

Report on the 2022 research culture project to create a sustainable supportive culture within the QUB for research-active African scholars

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Context and funding of the initiative

This report documents an initiative of six months towards establishing a network for research-active Africans at Queen's University Belfast (QUB).

In November 2021, QUB put out an internal call for applications which sought to enhance the cultures in which research takes place within the institution. Fifty applications were submitted from across the three faculties, with 8 projects successfully funded. This document reports on the focussed, supportive and compassionate activities undertaken within one of these projects, as a tangible new action with the aim of explicitly contributing positively to QUB's research cultures for specific academic citizens within the institution.

The proposal aimed to design and put into place activities to connect African researchers* from across QUB and to provide opportunity to decide next steps for creating a supportive culture for our research. Planned activities included two meets, open calls, and a research retreat, designed to establish a cross-campus, cross-disciplinary research development group. In the application we noted that:

- Intensive investment is required, as the findings of UKRI data (2021) about the funding award gaps (in terms of rates and amounts) and much scholarship have revealed, to mitigate the discriminatory conditions faced by scholars racialized as Black and those from the global South within the UK.
- There is much capital within current African researchers at QUB for inclusive knowledge sharing. Activities would bring those with more experience of UK, EU, US, Caribbean and African HE systems into proximity with those who are early career and/or those recently from non-UK contexts, over a focussed and sustained period of time to build relationships and supports around national and international research.
- The value of a period of a research retreat for focused time away from the demands and 'noise' of institutional, domestic and urban arrangements, to work on research individually and to communally interact about challenges, barriers, successes and tips to persist in research production with rest times to interact with the rural context, demonstrating compassion and support for colleagues.
- The need to enable interaction with African scholars from the south of the island, to provide opportunities for building networks and relationships for both the 'soft skills' to successfully navigate HEIs, and for building bridges for possible All Ireland research collaborations and mentorship relationships going forward.

We proposed an initiative underpinned by a model of collegiality as service leadership which had the potential to provide a strong foundation for a sustainable supportive culture.

Information about the project leads

The application was a collaboration between [Dr Felicity Kalu](#) (School of Midwifery and Nursing), [Dr Dina Zoe Belluigi](#) (School of Social Sciences, Education and Social Work) and [Dr Gift Sotonye-Frank](#) (School of Law). The application was drafted initially by Dr Belluigi with feedback collaboratively. Once the proposal was successful, it was decided that Dr Kalu would lead the initiative.

The leads were based in different disciplines and faculties, in addition to occupying different positions on the academic ladder – all of which was seen as possible positive points for reinforcing the nature of research development supports to productively cross disciplinary and professional silos to address varied challenges. In terms of how they identified, all the leads were Africa-born, with varied experience on the island of Ireland and international mobility from their studies, employment and personal experience. They were racialized differently within the UK context; and held differing religious beliefs.

In the application, it was shared that the three leads were also members of the established African Scholars Association of Ireland (AfSAI). Within that network, they had contributed to the organising of conferences in 2019 and 2020, and collaborated on cross-island collaborative research (such as Belluigi & Joseph 2021). Through the network, they had been active participants in events, such as meetings of the International Decade for People of African Descent 2015-2024. AfSAI is part of the steering group for the Republic of Ireland's initiatives under the United Nations. It was shared in the application that they intended to use the research culture initiative to enable them to extend the benefits of that primarily ROI membership to QUB and then across NI, where there were no

African professional membership association for researchers or academics in Northern Ireland at the time of writing. UCU in NI was the only branch not to have a Black Standing Committee in the UK, at the time of writing. As a member of the IRISE Committee, Dr Belluigi committed to share insights learnt from this initiative within that forum and with Research Development, through which she already had had interactions, such as the successful grant for a doctoral programme for academics in South African universities and as a recipient of GCRF-funds training.

The leads undertook this initiative to ascertain interest, and where it was demonstrated, to coordinate activities and interested parties in ways in which to lay the grounds for a democratically formed network. Thus, there was neither expectation nor presumption that the leads would be nominated nor serve as leaders of the network going forward. In these pages, the processes of discussion about their future leadership and governance are outlined, beyond the time scale of this initial project.

Initial activities to connect African research-active scholars at QUB

Activities during this initial phase of 6 months included two open calls, three meetings and a research retreat. We include narrative summaries, visual documentation and reflections following the chronology of what occurred in this section.

Open call for interest in joining a network

An open call with information about the initiative was circulated across QUB and via social media platforms in early 2022, for those research-active within QUB who identify as Africa-born or of African descent to register their interest. See Appendix A – Poster. The poster design included photographs of cloths selected from different regions of the African continent in the private collections of the three leads.

To gather expressions of interest, a questionnaire was designed. Graphic representations give an indication of the 54 responses at the time of writing. Of those, 39 responded confirming that they were African scholars according to the definition provided, which was

The term 'African' here indicates those persons who are Africa-born and those of Africa descent from the Caribbean, the UK, EU, USA et cetera. As the intention is to form a research network, it is specifically for those who undertake research, including those reading for their postgraduate degree, researchers and academics.

It should be noted that not all respondents identified as African scholars, with 14 selecting the option 'I am not an African scholar according to this definition above, but would like to be involved at a later date if applicable'. It also bares remembering that there were duplicates in response, and so the actual number is slightly smaller.

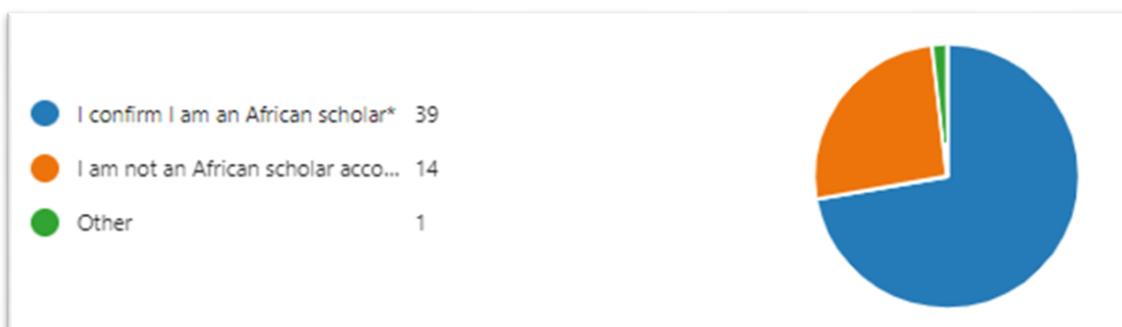


Figure 1 Graphic representation of expressions of interest registered on the online form

There is a need for more recruitment of African research-active scholars within the university. Challenges to communication across campus were many, including that there does not seem to be data centrally held on students nor staff that is collected/ requested by who those identify as African. Data reported to HESA is guided by UK and NI Equality law which misrepresents the range of identifications of those on the African continent and those of African descent. Moreover, requests for email addresses could not be made due to the institutional response to data protection legislation. This poses challenges to initiatives such as these.

