DRUSSA Benchmarking Report 2014

Summaries and analysis from the 2014 DRUSSA benchmarking survey and Leadership and Benchmarking Conference

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Preface

The results of the second DRUSSA benchmarking survey highlight a steady increase in approaches and attitudes being adopted by universities in strengthening institutional capacity to contribute research evidence in the development of pro-poor policy and practice.

This outcome is clearly the result of the hard work and commitment of the many leaders and champions across the network of universities taking part in the DRUSSA programme. These leaders and champions have led – and continue to lead – initiatives within their universities and, along with many of their colleagues, have brought new ideas and creativity to demonstrating how – sometimes small – changes in existing systems and processes can increase capacity in this area. Sharing this learning within and across universities has been a key component of the programme, and congratulations and thanks are due to all.

As demand continues to grow among policy and decision-makers for reliable evidence from science, technology, and social science research to stimulate sustainable development across a range of development challenges, it remains clear that universities have a critical part to play in contributing to this evidence base. As we enter the second half of the DRUSSA programme, the challenge for universities will be to ensure that all productiveness so far – in identifying and prioritising continued improvements, as put forward in the university action plans – is given every chance to be realised.

Karrine Sanders
Programme Manager, DRUSSA
Executive summary

The second benchmarking survey of research uptake management in sub-Saharan African universities participating in the DRUSSA programme has provided new insights into how research and research uptake are currently approached at the institutional level, as well as identifying some of the constraints universities face in getting research findings to end users.

As part of the exercise, universities responded to a comprehensive survey comprising institutional priorities; policies for research; staffing for research management and uptake; and current research and research uptake activities.

This report summarises and compares responses across those universities taking part in the project. Responses have also been compared directly with those from the first benchmarking survey, disseminated in 2012. In modelling the 2014 survey largely on the 2012 version, we have been able to begin mapping evidence of change in various aspects of research uptake – strategy, processes, research communication, and stakeholder engagement – over the course of the past two years.

By noting changes and trends in the universities’ approaches – as suggested by both the survey and during discussions which took place at the DRUSSA Leadership and Benchmarking Conference in Cape Town, South Africa, from 12-14 March 2014 – the report aims to give a comprehensive overview of areas of strength and weakness in order to identify good practice. It also aims to suggest key points for the universities to consider in continuing to strengthen research uptake management.

The following sections summarise the key findings in each area of research uptake (as outlined in the survey), followed by key points arising from discussions at the Cape Town conference.

Survey findings and key discussion points

Section A: Research uptake strategy

Survey findings

- There has been a reported increase in the number of offices and/or posts dedicated to research uptake since 2012. In 2014, almost all participating universities (20), compared to 12 in 2012, indicated that their institution has offices, units, or staff responsible for the communication of research results.

- There has been a growth in interest in research uptake across all university offices participating in the survey (libraries, public relations offices, vice-chancellor’s offices, industrial liaison offices, extension offices, and research management offices). None of the offices reported that interest in research uptake had diminished over the past two years.

- There has been an increase in respondents noting that their universities offer incentives to (academic) staff and departments to encourage the development of partnerships with the public, NGOs, and the private sector. Of those who responded to the 2012 survey, a little more than half (53%) said their university had such incentives, whereas the corresponding figure in 2014 is 72%.
Key discussion points from the benchmarking conference

- Document sharing: As managing research uptake cuts across many different areas of a university’s functions, participants were concerned about the challenges of composing policy and/or guidance documents for their institutions, and expressed a desire for more document-sharing between DRUSSA member institutions. As the programme progresses, member universities are developing and producing policy and strategy documents relating to the management of research uptake. While these documents will inevitably be context-specific in order to be effective, they could prove invaluable to other universities that are at the stage of drafting such documents for their own institutions.

It was noted that universities are beginning to offer incentives to their staff to encourage research uptake related activities, the consideration of research uptake in promotion criteria, and are revising job descriptions. It was suggested that it would be useful to share examples of new job descriptions among participants for roles dedicated to, or involved in, research uptake, as well as examples of policy documents that have included research uptake among promotion criteria.

To support this, DRUSSA has developed a Research Uptake Management Electronic Library (RUMEL). This online repository houses a collection of research uptake related documents sourced from member institutions and, more broadly, from institutions across the globe. Universities are encouraged to make use of this facility, both to source documents to aid their own development and to post documents to assist fellow DRUSSA members. To access RUMEL, visit the Document Index section on the DRUSSA website – [www.drussa.org](http://www.drussa.org)

- Balancing the need to act with formalised policies and structures: Participants acknowledged that much progress has been made within their universities in raising the profile of research uptake, and many have begun developing policy documents and strategies. There was, however, a concern that these processes work very slowly through the institutional machinery, and that without formal structures or policies in place to support research uptake, work already taking place might be lost if individuals working with DRUSSA leave the university or change roles, or if the university leadership changes.

To address these concerns, several universities noted that using existing structures – such as the council, advisory boards and (research) committees – could be (and in some cases already are) useful in formalising and getting support for research uptake if representatives from the DRUSSA programme are strategically placed within these structures. It was also recognised that leading by example may be effective in getting the ball rolling, as both management and researchers would want to be part of the success.

Section B: Research uptake process

Survey findings

- There was an increase in the number of universities noting that they have mechanisms to assess the impact of their research – up from 20% of respondents in 2012, to 41% of respondents in 2014.

- More than half of the respondents (64%) indicated that their university provides training or resources to their academic staff in order to help them identify the needs of external stakeholders and plan their research accordingly. This is considerably more than in 2012, when 47% of those responding to the question said that their university offered such support.
• Respondents indicated that university leadership and senior management are the most enthusiastic and actively supportive of research uptake, followed by research management staff. Attitudes among university leadership also appear to have improved since 2012.

Key discussion points from the benchmarking conference

• Building internal relationships for research uptake: Much has been done to improve awareness and support for research uptake within universities since the outset of the programme and, as noted above, particularly among senior management. However, despite increased interest across university offices – including public relations, offices of vice-chancellors, industrial liaison, extension, and research management offices – discussions revealed that communication and cooperation between these offices could still be improved.

Participants and invited experts both stressed the importance and necessity of coordinating research uptake efforts across the university, including the involvement of university management, units, departments, and faculties in the planning and development of a strategy. Such involvement would help to establish buy-in at a senior level, as well as support within faculties/schools. Participants also stressed the importance of strengthening the role of offices with responsibility for research uptake, and for these actively to encourage research uptake activities across the university by being more visible and by building confidence through demonstrated value. This could include identifying suitable researchers and projects for uptake, and suggesting multi-disciplinary projects in order to increase internal cooperation as well as improving the prospect of research uptake.

• Implementation team: To assist universities’ efforts to coordinate research uptake activities between internal units and faculties, and as institutional action plans start to take shape, it may be time to think carefully about individuals who can best support the implementation of plans and how to coordinate their efforts. In many cases, these individuals will closely resemble those brought together at each of the DRUSSA university visits. In other cases, new people may need to be brought in to fill niches or to replace staff who have moved on. In this context, it may also be worth considering that while senior management buy-in is crucial, they may not always be the most appropriate individuals to operationalise research uptake plans within the university.

Section C: Stakeholder engagement

Survey findings

• Over half of respondents said that their university gives high or very high priority to collaborating with non-HE actors, including partnering with the community to include their views in the research process.

• In terms of engaging external stakeholders with research results, respondents indicated that the most highly prioritised stakeholders are government ministries, departments and councils; research funders and donors; health and medical professionals; and enterprise and industry.

• Over half of the respondents noted that their university does not record research dissemination activities. However, over half also noted that their university does keep some form of record of their research activities, either through institutional repositories (where research output is tracked) or through annual reports.
Key discussion points from the benchmarking conference

- Recording research/research uptake activities: The survey indicates that keeping records of research activity remains a challenge for many universities, and participants were concerned that the lack of such information prevents them from fully capitalising on the good work already done at their universities. Many representatives highlighted the need to maintain some form of record of their university’s research activities, projects, and outputs – whether centralised or at departmental level. Recording such activities would assist those involved in research management, uptake, public relations, etc. in helping researchers to communicate their research, thereby showcasing the university’s research work. Such a resource would also enable researchers to be matched with research funding opportunities and, by demonstrating increased research output, could help to increase such funding.

- Building external relationships for research uptake: The discussions revealed that universities have concerns regarding the most effective means to develop lasting relationships with external stakeholders that will lead to sustained research uptake. Input from participants, as well as the external experts, suggested an incremental approach in which universities first identify the research to be used (this step is linked to the point above), as well as those who need to be involved, before approaching the intended beneficiaries, industries, businesses, or policymakers. The next step would be to identify the most appropriate means of interacting with particular external stakeholders – for example, open days, field demonstrations, policy dialogues, etc.

In order to maintain stakeholder relationships, building trust is essential. One suggested approach was to develop specific projects with the intended users of research – such as farmers, industries, and policymakers – to encourage support, inclusion and, ultimately, use of the research.

Section D: Dissemination of research

Survey findings

- Most university offices responsible for coordinating university publicity are not exclusively concerned with research communication. Only a few universities noted that their staff have qualifications or experience of science communication.

- 80% of responding universities reported that their institution either has or is developing a communication strategy. The survey shows that, since 2012, five universities have started developing these strategies.

Key discussion points from the benchmarking conference

- Communicating with the wider public and targeting your audience: Discussions highlighted the need to target audiences carefully. The danger of misdirected or poorly-directed information was acknowledged, as well as the potential to overload target groups with information not relevant to them.

To address these challenges, it is vital to define target audiences, cultivate relationships, and leverage appropriate media for communication. It is also important to ensure that there is institutional support for academics/researchers to communicate their research, as well as policies to guide interaction with external media. In all instances, it is important for university communications/public relations/research offices to work together to support researchers in communicating relevant outputs.
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DRUSSA Benchmarking Report 2014

This report provides an analysis of the trends identified through quantitative and qualitative responses to the second benchmarking survey of DRUSSA member institutions, in combination with outcomes and actions identified at the DRUSSA Leadership and Benchmarking Conference in Cape Town, South Africa, from 12-14 March 2014.

The report identifies areas of change in the management, processes, and practices related to the strengthening of research uptake management since 2012. It draws links between the data acquired through the survey and findings from the conference, as well as highlighting examples of challenges and good practice. We also consider some of the approaches put forward by the external experts who facilitated discussions at the conference, and suggest ways in which the DRUSSA programme can assist in the operationalisation of research uptake.

As we move into the second half of the DRUSSA programme, the 2014 survey focused on change since the outset of the programme. Its structure and questions therefore followed the general format of the 2012 survey, looking at different aspects of research uptake. However, some alterations have been made to accommodate the fact that we now know more about how research uptake is organised in the participating universities.

This report is organised into seven main sections and draws on major trends from the survey responses, as well as themes identified during discussions at the 2014 Leadership and Benchmarking Conference. For the purposes of this report, we have kept information taken from the survey responses anonymous, highlighting some of the commonalities and distinctions between responses without identifying the respondents directly.

How the report is structured

Section 1, Benchmarking by region, is an overview of regional change in participating universities between 2012 and 2014. The report thereafter focuses on the thematic areas of research uptake management as outlined in the survey sections,

Section 2, Research uptake strategy, looks at key areas of university management, structures, and functions relating to the communication and uptake of research. It is more focused on top-level support for research uptake than the previous survey, which sought to get a broader overview of how research uptake was organised at each university.

Section 3, Research uptake processes, looks at how university processes work to communicate research results, including how results are prepared and assessed for the intended end users of the research. This section has shifted focus towards assessing the impact of research on end users, as opposed to issues of intellectual property and commercialisation.

Section 4, Stakeholder engagement, aims to determine university procedures in engaging external stakeholders, looking more closely at the relationships universities seek to develop with key stakeholders in order to drive research results into policy and practice.

Section 5, Communicating research, addresses university processes applied in communicating research to the wider public (rather than specific stakeholders) in order to raise the profile of the university.
Section 6 considers the level of **Impact** that the DRUSSA programme is perceived by participants to have had on various areas of research uptake.

Section 7 is a summary of the **Research uptake plans** that have been collected from the DRUSSA member universities so far. The information collected in the first survey has been used to form the baseline for university development over the programme using ‘process benchmarking’, whereby universities set their own ‘benchmarks’ or areas to be developed. These benchmarks – synthesised into statements of good practice during the first benchmarking exercise – have been further refined by the participating universities and have begun to be incorporated into their research uptake plans.

Section 8 presents the key overall **Conclusions**.

