

ODA funding and its impact on the UK higher education sector

Introduction

1. The availability of Official Development Assistance (ODA) funded programmes for the higher education sector has had a considerable impact on the way institutions approach research. In light of the Spending Review and to support BEIS' submission to it, Universities UK International (UUKi) conducted a survey of its members to understand more about the benefits and impact of ODA-funded programmes, in particular, the Newton Fund and the Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF).
2. The survey was open from 7 August to 7 September 2020. Because of the time of year and the tight timescale, we received a limited number of responses: 20 universities submitted individual responses and we also received a submission from one consortium representing two additional institutions. There was a good geographical representation (through no submissions from Wales) and a good institutional balance (11 Russell Group, 11 non-Russell Group).
3. Despite the relatively low number of responses, we were encouraged by the consistency of the responses received, with institutions clearly striving to become more globally recognised for excellence and impact as a result of the ODA funding available. The universities have exemplified why ODA-funded programmes should continue to be offered to the higher education sector. Whilst being mindful that ODA funding exists to bring benefits to other countries, it also contributes to positioning the UK's higher education sector as a leader in the response to global challenges.
4. It is clear that the investment is starting to pay off, but given the relatively short period of time that ODA-funded programmes like the Newton Fund and GCRF have been running (since 2014 and late 2015 respectively). It would therefore be a huge waste of investment and resources to restrict funding or pull back on opportunities, just as the resulting networks are being built up and as outcomes are starting to take shape. With continued ODA funding to support the higher education sector, great strides can be made.
5. This document outlines five key findings from our survey, highlights some early data on Newton Fund and GCRF links to publications, and makes eight recommendations for further development of ODA funding.

Key finding 1

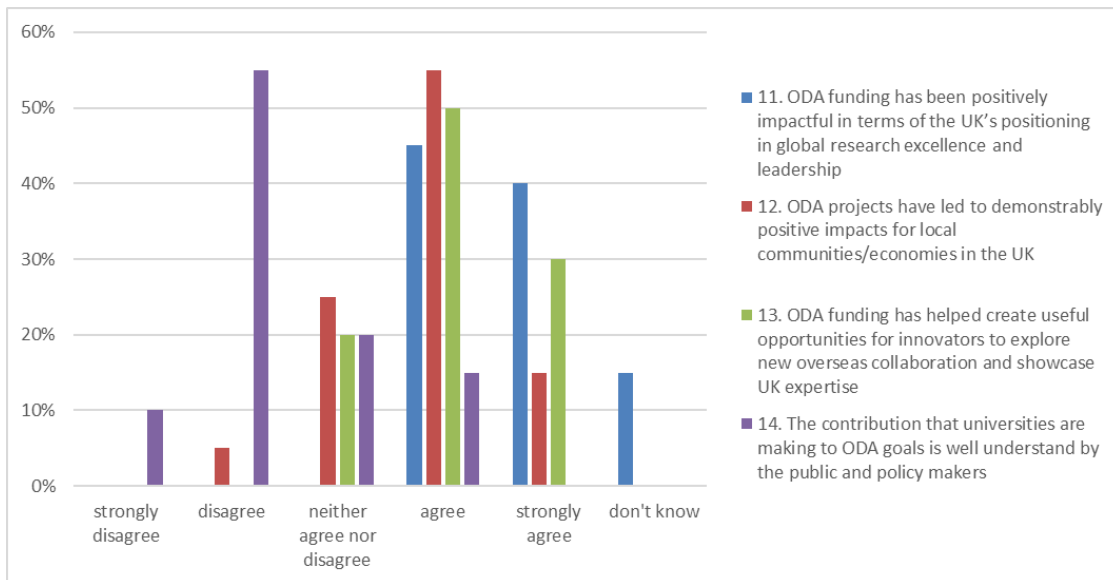
ODA funding has become an integral part of university research and international/global strategies. It has contributed to the university ecosystem and global reputation, and changed the way international research is conducted.