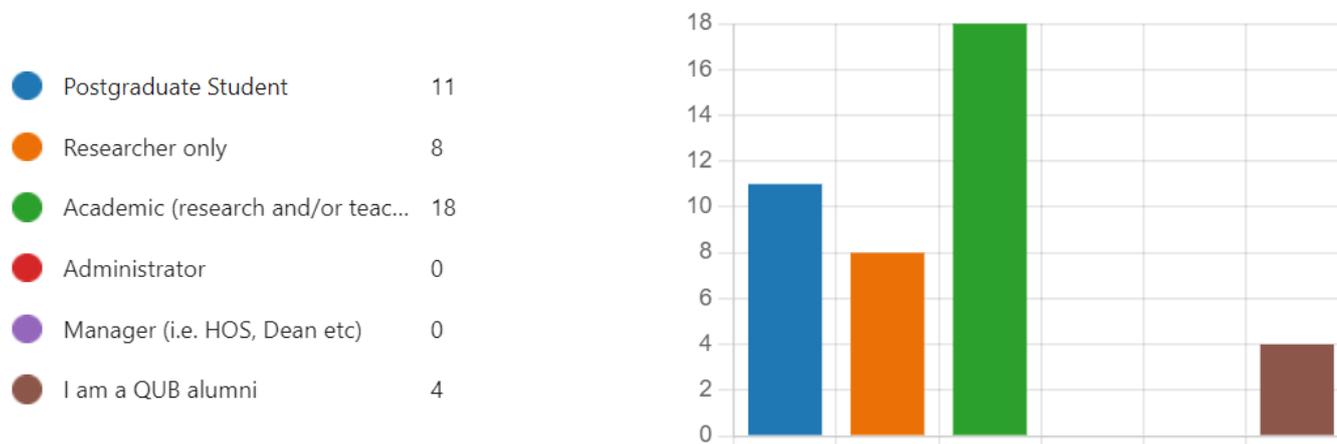


Figure 2 Visualisation of the levels of those who expressed interest via the online questionnaire

Responses were received from those in the Schools of AEL, HAP, Law, SSESW, QMS, Electronics, Electrical Engineering and Computer Science (EPS), Chemistry and Chemical Engineering, Psychology, Biological Sciences, Nursing and Midwifery, Medicine, Dentistry and Biomedical Sciences (MHLS), Global Food Security, The Senator George J. Mitchell Institute for Global Peace, Security and Justice, INTO QUB. There were no responses from those in Mathematics and Physics (EPS), Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering (EPS), Natural and Built Environment, Pharmacy, Gibson Institute, Institute of Cognition and Culture, Institute of Electronics, Communications and Information Technology (ECIT), Institute of Irish Studies, Institute of Professional Legal Studies, Institute of Spatial and Environmental Planning (ISEP), William J Clinton Leadership Institute, Centre for Cross Border Studies, and QUBIS Ltd.

We also allowed for those who were not eligible, either because they were not Africa-born or of African descent, nor not within QUB, to record their interest. Qualitative commentary including that they did so for the reasons of

- Engaging in African Studies itself, and who wish to collaborate and build a network/ hub/ centre across the Uni on this, which would be a great addition. There is appetite for a cross-Ireland network on this.
- Being independent scholars within NI, those who undertake work for civil society organisations and NGOs, who are African (in the definition we included) and seek intellectual collaborators/ a network.

These were shared in a meeting and email communications held with senior leadership (see Appendix E).

One respondent interested in the network, who was not within QUB, included important commentary on the University's relation with local African researchers in civil society organisations on the island of Ireland. An excerpt of that commentary is reproduced below.

*I lead a community-based African and Caribbean organisation which is contacted almost weekly by both local and international researchers, looking to get quantitative and qualitative data via our organisation. We are very clear in the conditions we insist on for those who want to collaborate or undertake research via our organisation. **We hope your research group will have clear ethical policies regarding how local organisations like ours is contacted and given a role in your research. We are tired of researchers who simply engage conveniently and do not offer meaningful credit to the role that organisations like ours play, sometimes not even mentioned in the footnotes of their published research.** (emphasis added)*

MS Teams created with interested members added

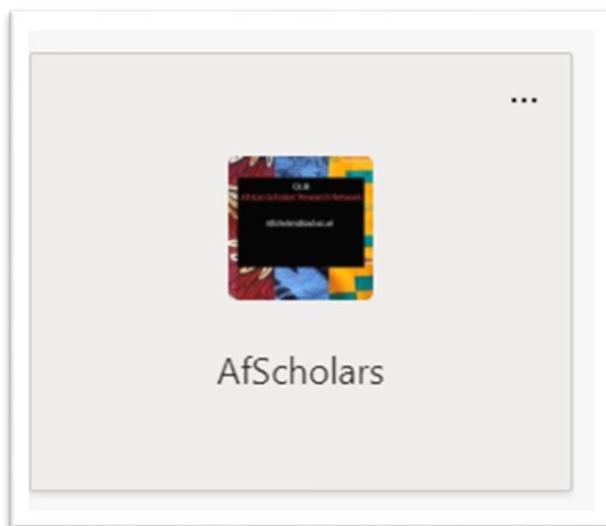


Figure 3 A shared online platform created using QUB software MS Teams

A shared online space was created called 'AfScholars' including the emails of those who expressed interested in the network. The shared space allowed for online meetings to held and recordings shared, in addition to asynchronous Information to be exchanged about the following events, in addition to matters related to research more widely are communicated therein.

First meeting about the network

Those who registered were invited to participate in a meeting on the 9th of March 2022. This meeting was held on the institutional online platform MS Teams. It enabled information about the initiative to be shared by the leads and the opportunity for interested parties to ask questions and share concerns and ideas about the initiative as a whole and to introduce ourselves to each other as the first steps to creating a community. See Appendix B – Material related to Meeting 1.

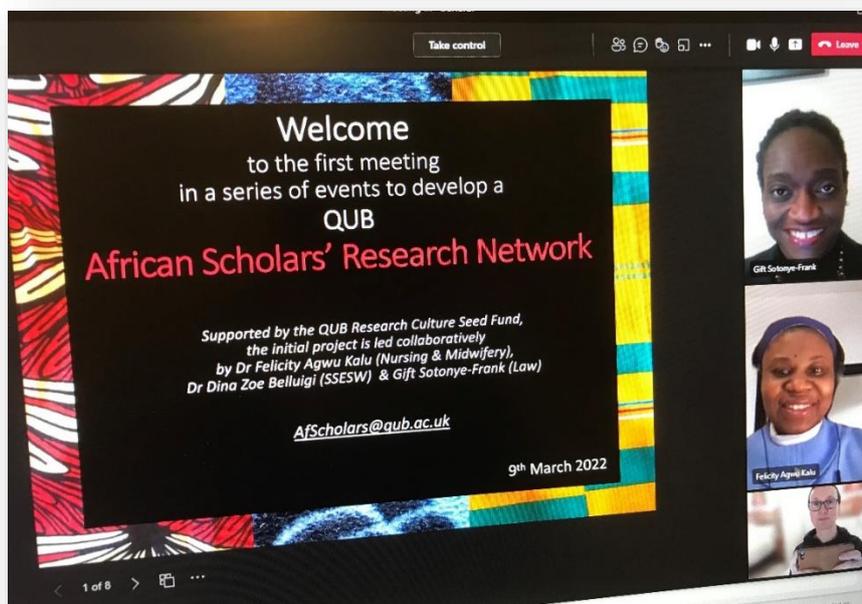


Figure 4 Screen capture of the three leads presenting during the meeting

The meeting lasted just under 2 hours. 24 people participated in this meeting, the slides of which are attached as Appendix 2.

Second meeting in preparation of the retreat

The second meeting engaged with those interested in the retreat, to negotiate the criteria for inclusion and for questions to be asked and ideas shared. This meeting was held on the 7th of April. Seven people participated in this meeting, with the recording shared. Slides are attached in Appendix C.