The survey results, the report, and the outcomes of the thematic sessions that took place at the 2014 DRUSSA Leadership and Benchmarking Conference aim to support universities further by highlighting areas of strength and weakness, and by considering where to direct efforts to support the operationalisation of priority areas.
1. Benchmarking by region

For the inaugural DRUSSA Leadership and Benchmarking Conference in 2012, it was agreed to group participating universities into regional sessions over the course of the three-day event. This was done in order to allow familiar institutional partners from neighbouring countries and regions to initiate discussions on research uptake capacity, drawing on their shared regional contexts and organisational landscapes. Launching the DRUSSA benchmarking process with a regional framework was seen as a natural approach to sharing experience and planning activities over the course of the programme.

For the 2014 Leadership and Benchmarking Conference, we opted instead to structure the event principally around thematic, rather than regional, sessions. The reason for this was that two years into the DRUSSA programme, participating universities have already had the chance to work together both within and across national and regional contexts (e.g. through the Nairobi Symposium in September 2013, the CREST short courses and graduate modules, and the online platform). As such, it was felt that participating universities would now benefit most by directing their attention towards specific strands of research uptake work more closely related to their particular areas of interest and experience. As will be seen in greater detail later in this report, these thematic sessions were based on the four sections of the benchmarking survey: research uptake strategy, research uptake processes, stakeholder engagement, and research communication.

While we took a principally thematic approach to benchmarking this year, there is of course still considerable value in analysing the benchmarking survey data from a regional perspective. The 2014 DRUSSA Leadership and Benchmarking Conference therefore included a half-day’s regional session in order to help facilitate this.

Accommodating a regional component to the programme allowed for comparative discussions, for progress to be measured within original groups, and allowed us to factor in any national or regional changes to the HE landscape overall and the possible impact of these changes on developments in research uptake management.

This section provides an overview and analysis of the 2014 benchmarking data from a regional perspective, as well as the key discussion points that arose from the regional sessions at the Cape Town conference.

East Africa

Of the nine participating universities in the east African region, two institutions – Kigali Health Institute and the National University of Rwanda – have since merged into the University of Rwanda. For the purposes of comparing datasets in 2012 and 2014, we have included data submitted by the two Rwandan pre-merger institutions. Future surveys, however, will involve data submitted by the single, newly-merged institution.

Research uptake strategy

The establishment of research strategies is widespread among the east African group, with all nine universities reporting that they have a strategy in place in 2014, (only one of these did not have a strategy in place in 2012). The majority (six out of nine) indicated that their research strategy has an emphasis or focus on research uptake. This doubles the number reported in 2012, when only three universities reported having research uptake embedded in their institutional strategy. This suggests that while the total number of strategies in place has been consistently high, there have been amendments and revisions towards a greater emphasis on research uptake management.
Eight universities indicated that their university has offices or posts in place with responsibility for communicating research or getting research into use – an increase of one since 2012. The offices most cited as having an interest in research uptake in 2014 are listed in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Offices and facilities with reported interest in research uptake (east Africa)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Office Type</th>
<th>2014</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research management office</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office of industrial liaison, IP, knowledge transfer, or</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>knowledge exchange</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vice-chancellor's office</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public relations or marketing office</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extension or community engagement office</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICT staff</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External advisory boards/commercial services</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: DRUSSA benchmarking survey 2014

This range of offices/posts is largely comparable with 2012, although there has been significant change in the number of external advisory boards/commercial services and industrial liaison/IP/knowledge transfer and exchange offices. No institutions reported external advisory boards as having an interest in research uptake in 2012, but this had increased to four by 2014. Similarly, only three institutions reported industrial liaison/IP offices having an interest in research uptake management in 2012, increasing to seven in 2014. This suggests that engagement with enterprise and industry is increasingly seen as central to research uptake management.

When asked to assign priority to five areas of university activity, the results from 2012 and 2014 were consistent, with teaching, research, and externally funded research ranked as the highest priorities. Outreach/extension work and relationships with the public/NGOs/the private sector were less prioritised.

This suggests a continued focus on fundamental objectives, including an interest in securing research funding. However, there have been some changes: the importance of relationships/partnerships and outreach/extension increased, with two more universities ranking these areas as a very high priority in 2014. However, while the importance of outreach and extension increased, it remains the lowest priority in 2014, as in 2012.

All universities indicated that they have mechanisms to develop links or partnerships with external stakeholders, which is one more university than in 2012. Further to this, all but one of the east African universities reported that their universities have (or are developing) incentives to encourage academic staff to develop links with external stakeholders – an increase of two universities from the previous survey.

Research uptake processes

We have seen significant change in approaches to research uptake processes among the east African universities since 2012. Previously, only one university reported that they had mechanisms to assess the wider impact of university research; this grew to four universities in 2014. These new mechanisms include research staff
evaluation surveys, annual research dissemination conferences and events, and evaluation frameworks designed within existing DRUSSA implementation teams.

When asked if they had mechanisms to obtain feedback from potential users regarding the usefulness of their research, only one university reported this being in place in 2012. By 2014, five universities had established such mechanisms, including research days/open days, the use of university radio to communicate and consult with listeners on research utility, and field visits.

We asked participants to report on any successes in enhancing research uptake processes between 2012 and 2014. One respondent told us they have ‘established an office for research dissemination’ involving the directors of community services and of technology transfer; another told us they have established a dedicated ‘research innovation and outreach division’. Two other universities have established dedicated funding streams to support research uptake activity at their universities.

Finally, we asked universities to report on the perceived influence of the DRUSSA programme on these changes to research uptake processes. Among the east African respondents, three universities told us the programme has effected change very significantly, while two others reported that it has done so significantly. One told us somewhat, and one said not very significantly.

**Stakeholder engagement**

Respondents were asked to rate a range of external stakeholders according to three different criteria: the degree to which the university prioritises its relationship with the stakeholder; the perceived strength of the relationship between the university and the stakeholder; and the perceived power of the stakeholder in terms of effecting societal and developmental change. The objective was to learn more about how universities identify power-brokers in their society, and to what degree they feel engaged with them. The results are shown in Figure 1.

Among east African respondents, the highest-rated priority stakeholders on average were government/ministries/departments/councils and health/medical professionals, with east African respondents ranking each at a priority of 9.25 out of 10. While both are given high priority, only the government stakeholder group is similarly highly ranked in terms of the strength of its relationship with the universities (also at 9.25). The strength of the health professionals group falls under 7.5 and, despite their high priority, they are also perceived as being marginally less powerful, at 8.5.

In general, the universities’ prioritising of external stakeholders outranks the perceived strength of the relationships and the perceived power of the stakeholder. However, there are two exceptions: on average, east African universities rank other universities as more powerful than they rank the strength or priority of their relationship to the university. Similarly, respondents rate the strength of media agents’ relationships with universities more highly than they prioritise their relationships with them.
Figure 1: Assessing external stakeholders by priority, strength of university relationship, and perceived power to influence policy (east Africa)

Communicating research

Systemised approaches to communicating research are well in place in participating universities in east Africa, with five having reported in 2012 that they had dedicated public relations offices with staff trained in PR; this grew to six by 2014.

We also asked respondents to elaborate on the specific approaches they undertook in order to communicate research to external audiences. Among the east African universities, there was a very high response rate for
research newsletters (internal), public lectures, and conference papers, with all respondents from the region telling us they use these methods to communicate research. Interestingly, while eight respondents use internal newsletters to disseminate research findings, only six utilise external newsletters for this purpose – suggesting that raising awareness of research findings among university staff is a higher priority at this stage than informing the general public, at least through this particular medium.

All but one university from east Africa use press releases and dedicated research websites as a means to engage the public with university research, and five universities indicated that they use university TV and radio, as well as external/private TV and radio, to communicate research more widely. Only a minority of respondents told us that they use email distribution lists to external stakeholders, or publicity directed to governments or to business. This suggests a stronger engagement with mass media and approaches to the general public, than to specific audiences within the public sphere.

Table 2: Approaches in place for communicating research (east Africa)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approach</th>
<th># of universities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research newsletter disseminated primarily within your institution (internal awareness)</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public lectures</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conference papers</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Press releases to external media outlets</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedicated research websites/web pages</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research newsletter disseminated primarily outside your institution (general public)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Database of research staff with media experience</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science cafes, open days, and trade fairs</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University TV and radio</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External/private TV and radio</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email distribution list to external stakeholders</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publicity directed to governments, NGOs, and INGOs</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publicity directed to business and/or science communities</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: DRUSSA benchmarking survey 2014

East African regional session at the Leadership and Benchmarking Conference

As noted, the 2014 Leadership and Benchmarking Conference involved a half-day session dedicated to regional discussion. The east African session focused in part on how best to embed research uptake (and the DRUSSA programme) across the university, and how to ensure that processes for communicating research are increasingly institutionalised. One university told us that the DRUSSA programme has given impetus to initiatives that had been previously discussed, allowing these initiatives to gain traction by involving a wide range of staff through the implementation team. While the process of change could be ‘slow and difficult’, they said, there has been proactive interest among deans and directors, as well as those involved directly in the programme. The process of establishing a dedicated research uptake policy, though, was ‘very slow’ and ‘tied up in university bureaucracy’. Another university told us that DRUSSA had helped inform the rationale for establishing a new DVC role for
research. This was able to occur because senior leaders at the university had bought-in to the programme and were convinced of the need to dedicate leadership positions to research and its effective communication.

Another university told us that while the broader institutionalisation of research uptake is the goal, different colleges (such as the medical college) maintain their own specific research strategies, and it will be a long-term process to establish overarching research uptake policies that enjoy common support and follow common procedures among these different internal constituencies. Collating research activities from across these various internal constituencies is also a challenge, but the university agreed that its leadership is committed to strengthening this.

The session focused too on how best to ensure that research gets the attention of policymakers and end users. The session facilitator raised the importance of identifying how policy is made and who the main players are in each specific university setting, and then of establishing ‘personal relationships with the main players’. The importance of making these individuals ‘feel comfortable in using you as a central point of contact’ was discussed, and it was suggested that ‘external stakeholders appear to appreciate having a central office to contact, rather than individual researchers’. To that end, researchers also need to feel that they can ‘trust the research office’ and that the office is there to help, and not another unnecessary ‘layer of bureaucracy’.

During the session, several universities agreed to ‘share strategies, policies, performance assessment, promotion criteria, and internal funding assessments’ with each other and with other universities in the programme, in aid of sharing good practice and learning from models that might apply in their own institutional contexts.

Some of the challenges identified in the session included high teaching workloads; the task of establishing comprehensive institutional repositories for research outputs; effective communication and coordination of human resources between PR and research offices; and achieving buy-in at all levels of the university. Despite the scale of these challenges, delegates raised the prospect of incentives that could be designed to encourage research uptake further, including negotiating time allocation for research to reduce their teaching loads, and the provision of overheads for researchers drawing on external funds.

Southern Africa

Research uptake strategy

The southern African session also progressed through the four topics covered in the benchmarking survey, beginning with research uptake strategy. All seven universities in the group reported having strategies in place in 2014 (with one of these universities reporting their strategy was underway). This is one more than was reported in 2012. As in the east African group, there was also notable growth in the proportion of strategies that have a research uptake element embedded within them: in 2012, five universities told us they did not have uptake as part of their research strategies but, by 2014, all universities reported having embedded uptake into their strategies. All but one of the universities in the southern group have specific posts or offices for research uptake, which is an increase of three universities since 2012.

The offices most cited in 2014 as having an interest in research uptake are cited in Table 3. In 2014, more universities indicated that external advisory boards/commercial services and the vice-chancellor’s office have an interest in research uptake than in 2012, but most other offices received similar interest ratings in 2012 and 2014. The universities also noted a number of offices that are involved in the communication of research results, including deans and alumni offices. One university highlighted two offices in particular: its centre for continuing
education, which is responsible for public education; and a field research centre, which runs its own independent outreach programme.

Universities in the group also gave the same rating to the survey’s five priority areas in 2014 as they had in 2012. Teaching, research, and externally funded research were rated first through to third (teaching was ranked as a very high priority by all universities, with research and externally funded research ranked very high by 70% of universities). The importance of outreach/extension and relationships with the public/NGOs/the private sector came in fourth and fifth, but still saw a growth in prioritisation since 2012. (In 2012, no universities ranked these areas as very high priority, whereas one and two universities respectively rated them as very high priority in 2014.)

Table 3: Offices and facilities with reported interest in research uptake (southern Africa)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facility</th>
<th>2014</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research management office</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offices of industrial liaison, IP, knowledge transfer, or knowledge exchange</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vice-chancellor's office</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public relations or marketing office</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extension or community engagement office</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External advisory boards/commercial services</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: DRUSSA benchmarking survey 2014

Research uptake processes

The second section of the benchmarking survey focused on research uptake processes. All but one of the southern African universities indicated that they have mechanisms to develop links or partnerships with external stakeholders, including the public/NGOs/the private sector, which is one more university than in 2012. Further to this, four out of the seven southern universities said that their institutions have incentives for academic staff to develop links with external stakeholders, which is an increase of two universities from 2012.

