The University of Bristol-University of Cape Town Cotutelle PhD Programme

Background to the Bristol-Cape Town Cotutelle PhD Programme:
The University of Bristol (UoB) and the University of Cape Town (UCT) have worked together to develop a framework agreement for operating Cotutelle PhDs. Cotutelle PhDs are a type of PhD distinguished by a number of features that comprise a very attractive opportunity for ambitious and talented early career researchers:

• Genuine shared co-supervision with academics in both Universities
• Registration at both Universities simultaneously to ensure you have full access to the full range of facilities and resources at both institutions
• Your PhD is carried out at both institutions (approximately a 50/50 split) with the sequence decided by the nature of the specific PhD project – there are funds to support this mobility requirement
• The PhD is examined at both Institutions, adhering to the examination requirements at each institution. Both institutions confer a degree certificate which references the Cotutelle (shared) nature of the PhD degree and the role of both Institutions. A graduate will be able to use the designation PhD (University of Bristol and University of Cape Town). This is highly likely to benefit your CV and career prospects
• Be part of a cohort of 7 Cotutelle PhD students across Health Sciences and Social Sciences
• Full membership of the Postgraduate Research communities at both Universities to provide you with two postgraduate research families
• Support and training at both Universities to help prepare you for your future career

These Cotutelle PhDs are of 4-years duration, and are fully-funded PhD scholarships, with the tuition fees and living expenses at both institutions covered by the studentship package (see Financial Details of the Cotutelle PhD Scholarship below). The programme of Cotutelle PhDs is cooperatively managed by the Bristol Doctoral College and the Office of Postgraduate Studies and Researcher Development at UCT, working in partnership with the supervisory teams.

Cotutelle PhD Project:
Affordability: an exploration of the missing criterion in health system decision making

Supervisors:
**Joanna Coast**, Health Economics at Bristol (HEB), Population Health Sciences, Bristol Medical School University of Bristol
**Susan Cleary**, Faculty of Health Sciences/School of Public Health and Family Medicine/Division of Health Economics & Health Economics Unit (HEU), University of Cape Town
**Will Hollingworth**, Health Economics at Bristol (HEB), Population Health Sciences, Bristol Medical School, University of Bristol
**John Ataguba**, Faculty of Health Sciences/School of Public Health and Family Medicine/Division of Health Economics & Health Economics Unit (HEU), University of Cape Town

Contact for details on this PhD project:

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1 Note: Cotutelle literally means ‘co-tutored’. In the South African Council for Higher Education framework, Cotutelle degrees are generally referred to as ‘joint’ qualifications.
Cotutelle PhD Project Summary:
The affordability of health services can be addressed at the individual level in terms of cost incurred directly by patients, but affordability is also an important consideration at the health system level, although the issue has often been fudged or ignored. Issues of affordability are particularly pertinent for South Africa, where a policy commitment to universal health coverage (UHC) under a proposed system of National Health Insurance (NHI) seeks substantive health system organisational and financing reforms. The aim of this research will be to theoretically develop the concept of ‘affordability’ in priority setting and to explore this concept empirically across the two very different settings of South Africa & UK.

PhD Detailed description:

Research Aims
The affordability of health services can be addressed at the individual level in terms of cost incurred directly by patients, but affordability is also an important consideration at the health system level, although the issue has often been fudged or ignored. The emphasis within health economics has typically been on the criterion of cost-effectiveness, with cost-effectiveness thresholds developed without explicit consideration of affordability either within the health system or broader society. There is increasing disquiet, however, about both the theoretical and empirical bases of the cost-effectiveness thresholds typically used in decision making, and the link between these thresholds and what the health system can ‘afford’, with international organisations such as WHO starting to focus on this issue.

In health economic terms, notions of ‘affordability’ are strongly linked to the perspective taken for decision making. In countries that take a health system perspective in decision making, such as the UK, a fixed budget is assumed, and an affordability criterion should theoretically be linked to the opportunity costs associated with displaced activity but research suggests that the thresholds used in decision making are significantly higher than opportunity costs within the system. In countries such as the Netherlands, that take a societal perspective, it is argued that the relevant threshold should relate to societal willingness-to-pay for health gained, although methods for generating such values are challenging.