Meeting with QUB leadership

During this time, Prof Flynn (Pro-VC Research and Enterprise) of QUB requested a meeting with the leads which was also attended by Dr Wendy McLoone, Head of Research Development. At this meeting, support was expressed for the initiative, with a request that further communication be made of specific initiatives or needs after the initial project, particularly to link with UK/ ROI African Scholars. Information about this meeting and the expression of support was communicated to the members at the second meeting. Please see Appendix E – Email correspondence following meeting with leadership.

Open call for the retreat

Following that, an open call was shared with transparent criteria for selection to the retreat, including the candidate's willingness to contribute to creating a supportive culture for African researchers within the institution. The open call is attached in Appendix D.

Research Retreat

The retreat was held from the 9th-11 of June 2022. This was the central activity planned for this initiative. It was held in a rural setting positioned between Belfast and Dublin. The hope was that for three days the researchers would work directly on their own projects, with set times to interact socially about the ways in which to persist, and where possible to act transformatively, within the conditions of current research cultures at QUB/ UK. Cognisant of wellbeing (Arday 2019), the latter was planned to occur during rest periods: informally when sharing meals and undertaking exercise; in addition to formal discussions and workshops during more 'downtime' periods. We also planned to invite ROI counterparts involved in undertaking similar supportive work of African scholars to share lessons learnt and build all Ireland connections.

The reporting about the retreat is divided into three sections below. The first section briefly outlines the preparatory engagements for the retreat. The second section focuses on the participants' time together during the writing retreat and the third section is the conclusion

The selection and confirmation of participants

As outlined above, a call for expression of interest was sent out on the 11th April 2022, requesting that applicants include within their expression of interest their rationale/ motivation for participating, their involvement in other networks, how they aim to bring value to the initiative, and ideas for how the network may be developed to advance the academic and research interests of African scholars at QUB and beyond.

Following the call 8 persons applied to participate at the retreat, one of which travelled to the venue for the first day without staying over. As the numbers did not exceed capacity there was no need for selection and all who applied were accepted. As part of preparation, a second email was sent out to those who indicated interest to confirm their interest to participate. This was to help with planning for the catering and room allocation at the retreat centre. It should be noted that prior to the call for interest, the venue for the retreat had already been booked and confirmed for the two-night planned stay. Two other academic staff members were invited at Ulster University, one of whom replied and indicated willingness to attend, but did not manage finally to participate.

As indicated in the table below, participants included a range of scholars, including students and staff, from various disciplines and career stages. One additional person was invited from ROI. Including the 3 leads on the project, the total number of participants was 10.

Participant	School within QUB	Current position
Dr Felicity Kalu	School of Nursing & Midwifery	Lecturer
Dr Dina Zoe Belluigi	Social Sciences, Education and Social Work; George J. Mitchell Institute for Global Peace, Security and Justice	Senior Lecturer
Gift Sotonye-Frank	School of Law	PhD student/ tutor
Stella Ibe Attah	HAP, Senator George J. Mitchell Institute for Global Peace, Security and Justice	Masters student
Dami Osekita	Social Sciences, Education & Social Work	PhD student
Nkem Itanyi	School of Law	PhD student
Dr Linda Oyama	School of Biological Sciences	Lecturer
Dr Eiman Abdel Meguid	School of Medicine, Dentistry & Biomedical Sciences	Senior Lecturer
Dr Chirangano Mangwandi	School of Chemistry & Chemical Engineering	Lecturer
Dr David Nyaluke	Business & Sustainable Development, University College Dubli, ROI	Lecturer

As soon as numbers were confirmed, a third email was then sent to participants with information which included a reminder of the dates of the retreat, details about transportation to the venue, a list of possible items to bring and a proposed schedule of activities for the duration. See Appendix F – Agenda of Retreat.



Figure 5 Participants of the Research Retreat

A summary of participants' time spent together at the retreat venue

The Mourne Lodge is located between the Spelga Reservoir and the Silent Valley where the Mourne Mountains of Northern Ireland sweep down towards the sea. It is social enterprise situated within a small rural community. Group transport to and from the venue was organised. Meals were provided, and were shared together on a single table. This, and the option of daily walking opportunities, allowed for social interactions and conversations. Each day had set times for participants to work along on their own research; in addition to the sessions focused on the network as a collective. In this way, we attempted to balance development of individuals' research with service to the collective's research.



Figure 6 Informal interaction during meals and exercise was centrally important to our process

In the rest of this section, we focus on the collective sessions related to building the supportive network.

1. Introductions & agreements: Day one on arrival

One of the first formal meetings allowed for participants to introduce what their individual goals were for the retreat period. We agree on the code of conduct to be adopted for those time periods (on individual research) to minimise distraction and to maximise time together to achieve the purpose set out. We also discussed the proposed schedule, which was adopted with a few minor changes made. All participants provided consent for photography by way of show of hands. Social media handles were shared and contacts made to promote information about the retreat and improve communication between those present.

2. Mapping research networks: Day one, evening

The group was led by Dr. Dina Belluigi in a session titled 'Introduction to network mapping'. Participants were provided instructions (attached) which guided them on how to map their academic research networks. This session was to prepare participants to create a visible map of their networks on large sheets of paper in order that other participants may be able to see, better understand, and discuss opportunities for collaborative work, support and possible research output.

3. Sharing prior experiences of building a networks: Day one, evening

Dr David Nyaluke, an African scholar in the Republic of Ireland and invited guest, gave a talk by way of story telling. He shared his own experience of mobilising African students within a number of different contexts. His passion to see African students mobilised within the academic community was influential towards the development of associations for African students in Ireland, and the African Scholars Association of Ireland (AfSAI), which brought research-active students and staff into proximity. Dr Nyaluke provided some tips on how to develop and sustain our network of African Scholars at QUB. These included:

- Commitment of time by the founding members (i.e. those who have currently identified as members of the African Scholars Research Network at Queen’s University Belfast)
- Advocacy initiatives such as relevant contribution to curriculum development as well as recruitment of more African staff in QUB
- Working with NGOs and also planning and executing events, such as conferences to promote collaboration as well as public and social media engagement to promote the Network’s visibility



Figure 7 Dr Nyaluke sharing his insights about establishing such networks within different contexts in the world

4. Sharing network maps: Day two, after lunch

This was a highlight for the group, with time together, developing our network maps and spending time viewing and sharing one another’s maps. It enabled us to connect at an intellectual level and discover interests and experiences of the scholars as depicted on their map. It was interesting to discover how widely travelled scholars are and how vast their networks are, even those ‘early career’.

The rich corpus of networks which were mapped presented a real opportunity for deep conversations among the scholars. It was also interesting to discover networks that cut across, Europe, UK, Asia, Africa and within QUB. Each participant had an opportunity to provide some context about their network as mapped on their sheet and also the opportunity to respond to questions. A selection of images taken during that activity are shared below:

- Becoming a collective voice for issues affecting African Scholars
- Points related to study about the African continent:
 - Developing projects that can benefit Africa
 - Research on Africa context: This will give us (Africans) visibility in research
 - Sharing existing/ widening networks within the African continent (NGOs and academics)

There were also challenges identified as some of the barriers and limitations experienced by African Scholars both at QUB and beyond. These included:

- Funding for black African researchers. Discussion of the funding award rates of black PIs.
- Lack of recognition of scholarship by African researchers
- Slow career progression in academia
- Isolation within the academy and lack of communication between African scholars
- Restricted mobility between North and South of Ireland as a result of immigration rules for Non –EU/UK nationals
- Time: Members of the network have to consciously create time to move the network forward, while balancing other interests
- Current visibility/status
- One-to-one membership drive
- Misrepresentation: For example, issues with discrimination and over-taxing of African students/ staff within the faculties
- Adequate operational and administrative structure for the network not in place



Figure 9 Images take during the activity of identifying and discussing opportunities and challenges

6. Drafting next steps for the network: Day three before lunch

On the last day of the retreat, the focus was on pinpointing the next steps and developing our mission, vision and objectives.

