



UKPRP Community of Practice

**ENHANCING FUTURE TRADE AND
INVESTMENT AGREEMENTS TO
ADDRESS HEALTH INEQUALITIES IN
THE UK**

**A research and development
manifesto proposed by the UKPRP
PETRA Network**

2nd edition

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THE UKPRP CoP NETWORK DEVELOPMENT THEME

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SUMMARY

PETRA was established on 1 September 2019 as a three-year project, funded by the UK Prevention Research Partnership, to explore the potential for trade policies to improve human health and tackle non-communicable diseases. PETRA was tasked with producing a research and development manifesto that identified gaps in current evidence and prioritised future research questions.

To our knowledge, this manifesto is the first time that such an analysis of the future direction of research and development in UK trade and health has been attempted. PETRA sought input from stakeholders with expertise in policy, evidence and implementation across many disciplines, including economics, public health, political science, law, and environment. In the process, PETRA had to adapt its workplan to Covid-19 as well as tackle the additional challenges of siloed research that lacks both a common language and understanding of evidence, and a fast-moving, fluid policy arena.

This iteration of the manifesto has emerged through inputs to PETRA's evidence enquiry, including commissioned position papers, video presentations and webinars, as well as external resources such as the areas of research interest in trade, economic recovery, and health inequalities published by the Parliamentary Office for Science and Technology. PETRA's virtual Sandpit in June 2021 sifted and synthesised the evidence in rich and intensive discussions that resulted in a three-pronged manifesto:

1. Framing the interdependent, indivisible and interrelated nature of health and trade from a rights-based approach would achieve: i) policy coherence between trade, health and climate to tackle the root causes of NCDs, ii) alignment with current objectives in addressing inequalities through the levelling up agenda and support for the work of the new Office for Health Improvement and Disparities and iii) support the effective delivery of the UK's Obesity Strategy.
2. Looking at the policy levers to support trade negotiations and deliver co-benefits to both health and economy: i) using the Net Zero strategy and delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals to enable trade deals to support current government commitments to deliver on climate change, ii) adopting rigorous health impact assessments to trade deals to benefit the "levelling up" agenda.
3. Building the evidence base for policymakers and policy influencers through multidisciplinary research; using modelling, case studies, and quantitative analyses to determine the population impacts of issues such as digital trade, public acceptability of trade-offs, and trade disputes.

PETRA's Co-Investigators and Expert Advisory Group agreed the priorities in this manifesto as an indication of the range of issues that could be usefully pursued by researchers and supported by funding bodies rather than as an exhaustive list of research questions for PETRA to address. During its third year, PETRA will refine the manifesto with further sets of stakeholders - such as the UK's youth parliaments, the public through the University of Sussex Mass Observation Directives, and Parliamentarians - as well as selecting key topics from it to develop a potential future research brief for the Network.

All manifestos are living documents, designed to respond flexibly to ever-shifting policy circumstances. Accordingly, PETRA presents this manifesto identifying priorities for trade and health research over the next five to ten years, with the aim of drawing greater attention to the secretive, political nature of trade negotiations that are heavily weighted in favour of economic outcomes.

1. BACKGROUND

The PETRA Network is an interdisciplinary expert community, exploring how international trade can improve human health and prevent non-communicable diseases (NCDs). It was established on 1 September 2019 as a three-year project, funded by the UK Prevention Research Partnership. The Network is hosted by the University of Chester with Professor Paul Kingston, Co-Director of the Westminster Centre for Research on Ageing, Mental Health and Veterans, as PETRA's Principal Investigator. Eleven Co-Investigators from eight UK universities plus the University of Sydney comprise the nucleus of the Network. PETRA's day to day work is overseen by the Management Group and a part-time Network Coordinator. Peer review is provided by an international Expert Advisory Group that comprises academics, third sector bodies, policy organisations and a professional communications company. There are over 50 wider members of PETRA.