These issues are particularly pertinent for South Africa, where a policy commitment to universal health coverage (UHC) under a proposed system of National Health Insurance (NHI) seeks substantive health system organisational and financing reforms. As part of these reforms, the NHI legislation will be developed during the period 2017-2022 and the resulting institutions will need to grapple directly with the challenges associated with affordability. These challenges are particularly stark for countries such as South Africa where, compared to other upper-middle income countries, health spending per capita is high but access to care is highly variable and health outcomes are poor. The aim of this research will therefore be to theoretically develop the concept of ‘affordability’ in priority setting and to explore this concept empirically across the two very different settings of South Africa & UK.

Research Questions
(i) To explore the meaning of ‘affordability’ in terms of the theoretical bases for this concept across different disciplines;
(ii) To explore perceptions of affordability among stakeholders in the South African system and in contrasting health systems with established HTA agencies;
(iii) Using tracer conditions, to determine the implications of explicitly accounting for affordability, using different methods.

Research Approach and Methodology
The student will initially explore concepts of affordability within health care decision making, drawing on the broad priority setting literature from across a number of disciplines, including economics, philosophy, politics/policy and psychology. The second phase of the research will involve the use of in-depth interviews with stakeholders comprising local and national decision makers, and those leading thinking on this issue, in the UK, the Netherlands and South Africa, to explore perceptions of affordability in various empirical contexts. The third phase of the research will be strongly dependent on findings from the first two stages, but will involve the application of quantitative techniques to explicitly account for affordability in the context of tracer conditions and the exploration of the implications in terms of efficiency and equity. Tracer conditions will be those that are expected to have a high budget impact, such as the use of Herceptin in breast cancer treatment.

Time spent in both Bristol and Cape Town:
The project will involve approximately equal time in Bristol and South Africa. We anticipate that the final plans will be agreed with the student upon appointment, but our preliminary plan would be that the student spends approximately the first fifteen months in Bristol, where (s)he will participate in the cohort-development, as well as conducting initial reading, familiarising her/himself with the UK NHS and other European systems, generating an initial proposal for the research, starting the process of generating relevant ethics approvals and conducting stakeholder interviews in Europe. The student will then relocate to South Africa for the next two years, where the remaining interviews will be conducted and the bulk of the quantitative work will be undertaken. The final nine months will be spent in Bristol, for further analysis and writing of the thesis.

Requirements and training provided as part of the PhD:
The PhD candidate will ideally have a background in economics/health economics or another relevant (social science or medical) discipline. They must be willing and able to engage with economic theory and have experience in qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis and/or willingness to acquire these skills during their doctoral studies.

Training needs will be explored initially with the student at the appointment stage. It is anticipated that training in both specific qualitative and quantitative methods will be required, as well as more generic and transferable skills such as literature review, writing for publication and presentation. There are strong training opportunities for the student to take advantage of within each institution, including short courses at the University of Bristol (http://www.bristol.ac.uk/medical-school/study/short-courses/) and Master’s level modules at UCT.

The Bristol Doctoral College coordinates an extensive programme of Personal and Professional Development course for all PhD students at Bristol, free of charge. Details of these are on the BDC website at http://www.bristol.ac.uk/doctoral-college/
Research Environment – Bristol and Cape Town:

The proposed project will be based at Health Economics at Bristol (HEB), Population Health Sciences, Bristol Medical School. HEB’s research is focussed on three key programmes: (1) Economics of health and care across the life course, (2) Improving efficiency and equity in health care, and (3) Methods for applied health economics. The HEB team includes more than 25 researchers and PhD students. It has a large portfolio of research projects funded by the NIHR, MRC, Wellcome, EU and others. HEB is located within Bristol Medical School, confirmed in the 2014 Research Excellence Framework as a leading centre for collaborative and multi-disciplinary research in population and translational health sciences. HEB has recently been relocated at 1-5 Whiteladies Road, bringing together HEB staff and doctoral students.

The proposed PhD project will be housed in the Health Economics Unit (HEU). Established in 1990 within the Faculty of Health Sciences at the University of Cape Town, the Health Economics Unit aims to build equitable health systems in South Africa and beyond through teaching, research and policy engagement. A comparative study of 6 similar research institutes in 2012 concluded that the HEU is “well established and well respected both nationally and internationally”. The unit is a major player within economic evaluation research, with UCT being the highest producer of economic evaluation in LMICs. The HEU occupies its own building in the Faculty of Health Sciences at UCT. The University of Cape Town (UCT) has consistently been the most highly rated university in Africa over the last decade, and attracts leading scientists from across the African continent.