Membership

The first issue raised was the issue of membership. Discussion was had about inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Those present voted by show of hands and agreed unanimously that membership of the network should be those who are African-born or of African descent (whether they be born in the Caribbean, the UK, EU, USA et cetera).

Before arriving at this conclusion, there was a debate regarding expanding the membership to Africans by citizenship

or marriage. There were several suggestions about the possibility of an additional clause that is more inclusive, another suggestion was to have associate members who are Africans by marriage, this suggestion sparked yet another argument about the rights and privileges of an associate member. It was argued that all the suggestions for inclusion sounded great but might undermine the nature and objectives of the network in a context where there were very few positive conditions for African scholars. In the end, the group unanimously voted to keep the membership restricted to those who are African-born or of African descent as underlined above.

As the intention is to form a research network, it was decided it should be specifically for those who undertake research. This is inclusive of those reading for their postgraduate degree, researchers and academics, regardless of their positioning by institutional contracts. This is in recognition that many persons accept contracts and degree types without realising the constraints this may pose on their research; and that the importance of being research-active was central to the commitments of the network.

Network constitution

The group then began the process of developing the mission, vision and objectives of the Network. Each person wrote notes individually to define the mission, and read these out loud. There was discussion, objections raised, appreciation expressed for the suggestions. These were drawn upon to develop a proposed constitution. It was agreed that it would be discussed with all those who expressed interest to become members at a meeting before the end of term.

All the participants were in agreement that developing and establishing a cross-campus African Scholars Research Network at QUB was crucial. It was seen as vital as a support network for the flourishing of the African scholars at QUB.

Concluding session

The concluding session was had around the last meal, a lunch. During this session, appreciation was shared about the input of those present. A card was presented to our host at the Mourne lodge for her role in making sure the food and accommodation were suitable, and thanks expressed to the staff.

A congratulatory card and shout out went to Gift Sotonye-Frank who recently passed her viva a few days before on 6th of June 2022. A 'thank you' presentation was also made to Felicity Kalu who had lead the organisation of the event. Thanks were also expressed to Dr Nyaluke for his contributions and belief in the QUB project. He too expressed thanks to those present, on behalf of AfSAI, for the invitation, and desire was expressed for more connections to come, especially in terms of participation at the conference in Limerick in November 2022.

Finally, thanks were expressed to the generous support received from QUB, through the Research culture seed fund award.



Figure 10 A warm concluding session was held with appreciations of expressed

Meeting 28 June 2022

A meeting was held on the 28th of June to report to interested persons of the project processes and solicit input into the network plans made to date. 13 participated in this meeting held in person on QUB campus, with one person attending virtually.

At that meeting, opportunities for members were shared; the retreat reflected upon by all those who attended; and the vision, mission, objectives and suggestions for structure were discussed, with a number of changes (see below). These were then voted on and conclusively agreed. Members affirmed the need to appoint two advisory members. Initial points were added for the draft code of conduct. Please refer to Appendix H – Slides from Meeting 3.

Constitution of AfSRN

Through this six month processes of activities, those involved drafted and agreed upon the following:

VISION

To become a collective voice and home for African scholars to flourish.

MISSION

- To support, nurture and develop the growth of African researchers
- To collaborate and exchange research ideas and activities
- To drive the research development, academic freedom and flourishing of African scholars
- To enable a major research network, successful in promoting the profile of research in and on Africa.

OBJECTIVES

- To identify and share opportunities for research resources and funding
- To identify and seek to address barriers to career progression
- To facilitate and encourage communication, collegiality, exchange, and mobility of African scholars at Queen's and beyond
- To address the isolation and misrepresentation of African scholars
- To advocate for the recognition and legitimacy of African research
- To recognise and celebrate the achievements of African scholars
- To create an environment that fosters the production of individual and multi/disciplinary research, its dissemination, and impact
- To engage as public intellectuals serving the local, regional and international communities

STRUCTURES

- A. A Governing **Council** consisting of 5 members. That number is symbolic of the 5 African regions and similar structuring in macro-level bodies. The Council membership should:
- be multidisciplinary
 - include male and female members
 - be democratically elected. Each member should serve a two-year term, renewable once. In the event that a member is unable to continue, a by-election will be conducted to fill the position for the duration of the remaining term
 - The Council will be responsible for making crucial decisions and representing the network, with majority voting. Decision-making on major issues could also be regulated by members voting.
- B. **Committees** will lead on important work, and report to the Governing Council. Suggestions for Committees:
- African scholars research engagement
 - Funding
 - Communication and dissemination
 - Staff and student recruitment/membership
 - Career development and progression
 - Collaboration and exchange
 - Programs and events
 - Advocacy
 - African research

C. **Membership**

The network is for research-active Africans at QUB and beyond.

- The term 'African' here indicates those persons who are Africa-born and those of Africa descent from the Caribbean, the UK, EU, USA et cetera.
- As a research network, it is specifically for those who undertake research, including those reading for their postgraduate degree, researchers and academics.

A **code of conduct** will be developed. This would ensure that no individual represents the network in ways not agreed upon. Members shall not misrepresent the AfSRN.

- It was agreed that this will be developed further, and circulated to be agreed upon by members.
- AfSRN meeting will hold the last Wednesday of every two months, 5-6pm (Wednesday 5-6pm, every other month).

The poster features a central black rectangular area with white and pink text. The background is a collage of colorful patterns, including a red and black zebra print on the left, a blue and white galaxy pattern at the top, and a yellow and teal pattern on the right. The text is centered within the black area.

Join us for the first meeting
in a series of events to develop a
QUB
African Scholars' Research Network

First online meeting: 9th March 2022 12:30 – 1:30 pm
[register here](#)

Record your interest to receive further information
[here](#)