6. We asked institutions to what extent they agreed that ODA funds have led to changes in institutional research strategies and/or institutional approaches. 100% agreed or strongly agreed that they had. The same response was true for the statement 'ODA funds have led to changes in institutional global/international strategies and/or institutional approaches.' It is clear that many institutions now have ODA-funded research programmes embedded in their institutional research strategies.
7. Universities have fully embraced ODA funding through adopting **more holistic approaches** to challenge-led themes and priorities. In particular, driving institutional commitments to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and embedding the principles of the UN SDGs within research strategies.
8. ODA funding has resulted in the **establishment of cross-disciplinary research institutes and centres** aligning with key institutional strengths and themes designed to address pressing global challenges. For example, as a result of an individual project, the University of Strathclyde has set up its new International Centre for Political Economy, as well as establishing its university-wide Centre for Sustainable Development. Additionally, the University of Birmingham has been enabled to establish and sustain their 'Institute for Global Innovation', a cross-disciplinary research institute designed to address pressing global challenges, with a particular focus upon Lower and Middle Income Countries (LMICs).
9. A number of respondents reported being able to support the **creation of new roles**, such as dedicated senior 'development' management (deputy vice-chancellors, deans) and professional services posts. It has also allowed early career researchers access to funding, supporting the creation of new relationships and building of their track record.
10. ODA funds have **supported international reputation-building** with institutions working collaboratively with their partners, leading to high-quality academic publications (with increased leadership and co-authorship of ODA researchers) and non-academic publications. It has achieved media coverage and provided contributions to other evidence of impact (for example, REF impact case studies, and policy influence).
11. It has also led to universities further **utilising their international campuses** to open up opportunities in particular regions, attracting international students and global talent in the process. Researchers at Heriot-Watt University's Malaysia campus have built upon GCRF experience to **secure more research funding** from the Malaysian government as well as increasing their pool of expertise and collaborators.
12. Survey respondents additionally noted **major changes to the way research is conducted**, whether through the formation of new interdisciplinary teams and communities of practice, or through more meaningful real-world community engagement. For example, Durham University's 'Transport Africa' series of GCRF-funded projects was delivered using a new interdisciplinary approach. As a result of its success, researchers are now using expertise gained to design an instrumentation scheme for the UK Environment Agency to investigate climate impacts on flood embankments.
13. Comments also included a **greater awareness of developing country challenges through co-creation and equitable partnerships** and a number have made significant progress towards building more equitable partnerships with ODA countries. For example, one institution noted that the requirement for collaboration has accelerated the establishment of equitable research partnerships in LMICs and enabled the proper funding of researcher time in ODA countries. In their words, 'this approach has significantly enhanced the UK's ability to engage with the best researchers in the Global South'.

Key finding 2

Through ODA funding, researchers have been able to contribute to cutting-edge and impactful research directly contributing to solving global challenges, including the UN Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs).

14. The survey explored the various ways in which ODA funding had been impactful. The majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with all the ways indicated, although over half did not feel that the contribution that universities are making to ODA goals is well understood by the public and policy makers (see graph below).



15. ODA funding has enabled UK institutions to position both themselves, and the UK higher education sector as a whole, as a **research partner of choice** with leading universities internationally. It has supported the UK's scientific leadership and catalysed collaborations across major global players and across several continents addressing global challenges.
16. ODA funding has led to high quality **impactful research** that has already had real-world influence. For example, ODA-funded research at the University of East Anglia has influenced evidence-based policy decisions on plastic waste management in Malaysia. At Durham University, recommendations from a project on 'Decent work regulation in Africa' have been used by UN International Labour Organisation (ILO) to shape global policy on effective labour laws.
17. Our experimental data shows that ODA funding appears to have led to an **increase in the number of co-authored publications** between the UK and developing countries in major international peer reviewed journals (see Annex 1).
18. Funding has also led to **capacity-building** among students and staff, through engaging academics, students and the general public in global issues and global policy development. This can be seen in the work of the University of East Anglia with UNESCO to develop literacy and overcome inequality.
19. **Joint development with UK industry** has also supported impact. In a recent ODA-funded project at the University of Leicester, face mask sampling used to detect TB infection in Africa has been adapted to detect infections of Covid-19 in the UK. And the same university developed an NHS online Covid-19 rehab service to help people in the UK who are suffering from long-term effects of the disease. The University of Strathclyde have worked with industry on water pumps, electric grid solutions and 5G networks, and the University of East Anglia noted that working with industry had led to the gaining of expertise in development of commercialisation and scalable manufacturing strategies.

Key finding 3

ODA funding, and in particular the Newton Fund and Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF), are unique in offering opportunities for impact at scale.

20. ODA funding is uniquely placed in the higher education funding landscape. Institutions value ODA funding as it enables research and delivers impact on a scale that was not possible before, both at individual project level as well as at institutional and sector level.
21. Both the Newton Fund and GCRF have specific features that make them very well suited to addressing global challenges, while offering the opportunity to capacity build and pump-prime excellent and impact-driven research.
22. GCRF QR is particularly welcome as funding that delivers small-scale, yet very effective, projects. For example, the engagement of local small communities in India, Colombia, Guatemala and Ecuador in management of hazards faced by people displaced by conflict or natural disaster. Such small-scale projects are often a prerequisite to larger projects, like the One Ocean Hub, set up by the University of Strathclyde, now a network of 52 academic and non-academic partners, to transform our response to the urgent challenges facing the ocean.
23. Respondents indicated a range of positive features of GCRF and the Newton Fund.

GCRF	Newton Fund
Has encouraged challenge-driven (rather than discipline-driven) research initiatives and the development of inter/transdisciplinary teams that would not normally have worked together	Has provided a complementary opportunity for universities since the bilateral and jointly agreed funded model which encourages and can lead to innovative approaches to international collaboration, with funding tending to support projects at early stages of development
Has led to greater integration of social science and arts researchers with the traditional science and engineering research base	Has been instrumental in developing researcher links (especially important for early career researchers)
Has inspired a wide range of researchers within universities to consider how their work has potential development impact, stimulating international collaborations among a new generation of researchers	Has strengthened collaborations with specific countries (e.g. Colombia, Vietnam) and has directly contributed to building capacity in the UK-wide international development portfolio
Has precipitated a shift in thinking towards universities as major actors in addressing challenges at a global level	Has been used as a building block to GCRF, enabling researchers to develop links and scale up their activities to enable further funding bids
Has offered opportunities for ODA partners to apply for and lead projects with new and more creative opportunities for research funding, where criteria, like access to environments, data, and local networks, may be as crucial as academic excellence	