We saw an increase of one university utilising user feedback and researcher training: in 2012, only one university reported that they had mechanisms to obtain feedback from potential users regarding the usefulness of the university's research and degree of benefit; this increased to two universities by 2014. Similarly, four universities in 2012 reported providing 'training or resources (for research-active staff) to identify stakeholder needs/demands and plan for research uptake'; this grew to five universities in 2014.

The survey also asked universities about the changes they have encountered in implementing research uptake processes over the last two years. Universities from southern Africa provided a range of examples of changes. One university told us '[w]e have started to monitor the distribution of funds and the productivity of research at the institution, as well as the amount of external and internal collaboration between projects. Research funding is also more focused towards impact and problem solving than just funding research to do research'. Another reported that 'Research uptake is at this point a standing item of the Senate Research Committee. In addition, it is now
located within the Office for Strategic Initiatives (DVC Office) and thus has a more focused institutional management effort’.

While all southern universities reported degrees of change since 2012, they also iterated certain challenges. One university told us that ‘[w]e still are not able to capture the full extent of our research impact and uptake’, suggesting that deeper monitoring and evaluation among end users could be useful. Another told us that changing research cultures is a long-term challenge that will require continued attention: ‘Challenges relate to implementation at the level of active researchers. Plans and ideas have been formed, but we have not implemented, for example, further workshops, other than those convened by DRUSSA. The overall time spent on managing this institutionally is a challenge, given that it competes with other strategic priorities […] There is some way to go to ensure that uptake is part of the fabric of research culture.’

**Stakeholder engagement**

Again, the third section of the survey focused on stakeholder engagement, with respondents asked to rate a range of external stakeholders according to three criteria: the degree to which the university prioritises its relationship with the stakeholder; the perceived strength of the relationship between the university and stakeholder; and the perceived power of the stakeholder in terms of effecting societal and developmental change. The average rankings given by southern African universities are shown in Figure 2, in descending order of priority (ranked out of ten).

As Figure 2 shows, participating universities in southern Africa rated NGOs/INGOs/international associations as their highest-priority external stakeholder group, also rating them as having the most relative power (8/10) and as having the second strongest relationships with the universities. The strength of university relationships with government ministries/departments/councils was deemed the highest of all relationships, though they were slightly less prioritised and, interestingly, were seen as having, on average, relatively less power than NGOs/international organisations.

The closest convergence of ratings for priority, relationship strength, and power was assigned to enterprise and industry, with the southern African respondents rating this (on average) at 7.57, 7.57, and 7.43 respectively. The greatest level of dissonance between priorities, relationship strength, and perceived power was found for the informal sector – average rankings gave this stakeholder a priority level of 5.86, while the strength of the relationship was rated at 5.00 and its power rated at just 4.15 (the only average rating to fall below 5 out of 10).

No stakeholders were rated more highly under the attribute of power than they were for priority or for relationship strength. Aside from government, the only stakeholder group rated as having a stronger university relationship than its university prioritisation were environmental groups/agencies.

Publishers and farmers/agriculturalists were two stakeholder groups identified as relatively highly prioritised by the southern African respondents, relative to the weaker state of their university relationships.
Figure 2: Assessing external stakeholders by priority, strength of university relationship, and perceived power to influence policy (southern Africa)

Source: DRUSSA benchmarking survey 2014

Communicating research

Southern African universities reported growth in the level of training and skills of key personnel working in areas of research uptake, particularly in offices of public relations. In 2012, four respondents told us that their offices responsible for publicising university research had staff trained in PR; by 2014, all seven universities reported their offices had staff with this training. Six respondents in 2014 told us that their staff also had training in marketing (up from five in 2012), and five reported staff with training in journalism (up from four in 2012).
We also asked which approaches the universities take to communicate research results to the general public. For southern African respondents, the most common medium was the research newsletter disseminated primarily outside your institution, with all seven universities utilising external newsletters. All universities bar one also utilised internal research newsletters, public lectures, university TV/radio, and publicity directed to business and science communities.

**Table 4: Approaches in place for communicating research (southern Africa)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approach</th>
<th># of universities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research newsletter disseminated primarily outside your institution (general public)</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research newsletter disseminated primarily within your institution (internal awareness)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public lectures</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University TV and radio</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publicity directed to business and/or science communities</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Database of research staff with media experience</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conference papers</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Press releases to external media outlets</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedicated research websites/web pages</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External/private TV and radio</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email distribution list to external stakeholders</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publicity directed to governments, NGOs, and INGOs</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science cafes, open days and trade fairs</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: DRUSSA benchmarking survey 2014*

The least common approach reported was science cafes/open days/trade fairs, with only one university in the region telling us they utilised this method. This contrasts with the east African region, in which six universities reported using such open days.

**Southern African regional session at the Leadership and Benchmarking Conference**

The southern African regional half-day session shed light on some specific initiatives in place at member universities and provided delegates with an opportunity to compare their progress against where they were when the DRUSSA programme began. One university told us that while they believed themselves to be ‘late starters’ due to changes in university leadership, they feel they have now secured senior leadership buy-in for research uptake, and that new systems are being put in place to organise and communicate research results better. They reported that ‘impact’ has been identified as a key part of the university research strategy, and that the university’s new research plan stipulates that ‘research projects must have dissemination criteria’. The university is also now formalising processes to ‘engage in packaging research in different ways for new audiences – specifically they are looking at producing items for the national radio and TV services’.

Another university in the session told us that although industrial placements for its postgraduate students provided ‘one potential avenue for the university to improve RU potential […] there is a need to train early career academics in research uptake management good practice, and to reward successes through career advancement’. This suggests an effort to achieve buy-in not only at the level of the university’s senior management, but also at the level of new and individual researchers, who have yet to universally accede to a
research uptake culture. To help achieve this, the university’s research office plans a faculty-to-faculty ‘road show’ to explain and reiterate the importance of embedding uptake into research plans.

Another university told us that they have identified nine niche research areas based on perceived benefit to rural communities. They told the session that they were particularly inspired by the experiences of another DRUSSA institution which had been able to ‘enlist NGOs to help bridge the delivery and communication gap between the university and the surrounding community’.

**West Africa**

**Research uptake strategy**

As in the east and southern African regions, all DRUSSA universities in west Africa reported having research strategies in place – a growth of one since 2012, when the strategy was still under development. Further to this, all but one of the west African respondents indicated that their strategies embedded elements of research uptake in 2014; only two had reported this in 2012.

All universities indicated that their institution has an office or post with responsibility for communicating research or getting research into use, which is an increase of three universities since 2012. The offices most cited in 2014 as having an interest in research uptake are shown in Table 5.

**Table 5: Offices and facilities with reported interest in research uptake (west Africa)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Office (and facilities)</th>
<th>2014</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research management office</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public relations or marketing office</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial liaison/IP/knowledge transfer</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge exchange offices</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vice-chancellor’s office</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extension or community engagement office</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External advisory boards/commercial services</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: DRUSSA benchmarking survey 2014

We saw growth in the number of external advisory boards/commercial services and offices of industrial liaison/IP/knowledge transfer/exchange reported as having an interest in research uptake, as compared with 2012. Most other offices received similar ratings survey-on-survey from this region.

As with other regions, the top three priority areas for the west African universities were teaching, research, and externally funded research. Teaching was rated as a very high priority by every university in the region in both 2012 and 2014. We saw notable change, though, when it came to the area of relationships with the public/NGOs/private sector, with no universities rating this as a priority in 2012 but five universities rating it as high or very high priority in 2014. The importance of outreach/extension also increased, but is still the area given the lowest priority overall in both 2012 and 2014.
Research uptake processes

All universities indicated that they have mechanisms to develop links or partnerships with external stakeholders, one of which had started the process of creating these mechanisms since the survey in 2012. Five of the seven west African universities also said that their universities have incentives for academic staff to develop links with external stakeholders, which is an increase of two universities from 2012. Three universities from west Africa told us they now have in place mechanisms to obtain feedback from potential users regarding the usefulness of the university’s research and degree of benefit, as compared with two universities in 2012.

We also asked universities to report on any particular changes in their approach to research uptake processes since 2012. One respondent told us that ‘some aspects of research uptake have been incorporated in the draft research policy [and] we are in the process of setting up a research uptake and management office’. Another university reported that, since the inception of the DRUSSA programme, they are designing and populating a publicly-accessible online research portal as well as a new externally-facing research newsletter, which will ‘showcase all research with significant uptake potential’.

Aside from the funding constraints and heavy workloads shared by the majority of universities, participants told us that ‘outmoded incentive systems’ did little to encourage the growth of a research uptake culture, and that the internal ‘coordination of research information within the university’ continued to pose challenges. This type of challenge was reported among respondents in each of the three regions, suggesting that both gathering research outputs from across departments and faculties, and communicating these results under an institutionalised system, attests to the complexity of building truly comprehensive research uptake management systems.

When asked to what degree the DRUSSA programme is seen to have influenced them in working to strengthen their research uptake processes, six of the seven west African universities said that DRUSSA had influenced them significantly. One of the seven told us the programme had been somewhat influential.

Stakeholder engagement

As with previous regions, participants in west Africa were asked how they would rate the degree to which they prioritise relationships with key external stakeholders, the strength of their relationship with key external stakeholders, and the perceived power of key external stakeholders to effect social change. The average results (in descending priority order out of ten) are shown in Figure 3.

Teachers/educators and enterprise/industry were both rated as top average priorities for west African respondents, averaging 8.57 out of 10. These stakeholders’ relative power, though, was rated lower, at 7.43 and 7.29 respectively. The greatest convergence of ratings was attributed to the government stakeholder group, with the average priority, strength, and power ratings as 8.29, 8.43, and 8.29 respectively. This suggests that universities are, on balance, measuring their level of prioritisation of government relationships proportionately to their perceived power, and that the strength of the university-government relationships, on average, meet expectations.

There is an interesting dissonance surrounding the stakeholder group of health and medical professionals, however. On average, the region’s universities assign relatively high priority to this group, rating them at 8 out of 10 for how much the universities prioritise these relationships. At the same time, health and medical professionals are also perceived to have relatively low power (at 6.14), and the strength of the relationships are rated as among the weakest (at 5.86). The reason for this group being so highly prioritised, while the strength and effectiveness of the relationship are reported as being challenging, may be worth considering in any new engagement efforts.
Figure 3: Assessing external stakeholders by priority, strength of university relationship and perceived power to influence policy (west Africa)

Source: DRUSSA benchmarking survey 2014

Communicating research

Regarding the level of training attained by staff with responsibility for research communication, we saw similar levels of training in 2012 and 2014 for the west African region. Four universities reported that staff with this responsibility had journalism degrees in 2012; this grew to five universities in 2014. While there were four universities reporting staff with marketing degrees in charge of research communication in 2012, this fell to three
universities in 2014. We also saw a drop in the number of universities reporting staff with PR degrees – from five in 2012, to four in 2014. This is the only evidence of a fall in the number of universities employing staff with related degrees in research communication roles.

As part of this section of the survey, we asked respondents to report on whether (and how) they had commenced initiatives in the last two years to make research findings more widely accessible. One university told us that they have created ‘a research uptake blog on the main university website [and are] exploring the use of science cafes and developing a research newsletter’ for future dissemination. Another told us that their forthcoming ‘Central Office of Research (CoR)…will coordinate these activities. Papers for the restructuring of the CoR [are] going through the various university committees.’ Four universities in the region reported new approaches to research communication that are under development and planned for launch in the next two years.

We also asked which approaches the universities take to communicate research results to the general public – see Table 6. For respondents in west Africa, the most common medium was publicity directed to business and/or science communities, with every university in the region reporting using this approach. This contrasts with responses from universities in east and southern Africa, where this is a middle-to-low priority. External or private TV and radio are also commonly utilised, with six out of seven universities using external media – one more than utilise their own university TV or radio services.

Only one university reported maintaining a database of research staff with media experience, in contrast to the high number of universities that report engaging with external media. Further, only one university maintains dedicated research websites, compared with four universities in the southern region and seven in the east. This suggests that cross-regional sharing of good practice in the establishment of research websites/pages may be of benefit.

**Table 6: Approaches in place for communicating research (west Africa)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approach</th>
<th># of universities</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Publicity directed to business and/or science communities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Publicity directed to governments, NGOs, and INGOs</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research newsletter disseminated primarily outside your institution (general public)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science cafes, open days and trade fairs</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedicated research websites/web pages</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Database of research staff with media experience</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: DRUSSA benchmarking survey 2014
West African regional session at the Leadership and Benchmarking Conference

The west African session featured case studies presented by participating universities and wide-ranging discussion as to how these good practices might apply in each institutional context. One university told us that they have been able to establish a range of new research uptake facilities over the past two years, having secured external grants to do so. Aside from the ratification of a new research policy, they have created an intellectual property and technology transfer office that ‘provides researchers with incentives [to] try to publicise their activities on the university’s website’. They have also established a research foundation to fund ‘strategic research areas such as energy’ which have development applications.