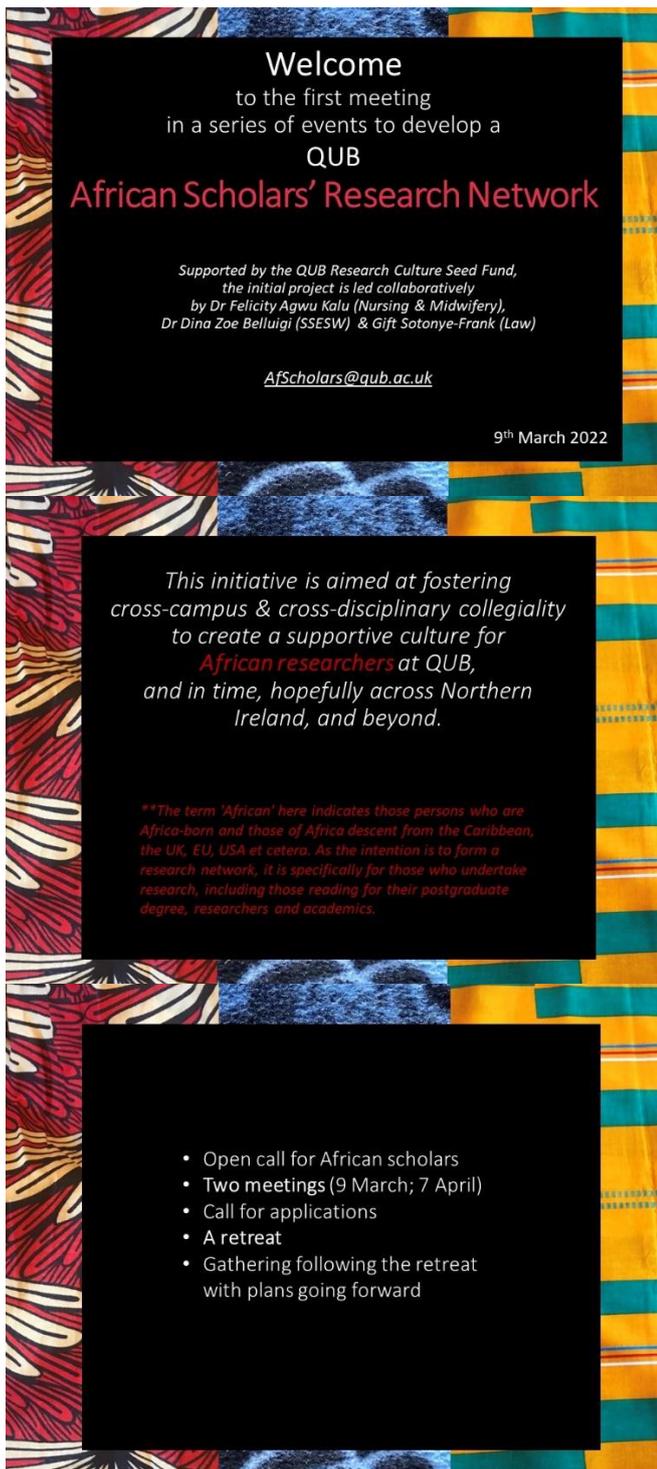
*This initiative is aimed at fostering
cross-campus & cross-disciplinary collegiality
to create a supportive culture for
African researchers at QUB,
and in time, hopefully across Northern Ireland, and beyond.*

*Supported by the QUB Research Culture Seed Fund,
the initial project is led collaboratively
by Dr Felicity Agwu Kalu (Nursing & Midwifery),
Dr Dina Zoe Belluigi (SSESW) & Gift Sotonye-Frank (Law)*

For more info AfScholars@qub.ac.uk

Appendix B – Material related to Meeting 1

Below are reproductions of the slides shared at the meeting, to be read from left to right.



Welcome
to the first meeting
in a series of events to develop a
QUB
African Scholars' Research Network

*Supported by the QUB Research Culture Seed Fund,
the initial project is led collaboratively
by Dr Felicity Agwu Kalu (Nursing & Midwifery),
Dr Dina Zoe Belluigi (SSESW) & Gift Sotonye-Frank (Law)*

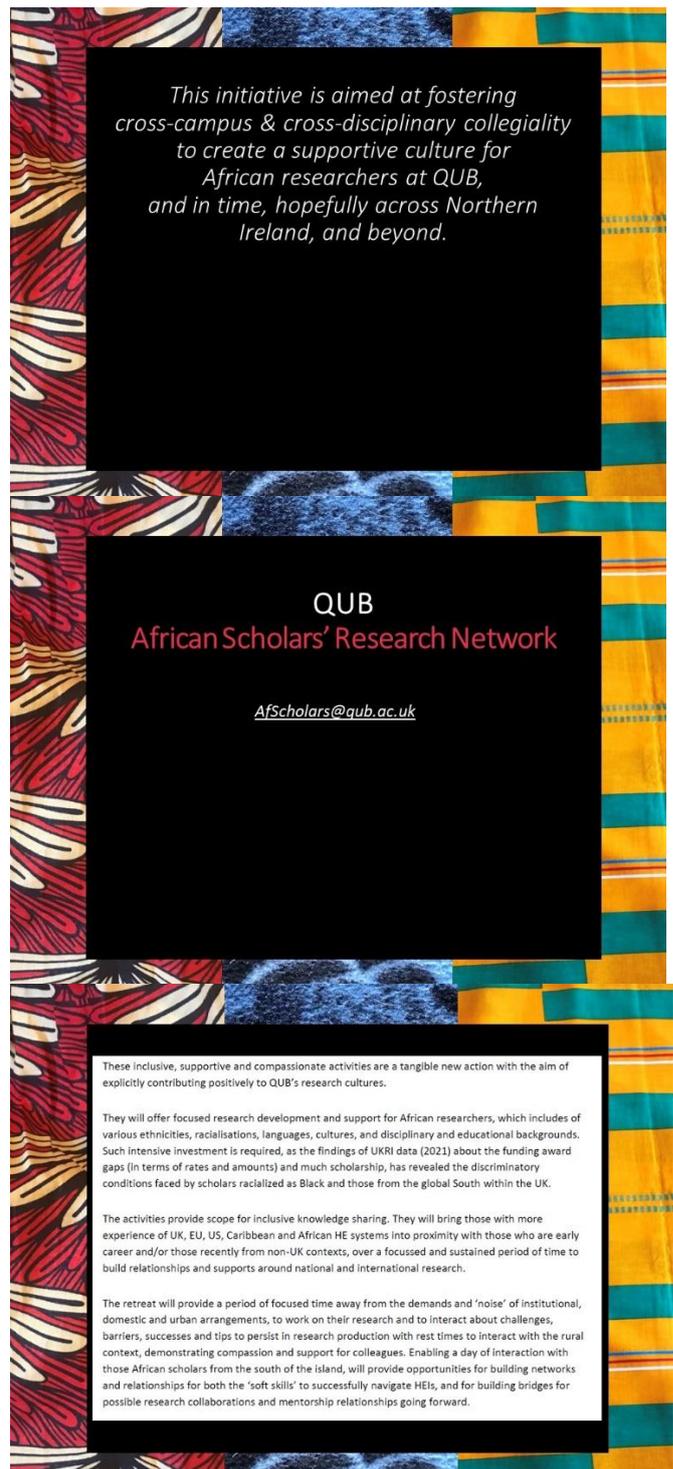
AfScholars@qub.ac.uk

9th March 2022

*This initiative is aimed at fostering
cross-campus & cross-disciplinary collegiality
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research network, it is specifically for those who undertake
research, including those reading for their postgraduate
degree, researchers and academics.*

- Open call for African scholars
- Two meetings (9 March; 7 April)
- Call for applications
- A retreat
- Gathering following the retreat
with plans going forward



*This initiative is aimed at fostering
cross-campus & cross-disciplinary collegiality
to create a supportive culture for
African researchers at QUB,
and in time, hopefully across Northern
Ireland, and beyond.*

QUB
African Scholars' Research Network

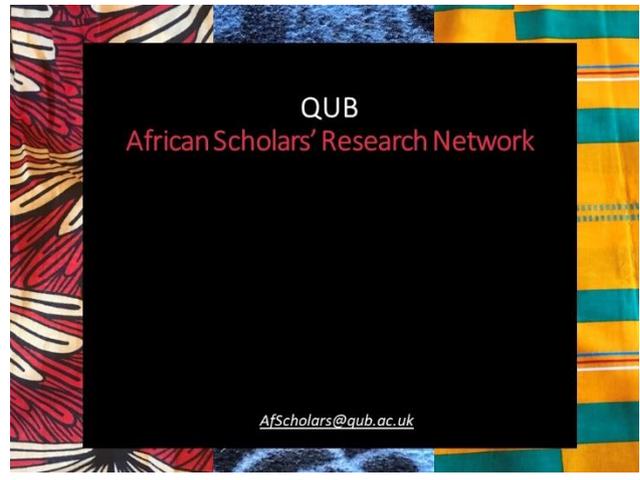
AfScholars@qub.ac.uk

These inclusive, supportive and compassionate activities are a tangible new action with the aim of explicitly contributing positively to QUB's research cultures.