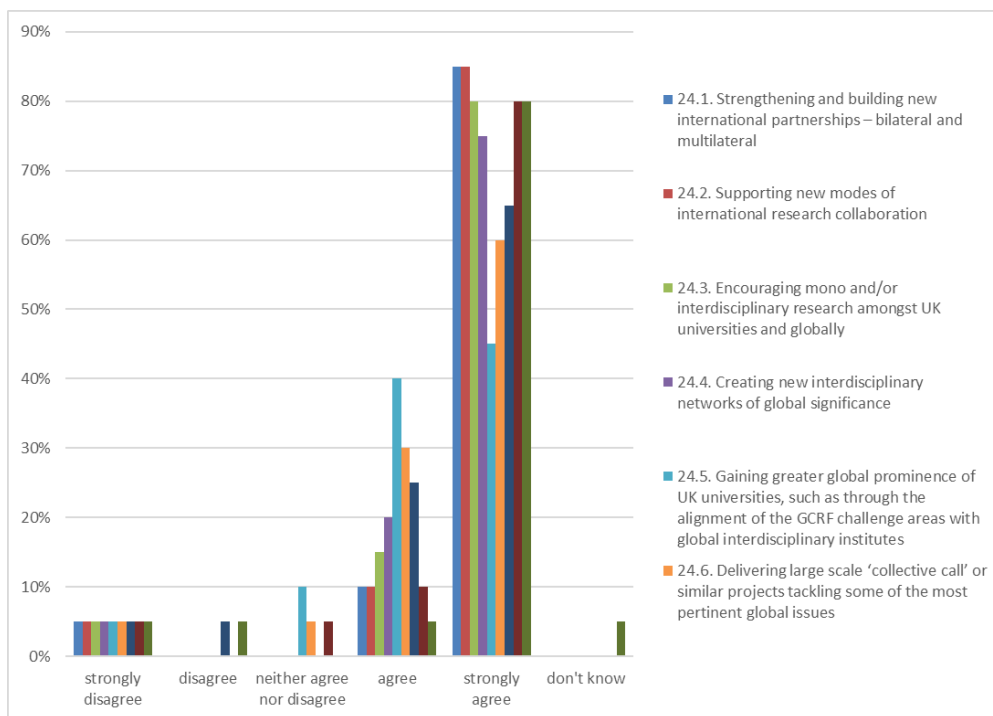
24. The networks and relationships built over the last few years via these funds enabled research groups to react rapidly to the Covid-19 crisis. Through a cross-disciplinary approach, the response to the Covid-19 crisis has been proactive, flexible and fast (see para 19 for examples). Other projects

include studying the effects of the pandemic on sex workers in Kenya and developing a prototype for ventilators with colleagues in Malawi.

Key finding 4

ODA funding has enabled universities to grow international collaborations and partnerships on the principle of equity

- 25. 100% of respondents agreed that ODA funds had led to new and wider institutional networks and that they had led to new or widening strategic partnerships with a varied range of actors (see graph below), including with:
 - i. **Higher education institutions in specific countries** (especially Development Assistance Committee (DAC) listed countries), regions, and continents in specific areas pertinent to the development agenda, covering subjects like environmental change, indigenous histories, and peace and conflict.
 - ii. **Leading research institutions in ODA countries**, for example, thanks to ODA funds, the University of Exeter have been able to consolidate Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) in Latin America, including with Instituto Nacional de Pesquisas Espaciais (Brazil), Colciencias (Colombia), Universidad de los Andes School of Management (Colombia) and Universidad de la Sabana (Colombia).
 - iii. **Non-academic partners** such as organisations in Colombia using sport to heal conflict, an organisation in the Amazon region in Brazil leading to cutting-edge participatory research on land conflict and resource capture, COP26 related networks, Snakebite hospital relationship, policy makers and NGOs regarding the protection of cultural heritage sites in Nepal, and education and training on water management technology with Peruvian MoAgric and NGOs.



26. At project level, universities have been involved in numerous **research consortia** such as Durham University’s engagement in the Global Network for Neglected Tropical Diseases with partners in Brazil, India and Pakistan. At the University of Exeter’s European Centre for Environment and Human Health, researchers have consolidated partnerships with countries in South East Asia (Indonesia, Vietnam and Philippines) through a GCRF Blue Communities Project and have strengthened partnerships with universities and government bodies in the Caribbean through MRC, AHRC and BBSRC GCRF funding.

