BOARD OF POSTGRADUATE STUDIES

The Board of Postgraduate Studies (BPS) plays a critical role in the realization of the university's mandate through the provision of a supportive ecosystem that promotes postgraduate students' research excellence. ***My Research Granary*101** is a series of simplified write-ups by Dr. Jackson Ndolo, that seek to build research capacity among KCA university postgraduate students, however, the information may be of help to any researcher who wishes to improve their academic writing skills with ease. This is in with the mantra, "BPS where students' research matters". This write-up provides information on; **Commercialising Postgraduate Research Output (From Research, Marketplace and Impact).**

Commercialising Postgraduate Research Output – Research to Market

1.0 Introduction

In today's knowledge-driven economy, research is increasingly recognised not merely as an academic exercise but as a critical driver of innovation, enterprise, and societal development. Commercialising research output involves transforming ideas, findings, and intellectual assets into products, services, or ventures that create value for society and the marketplace. For postgraduate scholars, particularly in Africa, this process provides a unique opportunity to bridge the gap between academic inquiry and practical application, creating impact in business, social sciences, and community development. Commercialisation allows researchers to see their work not only as a contribution to knowledge but also as a foundation for solutions that address real-world problems.

The journey from research to commercialisation is guided by key principles that determine its success. First, relevance is essential; the research must address a genuine problem or unmet need, ensuring that the innovation has practical utility. Protectability is also crucial, as intellectual property such as patents, copyrights, trademarks, or proprietary methodologies must be secured to preserve value and facilitate collaboration with industry or investors. Scalability is another consideration; an innovation must be capable of being delivered or implemented at a scale that justifies the time, effort, and investment involved. Collaboration across academia, industry, government, and communities helps bridge the “valley of death” between research and real-world adoption. Finally, impact orientation ensures that, beyond financial returns, the research contributes social, economic, or organisational benefits, which is particularly important for African contexts where addressing development challenges is paramount.

Research outputs can be commercialised in various ways, depending on their nature and intended impact. Technology transfer and licensing involve transferring an innovation to a business for commercial use, while spin-offs or start-ups allow researchers to create new enterprises around their findings. Partnerships with industry integrate research outcomes into existing operations, improving processes, organisational performance, or business models. Consultancy and professional services enable social science and business researchers to monetise their expertise through advisory, training, or policy work. Educational and knowledge products, such as textbooks, e-learning platforms, and professional courses, represent another avenue for commercialisation. In addition, social enterprises can leverage research to create sustainable, market-oriented solutions that generate social and economic value simultaneously.

The process of commercialising research is deliberate and multi-stage. It begins with identifying the commercial potential of the research by asking whether the findings solve a real problem, who the users or clients might be, and what unique value the output provides. Securing intellectual property rights is a critical next step, protecting innovations, methods, or frameworks before public disclosure. A thorough market assessment follows, considering potential clients, competitors, regulatory requirements, and market readiness. Based on these insights, researchers select the most appropriate pathway for commercialisation, whether it be licensing, spin-offs, consultancy, training products, or social enterprise initiatives. Prototyping and piloting help refine products, services, or frameworks based on feedback from actual users. The final stages involve launching the product or service, scaling operations, and measuring impact through uptake, performance, and social or economic outcomes. Integrating commercialisation efforts with institutional support structures such as technology transfer offices, entrepreneurship programmes, and revenue-sharing mechanisms further ensures sustainability.

The outputs of commercialised research are diverse, particularly for social sciences and business disciplines. Technological innovations may include software applications, digital platforms, or data analytics tools. Business and management research can produce leadership frameworks, supply chain dashboards, or performance assessment tools. Consultancy services emerge from organisational behaviour, public policy, or management research, offering advice, training, or advisory services to governments, NGOs, and private firms. Educational products, including professional development modules, e-learning platforms, and textbooks, translate research into scalable learning solutions. Social innovations, particularly from community development or social sciences research, can create toolkits, methodologies, or intervention models that address societal challenges while generating revenue or sustainability.

