development, delivery, and sustainability of equitable partnerships in international higher education, thus contributing to addressing imbalances within global higher education. Target users could be anyone working to develop and manage international research partnerships, delivering community-based participatory research, and/or working with indigenous communities.

Objectives of this project are:

1. To conduct a mapping of current activities, frameworks, best practice, and literature in relation to equitable partnerships in international higher education
2. To engage ACU staff, ACU members, and sector experts in the scoping and design of the toolkit, ensuring diverse input in the assessment of the utility of various tools, such as the [RFI](#)
3. To develop a toolkit for the development, delivery, and sustainability of equitable partnerships in international higher education that is accessible and translatable to the diverse contexts of the Commonwealth

### **5. Methodology**

Applicants should propose a methodology and a tentative work schedule that delivers the objectives within scope of work.

The ACU welcomes applications that include participatory approaches during both project inception and implementation.

**The ACU also welcomes collaborative proposals involving multiple institutions.**

## 6. Deliverables

The post-holder will be required to deliver the following:

1. A project workplan agreed by relevant stakeholders
2. A draft toolkit to be tested and reviewed by relevant stakeholders
3. A final toolkit which includes:
  - Theoretical grounding and mapping of key literature and best practice in relation to equitable partnerships in international higher education
  - Actionable frameworks and tools that can be utilised by staff and students within the diverse ACU membership to develop, deliver, and sustain equitable partnerships in international higher education
4. A dissemination meeting to present the toolkit to key stakeholders

## 7. Submissions

Please submit the following documents to [ept@acu.ac.uk](mailto:ept@acu.ac.uk) by **28 February 2022 at 23:59 UTC**:

- Technical proposal (3 pages maximum) including proposed methodology and delivery plan including inception phase
- Full budget that aligns with stated delivery plan and team profile
- Organisation profile (including expertise in developing toolkits or similar projects) and CVs of proposed project team (max 2 pages each).

## 8. Evaluation criteria for applications

This assignment will require a higher education professional, or small team of higher education professionals, who will work in close collaboration with the ACU.

The criteria for the evaluation of applications are:

- Experience of working with universities, internationally located, particularly in relation to research and partnerships.
- Experience of developing toolkits, particularly in relation to higher education and research.
- Strength and appropriateness of proposed methodology and demonstrated ability to engage diverse stakeholders and sources to achieve objectives.
- Value for money.
- Demonstrated ability to deliver projects virtually.

## 9. Background and context of ACU work on Equitable Partnerships

Throughout 2021 the ACU has been supporting the Research Fairness Initiative's 'Year of Equitable Research Partnerships'. Specific 'Equitable Partnership' activities we have delivered this year include:

### **Convening an ARUA-UKRI-ACU meeting to discuss the future of UK-Africa HE partnerships**

In this joint [communique](#), the ACU, The African Research Universities Alliance (ARUA) and United Kingdom Research and Innovation (UKRI) set out a vision for strengthening UK-African research partnerships, by building individual and institutional capacity, creating a supportive environment for researchers to thrive and grow, coordinating and aligning funding programmes and maximising research impact by enhancing networks and partnerships beyond academia.

### **Hosting RFI on the ACU Podcast, The Internationalist, to discuss Equitable Partnerships**

Kirsty Kaiser, Director of the [Research Fairness Initiative](#), which is based in South Africa, and Professor Imran Rahman, Dean of the School of Business at the [University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh](#), joined us on 'The Internationalist' podcast to discuss whether international collaboration has a fairer future. (You can listen to the podcast episodes [here](#).)

### **Delivering an Equitable partnerships for global research webinar**

In partnership with the [UK Collaborative on Development Research](#) (UKCDR) and the Research Fairness Initiative, the ACU delivered a webinar on the importance of fair research partnerships, as an activity of our Supporting Research Community. Speakers included Dr Marta Tufet, Executive Director of UKCDR, Professor Lyn Horn, Director of Research Integrity at the [University of Cape Town](#) in South Africa and Dr Mousumi Mukherjee, Associate Professor & Deputy Director of the International Institute for Higher Education Research & Capacity Building at [O P Jindal Global University](#) in India. (You can watch the recording [here](#)).

More broadly, the ACU has a sustained agenda aimed at supporting fair and balanced international partnerships through:

1. Providing a global network for skills and knowledge exchange.
2. Demonstrating and promoting good practices in equitable partnership working.
3. Facilitating activities that broaden minds and forge connections.

More information and examples of work in these three areas can be found below.

#### **1. A global network for skills and knowledge exchange**

To move the world forward, we must acknowledge and share the wealth of expertise that exists across the globe – not just in the global North – and the extensive and diverse ways

of knowing and thinking. All universities have something to learn from each other. The ACU promotes knowledge sharing and knowledge democracy through university networks and partnerships including:

- [Commonwealth Climate Resilience Network](#)
- [Commonwealth Peace and Reconciliation Network](#)
- [Higher Education and the SDGs Network](#)
- [Supporting Research Community](#)
- [HR in HE Community](#)

These networks and communities provide platforms for staff and students from universities around the Commonwealth, united by their interest and skills in specific areas, to share knowledge and ideas, contribute to policy dialogues, and build partnerships that will further these fields of work.

## **2. Good practice in equitable partnerships**

Universities can mutually strengthen capacity through long-term and equitable partnerships that specifically share knowledge and create locally rooted solutions. The ACU's capacity strengthening programmes support universities in building the skills and knowledge needed to ensure thriving teaching, learning, and research environments – creating the foundation for collaboration that is both fair and sustainable.

Through the [Partnership for Enhanced and Blended Learning \(PEBL\)](#), the ACU works with 24 universities across four countries in east Africa to scale up blended learning and co-create locally relevant online teaching modules, supported by the online learning expertise of global partners. Currently, over 10,000 students are benefitting from PEBL modules to build their skills.

The [Climate Impacts Research Capacity and Leadership Enhancement \(CIRCLE\) programme](#), delivered as a partnership between the ACU, the African Academy of Sciences (AAS), Vitae, and the Natural Resources Institute (NRI), aims to strengthen research capacity for climate and environment work in sub-Saharan Africa. CIRCLE provides fellowships for individual researchers while also developing institutional capacity to support and manage climate research activities.

For tools, guidance and resources from global partners focused on ensuring equity in international research partnerships, visit the [UKCDR & ESSENCE equitable partnerships resource hub](#).

## **3. Broadening minds and forging connections**

Studying in another country enables the exchange of knowledge, ideas, and cultures. This enhanced cross-cultural understanding and respect underpins the basis for equitable partnerships. ACU-administered scholarships provide students, and the next generation of researchers access to international educational opportunities, whilst creating lasting personal, professional, and diplomatic bonds between individuals and nations.

One example is [Andrew Harvey](#), a Canadian who received a [Queen Elizabeth Commonwealth Scholarship](#) to study at the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania, where he began a life's work to document the indigenous languages of the Tanzanian Rift Valley. His work with the Gorwáa community led to the creation of the first-ever dictionary of the language. Andrew's scholarship subverted the traditional direction of international study, away from the 'global North' as the traditional destination.

The [Commonwealth Futures](#) series brings together cohorts of young people with a focus on creating global citizens and giving them a voice in shaping their future.

The [Commonwealth Futures Climate Research Cohort](#) of 24 rising research stars will work towards solutions for climate-vulnerable regions in the run up to COP26. The ACU and the British Council are working in partnership to support the cohort to develop skills in research leadership, international collaboration, and translating research into action.