27. Respondents noted that partnerships have been developed on the **principle of equity** with academics from ODA countries bringing local in-country knowledge and experience, invaluable to the co-production to tackle global challenges such as environmental change and social inequality. This has been made possible by the underlying ability to fully (or, in the case of the Newton Fund, jointly) fund full costs of partners, leading to genuinely equitable and mutually beneficial collaborations.
28. In conducting ODA eligible research, **early career researchers have been able to establish overseas collaborations**, while researchers with experience in working with developing countries have access to new funds to develop their research.
29. Universities have considerably **strengthened their own capacity** for interdisciplinary and challenge-oriented research, while researchers across all career stages have developed skills such as ECR training to more effectively undertake international research collaborations, cross-institution exchanges, visits for talented researchers, developing new cohorts of students and exposure to other cultures.
30. Examples of new and improved collaborations include:
- i. University of Liverpool's Antislavery Knowledge Network collaboration with the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, that connects researchers, politicians and policymakers across the Commonwealth to tackle modern slavery.
 - ii. Brunel University's application to the 2019 GCRF Hub with two proposals on sustainable horticulture and the Sustainable Plastics Hub, with India, Indonesia, South Africa went through to interview stage. While not funded, they led to the establishment of extensive relationships and networks, which are continuing and are expected to lead to future collaborations.

Key finding 5

ODA funding has suffered from challenging timescales and processes, which at times are not commensurate with the principles of equitable partnerships

31. Although invaluable, ODA funding does suffer from a number of more technical and logistical challenges which can undermine their value. Developing a clearer linkage between GCRF and the Newton Fund might help to maximise value for money. The most commonly cited challenges were as follows:
- i. **Notifications.** A short turn-around time for responses to published calls, often with no early warning. Longer timelines would enable UK researchers to engage with overseas partners earlier to co-design and co-create better projects. GCRF QR allocations are notified very late in the spending period, making it very challenging for the universities to deliver in a timely and ODA compliant manner.
 - ii. **Scope of calls.** The often narrow scope can leave gaps in addressing identified partner needs, and in the case of the Newton Fund, relies on pre-existing connections with certain countries. Some Newton Fund calls with counterpart funders are so targeted that researchers can be excluded unless working within a very specific area.
 - iii. **Assumptions.** GCRF calls have overestimated the extent to which interdisciplinary working is already embedded in UK research. Institutions have had to grow this culture in parallel with the growth of international research. In addition, the expectation that impact evidence will be available early on in the funding cycle is unrealistic given the time required for research to generate impact in many disciplines.
 - iv. **Eligibility.** Not being able to fund PhD collaborations has an impact on capacity building. Match funding conditions of the Newton Fund is an issue. ODA funding has been affected by funders themselves having to respond to changes in strategic direction (e.g. the recent change of the role of China and India becoming more prominently seen as contributing to solving global challenges in partnership with the UK, rather than as part of the UK's development agenda).

- v. **Bureaucracy.** Application forms and annual audits are complex, even for relatively small amounts of funding. Compliance requirements can be onerous and payments can be delayed, impacting on activity.
- vi. **Partnership equity and cultural understanding.** Having an understanding of different procedures which take place across multiple organisations in different geographic contexts, awareness of cultural differences and accepting that challenges can arise in DAC nations that can impact on time schedules.
- vii. **Broadening reach.** Some respondents believe the Newton Fund is too restrictive in terms of its 17 partner countries, losing opportunities for collaborating with countries with high quality research sectors (e.g. Pakistan, Ghana, Nigeria and Ethiopia).

Recommendations

- 32. It is clear from the high level of agreement amongst respondents to our survey that **universities would strongly support a continuation of ODA funding to enable this solid platform to reach its full potential and ensure that the UK remains at the forefront of global developments.**
- 33. Relationships take time to develop. **Early warning of forthcoming calls** would provide confidence to institutions and lead to better proposals, as well as contributing to building trust in partner research communities. Better advance warning of calls would also give institutions time to prepare bids.
- 34. Future **ODA funding should maintain its focus on delivering global good** and should maintain support for elements of the funding cycle from pump-priming, networking and training to large grants, impact and solutions as all of the activities will strengthen and grow our global collaborations.
- 35. It should also focus on developing **close equitable relationships** with representative bodies such as African Research Universities Alliance (ARUA).
- 36. Future ODA funding should also include a strong focus on **training and capacity development of researchers** at all levels (including ECRs both in the UK and in developing countries).
- 37. A **bespoke funding stream should be launched to support the development of strategic partnerships** in research and education. This could help mitigate any negative impacts from the UK's changing relationship with the EU.
- 38. Future ODA funding could be more joined-up and **could better align its rules and processes** to support equitable partnerships and funding for in-country partners, including more grants led by in-country researchers and funding provided for PhD programmes.
- 39. Future ODA funding should **incorporate a communications element** that promotes the ODA-funded activities of successful institutions to ensure greater recognition of the higher education sector's critical role in addressing global challenges.