As well as these new initiatives, the same university also spoke about the challenges of sustainable collaboration with external partners, in terms of the effective dissemination of research outputs and the generation of cooperative research. ‘The university is an island, separate from others,’ they told the group, also noting that most new collaboration is taking place with industry and enterprise. Getting the attention of government policymakers has been a particular challenge.

Another university reported that they have also found engagement with government policymakers to be difficult, but that engagement with the wider public and with enterprise has been more successful so far. They have published an externally-facing research report, including photos and human-interest features and stories written in plain language for the non-academic community. The report has been distributed to both business and the public at large. Another university told the session they have done the same, having required all active researchers in the university to contribute a list of their published research findings. With the university offering staff financial incentives to make these contributions to the report, roughly 40% of researchers responded. It was agreed, however, that focusing on increasing this number for future reports needs to involve an expansion of what researchers (and graduate students) provide, with research publications not seen as ‘enough.’

One university spoke about involving student research in the university’s approach to uptake. Students are eligible to win seed funding for small parcels of research, with the requirement that they showcase research findings at open days and trade fairs. This leads, in part, to consolidating the university’s relationship with industry representatives, but also with the wider public.

The session concluded by identifying a range of challenges faced over the past two years, and approaches underway to address them over the duration of the programme going forward. Ongoing dependence on public funds was cited as a challenge, which many institutions are seeking to alleviate via increased partnership with private actors and with enterprise. Demonstrating research utility to government, though, was also seen as a way to help secure existing public funding streams, even while universities look to diversify the ways in which they secure funding. Also discussed was the potential impact on teaching if research staff were to dedicate more time and resource to research activity, communication, and uptake. While this question is also framed within the broader question around funding and resource, it was agreed that full-time postgraduate student cohorts should be expanded, and that they (and the research they generate) should be more central to the university’s research uptake strategy.
2. Research uptake strategy

With the regional summaries provided above, we have been able to learn from trends that have emerged between 2012 and 2014 in each of the African regions represented in the DRUSSA programme, and have seen the distinctions and commonalities that exist between regions in terms of approaches to research uptake. In the sections below, we move from a regional analysis to a more purely thematic analysis in which each of the four themes covered in the benchmarking survey and conference (research uptake strategy, research uptake processes, stakeholder engagement, and communicating research) are explored in greater depth. We involve data from the 2012 and 2014 benchmarking surveys, as well as examples and case studies arising from discussions at the 2014 DRUSSA Leadership and Benchmarking Conference.

Research strategy

The programme has revealed a view that research uptake is considered part of the overall research process and should therefore be incorporated into a university’s overall research strategy, rather than form a stand-alone strategy. The results of the 2014 survey appear to support this viewpoint. The survey found that all universities participating in the programme have overall research strategies, including two universities whose strategies were in development when the previous survey was conducted in 2012.

A majority of universities (86%) also indicated that their research strategy includes an emphasis/focus on research uptake, including two universities that had previously indicated that their policies only partly emphasised research uptake. This is a significant increase compared with 2012, when only five universities indicated that their policies considered research uptake and with most universities leaving the response blank. This focus is articulated in various ways, such as the inclusion of research uptake in the assessment of applications for internal research funds and in the evaluation of academic staff for promotion, support for communications and media training for researchers, or the direct inclusion of research uptake as a key strategic pillar in the university’s research strategy.

Research uptake structures

Offices/posts dedicated to research uptake

There has been a reported increase in the number of offices and/or posts dedicated to research uptake since 2012. In 2014, almost all universities (20), compared to 12 in 2012, indicated that their institution has offices, units, or staff responsible for the communication of research results. This increase can be accounted for in a variety of ways: some universities have set up new offices or appointed new staff, others have strengthened or restructured existing offices; some have done a combination of both.

Offices with an interest in research uptake

The survey asked participants to indicate which offices – in their view – have an interest in research uptake. That is to say, offices that could have a role to play in communicating research results, whether this has been formally recognised or not.
‘More projects are demonstrating impact and uptake than in the past since we started to put emphasis on monitoring the level of uptake. We also notice that projects that can show uptake tend to be funded a lot easier.’

The research management office, the library, and the PR/marketing office were the three offices most often cited as having an interest in research uptake in both 2012 and 2014, with a marginal increase for all three between the two surveys. Since 2012, there has been a considerable increase in the importance placed on external advice and offices related to commercial services: half of the participating universities indicated that external advisory boards/commercial services have an interest in research uptake, compared to 20% in 2012. More universities also reported that offices which manage industrial liaison/intellectual property and/or knowledge transfer/exchange have an interest in research uptake than in the previous survey. In this context, a few universities noted that their institutions include the considerations of industry when planning research goals and projects, through policies, guidelines, strategies, and advisory groups. Finally, the vice-chancellor’s office has entered the top offices cited as having interest in research uptake, with 17 universities now stating the importance of the vice-chancellor’s office in communicating research, compared to 12 in 2012. This could be related to many new and existing directorates of research (or similar offices) reporting directly to the vice-chancellor’s office.

Figure 4: Offices with a reported interest in research uptake – 2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Office</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Library</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office of Public Relations or Marketing</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vice Chancellor’s Office</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial Liaison / IP / Knowledge Transfer / Knowledge Exchange Offices</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extension or community engagement office</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Management Office</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: DRUSSA benchmarking survey 2014 (sample: 22)

Figure 4 shows the top six offices noted as having an interest in research uptake. All but two universities indicated that the research management office has an interest in communicating research results. This is closely followed by the library, the PR/marketing office, and the vice-chancellor’s office. Figure 5 shows the change from 2012 to 2014 (in absolute numbers), and shows that the largest increase can be seen for external advisory boards/commercial services and industrial liaison/IP/knowledge transfer/knowledge exchange offices.

As was the case in 2012, respondents indicated that extension and community engagement offices have a lower level of interest in research uptake when compared to the other five offices listed. Reasons for this may include the absence of extension offices across the sample, or that research uptake is primarily driven through research...
management, public relations, or industrial liaison and technology transfer structures, suggesting varied interpretations of the scope of what is considered ‘research uptake’ across participating universities.

**Figure 5: Offices with a reported interest in research uptake – change between 2012-2014**

![Bar chart showing change in interest in research uptake between 2012 and 2014 across various offices.](image)

*Sources: DRUSSA benchmarking survey 2012 (sample: 23); DRUSSA benchmarking survey 2014 (sample: 22)*

Looking specifically at degrees of change in the levels of interest in research uptake between 2012 and 2014, the highest growth in interest is reported among external advisory board/commercial services, with 11 respondents in 2014 indicating that these offices are interested in research uptake, compared with just four in 2012. Libraries and extension offices have seen the lowest levels of reported increased interest, with just two more respondents indicating interest now than previously.

While rates of growth in interest in research uptake change across the office types listed in Figure 5, we nevertheless have seen a growth in interest across all offices. None of the offices reported that interest in research uptake had diminished over the past two years.

**University priorities**

**Areas of university priority**

As in 2012, teaching remains the top priority for universities responding to the 2014 survey, closely followed by research (general) and externally funded research. There has, however, been a slight decrease in those giving high priority to general research, in favour of externally funded research – those who considered the latter to be a very high priority is 20% higher than in 2012. This compares against a marked increase in the high prioritisation of outreach and extension between 2012 and 2014, suggesting a correlation between the need for research uptake and the relative increase of prioritisation given to externally funded research.

> ‘[We have developed] a dedicated unit with the sole purpose of implementing research uptake plans for the university.’
Teaching, research, and community service form the core mission of most participating universities, and these are often used as assessable criteria in the promotion process. There has, however, been an increase in respondents noting that relationships with external stakeholders are a high or very high priority for their university, supported through new offices to manage external grants or by encouraging staff to engage in externally funded research though profit sharing arrangements. At the same time, staff are increasingly expected to win competitive grants for research and are assessed on their research output. These results match the initiatives mentioned above, whereby the interest and needs of industry are increasingly important in the design and consideration of new research projects.

**Figure 6: University priority areas – 2014**

Source: DRUSSA benchmarking survey 2014 (sample: 22)

**Figure 7: University priority areas – 2012**

Source: DRUSSA benchmarking survey 2012 (sample: 23)
Links or partnerships with the public, government, NGOs, or the private sector

All but one university either have or are developing mechanisms to develop partnerships/links with external stakeholders such as NGOs, industry, or businesses. In 2012, 75% of corresponding universities indicated that such mechanisms were in place at their universities. This corresponds to an overall increase in the importance awarded to the needs and interests of external stakeholders (as noted previously), with a particular emphasis on industry.

[We have] introduced a policy on pay for performance which takes into account research uptake activities.

There has also been an increase in respondents noting that their universities have incentives for (academic) staff and departments to encourage the development of partnerships with the public, NGOs, and the private sector. Of those who responded to the 2012 survey, a little more than half (53%) said their university had such incentives, whereas the corresponding figure in 2014 is 72%. The latter includes those who indicated that their university is currently developing incentives, both for departments and for individual academic staff.

Respondents to the 2014 survey listed a range of incentives for developing links with external stakeholders, both individual and institutional, which mainly relate to engaging in research funded by industry or businesses. For individual academic staff, these include non-financial and financial incentives such as incorporating research activity (particularly externally funded research), research output, and community engagement into formal promotion assessments, and reducing teaching loads in order to allow more time for research. Among financial incentives, respondents noted that their universities have policies for profit sharing when engaging in externally funded research.

'A key success has been the development and adoption of a ten-year strategy for research and innovation, which has a focus on research uptake. The university is committed towards supporting and resourcing activity to entrench research uptake.'

At the institutional level, respondents also reported a range of incentives to support the development of links/partnerships with external stakeholders. These include the use of memorandums of understanding (MoUs), and the introduction of new policies (for research incentives, partnerships, and so on) to guide relationships with government, with the public and private sectors, and with communities who may benefit from university research. Such incentives also include establishing (or strengthening) centres for innovation or incubation, creating offices to raise or manage funds from external donors (including the public and industry), and linking the approval of internal applications for research funding to a consideration of industry needs and demands.

However, while there appears to have been considerable movement towards rewarding engagement with external stakeholders, some responses to the 2014 survey indicate that the definition of ‘incentives’ has narrowed to become more precise (or not considered if not formalised into guidelines or policies). Broadly-defined incentives were considered sufficiently supportive of building external relationships in the previous survey.

Conference discussion

The research strategy theme was explored at the Leadership and Benchmarking Conference through a day and a half discussion in its own dedicated session, alongside the three other thematic sessions taking place at the event. The research strategy session featured case studies of good practice in research strategy at two of the
universities represented, as well as an external expert who co-facilitated the session and presented a range of approaches to successful research strategy.

The expert for this session was Dr Anthon Botha, head of the research management and technology transfer consultancy firm, Technoscene. Dr Botha discussed the need for universities, in designing research strategies that also embed uptake, to identify and understand what he termed ‘research uptake markets’ – or audiences and end users for university research – and, from there, to prioritise specific end users and specific engagement channels through which to engage them. The discussion led to agreement that these user groups are ‘context specific’, and that there will be a need to tailor engagement approaches to the language and the context in which the user is situated.

The group discussed in detail questions surrounding who articulates the needs of research beneficiaries (the interpreter or the researcher), as well as the complexity of facilitating dialogue between research producers and users. One delegate noted that users and producers of knowledge need to converse, but that users may be disparate and researchers often depend on knowledge translation or interpretation in order to communicate to non-academic audiences. How is this best facilitated?

One university delegate told the group that ‘the relationship between knowledge generators and users is very important, and must not be replaced by intermediaries’. Another delegate concurred, saying that ‘stakeholders and researchers should interact directly and not depend on intermediaries’. This generated further discussion regarding the balance between building trust and confidence between research and non-research communities (the direct relationship), but also raised the important role of professional engagement practitioners in ensuring communication can be most effective (the intermediary relationship). Further, researchers themselves may not have the time, resources, or knowledge translation experience to dedicate the required energies to the establishment and management of external relationships.

It was agreed that the development of a strong research uptake strategy is essential in clarifying an institutional approach to connecting research outputs to policymakers, industry, and the wider community. Some told the group that they recognised the need for any research uptake strategy to either be embedded within a larger research strategy, or to be developed ‘in dialogue with the [existing] policy and strategic plan’. It was agreed that the management of change is ‘crucial’, and that deans, heads of department, and other internal stakeholders should be consulted widely in order to strengthen institutional buy-in and to ensure the strategy reflects institutional capacity and agreed priorities. Dr Botha emphasised that, while senior buy-in is certainly essential, it is equally important to work closely with community offices, trans-disciplinary offices, and advancement offices. Internal agents who drive the ‘bottom-up’ building of the system are important in growing research uptake culture.