Joanna Coast's research interests lie in the theory underlying economic evaluation (including capability), developing broader measures of outcome for use in economic evaluation (including measures of capability, particularly the ICECAP suite of measures), health care decision making and the use of qualitative methods in health economics. She currently holds a Wellcome Investigator Award to develop a life-course approach to measuring capability for economic evaluation of health and social care interventions.

Sue Cleary is a Health Economist and Health Systems Researcher with over 15 years’ experience. She has held a number of teaching and research capacity development/leadership roles in the School of Public Health & Family Medicine. Over a 6-year period, Sue led an 8-country Health Economics capacity development programme that included a unique network of Health Economists (HEPNet) and the administration of 30 bursaries to African candidates on the Masters in Public Health specialising in Health Economics. She has published previously on the topic of the affordability of health care in South Africa.

William Hollingworth’s research has focussed on measuring cost-effectiveness of healthcare interventions in randomised controlled trials and using decision analysis models. He has particular interests in the economic evaluation of diagnostic tests and interventions for low back pain and sciatica, but he collaborates widely with colleagues with interests in other clinical topics including cancer care, public health prevention, mental health and child health. His methodological research interests centre on the use of variations in clinical practice as a method for commissioners and clinicians to identify and prioritise opportunities for disinvestment in healthcare.

John Ataguba is an economist. He is also a Commonwealth scholar and an elected member of the South African Young Academy of Science. He has taught topics in economics for over 10 years. His current research interests include poverty, inequality, equity in health and health care, social determinants of health, and health financing.

Start date:
The project is available for immediate start.

**Financial Details of the Cotutelle PhD Scholarship:**
This is a fully-funded PhD Scholarship which includes all tuition fees. When the student is physically present in Bristol, they will receive the standard UK stipend for PhD students, scaled to the amount of time spent in Bristol (currently £14.8 k per annum). Similarly, when the student is resident in Cape Town they will receive a PhD Fellowship award of ZAR 200 000 per year or part thereof (which includes the PhD tuition fee of between ZAR 20 – and ZAR 30 000). A sum of £3k per year is available to cover project expenses, directly incurred as a part of the research. Three return air flights are also included in the Scholarship package, and funds to attend one international conference during the PhD will be provided.

**Eligibility:**
This programme is open only to citizens of South Africa and other African countries that are included on the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) list.

Academically, candidates for the PhD may qualify for admission if they have:
- a Master’s degree
- an Honours degree, or a 4-year Bachelor’s degree, plus at least 1 year of registration for the Master’s degree
- a 3-year Bachelor’s degree plus at least 2 years of registration for a Master’s degree

You may also like to consult the admissions statement for the Population Health Sciences PhD programme in Bristol [http://www.bristol.ac.uk/study/postgraduate/2019/health-sciences/phd-population-health-sciences/](http://www.bristol.ac.uk/study/postgraduate/2019/health-sciences/phd-population-health-sciences/) which also contains information about the English Language requirements.

Please contact Joanna Coast ([jo.coast@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:jo.coast@bristol.ac.uk)) or Susan Cleary ([susan.cleary@uct.ac.za](mailto:susan.cleary@uct.ac.za)) if you are unsure about your eligibility.

**How to Apply:**
For this Cotutelle PhD Programme, interested students should apply via the Bristol application website. Please follow the instructions at [https://www.bristol.ac.uk/study/postgraduate/apply/](https://www.bristol.ac.uk/study/postgraduate/apply/)
This online system allows you to save your application as you go along. Please be sure to specify “The University of Bristol-University of Cape Town Cotutelle Programme” when answering the question about your source of funding.
Also please be aware that you can add transcripts or other requested documentation after you have submitted your application.
Please let the Project Supervisors know that you are applying to the programme.

**Closing Date:**
Please complete the online application by Wednesday 15th May, at 5 pm (GMT)
Shortlisted candidates will be interviewed by the supervisory team.

**Contact for the Cotutelle Programme:**
For academic enquiries about this project, please contact Joanna Coast ([jo.coast@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:jo.coast@bristol.ac.uk)) or Susan Cleary ([susan.cleary@uct.ac.za](mailto:susan.cleary@uct.ac.za)).
For all other enquiries and questions about the Cotutelle PhD Programme, please contact Dr. Terry McMaster, Director of the Bristol Doctoral College, University of Bristol, or Prof. Peter Meissner, Director of Postgraduate Studies, University of Cape Town.

References