For further information please contact Dajana Dzanovic, Head of Strategic Partnerships
dajana.dzanovic@international.ac.uk

Annex 1: Publications trends and ODA funds

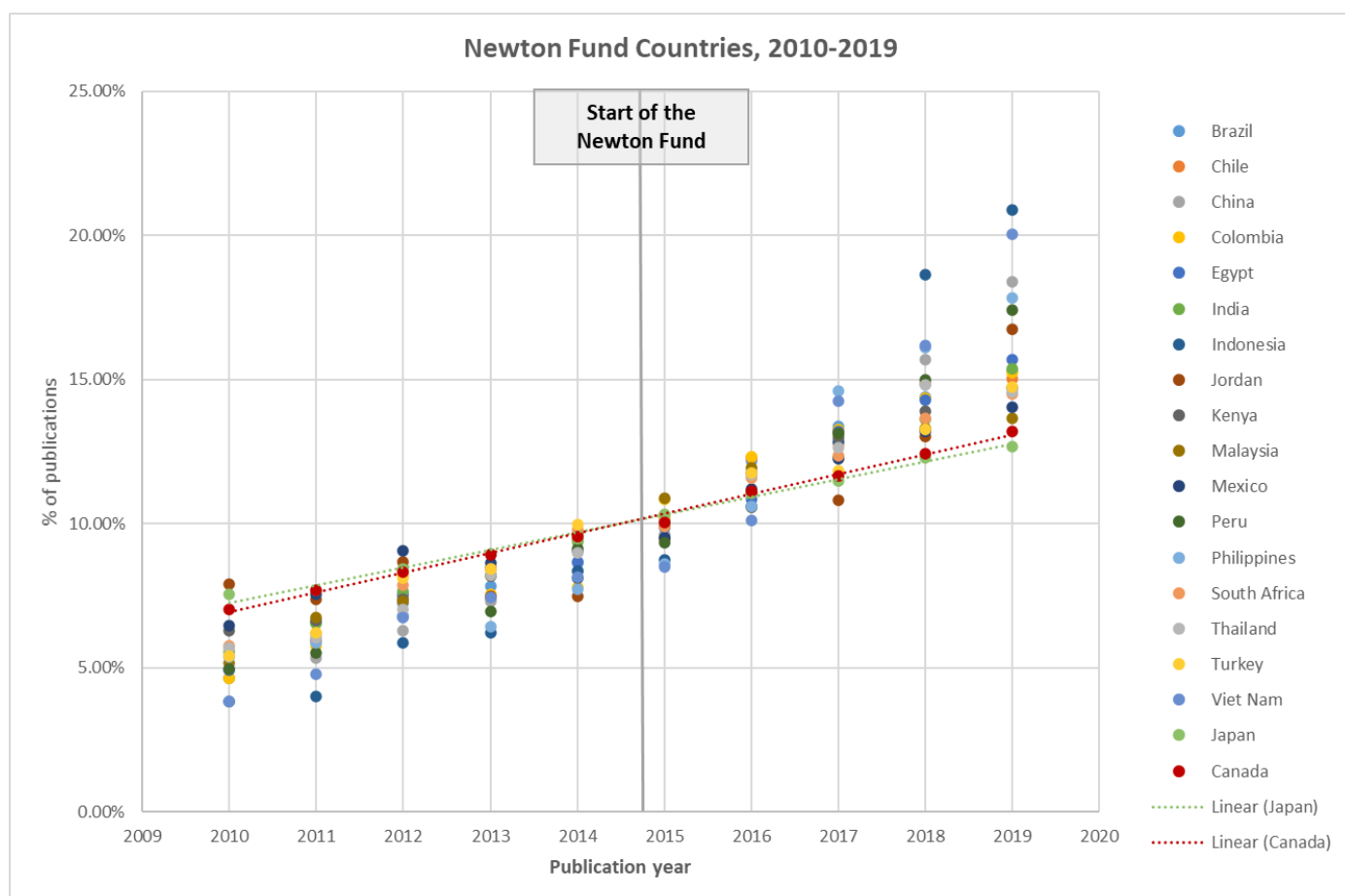
We used SciVal to look at publication trends in relation to ODA funds, for both the Newton Fund (commenced late 2014) and Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF, commenced in 2015).