This discussion reaffirmed the group’s agreement that strategies across an institution should be complementary, reinforcing, and indeed fully integrated, and that the common institutional strategy should align with local, national, and regional contexts.
3. Research uptake processes

This section of the survey looked at the processes by which universities communicate and prepare research results to ensure that they can be readily understood by external stakeholders. It examined how universities assess these communication activities and determine their impact, as well as looking more closely at university staff attitudes towards research uptake activities and whether or not these have changed since the beginning of the programme.

Determining the impact of research

The 2014 survey asked participants a number of questions to find out if their universities have mechanisms to assess the wider impact of their research, as well as procedures to assess the effectiveness of such mechanisms.

Less than half of respondents (41%) indicated that their university has mechanisms to assess the impact of their research. The number of universities reporting that they evaluate their own dissemination mechanisms to determine their effectiveness, perhaps unsurprisingly, matches the number of those who indicated that they have such mechanisms. In the 2012 survey, these two questions – the first enquiring about formalised processes of assessing the wider impact of research and the other enquiring about the effectiveness of these – were conflated and slightly differently worded¹, therefore comparisons will not be exact.

'We are placing a much greater emphasis on research dissemination. Previously it was mostly externally funded projects that were highlighted. In 2014, we will include all [internally funded] projects as well.'

Nevertheless, there has been an increase in the number of universities noting that they have mechanisms to assess the impact of their research – up from 20% of respondents to 41%. These results line up well with further findings from the 2014 survey that indicate an increase in universities noting that they have mechanisms to obtain feedback from potential users regarding the usefulness of their university’s research and the extent to which users benefit from it.

Many respondents noted that current mechanisms to assess the impact of their research and its effectiveness are not yet in place or are very weak at their universities. However, respondents did highlight current efforts to provide end users with an opportunity to give feedback on research they could benefit from – including demonstrations within communities, open days to which potential users of research are invited, monitoring of media, and meetings of external funders at which immediate feedback can be given on research output and impact. One university also noted that they have been carrying out evaluation surveys among staff in order to show changes since the start of the DRUSSA programme.

Some respondents also noted that they are making efforts to improve their monitoring of research impact – by incorporating impact assessment in their research policies, for example. One university is currently engaged in a project which aims to improve stakeholder engagement by focusing on how the university interacts with its stakeholders, what kind of knowledge is generated, and who benefits from this interaction.

¹ Survey question in 2012: Are there any monitoring and evaluation procedures in place at your university to assess the external impact of dissemination and communication of research results and research uptake? Survey questions in 2014: Are there any mechanisms in place at your university to assess the wider impact of university research? Are there any mechanisms in place at your university to assess the effectiveness of mechanisms to disseminate and communicate research results? (i.e. assessing the effectiveness of radio and TV, external newsletters, the university website, and other means of dissemination).
‘We have started to monitor the distribution of funds and the productivity of research at the institution, as well as the amount of external and internal collaboration between projects. Research funding is also more focused towards impact and problem solving than just funding research to do research.’

A few universities also noted that they monitor and assess the impact of research through the measurement of research output – the number of publications, articles and citations, as well as information on grants and contracts, for example. In this regard, it is interesting to note that one university’s response indicates that this type of assessment is not considered sufficient to gauge the impact of university research, whereas other responses list these among the impacts of research.

Communicating research to relevant stakeholders

More than half of the respondents (64%) indicated that their university provides training or resources to their academic staff in order to help them identify the needs of external stakeholders and plan their research accordingly. This is considerably more than in 2012, when 47% of those responding to the question said that their university offered such support.

Attitudes towards research uptake

A new question in the survey enquired about university staff attitudes towards research uptake within each university. Participants indicated that their university leadership/principal officers are the most enthusiastic and actively supportive of research uptake, followed by research management staff.

Figure 8: Enthusiastic, actively supportive, and engaged attitudes towards research uptake – 2014

A third of respondents also indicated that dean/directors of institutes and centres and junior research staff are supportive of research uptake, but that they are not actively engaged in research uptake activities. Very few
respondents said that staff are negative towards research uptake, but quite a few noted that staff are interested yet do not have experience of the area.

Change in staff attitudes towards research uptake

The 2012 benchmarking survey did not include a question on university staff attitudes towards research uptake. However, participants in the 2014 survey were asked to indicate attitudes in 2012, if these were known. More than half of universities noted attitudes in 2012 and, of these, all but one respondent noted changes in university staff attitudes towards research uptake. These changes were mostly positive, with respondents indicating an improvement in staff attitudes as well as more active involvement in research uptake activities. This is particularly noticeable among university leadership staff, but also among communications and public relations staff.

Conference discussion

Delegates at the Leadership and Benchmarking Conference were given the opportunity to attend a breakout session that focused specifically on university processes for research uptake. The session was led by Dr Marilet Sienaert, Executive Director of Research at the University of Cape Town, South Africa.

Using the University of Cape Town as a case study, Dr Sienaert defined the difficult issue of managing research uptake processes as twofold. In the first instance, there are processes whereby universities communicate and prepare research results in forms that can be readily understood by external stakeholders; in the second instance, there are self-reflective processes that assess the impact and effectiveness of the university’s efforts to communicate research results. The very nature of these two sets of processes means that, in practice, they will often overlap and interlink. However, from a preparatory planning perspective, it is important for university decision-makers to ensure that the goals of both of these process strands are met.

‘Management has indicated that it would support change in the structure to create the position of Director of Research and Extension, as well as implement a communication policy which recommends a strengthened communication structure. An extension policy is also being developed to support taking research to the end user.’

An important element of this discussion focused on the value of supporting any new research uptake strategy or policy with a ‘standard operating procedure’ document. Such documents should make clear who within the university is responsible for particular actions, as well as outlining reporting functions. Moreover, standard operating procedures should address each new activity and how those activities are to be integrated into existing structures.

In approaching these issues, Dr Sienaert recommended that research uptake activities and coordination would need to be placed in one office – initially, at least. Within the University of Cape Town, research uptake capacity building efforts were run out of the Research Office. However, there were legitimate arguments for such activities to have been overseen by the offices of human resources or external relations, and each university is encouraged to consider carefully a system that works best for its individual context. The identification of one seat for research uptake leadership facilitated the growth of institutional research uptake capacity during its nascent stages. However, Dr Sienaert also stressed that because research uptake management is very diffuse, a more mature approach to research uptake will require a more complex set of processes to emerge, whereby a number of activities will be carried out simultaneously across a whole range of university units.
Delegates noted that, in the past, a major stumbling block to universities in the region learning from each other was a difference in terminology. Dr Sienaert noted that DRUSSA was assisting in addressing this issue by establishing a common lexicon of terms for research uptake activities. These are now beginning to become established outside of the DRUSSA member universities, as well as within.
4. Stakeholder engagement

This section aimed to determine the procedures used in engaging external stakeholders by gauging how participating universities work with key decision-makers and users of research findings to drive research results into policy and practice. The questions in this section were not included in the 2012 survey and therefore direct comparisons cannot be made. Where appropriate, links with findings from the 2012 survey were considered.

University-stakeholder relationships

Participating universities were asked to provide details of their relationship with external stakeholders in terms of which stakeholder relationships they **prioritise**, the perceived **power** of stakeholders in influencing societal change, and how **strong** they consider their relationships with the respective stakeholders to be.

As shown in Table 7, the stakeholder groups most frequently indicated as a very high priority were government/ministries/departments/councils; research funders/donors; health/medical practitioners; and industry. These stakeholders were also associated with strong relationships and perceived to have strong power to influence societal change.

**Table 7: Assessing external stakeholders by priority, strength of university relationship and perceived power to influence policy (mode average of all responses) – 2014**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UNIVERSITY-STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT: MODE AVERAGES OF PRIORITY RELATIONSHIPS, POWER OF AGENTS AND STRENGTH OF RELATIONSHIPS</th>
<th>PRIORITY</th>
<th>POWER</th>
<th>STRENGTH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Government, ministries, departments and councils</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research funders and donors</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and medical professionals</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enterprise and industry</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmers and agriculturalists</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers and educators</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media agents</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publishers</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other universities (domestically and internationally)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal sector</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGOs, INGOs, and international associations</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental groups and agencies</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: DRUSSA benchmarking survey 2014 (sample: 22). Mode averages are the ratings (using a scale of 1-10) most frequently reported, 1 being the least important and 10 the most important.*
‘Findings from research on the prevalence of substance abuse among youth in are being used to develop a policy on substance abuse prevention by the Ministry of Youth.’

For the remainder of the stakeholders, the responses were more widely spread, with clusters at both ends of the scale. For example, at first glance, the most frequent response with regard to publishers indicates that universities perceive the relationship to be weaker than publishers’ power to influence change. However, looking more closely, there is a wide spread in the responses, with almost half of the sample indicating that the relationship is strong, whereas around half say it is medium or below. These findings may merit closer examination to unlock some of the disparities in the data.

For more details on views regarding university engagement with external stakeholders and how universities compare to the modes, see Appendix.

Priority mechanisms to engage external stakeholders

Respondents were also asked to tell us which mechanisms they favour in engaging key external stakeholders in university research. The survey found that universities give the highest priority to including public and private sector representatives (e.g. government and industry) on university research boards or councils, and to collaborative research projects with other universities. Interestingly, over half of respondents also said that their university gave high or very high priority to collaborating with non-HE actors, including partnering with the community to include their views in the research process.

Figure 9: Top five reported mechanisms to engage external stakeholders – 2014

![Bar chart showing priority mechanisms to engage external stakeholders](image)

Source: DRUSSA benchmarking survey 2014 (sample: 22)

Interestingly, results also show that over half of respondents (55%) give high or very high priority to involving external stakeholders at the agenda setting and dissemination stages of the research process (particularly
agenda setting), whilst only a third give the same priority rating when it comes to involving stakeholders at the design stages of research projects.

‘The Department of Agricultural Engineering has developed an improved version of a maize shelling machine [which] is currently being used by farmers. Hermetic storage containers have also been developed and are currently being used by farmers across the country.’

This can be linked to responses in 2012 (although the exact question was not asked), in which many of those participating indicated that the involvement of external stakeholders or beneficiaries in the planning/design of research was related to funding agency requirements or included in research contracts.

Conference discussion

Delegates at the stakeholder engagement thematic session heard from Professor Frans Swanepoel, Director of the African Doctoral Academy at Stellenbosch University, South Africa. Professor Swanepoel outlined some of the building blocks for sustainable knowledge partnerships which enhance research output and uptake.

First, it was noted that each partnership needs strong leadership support and engagement in order to tie together the many entities that will need to work together to be successful. In selecting lasting partnerships, Professor Swanepoel highlighted that these need to be relevant to the university in terms of fitting into the wider research framework/strategy, but also match the aims of the partner. In this context, it is important that the partnership is equal and shares a common vision of how the partnership is going to work together to ensure that the combined efforts are worth more than what each party could achieve on their own.

‘We are currently piloting an electronic database to manage information and recording in respect of partnerships. Stakeholder engagement is one of the pillars of our ten-year research strategy.’

The delegate discussions revealed that universities have concerns regarding who the best partners would be and the most effective means of developing lasting relationships that will lead to sustained research uptake. A step-approach – whereby universities first identify the relevant research, as well as those who need to be involved, before approaching intended beneficiaries, industries, businesses, and policymakers – was suggested by delegates. However, it was also noted that both internal and external parties should be involved at the earliest stage possible, and thereafter identify the most appropriate means of interacting with the particular external stakeholders. This could done via pilot programmes and case studies to explore the most appropriate partners and modes of engagement, highlighting that modes of engagement may need to be adapted to the specific partner.

In order to maintain relationship/partnerships, building trust is essential. While recognising that partnerships are longer-term and separate from one-off projects, one suggested approach was to develop specific projects with the partners/intended users of research, such as farmers, industries and policymakers, to encourage support, inclusion, and ultimate use of the research.

Delegates also highlighted that communication and coordination within the university remains a challenge and that the office responsible for research/coordination could act as focal point, bringing the various university units, departments, and faculties together by being proactive and visible, and by encouraging researchers to contact them for help regarding possible projects and partnerships.
In this context it was also noted that record keeping for university research activities remains a challenge for many universities, and representatives were concerned that the lack of such information hinders them from capitalising on the good work done at their universities. Many representatives highlighted the need to maintain some form of record of their university’s research activities, projects, and outputs – whether centralised or kept at departmental level and routinely fed to offices charged with communicating research. This would give units involved in research management, research uptake, coordination, public relations, etc. a greater ability to help researchers to communicate their research, thereby showcasing the research of the university. Such a resource would also enable the matching of researchers with funding opportunities and identify possible multi-disciplinary projects and potential partners. It could also increase research funds by demonstrating increased research output.

