

The Digital University in Africa

Terms of Reference

The opportunity

British Council is seeking to commission a series of exemplar (showcase) projects, action research projects and research studies in Sub Sahara Africa that will contribute to establishing a more significant body of evidence to support the case for digitalisation in higher education in SSA.

Background

As the world is undergoing an unprecedented transformation, Higher Education (HE) systems in Sub Saharan Africa (SSA) have been confronted by the challenge of shifting swiftly to digital delivery. This issue is not just short term, the pandemic has shone a light on the challenges faced by the university. It is also recognised there are long term drivers creating the need for transformative change in higher education: advances in technology, globalisation, partnership and collaboration and the need for greater sustainability and improved access. Demographic shifts are also changing the demands placed on HE systems in Sub Saharan Africa, as a greater percentage of the youth population seek to access HE places; graduate profiles required by the economy are changing and migrant populations are seeking to participate in HE but face challenges in accessing the system. Digitalisation has the potential to transform as well as disrupt.

There is growing recognition that digitalisation of higher education is an increasingly important catalyst for universities to adapt and thrive amidst this uncertainty and disruption caused by global trends in the long term and the pandemic in the short term.

Our project wishes to explore the diverse and interlinked aspects of digitalisation in universities in Africa and seek a greater understanding of different options for future digitalisation. Our project objective is to work together towards embedding technological advancements in higher education in SSA to support the development of digital learning, strengthen virtual exchange and collaboration between the higher education communities on both continents, allow for better inclusiveness and access, and to assist students, staff and higher education institutions to address these challenges.

Geographic Scope for this project

British Council is seeking EoIs for projects based in **Nigeria**, **South Africa**, **Ghana** and **Kenya**. **You may wish to concentrate on a single country or if you have access and knowledge of**

regional approaches in SSA then you may wish to scope your project across a number of countries within the SSA region.

Objectives and Work Strands

Through the provision of seed-corn funding to be awarded through this competitive process, our objective is to build a body of evidence from a range of exemplar (showcase) projects, action research projects and research studies that demonstrate potential for successful uptake and embedding of digitalisation of HE for national higher education systems and universities to adopt in the long term.

Our project will aim to investigate, understand and / or exemplify through three work strands of digitalisation in HE in SSA in the following areas:

Work strand 1

1. **National and institutional digital related policy and strategy for university leaders and policy-makers**, including analysis of how digitalisation can be comprehensively adopted and integrated into national and institutional systems and a clearer understanding of the role education leaders play in digital education. The objective is to understand how policy and strategy can facilitate adoption and embedding of digital methodologies and provide guidance protocols where possible, consideration should also foreground enablers and barriers to access and equity issues.

Project proposals should address analysis of prevailing policy and strategy and offer potential solutions on how to adapt and implement for successful digitalisation of HE at national and institutional levels. Considerations should be made for policymakers, stakeholders and institution leaders, highlighting needs and gaps in understanding of how this process can happen effectively, and also implications for governance and engagement with university stakeholders (e.g. industry, community and students).

Work strand 2

2. **Digital literacy, skills and competencies of academics, professional services and university leadership**, including analysis and potential guidance for different elements of digital education including:
 - Online teaching skills including pedagogic skills and knowledge required of academics
 - Assessment and accreditation of digital programmes
 - Academic career development and recognition systems

Exemplar projects and / or action research projects are particularly welcomed in this work strand. Project proposals may review, identify and propose recommendations to resolve issues faced by academics and professional services in adoption and implementation of digital education, including development of pedagogic skills required, teaching methods, student engagement practices.

You may wish to examine how the Covid-19 crisis has altered the adoption of digital, the role of hybrid / blended learning in this new landscape; assessment and accreditation issues of online / blended delivery programmes; career development issues and recognition frameworks for digital skills development.

Work strand 3

3. **Digital content, tools and platforms.** To expand our understanding of creation and sharing of content in SSA, including access to high quality content, quality assurance, validation and recognition of courses and learning opportunities. Proposals in this work strand may be delivered through exemplar projects, action research or field research. You may also wish consider development strategies necessary for sustainable online and / blended delivery approaches (contextually sensitive) that provide exemplar models for further uptake; improving practices in content development (any subject areas), and accessibility issues.

Expected outputs and Deliverables including Timeframe

Whilst individual timelines will be negotiated with the successful applicant, the following deliverables are required:

- Detailed project workplan and M&E plan – By end of month 1
- Inception report including project aims and objectives, organisations and stakeholder engagement plan for your project in SSA (Nigeria, South Africa, Kenya, Ghana) – End of Month 2
- Delivery of approved project – To commence by end of Month 2
- Project report on completion of delivery – Project end date. Including the following elements:
 - Executive summary (2-4 pages max)
 - A report presenting the findings of the project
 - Presentation highlighting key findings from the project
 - If you choose to conduct an exemplar project or action research project: A guidance document presenting options of practice that may be followed by stakeholders, highlighting innovative initiatives to be developed.
 - OR If you choose to conduct a research report: you will be required to provide transcripts of key stakeholder interviews

Note: Due to funding arrangements, we expect all projects to have delivered 90% of the project by 31st March 2021

Estimated Calendar for Key Project Dates

Launch of EoI – **October 2020**

Deadline for submission of EOI: **November 6th, 2020**

Selection and notification of successful projects: **November 10th 2020**

Delivery phase for successful projects: **Commencing after November 10th 2020 (contract issuance)**

Draft final report from successful projects: **March 20th 2021**

Selection and profile of applicants

Applicant organisations should be based in UK or Nigeria, Kenya, South Africa or Ghana.

Have field knowledge of working in this area in SSA

Have demonstrable knowledge and experience in project delivery (within the specified timelines)

Applications will be assessed on innovative and compelling approaches to capturing evidence of digitalisation of HE

Emphasis for these projects is NOT on the technological aspects of digitalisation of the academy. Our interest lies in uncovering evidence of human and social interactions as well as economic and socio-political approaches to analysis.

Indicative budget

The indicative budget for projects is between **£15,000** and **£40,000**

All spending must be in line with ODA funding requirements. The proposed activity must promote welfare and economic development of ODA countries.

In this call we invite institutions to put forward proposals for compelling projects (action research, market research, and exemplar / demonstration projects) to be delivered in Africa (see geographic scope) that provide evidence on uptake and implementation (including identification of enablers and barriers) of digital approaches within HE.

Eligible costs

See Eligible Costs Document attached.

General principles & guidelines

We are looking for:

- Proposals that engage with academics, academic leaders (Vice Chancellors, etc) policy-makers, and / or digital providers in the SSA countries listed
- Projects can be delivered through digital means and should be in line with guidelines for Covid-19 travel restrictions or face to face if prevailing guidelines permit for travel and face to face meetings.
- Examples of project methodologies include (but are not limited to): action research projects, demonstration or exemplar projects whereby you identify a barrier or obstacle (for example, digital literacy and competencies in the academy) and investigate how this may be mitigated or overcome.
- Proposals must demonstrate excellence and innovation in research, thought leadership, engagement or teaching and learning. We do not wish to duplicate existing knowledge.
- We welcome proposals from all academic disciplines.
- We are interested to receive proposals from consortiums, as well as individual consultants and institutions