Methodology

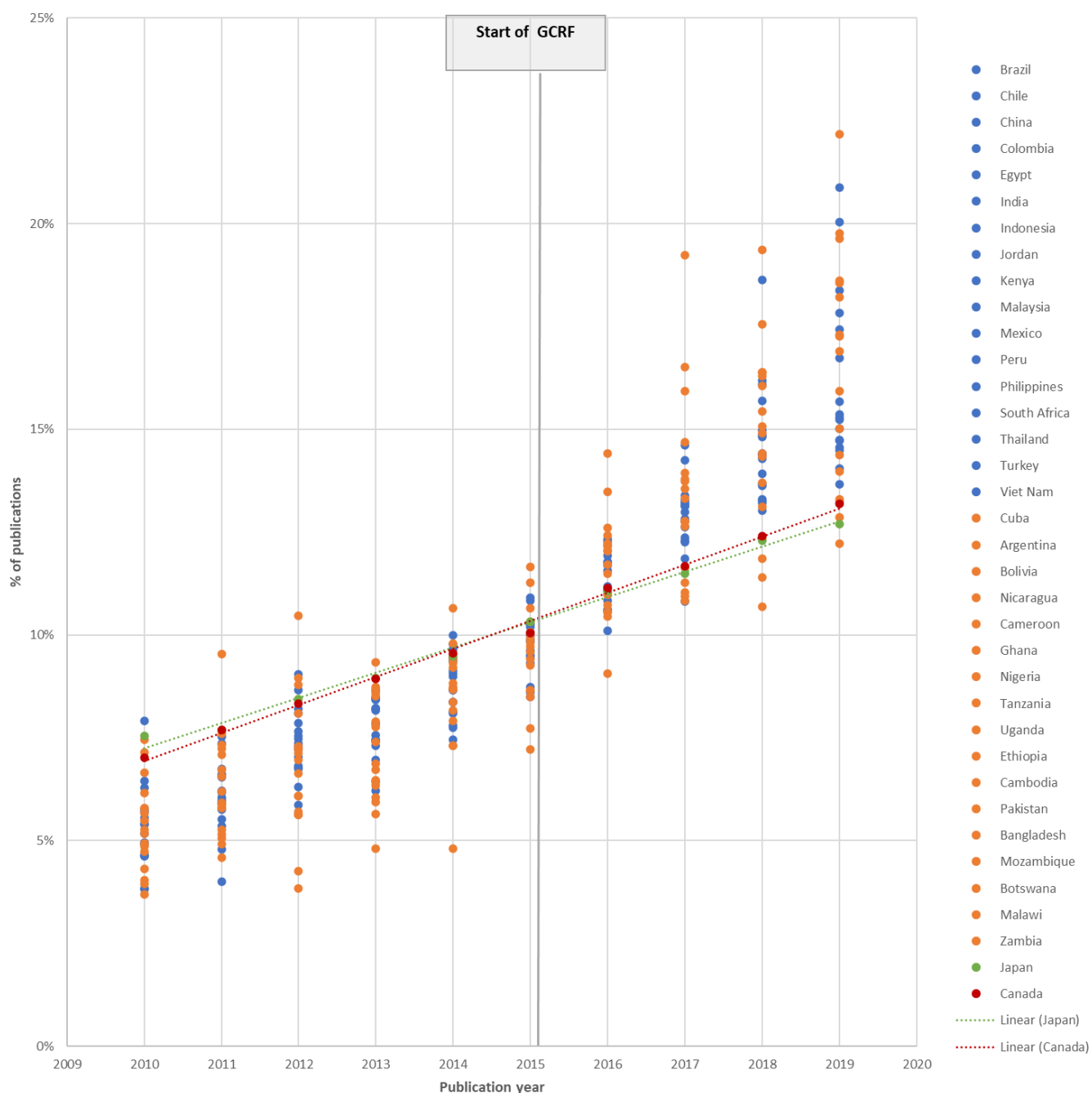
We used publications data for the period 2010-2019 including all publications between the UK and a given ODA country. This contains sufficient data before and after the commencement of the ODA funds to detect any trends. We selected 17 Newton Fund countries and an additional 17 GCRF countries which were chosen based on the number of UKRI GCRF grants awarded and their regional representation. As the number of international publications is on the increase overall, we selected Japan and Canada as comparator countries. This enabled us to compare any publication trends detected in ODA countries with those of a 'typical' international collaborator and with no significant international research funding investment.

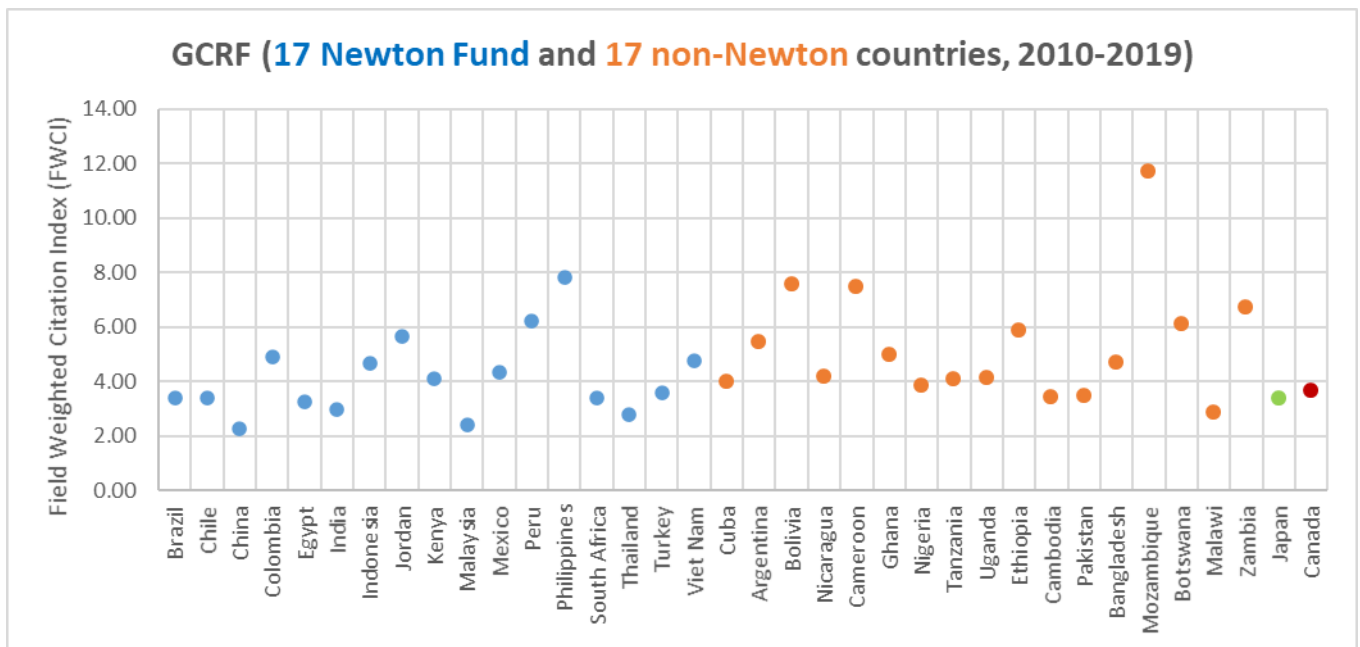
The results are presented in the graphs below and broadly speaking, we can make the following observations:

- There is a potential link between the increase in the number of publications with the introduction of ODA funds (with the period of 2015-16 being a turning point)
- This increase is visible for both the Newton Fund and GCRF, although which contributes more significantly is difficult to gauge
- This increase is significant as it is higher than what a 'typical' trend would return (by using Japan and Canada as comparators)
- The Filed Weighted Citation Index (FWCI) for ODA countries is 82% higher than for Japan and 65% higher than for Canada.



GCRF (17 Newton Fund and 17 non-Newton countries, 2010-2019)





Limitations

Please note that these are very early observations and further analysis will be necessary. This data should currently be regarded as experimental and may not indicate causation. The initial data included all publications that have UK and a partner country, and no variables were controlled. The next step of the analysis would include limiting the number of publication co-authors and analysing Field Weighted Citation Index (FWCI) trends.

Annex 2: Institutional level case studies

Please see below for a summary list of case studies provided by survey respondents and shared here with their approval. We are in the process of collecting further evidence on the positive impact of ODA-funded projects and can provide further examples on request.

University of Liverpool

GCRF/Newton Fund has stimulated changes in five ways:

- 1. Reconceptualising international strategy.** Prior to GCRF/Newton, a priority country was seen as a mature or emerging research power (aside from a long-standing health partnership in Malawi). The set of countries has broadened considerably and includes countries not normally featured in an international strategy, e.g. Belize, Zimbabwe, Yemen. Awards have supported work in 49 countries and GCRF QR 76 countries. The nature of partnerships has changed considerably, with a more nuanced view of capacity-building and now considers the development needs of a country. Awards have enabled a capacity-building network in 'one health' to be developed in the Horn of Africa. GCRF funding for the Anti-Slavery Knowledge Network has allowed us to build relationships with over 20 new UK and international partners (academic and outside academia) in formal and informal capacities. It has allowed existing relationships to be formalised through funding agreements and contracts. Some have in turn become partners in other research projects strengthening our working relationships with them.
- 2. Strategic and holistic approach to research development and environment.** The three year timeframe of GCRF QR enabled a planned strategic approach to developing ODA research within the institution. ODA research is being made integral to the research environment. QR funding is an essential element in building a pipeline of research projects by engaging the wider academic community and supporting them to build the relationships needed for larger-scale research collaboration. 133 projects have been supported from 113 academics. QR has enabled the research programme to be shaped e.g. using pump-priming to encourage work in under-researched geographical regions. Funding has enabled responsiveness (e.g. a Covid-19 rapid response call funded 18 projects in 15 countries) and innovation (e.g. visiting fellowships reshaped with more significant virtual elements for professional development of LMIC researchers). Monitoring and evaluation of pump-priming funding is conducted in a rigorous way. Projects funded in 2016-17 are being tracked for long-term outcomes and impact.
- 3. Focus on impact and SDGs.** ODA research has required impact to be treated as an integral element in the design, delivery and evaluation of research. Although tools such as theory of change and logical frameworks are not always directly applicable to research, some of their fundamental concepts are being adopted. The UN SDGs are now seen as a useful framework for expressing impact.
- 4. Ways of working and research support processes.** ODA requirements have led to the strengthening of processes such as due diligence, gender equality, and safeguarding. University of Liverpool was commissioned by the UK Collaborative on Development Research (UKCDR) to develop guidance for the sector on safeguarding in an international development context. Notably, the approach has been heavily shaped by the LMIC collaborators in the Anti-Slavery Knowledge Network project.
- 5. Engaging a wide range of disciplines.** Some of the academic community (global health) were already engaging with ODA. We have seen a broadening of the academic community engaging with ODA. Notably GCRF/Newton Fund has enabled significant shifts in focus for humanities and social science colleagues in terms of thinking internationally.

Durham University

- 1. Durham Global Challenges Centre for Doctoral Training (CDT).** The setting up of this CDT is one of the biggest impacts of GCRF for Durham University, and the UK's global research. This CDT is funded by GCRF QR with significant investment from the university, as a measure of how important an endeavour this is perceived to be. The centre comprises 25 students from the Global South to work on challenge-facing research projects in collaboration with Global South partners. The students split their time between Durham and their overseas country of interest to

ensure the relevance and equitability of the work and its impacts. This flagship endeavour is evidence of the university's commitment to challenge-led research and working towards the SDGs which can be attributed largely to the advent of GCRF and Newton funding. The CDT has been the vehicle by which we have formed a large number of new and significant international partnerships and also strengthened existing ones. The CDT as a whole, impacts on all 17 of the SDGs through all of the 25 projects supported.