Covid-19 required PETRA to reshape the delivery of its workplan, particularly as policymakers have had far less capacity to engage than anticipated at the outset. Governance meetings have taken place online instead of face-to-face and an evidence enquiry, supported by commissioned position papers, replaced the planned evidence-gathering workshops. This culminated in a virtual, rather than the planned residential, Sandpit research prioritisation exercise in June 2021. Although it compromises on relationship-building, remote working has bridged time differences and geographic location very effectively. This has delivered wider input to the research identification and prioritisation work from disparate expertise than might otherwise have been achieved.

Important progress has been made, especially during the difficulties imposed by the pandemic. However, the immense scale of bringing together diverse disciplines to unpick the topic of trade and health cannot be under-estimated. Subject experts are siloed with little common understanding or vocabulary and minimal mechanisms for joint work.¹ To our knowledge, this manifesto is the first time that an analysis of the future direction of UK research and development in the field has been attempted.

As with all manifestos, PETRA's R&D manifesto is a living document that will evolve as PETRA brings together new partners and researchers and facilitates cooperation between them through events and identifying common challenges. It is a dynamic process that has to respond to a fast-moving policy environment. During its third year, therefore, PETRA will build on and refine this manifesto, engaging with presently under-represented disciplines and with policymakers, including Parliamentarians in both Westminster and the devolved nations, third sector advocacy bodies and the public, in particular with young people who will inherit the legacy from the trade deals currently being negotiated and signed.

1.1 About this research manifesto

PETRA was established to build interdisciplinary links and develop research capacity to investigate the relationships between trade and health in order to better inform policymakers on the potential for this field to tackle the root causes of NCDs. The aim is to become a Centre of Excellence and Action on trade-related matters that are, or have the potential to be, instrumental for the public's health and wellbeing. PETRA delivers this aim by:

¹ Melvin K (2021) *Challenges confronting PETRA*. Briefing paper. Chester: PETRA <https://cutt.ly/DRjRbFr>

1. Addressing NCD prevention at scale: linking interdisciplinary research across the disciplines of law, public health, economics, the environment and public policy to assess and quantify the broader social and environmental co-benefits of trade measures in NCD prevention.
2. Establishing research and development priorities in trade and health, learning from international experience in using trade and investment agreements (TIAs) to promote health.
3. Building interdisciplinary research capacity in trade and health, developing collaborations on trade and health between academic disciplines, third sector and government users and international expertise to break down existing silos of work and increase its impact.
4. Informing policy on the implications of trade for health, improving the potential for collaboration across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland by sharing perspectives, information needs, and innovations on trade and health policy.

Fundamentally trade negotiations are and are likely to remain, highly secretive. The research focus, therefore, is on how best to inform those involved, or those who can potentially influence, trade negotiations and as well as promoting research funding for multi-disciplinary, multi-sectoral collaborations to investigate the intended and unintended impacts on the public's health. PETRA developed this R&D manifesto through a process of consensus evaluation and expert judgement of evidence gaps. A wide variety of inputs were sought:

1. **An evidence enquiry 2020-21**: inviting submissions on trade implications of themes such as air pollution, Brexit, alcohol consumption, access to medicines, and health inequalities. Evidence included 13 written position papers and six video shorts.
2. **A systematic literature review** (in press): a two-part literature review with the first part comprising an update of the 2017 systematic review by Barlow et al², which focusses on the impacts of TIAs on NCD risk factors, and the second part evaluating the opportunities for protecting or enhancing policy space in TIAs.
3. **Webinars 2019-21**: five webinars were convened to look at trade and investment laws, discuss trade disputes, examine Technical Barriers to Trade, and explore post-Brexit governance in the UK.
4. **Virtual Sandpit & ideas lab in June 2021**: attended by 47 participants from across England, Wales and Scotland and representative of academic, non-government advocacy bodies, and policymakers.
5. **External evidence (outwith PETRA)**: during 2020-21, the [Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology](#) published areas of research interest on health inequalities, economic recovery post-Covid-19, and global trade which provided further input on policymakers' evidence needs. Alongside this, PETRA also considered significant policy statements such as the [G7 communiqué](#) in May 2021.