To ensure that partnerships work as efficiently and effectively as possible, Professor Swanepoel advised universities to have a memorandum of understanding (MoU) that clearly outlines the activities, resource allocation, and responsibilities within the partnership, as well as a results framework to monitor its progress and achievements. When producing the results framework, it may also be worth considering which research results are most suitable for uptake and to identify success factors that can be capitalised on to enhance research uptake. Finally, it was noted that the sustainability of partnerships depends on the university’s ability to institutionalise the partnership. In other words, universities should ensure that the success of the project is not built on individual researchers. Good relations between individuals working in the partnership are necessary for its success.
5. Communicating Research

This section of the survey aimed to determine the universities’ processes for communicating and publicising research findings. It looked at the ways in which participating universities publicise research results in order to raise the profile of their institution. Rather than report on particular approaches to specific stakeholders (as in Section 3), universities were asked to tell us about how they approach the wider public to make research findings known.

Coordinating university publicity

Participants were first asked to tell us where in their university overall publicity material is coordinated. Almost all respondents said their universities have central offices that are responsible for collating and distributing publicity material – typically the public relations office or marketing and communications office, often working with departments, faculties, and research centres to collect the relevant information.

Most university offices responsible for coordinating university publicity are not exclusively concerned with research communication, and only a few universities noted that their staff have qualifications or experience of science communication – similar to findings in 2012. A majority of staff in PR offices, however, are reported to have qualifications in PR-related subjects, which is an increase of three universities since 2012. Over half of universities also indicated that staff in these offices have degrees related to marketing, communications, and journalism, ranging from diploma to PhD level. Some universities particularly noted the DRUSSA short courses and MPhils.

‘Working closer with the marketing department has resulted in more visibility of research, and an increase in focus on research output.’

However, the responses indicate that quite a few universities have not made any distinction between the different categories of communication, reporting the same qualifications (and staff) across all categories (i.e. PR, marketing and communication, journalism, and science communication).

In some universities, responsibility for publicising research results is shared among a number of offices – such as research and/or publications offices, libraries, or particular departments or centres – which separately communicate the research results emanating from their individual units to specific audiences. However, these often work with the PR and ICT offices in order to distribute publicity more widely.

There have been relatively few reported changes in offices responsible for university publicity and/or research communication between 2012 and 2014, although some universities have recorded additional offices, such as the research and/or publications office and the library.

Communication and marketing strategies

Almost all universities responding to the survey (80%) said that their institution either has or is currently developing a communication strategy. The findings of the survey show that since 2012, five universities have started developing these strategies. On the other hand, only a third of universities have marketing strategies (36%), with a further four universities currently developing these strategies. However, in the 2014 survey,
respondents were asked to report on communication and marketing strategies separately, whereas in 2012 these were conflated into one question. Therefore, the above comparison with 2012 should be viewed with some caution.

Figure 10: Reported level of stakeholder engagement in the research cycle – 2014

Source: DRUSSA benchmarking survey 2014 (sample: 22)

Recording research dissemination activities

Over half of the respondents noted that their university does not record or keep centralised records of research dissemination activities. However, over half also noted that their university does keep some form of record of their research activities, either through institutional repositories (where research output is tracked) or though annual reports, summarising research activities. Some universities also noted that their university keeps records of research activities at the departmental level, for example in the university library, the research office, or in individual departments or faculties. None of these, however, relate specifically to recording dissemination activities, but rather to research activities in general (which may or may not include dissemination). It is also interesting to note that a majority of universities (15) did not record any change in the recording of research dissemination activities since the benchmarking survey in 2012.
Communicating research results

Announcing new research

The most cited channels through which to announce new research projects externally were external media (including print, TV, radio, and social media), newsletters and journal articles, and the university website. Many universities also noted the use of public-facing events, including open days, conferences, stakeholder meetings, and demonstrations of research within communities that may benefit from the research. Around half of the participating universities have not made any substantial differentiation between external and internal modes of communication, as they have indicated very similar channels to reach their external audiences. Additionally, some universities have indicated channels that would usually be considered as external – such as newspapers, radio and public lectures, and open days – to reach staff within the university.

Most universities, however, use the university website or newsletters to announce new research internally, followed by annual reporting to senior university management and internal email distributions lists, although the latter has decreased in use since 2012 (see Figure 11).

For the most part, these have not changed significantly since the 2012 survey, although survey participants noted an increased use of external media – including social media, print, TV and radio, and university websites – to announce new research.

Management increasingly embraces community engagement as one of the functions of universities.‘

Communication channels

Respondents were asked to let us know of the ways in which they communicate and publicise research results. As shown in Figure 11, the most commonly used communication channels for research results are conference papers, public lectures and internal newsletters, as well as the university website (as noted above). The use of conference papers and internal newsletters is an interesting finding since these would typically be directed to staff within the university or academics at other institutions, rather than to potential users or beneficiaries of research. These channels may also be less accessible to the wider public, both in practical and language terms. However, there has also been an increase in the use of external newsletters aimed at the general public, used by 15 universities in 2014, compared to eight in 2012.

Six more universities noted that their university now has a database of research staff with media engagement experience. The use of email distribution lists to communicate research results to external stakeholders, on the other hand, has decreased since 2012, as has the use of publications directed specifically towards the public sector (government and NGOs, for example).
Figure 11: Most used research communication channels – 2014

- Dedicated website or webpage: 73%
- Press releases: 82%
- Public lectures: 86%
- Internal research newsletter: 86%
- Conference papers: 96%

Source: DRUSSA benchmarking survey 2012 (sample: 23); DRUSSA benchmarking survey 2014 (sample: 22)

Figure 12: Most used research communication channels – change between 2012-2014

Source: DRUSSA benchmarking survey 2012 (sample: 23); DRUSSA benchmarking survey 2014 (sample: 22)
Conference discussion

One of the conference breakout sessions gave delegates the opportunity to hear from Nick Scott, Digital Manager (Communications) at the Overseas Development Institute, UK, who shared his expertise on communicating research to a wide variety of audiences.

Mr Scott began by outlining the concept of the ‘public’, highlighting that these are typically both hard to reach and engage due to increased amount of available information and lack of time. He emphasised the importance of engaging your audience by making research results available in a format, and in a context, to which they can relate, and in places where they would normally go for news – research related or not. He also stressed the need to communicate research in ‘bite-sizes’ in order to encourage further exploration of results.

Mr Scott went on to outline five key points to consider in communicating research results to the wider public: changes in communication, the price of communication, enabling researchers to communicate their research, communication as part of the research process, and the merits of communication strategies.

As internet use has increased in the past decade, the public (and academia) are experiencing information overload. As an example, it was noted the average person receives five times more information today compared to the mid-eighties, which in turn has led to different consumption patterns – including spending less time on each item read. While adapting research information to fit a world of information overload is a difficult task, Mr Scott noted that it is very important for researchers (with or without the help of communicators) to spend time on synthesising their research results into accessible abstracts – both in real and language terms. In this context, it is also important to realise that the mode of sharing information has changed and to not shy away from new forms of media (when available) through which research could be made more accessible. One such example is using blogs that can encourage further exploration of research. Addressing concerns over quality, Mr Scott emphasised that these forms would not replace peer-reviewed articles, but rather act as a conduit to research. New media does not need to be expensive in terms of software, as long as universities dedicate enough people to engage with it. Discussion among the delegates highlighted mixed views about who should be responsible for communicating research – researchers or intermediaries – noting that many academics have heavy teaching loads on top of research and community service duties. In this context, there was also a concern about lack of capacity among university staff, both academics and administrators, to properly communicate research results. and that cooperation between university units needs to be improved.

‘[We have] embraced open access to enhance the dissemination of research findings. To support this, an open access policy has been developed and implemented and, as a result, research findings are placed on the institutional repository, including full text theses. The digital repository is accessible to external people.’

In a team of researchers, it may be worth focusing on those who are able and willing to act as communicators and using communicators where these can help. Part of this includes building up a good working relationship between researchers and communicators, in which researchers help communicators pick out the most interesting pieces of information and present these in a way that attracts attention without being sensationalist. Providing solid facts that researchers can support may also prevent external journalists from misrepresenting information. Delegates expressed considerable concern about journalists taking research out of context with a detrimental effect on individual researchers, particularly in politically sensitive settings. It was also noted that some delegates were not aware if their university has a clear policy or guidelines for dealing with external media. To address these issues some delegates recommended building good relationships with journalists by making sure they receive accurate
information, but also by setting clear boundaries and clarifying power relations. It was also suggested that if a researcher is not clear on university policy, they should refer such matters to the appropriate communications or public relations office.

From the survey results, we saw that many universities have begun developing communication strategies, but the discussion revealed that these may be hard to push through institutional bureaucracy. Mr Scott suggested that good strategies are built on experience and that testing out what works for each university – e.g. by organising competitions within the university to find the best research to communicate – may be a good way to see what strategy would work best, as well as gaining support for such a strategy. Universities could also consider what might be the best incentives for researchers – e.g. effective communication of recognition – and lead by good example in communicating to external audiences.

During the discussions, delegates also noted progress made in getting research results out to the wider public, including differentiating between internal and external modes of communication, choosing which research is most suitable for uptake, and beginning to address capacity issues. One delegate explained that their university has developed an in-house course in research uptake, whereas another has seconded staff to another institution for work-shading. It may also be worth considering ensuring that any learning from courses delivered through the DRUSSA programme (CREST), as well as learning from the benchmarking exercise, is disseminated throughout the university, either via training courses or workshops and/or via briefing papers to both leadership and researchers. These could be useful tools to maintain learning within universities.

Delegates also noted an increased use of their university websites to present research results to the public, including research reports, annual reports, and abstracts. One university has also created a specific area for research uptake on their university website and increased access to researchers by including links to their research profiles. While it was noted that publishing research-related information on the university website does not guarantee participation, making the public aware is a first step in engaging them further in university research.
6. The impact of DRUSSA

In the 2014 survey, a new question was introduced to explore the degree to which DRUSSA is seen to have influenced change and/or attitudes towards research uptake management, specific to each section theme. For ease of reporting, findings from these four questions have been collated from these original four sections, and aggregated and analysed here.

Measuring the impact of DRUSSA on institutional change

Each section of the benchmarking survey concluded with a question about the extent to which DRUSSA is perceived to have impacted upon institutional change, relating to each section’s focus area in particular. Respondents could choose between not very significantly; somewhat; significantly; and very significantly; as well as don’t know.

Table 8: Perceived impact of DRUSSA on the four benchmarking survey themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceived impact on research uptake strategy</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significantly</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very significantly</td>
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<td>27%</td>
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<td>Grand total</td>
<td>22</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Perceived impact on research uptake processes</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>%</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not very significantly</td>
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<td>5%</td>
</tr>
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<td>12</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very significantly</td>
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<td>Grand total</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceived impact on stakeholder engagement</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>%</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not very significantly</td>
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<td>45%</td>
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<tr>
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<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Perceived impact on communication of research</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not very significantly</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significantly</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very significantly</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand total</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Correlating with earlier findings suggesting that attitudes towards research uptake have changed most among university leaders and senior management, it is in the area of research uptake strategy where we see DRUSSA have the most significant impact in influencing change. 27% of respondents reported that DRUSSA has had a very significant impact in this regard, with 36% reporting significant impact (a total of 63% positive impact overall). No respondents reported that DRUSSA has had no impact at all on research uptake strategy, although approximately one third reported that the programme had only somewhat impacted upon strategic change.

As regards research uptake strategy, one respondent told us that DRUSSA has enabled the creation of a platform for discussion for the development of possible strategies. Researchers and public relations staff from different sections of the university had the opportunity interact and share ideas regarding improving research uptake activities. Another indicator that ‘working with the top executive offices of the university (VC and DVC) has increased research uptake awareness. More staff members are now questioning the relevance of their research and incorporating research uptake strategies in their proposal at the onset of formulation. There has been increased engagement with different stakeholders by the university in trying to understand what the needs and problems of our society are in our effort to solve and address these through research’.

Regarding research uptake processes, we found there was a lower level of very significant impact reported, but a higher level of positive impact overall. A majority of respondents, 55%, reported that DRUSSA has had a significant impact on influencing research uptake processes, with a further 18% reporting that the impact has been very significant (totalling to 73% positive impact overall). One respondent indicated that the programme has not very significantly impacted upon research uptake processes between 2012 and 2014.

Respondents also provided examples of the impact of DRUSSA on these processes. One respondent said that ‘before the inception of the DRUSSA programme, the research office had very little information on the extent of impact and research uptake. This has also resulted in a number of policies aimed at improving the impact and research uptake. Therefore it can be stated that the way research has been funded has changed due to the DRUSSA programme’. Another respondent, however, offered a note of caution: ‘This is [a] work in progress. DRUSSA must understand that this is a very ambitious project and we don’t have the ideal implementation capacity to move this along speedily’.

On balance, it is in these first two sections – research uptake strategy and processes – where we see the highest levels of perceived impact for the DRUSSA programme thus far.