- 2. N8/ARUA partnership.** The N8 universities held a joint workshop with the African Research Universities Alliance (ARUA) Centres of Excellence (CoE) in Ghana in 2019 to discuss future potential research collaborations, funded by GCRF QR. This has led to a number of new partnerships, some leading to research proposals, one successful. Durham has also led on a further workshop in collaboration with the Water CoE to further cement relationships, and a Durham researcher travelled to Addis Ababa to participate in a Water CoE capacity-building workshop. This is a strategically important relationship for Durham which is enabling the widening of our research collaborations with Africa and leading to new opportunities for funding and research resulting in a wide-ranging impact.
- 3. Global Network for Neglected Tropical Diseases.** This Growing Capability GCRF award led by Prof. Graham Sandford and Dr. Steven Cobb has had far reaching impacts across South America and South Asia. Of particular note is the researcher training programme which has so far trained over 100 researchers worldwide in techniques relevant to tackling Neglected Tropical Diseases. Quotes from attendees include:

'I feel that the knowledge learnt, experience and vision will last forever...Your admirable work inspires younger scientists into continuing working in this scientific field and to make us know that is not impossible to make science and contribute to the society. I have returned home motivated into continuing working hard to become a qualified medicinal chemist and a future professor of this subject in my native country [of] Peru.' (Peruvian student, studying at the State University of Campinas, Brazil).

'Five well spent and highly informative days... really important and beneficial to me' (Student from University of Delhi, India).

'...the environment during the course was very nurturing not just in terms of science, but also in terms of collaboration and predisposition. I met colleagues from India, Brazil, Iran and UK among others, which opens the possibility of collaboration in the near future'. (South American student studying at York University, UK)

University of Birmingham

'The GCRF, and ODA research funding more broadly, is essential for applying the UK's world leading scientific expertise to the world's most pressing challenges.' (Prof. Tim Softley FRS, PVC for Research & Knowledge Transfer).

'Too often the burden of economic deprivation, environmental degradation and ill health falls on those in Low and Middle Income Countries. By providing a mechanism whereby UK researchers can engage with communities who live with these challenges, and work with them to develop meaningful solutions, we're ensuring that we apply knowledge and resources to the communities that need them the most.' (Prof. Hisham Mehanna, Director, Institute for Global Innovation).

'The funding that the GCRF provides has allowed scholars who would never have conducted research to the Global South to explore new frontiers of knowledge and generate insights that will help communities who would not have otherwise benefitted from their expertise.' (Prof. Dominique Moran, Deputy Director, Institute of Global Innovation).

University of Leicester

GCRF has had a huge impact in our institution in terms of fully embedding challenge-led research in our institutional strategy, but also in reaching a cultural change amongst our academics. Interdisciplinarity, consortium-building activities and collaboration with non-academic partners, from government departments to intergovernmental institutions, NGOs and communities have developed substantially and now form a core approach to challenge-led research. We have also been growing strategic long-lasting

partnerships built on principles of equity, sustainability and empowerment to address key global challenges. Through GCRF funding, we have increased international visibility of our institution, our research excellence, approach to inclusivity and our ambition as ‘citizens of change’.

Eastern Arc regional consortium: UEA, Essex and Kent

ODA funding has allowed our research to have an impact beyond academia, and beyond the UK. It has enabled our researchers to think globally, and has encouraged us, in developing our five year strategy, to focus on sustainable development, and to use the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals as a de facto metric for measuring progress and success.

We are very concerned that the merging of DFID and the FCO, and the somewhat lukewarm commitment to ODA-related support in the R&D Roadmap, will lead to a weakening of the UK’s focus on research with and for the benefit of DAC list countries, and the necessary global effort towards sustainable social and economic development. This has the potential to undo much of the progress that has been made.

ODA funding will be a key enabler of Eastern Arc’s ambition ‘to deliver real and tangible change through a close collaboration to address pressing issues of sustainable development’, and without it our work will be that much more difficult. We will, of course, continue to support and develop our excellent research, but it will inevitably be the case that fewer colleagues will be encouraged to look to projects with global impact, and will instead turn to UK-focused efforts. This would be a loss for vital global research, but also for UK leadership and, on both an institutional and individual level, a significant reduction of opportunity.

Heriot-Watt University

South East Asia has been a priority region based around our Malaysia campus. Regional research workshops extended our range of regional partners, including academic, governmental, civil society and business. This rapid expansion of our regional networks has also produced a ‘multiplier effect’ by enriching partner relationships beyond single researchers. Malaysian researchers are increasing success in winning local funding. Opportunities are emerging to engage more effectively with multilateral organisations, such as UN Development Programme. South America is a priority where we see expansion and enrichment of our networks with partners. Although many researchers had existing links in the region, before GCRF these were mainly at an individual level. The GCRF investment has allowed us to build greater cohesion among our researchers working with South American partners. We have also built more extensive partnerships with key institutions, giving access to a broader range of research collaborations.