The final approach presented in Section 2 was agreed jointly by PETRA's Co-Investigators and Expert Advisory Group in October 2021. The proposed priorities will form the basis of PETRA's stakeholder engagement during its third year to test, verify and further refine the research themes and questions.

² Barlow, P et al (2017) The health impact of trade and investment agreements: a quantitative systematic review and network co-citation analysis. *Global Health* **13**:13 <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12992-017-0240-x>

1.2 Definitions:

- **Health** research covers interventions to tackle and prevent NCDs such as: front of pack labelling, food imports, agricultural and environmental protections and standards, tobacco and alcohol taxation, plain packaging, health impact assessments.
- **Trade** research covers the negotiation and implementation of free trade and investment agreements, mini-trade deals, bilateral agreements, multilateral agreements as well as tariffs, services, imports and exports, technical barriers to trade and phytosanitary agreements.

2. FUTURE RESEARCH

On the basis of input to date, PETRA's Co-Investigators and Expert Advisory Group propose a three-layered R&D manifesto:

1. Framing and analysing the 'interdependent, indivisible and interrelated' nature of health and trade.

2. The levers to support policy objectives.

3. Solutions: multidisciplinary modelling, case studies, and quantitative analyses/tools.

This layered approach to future R&D will support interdisciplinary, cross-sectoral research to explore the power and potential of the UK's new trade and investment agreements over the next ten years to improve and protect the public's health and wellbeing and help tackle the root causes of NCDs. The real challenge, however, will be for this research programme to engage with a political context that focuses on achieving economic outcomes through trade deals and trade negotiations which presently exclude health as a direct consideration.

The following areas were identified as priorities for investigation either as new research or where evidence may exist but has not been translated into action.

Notes:

- This manifesto should not be viewed as an exhaustive list of all potential research questions. Trade and health is an extremely broad field notable for having a wide spectrum of interests. The questions presented here emerged from cross-sectoral and interdisciplinary discussions as being valuable starting points acceptable to all represented disciplines rather than an absolute list of priorities.
- The research question numbers do not necessarily indicate priority at this stage.
- The manifesto will benefit from additional engagement with disciplines that, to date, have been under-represented in PETRA's discussions. These include agriculture and agronomy, ecology, information technology relating to digital marketing and ecommerce, as well as the behavioural and environmental sciences.

Research theme 1. Framing and analysing the 'interdependent, indivisible and interrelated' nature of health and trade

The development of this R&D manifesto has taken place in a highly political and rapidly changing policy arena. A complicating factor is that the health community is almost never party to trade negotiations

and is rarely in a position of influence. However, in May 2021 the G7³ affirmed a commitment “to advance key issues including trade and the environment, trade and health, and digital trade” and recognised the need for trade agreements to be “responsive to the needs of global citizens.” In order to achieve parity between the trade and health communities, PETRA, therefore, believes it is a priority to further explore how the public’s health could be sustainably embedded in TIAs, multi-level public interest governance, and scrutiny and dispute mechanisms for trade deals. As such, the first layer of the manifesto addresses questions around the intersection of trade and health agendas.

The G7 communiqué confirmed its obligations under international human rights law by which States commit to respect, to protect and to fulfil human rights. The upshot is that States cannot restrict the enjoyment of human rights but must protect individuals and groups against any abuses of human rights. Additionally, States are obliged to act to ensure continuing enjoyment of such rights. This includes the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. The “interdependent, indivisible and interrelated”⁴ nature of human rights also means that the right to health is a powerful way of protecting not just health but also rights around other determinants of health such as food, adequate housing and standards of living, and freedom from discrimination. Since the purpose of trade is to “boost economic well-being, and through that improve health,”⁵ PETRA concludes that trade is in itself consistent with advancing human rights. TIAs should provide the means by which such obligations to respect, protect and fulfil human rights can be promoted.