They will offer focused research development and support for African researchers, which includes of various ethnicities, racialisations, languages, cultures, and disciplinary and educational backgrounds. Such intensive investment is required, as the findings of UKRI data (2021) about the funding award gaps (in terms of rates and amounts) and much scholarship, has revealed the discriminatory conditions faced by scholars racialized as Black and those from the global South within the UK.

The activities provide scope for inclusive knowledge sharing. They will bring those with more experience of UK, EU, US, Caribbean and African HE systems into proximity with those who are early career and/or those recently from non-UK contexts, over a focused and sustained period of time to build relationships and supports around national and international research.

The retreat will provide a period of focused time away from the demands and 'noise' of institutional, domestic and urban arrangements, to work on their research and to interact about challenges, barriers, successes and tips to persist in research production with rest times to interact with the rural context, demonstrating compassion and support for colleagues. Enabling a day of interaction with those African scholars from the south of the island, will provide opportunities for building networks and relationships for both the 'soft skills' to successfully navigate HEIs, and for building bridges for possible research collaborations and mentorship relationships going forward.



Below is the email sent to participants following that meeting.

From: QUB African Scholars Research Network
Sent: 10 March 2022 07:43
To: Felicity Agwu Kalu; Gift Sotonye-Frank; Dina Belluigi
Subject: Follow up from first meeting

Dear colleagues

Yesterday we have our first meeting towards establishing a research network for African scholars who are at Queen's University Belfast (including past staff/ students). A recording of the first part of the meeting is accessible [here](#) to those within QUB- please do share it with those you think may be interested who did not attend. Thank you to 21 participants of our first meeting today, for coming and listening to our initial plans for this project, and for introducing yourselves to us all. We are very excited to see this initiative come to fruition and to work with you.

We encourage all to note their details within [this form](#) to keep up to date with the project processes. We are so pleased that 32 QUB African researchers (students, researchers, academics and alumni) have done so already, from 11 of the 15 QUB Schools, and two Institutes; and 12 additional people interested in future connections within and beyond QUB.

That list helps us know who to communicate to about future meetings and events, and so we will only use that for future communications.

For your diaries, the next meeting on the [7th April 1pm online](#) is specifically about what we all want out of the Research Retreat (9-11 June). If you are not able to attend the retreat but are regardless invested in seeing this network take shape, let us know (by return email) if you'd be prepared to serve on the selection panel of those who are keen to attend the retreat. Those numbers are limited by funding unfortunately, and we'd appreciate the help in making the selection (based on criteria we'll negotiate in the April meeting together). It would be a good way to get to know you and your commitments to African researchers work too.

Till we meet again, please spread the word and stay well,
Felicity, Dina and Gift.

This initiative aims to foster cross-campus & cross-disciplinary collegiality by creating a supportive culture for African researchers at QUB, and in time, hopefully across Northern Ireland, and beyond.

Be sure to record your interest in this network, and to receive more information, by completing [this form](#).

Supported by the QUB Research Culture Seed Fund, the initial project is led collaboratively by Dr Felicity Agwu Kalu (Nursing & Midwifery), Dr Dina Zoe Belluigi (SSESU) & Gift Sotonye-Frank (Law).

Appendix C – Slides from Meeting 2

Below are reproductions of the slides shared at the meeting, to be read from left to right.

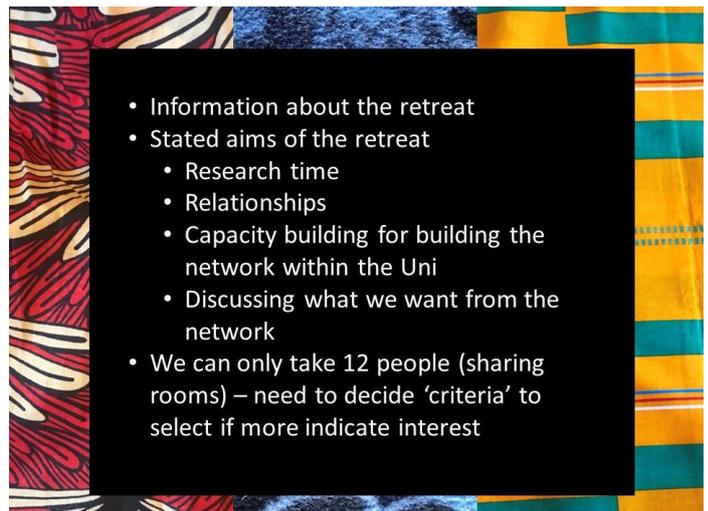


Welcome
to the second meeting
in a series of events to develop a
QUB
African Scholars' Research Network

*Supported by the QUB Research Culture Seed Fund,
the initial project is led collaboratively
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AfScholars@qub.ac.uk

7 April 2022



- Information about the retreat
- Stated aims of the retreat
 - Research time
 - Relationships
 - Capacity building for building the network within the Uni
 - Discussing what we want from the network
- We can only take 12 people (sharing rooms) – need to decide 'criteria' to select if more indicate interest



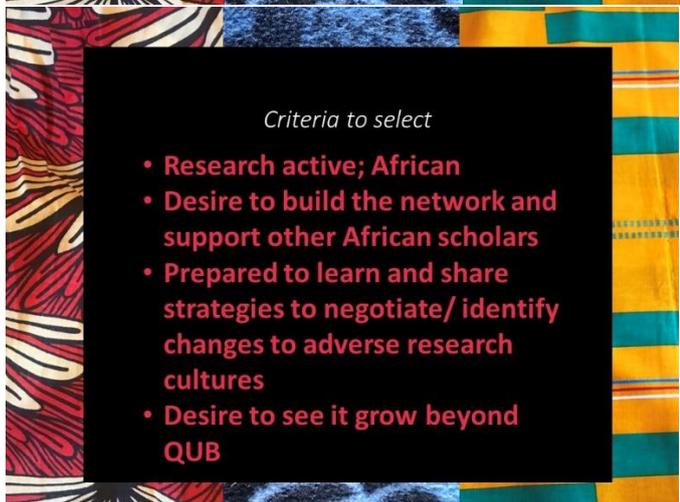
Info about the retreat

- **9 – 11 June**
- **Mourne Mountains**
- **Bus to there**
- **Modest accommodation – shared rooms, food provided, wifi, nature**
- **Whole accommodation of 15 rooms with one conference facility**
- **One night David Nyaleka, one night Eburn Joseph**