A total of 42% of respondents reported a positive impact on stakeholder engagement (32% reporting significant impact, and 9% reporting very significant impact); while a further 9% thought the impact had been not very significant. Of the four sections, it is in stakeholder engagement where we see the highest level of respondents indicating that DRUSSA has somewhat impacted institutional change – with 45% of respondents selecting this option.
In this section, respondents told us that impact may be slower to measure than in other sections. ‘The area of stakeholder engagement has been indirectly influenced by DRUSSA in that we have to date focused on the research activity processes and not on the management of stakeholder[s],’ said one. Another said that stakeholder engagement is ‘still new and [we are] building capacity. Impact will be realised later’, while others told us that attitudes towards the importance of such engagement have changed, even if the realisation of markedly improved stakeholder engagement remains a work in progress.

Finally, as regards DRUSSA’s impact on the communication of research, we see similar numbers to the section on stakeholder engagement, with 45% of respondents reporting positive impact (32% significant, and 9% very significant, as before), though there is a slightly higher rate (14%) of those reporting that impact has been not very significant. One respondent told us that attitudinal change has been achieved, but that more needs to be done to translate such change into new models of communication. ‘Despite the awareness created by DRUSSA, [our office] lacks capacity in science communication,’ said one respondent. Another respondent reported that the DRUSSA campus visits and activities ‘have driven us to work more deliberately with the institutional marketing department. However, we have a long way to go to ensure an improvement in public relations at the project level i.e. at each and every project level. The goal thus is to influence practice. Thus at this point the influence has been largely at a higher institutional level.’

These differences in how respondents attribute institutional change to the DRUSSA programme are perhaps natural, given that the scope of activity covered in each of the survey’s sections varies as well. Research uptake strategy and processes, for example, are areas of work that perhaps fall more fully under the exclusive remit of the universities themselves. They are therefore able to convene regular meetings of research active staff and offices engaged with research uptake; to design or amend university policy to reflect an institutional emphasis on research uptake; and to coordinate research agendas with approaches to getting research into use. Areas of work such as stakeholder engagement and wider communication, however, begin to involve actors external to the university in a more central way, therefore ascribing change and impact can be longer-term in nature and somewhat more complex. Circumstances in which agents of government, industry, or civil society are not seen to have fully subscribed to the utility of university research, for example, can discourage respondents from assigning significant change to these spheres of work. Continued monitoring and evaluation in this area, however, may begin to measure some important changes and impact flowing from the programme as it progresses into its second phase.

**Differentiating institutional change**

In addition to asking respondents to assign impact to the DRUSSA programme in terms of influencing change, we also asked respondents to specify types of change, particular challenges in realising change, and particular successes in realising change, as the programme progresses into its second phase.

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**Changes**

**Research uptake strategy**

We saw a high number of responses from universities reporting change in their research uptake strategy, with 21 respondents providing examples of changes – either to university strategy documents themselves or to the way in which research uptake is considered at the level of university management. One respondent told us that ‘research uptake is at this point a standing item of the Senate Research Committee. In addition, it is now located within the
office for Strategic Initiatives (DVC Office) and thus has a more focused institutional management effort’. This suggests that buy-in for developing uptake has been achieved at the strategic level, and a commitment to processes and resources may be anticipated.

As evidence of this at another university, one respondent reported that they ‘have started to monitor the distribution of funds and the productivity of research at the institution, as well as the amount of external and internal collaboration between projects. Research funding is also more focused towards impact and problem-solving than just funding research to do research’. Another told us they have embarked upon the ‘hiring of staff, including someone who will be in charge of its research management and support services that makes research information easily accessible’. These resource commitments require strategic support and can help to provide university leadership with ways to measure change in research uptake efficacy.

Regarding the way in which research uptake dialogue and strategy is structured across the institution, one respondent told us that ‘regular meetings and efforts to win the support of the chamber of commerce collaboration [have commenced] … [Also] discussing with journalists, to train them for appropriate health reporting among other similar issues for DRUSSA’. Another similarly indicated that they are beginning the process of ‘restructuring of the Research Innovations and Outreach division’, while another said that ‘collaboration patterns between all units that share the responsibility have improved. These units are communicating more, better and [are] collaborating more [often]’.

This interdepartmental collaboration, and the integration of various institutional functions to achieve strengthened research uptake management, can be seen as outflows from a more deliberate and focused strategic vision towards getting research into use.

Research uptake processes

As sustained institutional processes necessarily flow from strategic decisions, respondents were also keen to emphasise changes they have seen at the process and procedure level. 18 respondents reported changes in research uptake processes, many of which concerned the establishment of discrete research uptake offices or the embedding of research uptake management within existing offices.

One respondent told us that they are ‘in the process of setting up a research uptake and management office [and are] populating the database of completed and ongoing research to inform research uptake management initiatives’. This commitment to new resources was also seen at another institution, where a requirement to include uptake components has been built into internal research proposals, as well as externally funded research projects. They reported that they ‘are placing a much greater emphasis on research dissemination. Previously it was mostly externally funded projects that were highlighted. In 2014, we will include all projects funded by [the university] as well’.

Some changes to process concern participants’ approaches to dissemination and engagement (which we will also return to again later, in the section on the communication of research). One university said that they have developed a ‘special issue of the university newsletter, showcasing all research with significant uptake potential to appear soon, [and] more regular reporting of research and related events using the university radio and the public relations office’. As seen in some of the comments in the section on strategy, we also received a range of responses regarding changes to research uptake processes which emphasised joined-up, cross-institutional approaches, and steps towards utilising a range of existing internal offices, functions, and expertise.
Stakeholder engagement

As noted in the earlier section on DRUSSA’s perceived impact, measuring change in stakeholder engagement is perhaps a longer-term endeavour than measuring change to institutional processes and strategy. We received 17 comments regarding changes to stakeholder engagement over the course of the DRUSSA programme thus far. These often focus on the university’s emphasis on engaging stakeholders more vigorously, and embedding engagement into the research cycle, although there are also examples of how stakeholders have responded and taken advantage of universities’ efforts to get research into use.

Regarding internal attitudes to stakeholder engagement, one respondent told us that ‘the university realised that it needed a different approach to its funding and adopted a more outward-looking and engaging research strategy, leveraging funding and research opportunities with industry and other partners by matching funds obtained from external sources’. Another reported that ‘stakeholder engagement is one of the pillars of our ten-year research strategy. Therefore, there is now a strategic perspective and various actions are being planned to improve this area of operations’.

These strategic applications of research energies directed towards engaging specific power-brokers and policymakers are good first steps. Other respondents provided evidence of a more concerted engagement with industry as well. One reported that they have established a new ‘Office for [the] Director for Community Service and [an] Office for University Industry Linkage and Technology Transfer’ over the course of the programme. Others are designing systems to demonstrate how research staff are considering the need for stakeholder engagement within their own proposals, telling us that they are developing ‘annual performance plans which include stakeholders’ engagement’.

While some respondents again illustrated their pan-institutional efforts towards improved engagement (one reported that they are pursuing the ‘harmonisation and organisation of scientific conferences and workshops by the different schools and departments’, while another told us they are designing ‘measures to improve collaboration with the cooperation office on the one hand, and the research management and teaching/programmes offices on the other hand’), others alluded to how the stakeholders themselves are brought closer to this process. One respondent is looking at the creation of ‘more enabling platforms for direct external stakeholder-university technical staff exchanges’, while another has proactively involved ‘stakeholders at the [research] board level’.

Communication of research

Compared to other sections, we had fewer responses regarding specific examples of change in approaches to the communication of research, with 12 universities giving us examples of what has changed (compared with 21 examples of change in research uptake strategy). We have seen change, as noted in other areas of this report, in the ways in which different units, offices and departments collaborate to communicate research more effectively to the public, usually involving offices responsible for the website, public relations and marketing offices, and libraries.

One respondent told us that they have ‘redesign[ed] the university website and successful deployment of research blog’ to provide a public platform dedicated exclusively to research results. Another has emphasised efforts towards knowledge translation, with an ‘improved synergistic relationship between research and innovation management and the marketing function’. Several responses also emphasised a renewed focus on the dissemination of research findings through university radio or through engagement with mass media.
Another university told us that they are ‘publishing a report for the 2013 Annual Research Dissemination Conference’ which they hope will lead to further discussion and new learning regarding good practice in public engagement. Such initiatives, as always, require a degree of strategic and financial commitment in order to be realised. However, one respondent indicated that this is in place: ‘the university has voted in more money and has dedicated more hours for line staff to disseminate research results to the wider community’.

**Challenges**

**Research uptake strategy**

While there have been some noteworthy changes in universities’ approaches to the strategic management of research uptake over the DRUSSA programme so far, there are of course some challenges that participating institutions have faced along the way. Some of these challenges, as might be expected, concern the allocation of requisite resources to enhance uptake, while other challenges concern longer-term efforts to influence research culture towards an emphasis on uptake. Through the survey, we received 21 examples of challenges in the area of research uptake strategy.

Several institutions echoed the sentiment that ‘staffing and the lack of funding as well as the active implementation of the policy’ were barriers to rapid change in uptake strategy, with another university reporting that they face ‘limited resources, both financial and human’. Marshalling the necessary resources to focus on uptake also depends in large part upon the depth and breadth of attitudinal change within a university: ‘Research uptake will need a lot of buy-in from faculty members, plus [the] lack of dedicated funds for carrying out intensive research uptake campaign [is a challenge]’, explained one respondent.

This alludes further to changes in research culture which are slow-moving and may only become more evident in time – for example, ‘changing the mindset of researchers to incorporate the whole cycle in research planning, i.e. to focus on the end result, and to plan for research uptake,’ said one respondent. Others raised the difficulty of institutionalising change. One told us that ‘communicating research from the different units is still difficult’, while another affirmed that they ‘still are not able to capture the full extent of our research impact and uptake’.

**Research uptake processes**

Challenges in facilitating strategic change can also exacerbate challenges in implementing policy and processes. 20 universities replied with examples of challenges to effecting change in research uptake processes.

One university reported that ‘staff complain that [a] shortage of funds often results in cutting down the budget for dissemination of research results, which is discouraging them from adopting RU strategies’, drawing the link between strategy and process quite explicitly. Another noted: ‘There is no designated member of staff that is charged with the responsibility of research uptake monitoring and management’, alluding again to resource allocation.

Several respondents focused instead on the challenges faced by individual researchers and research teams, rather than challenges directly associated with strategy. These challenges ranged from those of time management to those of influencing change in research culture. One respondent reported that there was ‘inadequate motivation on the part of the researchers, inadequate time [and] insufficient research funding to cater for these activities’.
One university provided a detailed response to this particular challenge: ‘Challenges relate to implementation at the level of active researchers. Plans and ideas have been formed, but we have not implemented, for example, further workshops, other than those convened by DRUSSA. The overall time spent on managing this institutionally is a challenge, given that it competes with other strategic priorities. Resources may be required for a dedicated research uptake manager. We have to spend more time at lower levels e.g. ensuring that research uptake becomes a standing item at faculty level meetings. Perhaps the biggest hurdle is the changing of mindsets.’

Stakeholder engagement

Some of the challenges faced in achieving sustained stakeholder engagement flow from challenges relating to strategy and process. However, some challenges arise in environments external to the university as well. In all, 18 respondents to the survey cited examples of the difficulties faced in generating stakeholder engagement with research outputs.

Related to the challenge of achieving a more uniform institutional drive towards research uptake, one respondent told us that they ‘are still developing this entrepreneurial culture of engagement which means that there are still a number of units and departments that do not [see] engagement at a desirable level with external stakeholders’. Another told us that while awareness of the need for stakeholder engagement has been achieved, there is a lack of ‘policies to guide the implementation’. Another reiterated that ‘only awareness has been increased. There is a need to implement the stakeholder engagement as well’.

Even in cases where the university is actively focusing on new approaches to such engagement, there remain challenges to achieving buy-in from external end users. One respondent noted that ‘political changes at [government] level tend to affect relationships with stakeholders – we have no control over this’.

Communication of research

Efforts to generate strengthened models of communication have faced hurdles, but respondents provided fewer examples of challenges in this section than in any of the other three areas. 15 respondents reported examples of challenges in effecting change in the communication of research.

A common theme that emerges concerns challenges in joining up the relevant offices and units to ensure that research is comprehensively communicated from all departments, and in a consistent way. One respondent told us that ‘the public engagement systems are under the control of another directorate, which is also responsible for protocol for visitors to the university. It is difficult to engage them in other activities’. Another respondent echoed this, telling us that ‘due to decentralisation, obtaining information on research from the departments is a major challenge’.

There are two separate challenges alluded to here – the challenge of joining up units with a responsibility (or potential responsibility) for communication (including PR offices, research management office, libraries, and others), and the challenge of collating research activities from all university faculties and departments in an equal manner. Research cultures as regards uptake can vary between academic disciplines, which further complicates the process of coordinating the communication of research results.