PETRA believes that applying this framework to TIAs will both support the G7 aims and offer added value to government departments in i) achieving policy coherence between the economy and health, ii) alignment with current objectives in addressing inequalities through the levelling up agenda and the work of national public health agencies and offices across the UK, iii) supporting effective delivery of NCD prevention strategies in obesity, tobacco, harmful alcohol consumption and air pollution and iv) enabling the UK to argue for the better and fairer trading rules at the WTO that will strengthen environmental, animal welfare, food safety, human rights and labour standards.⁶

Research questions (NB: the numbering does not necessarily indicate prioritisation)

- RQ1 What is the role of multi-level governance structures and how will these impact on national policy decisions on both trade and health?
- RQ2 How could a rights-based approach to TIAs deliver ethical and sustainable policy impacts in health and the environment at the same time as improving economic outcomes?
- RQ3: How will the UK Internal Market Act (which affects trade between UK nations and between them and the world) affect devolved powers over health policy post-Brexit?

³ *G7 Trade Ministers' Communiqué* (2021) London: Department for International Trade (28 May) <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/g7-trade-ministers-communique>

⁴ *The right to health* (2008) Factsheet 31. Geneva: Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights <https://www.ohchr.org/documents/publications/factsheet31.pdf>

⁵ Winters LA (2020) *Can trade agreements really be bad for your health?* Chester: PETRA: trade and health network <https://cutt.ly/WRxgSmv>

⁶ *Government response to the Trade and Agriculture Commission report* (2021) London: Department for International Trade <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/government-response-to-the-final-trade-and-agriculture-commission-report>

Research theme 2. The levers to support policy objectives

The second layer of the manifesto identifies key ways in which TIAs could provide additional support for government policy objectives and to protect and improve the public's health through the prevention of NCDs. Two levers stand out as being of particular value⁷:

The first key lever lies in the use of health impact assessments (HIAs). Evidence points to the successful use of HIAs to support “the early identification of emerging impacts of events such as Brexit, Covid-19 and climate change.”⁸ The adoption of HIAs as a screening tool to check trade deals for their health and environmental impacts could be a key contributor to both NCD prevention and the “levelling up” agenda since they can highlight effects on differing population groups and communities.⁹ HIAs can also contribute to the support of cost-benefit analyses and other forms of economic assessment.

The second lever is provided by climate change policies such as the Net-Zero strategy¹⁰. This R&D manifesto is published against the backdrop of COP26 that takes place in November 2021. COP26 aims to “accelerate action” on both the Paris Agreement and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.¹¹ The fact that COP26 takes place in Scotland provides the UK with a golden opportunity to take the unique step of enhancing its trade deals so that they are designed to deliver on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Regional trade agreements already include measures to protect the environment, and evidence shows that the rise in environmental technologies is contributing to economic growth. However, evidence highlights the need for further work to prevent pollution-generating activities from migrating to countries with less stringent environmental controls.¹²

Research questions:

- RQ4 What lessons can be learned from assessing the population health impact of the UK's previous TIAs?
- RQ5 How can HIAs be used to identify a model TIA that is based on maximising health outcomes?
- RQ6 How could the sustainable development goals be used to create a model of a sustainable and ethical trade and investment agreement for the UK?

Research theme 3. Some solutions: modelling, case studies and multidisciplinary quantitative analyses and tools

The third layer of the manifesto focuses on identifying ways in which to further the evidence base on the impacts and effects of TIAs and take due account of the public's health.¹³ PETRA believes that there are some issues of particular importance that are currently under-explored. High on the list is the need to explore the role of the State and to investigate the sharing of powers and responsibilities between different state actors, including the devolved administrations. The impact these have on regulation and

⁷ Evans G, Hopkins H (2021) *PETRA Virtual Sandpit and ideas laboratory: a report on key points of the Sandpit*. London: Hopkins Van Mil

