

Strategic Pursuit of External Funding for WUN Research

Professor David Hogg – Chair of Academic Advisory Group
Dr Susie Jim – Chair of Coordinators Group

Thus far, the WUN research profile has been built largely ‘bottom up’ via seed funding through the Research Development Fund and has resulted in around 80 Interdisciplinary Research Groups (IRGs) which are currently active. The WUN Sustainability Fund has provided further subsequent support for some IRGs. One key success is our [Global Farm Platforms](#) project, which has attracted in excess of £5M in external funding for its partner institutions and has produced 10 publications, including two papers in *Nature*.

Clearly, this is not the trajectory of all IRGs and WUN faces the challenge of establishing sustainable multi-national research teams, when most available funding is from national sources. Fortunately, there are already notable instances of sustained collaboration between national funding agencies. For example, the [CHIST-ERA programme](#) coordinates support for research spanning multiple countries in Europe and beyond. Although the infrastructure of CHIST-ERA is supported by funding from the EU, participation in projects is funded by national agencies.

Within the UK, there is growing emphasis on international research collaboration which is ODA (Official Development Assistance) compliant - interdisciplinary, challenge-led and building equitable partnerships for sustainable development in the [DAC list](#) of countries - and an increasing number of multilateral funding arrangements to support this ([UKRI Global Challenges Research Fund](#), [Newton Fund](#), etc.). It now seems highly likely that a new round of the UKRI GCRF will provide increased opportunities for wider collaboration involving national funding agencies from outside the UK (German, Swiss, Dutch, Canadian, etc.) and international agencies such as the UN and International Red Cross, to leverage co-funding and also impact.

On the basis that these and other multilateral funding arrangements are increasing worldwide, there now exists a major opportunity for the WUN to benefit from a more strategic ‘top down’ and direct approach in the pursuit of external funding to complement our current ‘bottom up’ RDF scheme. This approach draws together some key priorities in our Research Strategy 2017-10, namely:

- *Alignment of WUN Global Challenges to the UN’s 17 Sustainable Development Goals* - this is of particular pertinence to the research profiles of our regional African and China groups, and our International Policy Research Group
- *Maximising visibility and impact with **international agencies*** - engagement with and securing the support of relevant global organisations. This is particularly the case for the UN, given our focus on the SDGs.

- *Maximising visibility and impact with **funding agencies*** – engagement with national funding agencies to promote the benefits of multi-national collaboration, drawing on the achievements of WUN, and motivating joint funding initiatives between national agencies.

The above factors highlight the congruence and opportunity for the WUN to plan ahead now for ambitious multi-partner research programmes in the expectation of a viable and strategic route to external funding.

Our Global Challenges Steering Group meetings at the AGM in Perth will provide an early opportunity to marshal ideas for such programmes, as we have done successfully in the past. Ideas that emerge could then be developed through strategic funding in the 2018 RDF round.

The WUN Coordinators Group is maintaining a concise database of national sources of research funding to inform the development of proposals (see Annex A). This will be extended with information on multi-lateral funding agreements as soon as we become aware of these.

“The advice I would give WUN would be to mobilise your resources to bring together your universities, to be in the best possible position to work up applications to future GCRF. I would also encourage universities to be making contacts with the UN, etc., so that you have the high-level partners for future bids. I would advise you to pursue internationalisation - with partners in developing countries - vigorously and strategically.”

Director of International and Interdisciplinary Research at UK Research and innovation (UKRI).