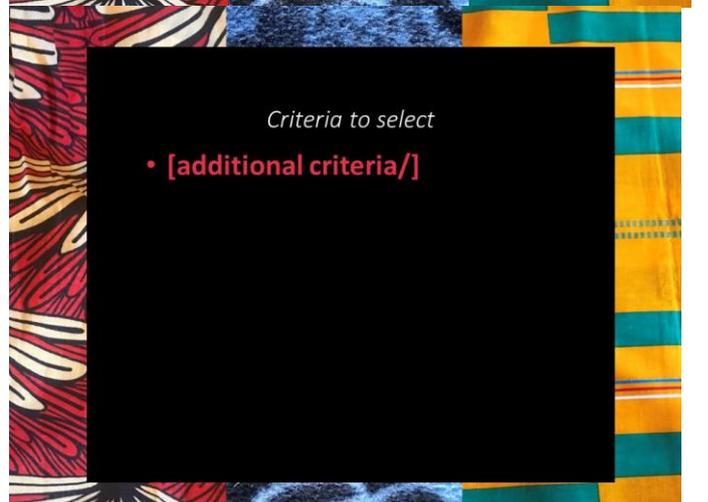
Stated aims of retreat

- **Research time**
- **Relationships**
- **Capacity building for building the network within the Uni**
- **Discussing what we want from the network**



Criteria to select

- **Research active; African**
- **Desire to build the network and support other African scholars**
- **Prepared to learn and share strategies to negotiate/ identify changes to adverse research cultures**
- **Desire to see it grow beyond QUB**



Criteria to select

- **[additional criteria/]**

Assessment Panel

- **Project leads: Felicity, Gift and Dina**
- **Student:**
- **Researcher:**
- **Staff:**
- **Alumni: Carla Queiroz**

- 11 April – circulate call for expressions of interest for retreat (with criteria)
- 25 April – deadline for EoI
- 2 May – notify those attending and ask for confirmation
- 9-11 June – Research Retreat

AfScholars@qub.ac.uk

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African Scholars' Research Network

AfScholars@qub.ac.uk



Call for
research-active QUB students, researchers & academics
to participate in a 2 day **Research Retreat** (9th-10th June 2022) to develop a
QUB
African Scholars' Research Network

Eligibility criteria - Applicants should be African *

Send your Expression of Interest by 25 April 2022 in a word document of max 500 words to AfScholars@qub.ac.uk, noting the following:

- Why you want to participate
- Other networks of which you are/have been a part
- In what ways you aim to bring value to this initiative
- How this network can be developed to advance the academic and research interest of African scholars at QUB and beyond

This initiative is aimed at fostering cross-campus & cross-disciplinary collegiality to create a supportive culture for African researchers at QUB, and in time, hopefully across Northern Ireland, and beyond.

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**The term 'African' here indicates those persons who are Africa-born and those of Africa descent from the Caribbean, the UK, EU, USA et cetera.*

Appendix E – Email correspondence following meeting with leadership

From: Emma Flynn
Sent: 23 March 2022 11:55
To: Dina Belluigi; Wendy McLoone
Cc: Felicity Agwu Kalu; Gift Sotonye-Frank
Subject: Re: Update: QUB AfScholars and Research Cultures on MME in NI

Many thanks for the update Dina, very helpful. Congratulations on the grant, and I look forward to hearing more about the results.

I look forward to hearing more from the network as reflections develop.

Safe travels,
Emma

From: Dina Belluigi <d.belluigi@qub.ac.uk>
Sent: 23 March 2022 09:35
To: Emma Flynn <E.Flynn@qub.ac.uk>; Wendy McLoone <w.mcloone@qub.ac.uk>
Cc: Felicity Agwu Kalu <f.kalu@qub.ac.uk>; Gift Sotonye-Frank <gsotonyefrank01@qub.ac.uk>
Subject: Update: QUB AfScholars and Research Cultures on MME in NI

Dear Emma and Wendy

I hope you are both well.

Queen's African Scholars Research Network

In our meeting with the QUB AfScholars team, you asked for a brief indication of who the network *currently* does not serve, who have indicated an interest to participate. For the most part, this was:

- those who are interested in African Studies itself, and who wish to collaborate and build a network/ hub/ centre across the Uni on this, which would be a great addition. There is appetite for a cross-Ireland network on this.
- independent scholars within NI, those who undertake work for civil society organisations and NGOs, who are African (in the definition we included) and seek intellectual collaborators/ a network.

But it is still early days – this is what we picked up from the register on interests and the first meeting.

Academic Research Responsiveness to Ethnic Minorities and Migrants in Northern Ireland

I also wanted to inform you that I have been successful in a BA Leverhume application, for a project following on from the mapping you were kind to help promote, Emma ([see here](#)). It relates directly to the concern with 'research culture' and also the social good purpose of the university. It is in partnership with the MME ThinkTank of NI. More can be found here - <https://pure.qub.ac.uk/en/projects/academic-research-responsiveness-to-ethnic-minorities-and-migrants> - but in time I hope we'll interact about it, and that the findings will be of value in your endeavours.

Apologies for the delay in this message. I have been travelling, and indeed leave in an hour for a flight for the British Council- South African doctoral programme for academic staff with Rhodes, Fort Hare and Queen's (you'll remember the MOU no doubt).

Best regards
Dina.

I sometimes work out of hours and send emails across time zones. Please don't feel obliged to respond outside your own preferred working hours.

Appendix F – Agenda of Retreat
Prior to the retreat, this provisional agenda was circulated to participants. Slight amendments were made on arrival as reported.

From: QUB African Scholars Research Network <AfScholars@qub.ac.uk>
Sent: 31 May 2022 10:12
To: QUB African Scholars Research Network <AfScholars@qub.ac.uk>
Cc: Felicity Agwu Kalu <f.kalu@qub.ac.uk>; Dina Belluigi <d.belluigi@qub.ac.uk>; Gift Sotonye-Frank <gsotonyefrank01@qub.ac.uk>
Subject: The Retreat-Thursday 9th - Saturday 11th June 2022 at the Mourne Lodge

Dear Colleagues,

As we look forward to our retreat at the Mourne Lodge from the 9th-11th June 2022.

On Thursday, 9 June 2022 please arrive at 10:00 a.m. in front of the main gate of Queens University Belfast. The bus will leave to Mourne Lodge at 10:30am.
We will Leave Mourne Lodge at 13:00 hours on Saturday 11 June 2022 to return to Queens University Belfast.

See below for a proposed schedule for each day's events and a suggested checklist of items to bring.

Looking forward to seeing you all. Please get in touch with us if you have any queries.

Kind regards,
Felicity, Gift and Dina

9th June 2022 Arrival/Day 1

11:45-12:30- settle into rooms
12:30-13:30- Lunch
13:30-15:00- Introduction of Participants, goal setting on arrival for individual research during retreat and share with colleagues/agree on some ground rules of engagement
15:00-17:30- Independent working
17:30-18:30- Dinner
18:30-19:00- Introduction to identifying and mapping networks/affiliations- Dina&Felicity
19:00-20:00- Talk by David Nyaluke-on AfSAI in ROI, challenges and opportunities
20:00-21:00-Planned walk (optional)
21:00- closing/ tea and coffee

10th June 2022 Day 2

07:00 – 7:45 Walk (optional)
08:00-9:00 breakfast
09:00-12:00- Independent working
12:00-12:30-Discussion (Map their networks/ affiliations, research interest to share)
12:30-13:30- Lunch
13:30-14:00- Discussion (Map their networks/ affiliations, research interest to share)Contd
14:00-16:00: Independent working
16:30-17:30 Small group discussion-By Felicity Dina and Gift
17:30-18:30- Dinner
18:30-19:30- Plenary report back from small group discussion (5 mins per group) followed by large group discussion on what is to be done
19:30-20:30- Walk in the Mournes
20:30-21:00- tea/coffee/closing

11th June 2022 Departure/Day3

07:00 – 7:45 walk (optional)
08:00-09:00- breakfast
09:00-10:30- Independent working
10:30-12:00- Respond to how achieved research goals and Next steps for ASRN
12:00-13:00- Lunch
13:00- Departure

List of items to bring

Comfortable hiking shoes and socks and appropriate clothing
Water bottle
Your personal laptop for independent working
Extension cables and adaptors
Snacks (Your preferred options for tea/coffee)
Notepads/Pens
Any medications etc

P.S Our thinking is this schedule is provisional and if anything does not work for you as a participant we will, on arrival, ask for feedback and make amendments

This initiative aims to foster cross-campus & cross-disciplinary collegiality by creating a supportive culture for African researchers at QUB, and in time, hopefully across Northern Ireland, and beyond.

