

DRUSSA Strategic Consensus

Resolutions and actions to take forward from the 2016 DRUSSA Vice Chancellors' Leadership Seminar

Introduction

The **Strategic Consensus** document is the product of deliberations at the **2016 DRUSSA Vice Chancellors' Leadership Seminar** (26 July 2016, Accra, Ghana). It captures and distils the discussions, summaries, outputs and recommendations for action put forward by Vice Chancellors and other university leaders at the Seminar, in aim of securing institutional gains in the development and strengthening of research uptake systems for the medium- and the long-term.

The **Strategic Consensus** is intended to help university leaders to synthesise and, importantly, to mobilise action agreed among Seminar participants, based on strategic objectives and actions discussed at the Seminar. It was recognised during the proceedings that research uptake is a vital strategic good for all universities in the programme, and indeed for universities worldwide. From there, it was also agreed that university leaders have a critical role to play in not only establishing strategic direction, but also in leading and enabling practical actions that can help to realise such strategic goods. As such, while this document reflects the strategic objectives that were established at the Seminar, it also outlines the concrete steps that university leaders can take to further these objectives and to take new action to ensure sustainability.

In this respect, the **Strategic Consensus** should be considered a guideline to inform the design of medium- and long-term action plans in support of sustainable research uptake systems across DRUSSA partners. As such, it can also be read in dialogue with the **DRUSSA Benchmarking and Leadership Conference Consensus** document produced by DRUSSA Leaders and Champions as an output of the 2016 Benchmarking Conference (25-27 April 2016, Mauritius).

Recommendations and actions from the DRUSSA Vice Chancellors' Leadership Seminar have been organised under:

- **Key messages:** Summarising the messages delivered by keynote speakers, external guests and participating Vice Chancellors and university leaders
- **Where do we want to be in five years?** Establishing agreed strategic objectives and targets for our universities for the future
- **How are we going to get there?** Practical approaches to meeting our strategic objectives in the areas of research uptake *sustainability, engagement, operationalisation* and *research culture*.

Key messages

Engaging with policy

- Stable and constructive **dialogue** between government, universities and research funders is required to anticipate policy change and build confidence.
- “We need to back up policy with **credible evidence**, even when it hurts. We should not be afraid of evidence that takes us in a direction that we might not have expected.”
- Academic fellows in **policy environments**: we should be alert to environmental, cultural and experiential challenges
- Political environments are challenging to navigate, but the demand for evidence-informed policymaking is substantive and pressing
- Funding bodies also need “**good stories**” and strong examples of results to inform the design of their own programmes

Institutional change

- Funders are interested in **strategic focus** for the long-term impact of research, though institutional change can be slow
- University systems shape **research culture** (amongst early career researchers and senior academics alike)
- **Researchers** as communicators *and* specialist **professional support** for research communication: both are important for high-quality research uptake
- Research **relevance** is a function of identifying stakeholders early in the research design (whether stakeholders are local, national, governmental, private, academic or broadly public)
- **Ownership** for sustainability: university context should be at the heart of research uptake strategy and methodology

Where do we want to be in five years?

- Research uptake capacity and management systems are fully embedded and **sustainable**
- **Engagement** between universities and their stakeholders is even more constructive and resilient
- Current research uptake policy and strategy is fully **operationalised**
- **Research culture** is consolidated and uptake-orientated, and the university's research uptake functions, systems and structures are well-recognised, internally and externally

How are we going to get there?

Sustainability

- **Strengthening the core:** Given the valuable research uptake experience amongst DRUSSA universities, leaders should foster the continuation of a post-programme network to continue to advance and share their research uptake strategies and systems.
- **Reaching out:** University leaders can also commit their institutions to robust participation in national and regional forums and bodies, including RIMAs, ARUA, the AAU and Vice Chancellors' associations to drive the research uptake agenda more widely. Also, greater cooperation *between* these bodies will be important to promote the normalisation of research uptake as central to the research enterprise overall
- **Building for the future:** Funding bodies should consider extending future support for research uptake capacity building, expanding the university-policy dialogue model and strengthening demand-side engagement

Engagement

- **Academies of science** and **national research councils** are critical partners in promoting and incentivising good practice in research uptake, as are national higher education commissions and bodies
- University leaders, both individually and in concert, should focus on establishing **demand-side needs** amongst key stakeholders in policymaking, community and industrial settings.
- In establishing institutional research priorities, there is potential for universities to address existing and emerging **development demands**, which can be captured through research needs assessment tools for policymakers
- National and regional **research uptake symposia between universities and ministries of government** should be expanded and sustained. Universities should be prepared to make resources available to support such events

Operationalisation

- **Utilise research uptake trained staff** to both produce support materials and also to train new, incoming staff in research uptake (utilising existing DRUSSA learning resources wherever appropriate)
- Put in place **dedicated budgets to support research uptake** management development – something that Vice Chancellors are well placed to establish
- Consider **research uptake performance** as criteria for promotion and reward – a replicable model that can work well
- Train researchers and research offices in **policy entrepreneurship**
- **Take advantage of tools** that DRUSSA and partner universities have developed over the life of the programme (including action plan templates, stakeholder maps, handbooks, guidelines and training)

Research culture

- Research uptake should be incorporated into **internal research funding criteria**, helping ensure research uptake models are applied at the design stage of research projects
- Researchers should be encouraged to engage with potential external stakeholders and communities of demand **early in the research design**
- Performance management for research and professional staff can formally **recognise efforts at research uptake**
- Existing mechanisms (and national policy levers) can be used to **recognise and reward impactful research**
- In considering basic “versus” applied research findings, **relevance** and appropriateness for uptake should be determined in terms of the research audience, whoever it might be and from any discipline

Planning for action

A template for operationalising research uptake strategy

		Objective or aim	Timing	Who is responsible and who implements / is involved this activity?	How measure outcome? How do I know it's successful?
External	1				
	2				
	3				
Internal	1				
	2				
	3				
Any other notes or comments, reminders					

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