A benchmarking tool to assess the capacity of African universities' systems for managing research

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Introduction

Strengthening the research capacity of individuals and institutions is essential to generate evidence for context specific policies. The importance of providing researchers with a conducive environment has led to recent efforts to boost the capacity of low-middle income country universities in research governance and management. This study (2014-16) describes a novel process for conducting a holistic assessment of a university's research management systems against an evidence-based benchmark.

Materials and Methods

A framework was developed to guide a literature search to identify all components of a university's research support systems.

Components were grouped into themes (Fig. 1) and data collection tools (interview guides, document reviews and observation guides for research facilities) were used to assess research systems during site visits to four universities from the Malaria Capacity Development Consortium.

Results

Across the 4 universities, 76 interviews were conducted, 65 documents were reviewed and facilities (libraries, research laboratories, offices) were visited. University research systems commonly lacked:
- research strategies
- project tracking mechanisms
- sign-off processes for contracts
- adequately resourced research support office
- effective financial tracking
- sufficient administrative support
- systematic processes to support research uptake

To varying degrees, the universities have used the findings from this review to develop and implement action plans to address their capacity gaps.

Figure 1. Institutional research system components

Conclusions

This study has developed a benchmark and a transferable process for universities to systematically review all their research support systems.

The benchmark and process enables universities to take a strategic and evidence-informed approach to identifying gaps in their research systems, thereby improving their effectiveness in generating and managing international quality research.

Further Information

Please go to:
http://www.mcdconsortium.org/what-we-do/institutional-support

http://www.lstmed.ac.uk/research/centres-and-units/capacity-research-unit

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