One respondent told us that they have ‘no expertise in science communication’, suggesting that knowledge translation itself is a principal challenge that they face. As concerns the next generation of researchers, another respondent told us that ‘mechanisms to involve students in engagement activities [are] not fully developed’. This is
a critical point, as it will be new academics coming into the system that will arrive with, it might be argued, relative openness as to what the full research cycle ought to involve (research uptake included).

Successes

Research uptake strategy

Despite some of the very real hurdles that member institutions face in effecting change towards greater research uptake, there have been many strong examples of successes across each of the four sections of the survey. For this section, 19 respondents provided explicit examples of successes so far in effecting change in research uptake strategy.

One area of success has been an institutional commitment to developing the requisite human resources to enable strengthened uptake, either through training or through taking on new, dedicated personnel. One respondent indicated that ‘members of staff have undertaken training in research uptake theories and practices and are beginning to incorporate this aspect in their proposal writing’, which suggests strategic engagement of researchers themselves. Another respondent told us that they ‘have interns coming to the [office] annually to assist with dissemination. Besides the research newsletter, we are also embarking on a project to increase visibility through the development of a webpage dedicated to research activity and output’. Another said that ‘[a new office has been] established with the sole purpose of implementing research uptake plans for the university’.

These initiatives will have grown out of strategic decisions at the highest level of the university, and other universities provided examples of such decisions being taken in situ. One told us that ‘DRUSSA stimulated further interest on research impact as highlighted in research strategy and led to the approval of a review of [our] research to establish its impact over the last 30 years [so as] to learn lessons for research uptake strategy’. Another also reported formal changes to their research strategy to incorporate an emphasis on uptake, with the result that ‘more projects are demonstrating impact and uptake than in the past since we started to put emphasis on monitoring the level of uptake’. This is an important final point: in order for research uptake strategy to be proven as effective, efforts to monitor the level of uptake more closely will be of great value to the university.

Research uptake processes

Some of the above examples relate also to successes in research processes. In this next section, respondents provided more in-depth case studies of successes in this area.

20 respondents gave us examples of successes in research uptake processes, including the establishment, or repurposing, of specific offices with responsibility for research uptake. One university told us that they ‘successfully got management to agree to help set up the RUM office’ and also ‘successfully undertook a stakeholder mapping exercise’ as part of this. Another has established an ‘office related to research dissemination’, which also involved the active engagement of university management. Another university foresees similar initiatives coming to bear in the near future, telling us that ‘management has indicated that it would support change in the structure to create the position of Director of Research and Extension, as well as implementing a communication policy which recommends a strengthened communication structure. An extension policy is also being developed to support taking research to the end user’.

While these new processes and functions do require university leadership, some respondents asserted that they have been able to move towards new processes in a more staggered way, according to the particular needs and
resources found in units across the institution. One said that ‘one of the university institutes is establishing a research uptake fund to support research initiatives that incorporate uptake’, which suggests a degree of independence in their ability to resource enhanced uptake.

**Stakeholder engagement**

Respondents provided some strong examples of success in the area of stakeholder engagement, with 15 universities providing responses in total. Some of these concern the development of new (or established) offices specifically to oversee stakeholder engagement, while others provide evidence of an increase in the number of projects that have achieved uptake or that involve external stakeholders.

One respondent told us that they are now coordinating research groups with donors and funders in order to ‘make efforts to reach target beneficiaries’. One result from these coordinated groups has been that ‘research findings from agronomy have been widely adopted by the participating farmers and many have success stories to tell’. Another respondent corroborated this, telling us that ‘there are now a greater number of joint research projects with external stakeholders, some of which are also target groups and beneficiaries of the research’.

While some research has already been successful in engaging with beneficiaries and target groups, other respondents reported the development of internal systems to train and support systems for future engagement. One university told us that they are ‘setting up university technical teams to discuss training and research needs with production and technical staff in the private sectors’, while another said they have ‘organised one workshop on stakeholders dialogue in 2013 to discuss how the university and stakeholders can work together’. Further to this, another university provided an example of how they seek to make stakeholder engagement a sustained aspect of the research cycle, with a proposal in place to create ‘the position of Director of Research [which] will institutionalise the management of research uptake, [as well as] the development of a communication policy which, when implemented, will ensure that the communication office is strengthened with an expanded mandate on engaging with stakeholders’.

**Communication of research**

In addition to the changes reported earlier regarding the communication of research, ten respondents provided particular examples of successes in communication, public engagement, and wider dissemination. These included open days, trade fairs, and functions designed for public engagement specifically. Others involved new approaches to utilising university and mass media in the communication of research findings.

One university told us ‘a university radio [station] is established that will help disseminate research related activities’, while another reported that they held a ‘successful community engagement conference in September 2012’. Part of institutionalising such successes can also come from the establishment of policy in public engagement, and one university told us that ‘an extension policy [is] being developed to enhance research uptake and research communication. A proposal to create the position of Director of Research and Extension [will also] work closely with the communication office and research units, as well as managing the research processes’.

In several sections, we have seen both challenges and successes in coordinating research uptake activity across different units and departments. One respondent told us that they are making an explicit effort to ‘work closer with the marketing department [which] has resulted in more visibility of research, and an increase in focus on research output’. In addition to working with the marketing team, they are also working more closely with the IT and web management team to communicate of research results, telling us that they ‘are using the web more vigorously to publish output and results’. 
7. Research uptake plans

At a symposium held in Nairobi, Kenya, in September 2013, representatives from each of DRUSSA’s member universities composed a draft research uptake plan for their respective institutions. These plans were the product of individual knowledge and experience, refined through constructive criticism from peers external to the university. Each plan was university-specific and sensitive to the individual contexts, strengths, and challenges at the institution concerned. They were also influenced by each university’s current engagement with the DRUSSA programme, with those institutions that had hosted a DRUSSA team visit at a more advanced stage of planning than those who were yet to receive such a visit. The plans were based on a standard template, which asked participants to list a series of component activities – grouped under seven broad headline areas – to be undertaken at their university. The template also required participants to suggest timelines for the completion of the suggested activities, as well as indicating the people or units who would be responsible for delivering on those activities.

The following is a brief analysis of the trends that emerged in the plans that were submitted. At the time of writing, 13 of 24 plans have been submitted.

**Actions to ensure university engagement in promoting research uptake management**

There is uniform consensus across the universities that the DRUSSA leaders and champions have a prominent role to play in this area, particularly as many of the DRUSSA leaders are at deputy vice-chancellor level and are therefore part of their university’s senior management team. High on the list of proposed activities is the introduction of research uptake issues as a standing item at regular high-level meetings (senate research committee meetings, for example) and, more broadly, at faculty level research meetings. Other priority action areas are the development of ‘terms of reference’ (ToR) for the DRUSSA implementation teams at each university, clearly stating what is expected of team members, and the hosting of DRUSSA ‘road shows’ within individual faculties/units across the university. These would be facilitated by DRUSSA implementation team members and/or university staff members who have attended the DRUSSA short courses or degree programmes, and aim to inform a broader base about research uptake initiatives.

**Actions to establish university-wide DRUSSA implementation teams**

There is considerable overlap between this section and the previous one, and the character of each university’s development in this area will depend on whom they choose to participate in the implementation teams and how they elect to structure their institution’s ToRs for their respective teams. How universities choose to organise their teams, however, and effective communication between team members, the institutional DRUSSA leader and champion, and the broader DRUSSA programme, is deemed critical. There is no one prescriptive method for how this ‘should’ be achieved and each university is encouraged to pursue methods that they believe will work best for their members. Regular meetings between DRUSSA team members, the establishment of an institutional discussion platform for team members, greater use of the DRUSSA Coffee Station, or combinations of all three were suggested as avenues for progress.
Actions related to policies relevant to research uptake

It is important to note that ‘stand-alone’ research uptake policies have been broadly rejected by DRUSSA member universities in favour of a process of adapting or re-drafting existing research (and possibly human resource) policies to include elements specific to research uptake. With this in mind, there are significant individual differences in this section, as each of the universities is at a different stage of the process. Some are in the process of drafting policies that will include research uptake elements; some have completed drafts that are currently under consideration by the university senate or equivalent body; and others have an approved policy and are examining implementation strategies. DRUSSA will be looking to facilitate greater inter-university networking on this issue, connecting universities who are at a similar stage in the process – as well as linking universities at a relatively advanced stage with those at a modest level of development – in order to foster shared good practice.

Once such policies have been implemented, universities will need to give thought to how to implement and publicise new policy issues relevant to research uptake. Current suggestions indicate that universities will be looking to leverage those staff members who have engaged in DRUSSA short courses and degree programmes, as well as the broader DRUSSA implementation teams, to achieve these objectives. An issue only infrequently addressed in the current draft plans is the need for a process to monitor and evaluate research uptake policy elements once they have been implemented. This is crucial for the effectiveness and sustainability of the policies, and will need to be given careful thought by member universities as they progress through the process of implementing new policies in this area.

Actions to address recording and access to records of university research

Actions in this section centred on the establishment of institutional repositories for research, as well as the most effective strategies to ensure that existing repositories are maintained, accessible, user-friendly, and kept up to date. Universities could greatly benefit from a DRUSSA toolkit section on this issue to help identify good practice in this area.

Actions to engage with key stakeholders to promote research uptake

Under this section, many of the draft plans submitted list the need to record and maintain contact with current stakeholders, the use of targeted media engagement to interact with key stakeholders (including the use of institutional websites, other media assets, and university open days), and the appropriate leveraging of alumni connections. While these can all be effective ways of engaging with external stakeholders, they do not specifically assist in identifying who a university’s key stakeholders are. Exercises to help identify key external stakeholders are conducted at DRUSSA university planning workshops, and universities are encouraged to re-examine past attempts at research uptake (successful or otherwise) to identify what has worked in the past, which stakeholders are receptive to what, and where their institutional strengths and weaknesses lie.
Actions to engage local media to improve their understanding of research and research uptake

Different strategies identified to address this issue include establishing regular contact with the media (regular open days, periodic press releases, and so on), providing training in media engagement for academics (and, crucially, developing capacity within the university to carry out and reinforce this training), establishing closer links between academics and university public relations offices, and the targeted use of university media assets (such as radio, for example). These are all legitimate avenues to achieve greater traction with local media but, as observed in Section 5, contextualising approaches is key; universities need to identify and target strategies that play to their current strengths.
8. Conclusions

As in 2012, the 2014 DRUSSA benchmarking process involved three major phases:

- The initial benchmarking survey, used to collect, compare, and analyse quantitative data and particular examples of research uptake activity
- The 2014 Leadership and Benchmarking Conference, at which leaders and champions of the programme convened to discuss in greater detail ways in which institutional change has been achieved and is being developed
- The final Benchmarking Report, including survey data, but also further summaries and conclusions from the conference, and deeper analysis of trends that emerge from discussions at the conference.

The findings from the survey give us a strong basis to measure not only the current state of play at DRUSSA member universities, but also the degree of change that has been seen since the first benchmarking survey and report in 2012.

One notable area of change reported among some universities involved either the establishment of new offices to provide management of research uptake activity, or the incorporation of research uptake management into existing offices or structures. There has also been a significant growth in reported collaboration between offices and units within universities which share an interest or a potential role in the management of research uptake, including libraries, public relations offices, marketing offices, IT units, vice-chancellors’ offices, extension offices, and research management offices.

The survey findings also suggest a trend towards an increased awareness of, and support for, research uptake among university leaders. The highest levels of university management were perceived, on balance, to have the highest level of enthusiasm for research uptake activity, which is an essential component to realising greater implementation of uptake processes across an institution.

We have also seen strong examples of stakeholder engagement and the wider communication of research, with evidence of growth between 2012 and 2014 including the establishment of new channels of university media (such as radio stations and dedicated research webpages), as well as the introduction of research findings to university radio programming. The majority of survey respondents told us that they now regard engagement with external stakeholders to be either a high or a very high priority. This represents a dramatic change from 2012, when most respondents expressed interest in research uptake, but said it had not yet been established as an institutional priority.

As the DRUSSA programme moves from its first to its second phase, we proceed with some clear indicators of change, and lessons as to how to support member universities further in their plans for rolling out and institutionalising research uptake in the future.
Appendix: university-external stakeholder relationships

The horizontal lines on the graph indicate the MODE averages reported. For example, on the graph titled ‘Enterprise’, the most frequently reported rating regarding the PRIORITY of the universities’ relationship with enterprise is 10. The most frequently reported rating regarding POWER to shape social change with enterprise is 8; and the most frequently reported rating regarding the STRENGTH of the university’s relationship with enterprise is 7.

The mode average for PRIORITY is also 10
The mode average for POWER is also 5

The mode average for POWER is also 8
The mode average for POWER is also 7

The mode average for PRIORITY is also 6
The mode average for POWER is also 6

The mode average for PRIORITY is also 8