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Appendix G – Instructions to map a social research network

Academic Social Network Map



Academics operate within social networks for support, collaboration, dissemination, impact and career advancement. These may be structured by institutions and membership organisations. However, in many instances, we make connections due to research interests, work and study experiences, and counter-networks if one has not (been) aligned or enabled by those dominant or formalised. The instructions below will assist you to map your own social network.

Instructions:

Follow this step by step. You have more than one sheet of paper, so you can map it first 'in the rough' with mistakes and alterations, and then re-draw it for sharing. Collect the two large sheets, a small sheet for jotting notes, pens, papers and other materials we have brought for you. The network will be mapped using concentric rings much like the trunk of an old tree that is being read for wisdom, with the subjects of the headings below:

Academic you

At the center of the sheet is you. Write your name. Draw a ring around your name. This is about your networks, which only you bring together this matrix of relations. No network will be the same as another so forget those around you and try to **center yourself**.

The contexts within which you have worked

The second layer acknowledges that networks stem from the contexts in which each of us have lived, studied, and worked. Jot these down on the paper for your notes. They could include countries, universities, civil society organisations, regions etc. On the large sheet, draw another ring that envelops the first. Within this write the contexts which continue to (in)form your connections as an academic. (If a context was not enabling for such connections, you need not include it. However, sometimes recording something as a 'dead end' or 'detour' is sometimes also productive for others to avoid or learn from.)

Your research interests

The third ring maps where your research interests lie. Remember, this is not about an idea(!), it is about **your** interests. Jot these down on a piece of paper first, then see where to place them on the big sheet. Some of us have very linear ways of working, others of us have had staggered and divergent research interests. Some has clear places where these research interests/ foci were developed – where that happens, put it close to the context where the connections are the strongest (which you identified in the first ring) and/or add lines connecting to other contexts where there are connections now (if applicable).

Networks and key agents

Looking at these research interests, from them draw the key agents, i.e. people that make things happen with or for **you**, not necessarily those in assigned leadership roles. These agents may be part of networks or organisations that you have also found of value. They may be regional or international. If the networks/ institutions play a big role, name them in large writing with those agents. If it is the agent that is most important, then put the network/ institutions name in small in brackets below their larger name.

Contexts by country/ region

In the last ring, identify the countries or regions you are connected to through your social network mapping. There should be a relation to what you have identified in the prior ring. If one of those you identified in the prior ring is 'international', indicate the regions where those you are connected to are most active.

Sharing with others

With your network now mapped, look at how to show connections between aspects of it. Consider making some of the agents/ organisations **bold** where they are strong connections for you or highlight areas across the rings which are the most active. Add lines to connect across rings if you think those connections are important. Add crosses to indicate where they are no longer functioning or that the person would be a bad connection. Once complete, produce a version that can be read by others, with a key to show what bold/ highlight/ cross etc means. Change the shapes too if you prefer.

This is being produced within a space of trust. No persons named on another person's sheet should be contacted directly.

No information should be shared with others beyond this space.

Ask the person directly if you are interested in making a connection.



Reference: Dr Dina Zoe Belluigi 2022

Appendix H – Slides from Meeting 3

Below are reproductions of the slides shared at the meeting, to be read from left to right.

Welcome
to the third meeting
in a series of events to develop a
QUB
African Scholars' Research Network

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by Dr Felicity Agwu Kalu (Nursing & Midwifery),
Dr Dina Zoe Belluigi (SSESW) & Gift Sotonye-Frank (Law)*

AfScholars@qub.ac.uk

28 June 2022

Agenda

1. Welcome
2. Opportunity: research development
3. Brief report back on retreat
4. Presentation on proposed:
 - Vision, mission, objectives
 - Governing and organising structure of the network
5. Next steps
6. AOB
7. Next meeting

Opportunity for Black African Scholars

- **Member of research development wishes to meet to tailor research development to needs of Black ASRN members**
- **Second week September – when best?**

The 1st ASRN Retreat



The 1st ASRN Retreat

Name	Discipline	Current position
Dr Felicity Kalu	Nursing & Midwifery	Lecturer (Education)
Dr Dina Zoe Belluigi	Social Sciences, Education and Social Work; Mitchell Inst	Senior Lecturer
Gift Sotonye-Frank	Law	PhD student/ tutor
Stella Ibe Attah	Mitchell Institute	Masters student
Dami Osekita	Social Sciences, Education & Social Work	PhD student
Nkem Itanyi	Law	PhD student
Dr Linda Oyama	School of Biological Sciences	Lecturer
Dr Eiman Abdel Meguid	School of Medicine, Dentistry & Biomedical Sciences	Senior Lecturer
Dr Chirangano Mangwandi	School of Chemistry & Chemical Engineering	Lecturer
Dr David Nyaluke	Business & Sustainable Development, UCD, ROI	Lecturer

Process

- Shared meals & walking
- Sharing social media info
- Individual research time
- Mapping & sharing our individual research networks
- Lesson learning fr Dr Nyaluke
- Identifying challenges faced by African scholars
- Considering opportunities for the network
- Drafting proposed structure of the network & its constitutions



Proposed steps forward

VISION

To become a collective voice and home for African scholars to flourish.

MISSION

- To support, nurture and develop the growth of African researchers
- To collaborate and exchange research ideas and activities
- To drive the research development, academic freedom and flourishing of African scholars
- To enable a major research network, successful in promoting the profile of research in and on Africa.

Proposed steps forward

OBJECTIVES

- To identify and share opportunities for research resources and funding
- To identify and seek to address barriers to career progression
- To facilitate and encourage communication, collegiality, exchange, and mobility of African scholars at Queen's and beyond
- To address the isolation and misrepresentation of African scholars
- To advocate for the recognition and legitimacy of African research
- To recognise and celebrate the achievements of African scholars
- To create an environment that fosters the production of individual and multi/disciplinary research, its dissemination, and impact.
- To engage as public intellectuals serving the local, regional and international communities

Proposed steps forward

a) A Governing Council consisting of

- 5 members
- Interdisciplinary
- males and females
- democratically elected

The governing council will be responsible for making crucial decisions and representing the network. Decision making on issues could also be regulated by members voting.

b) Committees who report to the governing council, & undertake work on:

- Funding
- Communications (including recruitment)
- Career development and progression
- Collaboration and exchange
- Programs and events
- Advocacy
- African research

c) Need to develop a code of conduct.

Any other business?

- **[additional considerations]**

Next meeting

- **Info to follow on meeting with research development (2nd wk September)**
- **Perhaps third week September for ASRN?**

QUB

African Scholars' Research Network

AfScholars@qub.ac.uk

To reference this report: Kalu, F., Belluigi, D. Z., & Sotonye-Frank, G. 2022. Report on the 2022 research culture project to create a sustainable supportive culture within the QUB for research-active African scholars. Prepared for the African Scholars Research Network (AfsRN), Queen's University Belfast.