There are notable African examples demonstrating how postgraduate research can be successfully commercialised. At the University of Johannesburg in South Africa, a postgraduate study in information science explored digital engagement for alumni offices. This research led to a spin-off company, Gradnet Holdings, which developed alumni portals for multiple institutions, illustrating how social science research can be converted into commercial digital services. In the University of Cape Town's Biopharming Research Unit, postgraduate researchers contributed to plant-based vaccine production, which was eventually commercialised through a spin-off company, Cape Bio Pharms, showing the potential of research-intensive collaborations in biotechnology. In East Africa, postgraduate studies in plant breeding under the Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM) produced improved seed varieties that were adopted by farmers, highlighting how agricultural research can link to market impact.

Social sciences and business research in Africa present unique commercialisation opportunities. Research in leadership, organisational effectiveness, supply chain management, financial inclusion, procurement, and policy can be transformed into consultancy services, training programmes, digital tools, or social enterprises. For example, a thesis on "Green Procurement Practices and Supply Chain Performance" could evolve into a consultancy service offering audits, performance dashboards, and training to manufacturers across the continent. Similarly, a study on "Adaptive Leadership in Faith-Based Institutions" might result in a certified leadership training programme or a digital learning platform for educational institutions. Research on "Mobile Banking and Financial Inclusion of SMEs" could lead to fintech advisory services, mobile applications, or policy consultancy, translating findings into practical, marketable solutions.

The ultimate goal of research commercialisation is impact. Beyond financial returns, successful commercialisation strengthens institutions, fosters innovation ecosystems, creates jobs, and addresses societal challenges such as food security, healthcare, financial inclusion, and organisational effectiveness. For African postgraduate researchers, commercialisation provides a pathway to convert knowledge into value, bridging the gap between research and practical outcomes. By adopting an entrepreneurial mindset, leveraging institutional and industry support, protecting intellectual property, and designing products or services aligned with market and societal needs, researchers can ensure that their work transcends academic boundaries and becomes a catalyst for development, innovation, and sustainable impact.

In conclusion, commercialising research output is a dynamic, multi-stage process that integrates high-quality research, market strategies, and social and economic impact. For social sciences and business research in Africa, commercialisation enables postgraduate scholars to transform academic work into tangible solutions, ventures, or services that benefit society. By embracing the principles of relevance, protectability, scalability, collaboration, and impact, and by strategically navigating pathways such as spin-offs, consultancy, educational products, or social enterprises, African scholars can ensure that their research contributes meaningfully to enterprise, policy, and community development. Commercialisation is not merely an endpoint; it is a continuous cycle of knowledge creation, practical application, and sustained societal benefit.

Steps for Postgraduate Researchers to Commercialise Research

This worksheet guides researchers to think through commercialisation systematically:

1. Identify Potential Impact
   a) What real-world problem does your research address?
   b) Who benefits from your findings (clients, communities, businesses)?
2. Define the Commercial Output
   a) Is it a product, service, framework, or methodology?
   b) Can it be packaged into a consultancy, digital tool, training module, or social enterprise?
3. Protect Intellectual Property
   a) Have you explored patents, copyrights, trademarks, or proprietary rights?
   b) Are there institutional mechanisms to support IP protection?
4. Market and Stakeholder Analysis
   c) Who are your potential clients or users?
   d) What is the demand for your innovation?
   e) Who are the competitors and what are the regulatory requirements?

5. Choose a Commercialisation Pathway

   f) Licensing to existing businesses
   g) Spin-off or start-up creation
   h) Consultancy or professional services
   i) Training modules or e-learning platforms
   j) Social enterprise for community or social impact

6. Prototype or Pilot Your Innovation

   k) Can you create a minimum viable product, service, or framework?
   l) How will you test and refine it with real users?

7. Launch and Scale

   m) What are your marketing, distribution, and partnership strategies?
   n) How will you generate revenue and sustain operations?

8. Measure Impact

   a) How will you assess uptake, outcomes, and societal or business impact?
   b) How will you use feedback to improve or expand your offering?

9. Institutional Support & Networks

   c) Which university offices, incubators, innovation hubs, or industry partners can assist?
   d) Are there funding programmes, grants, or competitions to leverage?

10. Long-term Sustainability

   e) How will your commercialised research continue to generate value over time?
   f) Can it be scaled or adapted to other contexts or regions?

NOTE: ***My Research Granary 101/06/2025*** *will present Key Skills for Postgraduate Students to Draft a Research Concept, Seek Funding, Undertake the Research, Disseminate, and Commercialise.*

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