⁸ Green L et al (2021) *Rising to the triple challenge of Brexit, COVID-19 and climate change for health, well-being and equity in Wales*. Cardiff: Public Health Wales WHO Collaborating Centre on Investment for Health and Wellbeing. <https://phwwhocc.co.uk/whiasu/rising-to-the-triple-challenge-of-brexit-covid-19-and-climate-change/>

⁹ 7

¹⁰ Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (2021) *Net Zero strategy: build back greener* (2021) London: HM Government <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/net-zero-strategy>

¹¹ *UK Climate Change Conference UK 2021* [website] <https://ukcop26.org/> as at 5 October 2021

¹² Vardoulakis S (2020) *Impact of trade, and trade and investment agreements, on air pollution and public health*. London: PETRA <https://cutt.ly/0EZukX/>

¹³ 7

the regulatory environment in the context of trade policies requires significant investigation. PETRA proposes three routes to developing the tools and evidence that it considers could be of additional help to policymakers: modelling, case studies, and quantitative analyses.

1. Modelling

Modelling techniques such as Computable General Equilibrium (CGE) are commonly used by trade economists to quantify the impact of policies on the economy. They have been used in recent years to also assess and value the impact of, and on, health issues, including NCDs, and of environmental impacts. PETRA considers CGE modelling as a vital tool for the comprehensive evaluation of the health, economic and environmental impacts of TIAs.

Research questions:

- RQ7 How far could rollover and future TIAs deliver on government priorities such as the National Food Strategy and Net Zero agenda?
- RQ8 What are the health and economic consequences of current, rollover, and future TIAs, especially in relation to sanitary and phytosanitary chapters?

2. Case studies

PETRA recommends initiating a programme of case studies as a “useful, practical, and rapid”¹⁴ mechanism to monitor and evaluate the impacts of current and future TIAs.

Research questions:

- RQ9 How can the UK’s front-of-pack nutrition labelling be regulated without challenge under the Technical Barriers to Trade?
- RQ10 How do differing local, regional, national and global state actors impact and influence marketing of unhealthy foods, alcohol and gambling?
- RQ11 How can TIAs improve areas of deprivation as experienced by the UK’s coastal and fishing communities?
- RQ12 How will TIAs contribute to achieving WHO air quality standards and how can the UK’s industries support these aims?
- RQ13 How does the burden of proof for public health measures impact on the right to regulate and how can future TIAs protect national policy space?

3. Multidisciplinary analysis and tools

The intersection of trade and health demands a collaborative, interdisciplinary, cross-sectoral effort to understand how principles and evidence being used by different communities can be brought together and co-ordinated to improve health outcomes for NCDs¹⁵. Enabling policymakers and advocacy organisations to participate in research programmes can improve the potential for evidence to be turned into policy and practice. Taking a multidisciplinary approach to quantitative analyses broadens understanding of the wider impacts of TIAs and enriches the development of the evidence base. Examples which appear to lend themselves to this sort of approach include:

¹⁴ 7

¹⁵ 7

Research questions

- RQ14 What are the impacts on, and implications for, population health of the shift to digital commerce and services during Covid-19?
- RQ15 What trade-offs are acceptable to the general public in negotiating TIAs that may affect food standards and access to unhealthy commodities?
- RQ16 How do intellectual property rights impact population health, using the example of vaccine equity?

3. STAKEHOLDERS

3.1 Current stakeholders

PETRA has sought to reach a comprehensive range of organisations and individual experts since its formation. The aim has been to help develop and expand the Network, achieve alignment on PETRA's objectives and goals, and assist with addressing potential issues or conflicts that arise from bringing together disciplines that have not collaborated previously. Figure 1 illustrates the ways in which stakeholders contribute to PETRA's outputs. These stakeholders have expertise in policy, evidence and implementation of action across the many disciplines represented in PETRA, including: economics, public health, law, public policy, political science, and environment. Support from such stakeholders is fundamental to securing the Network's sustainability beyond 2022.

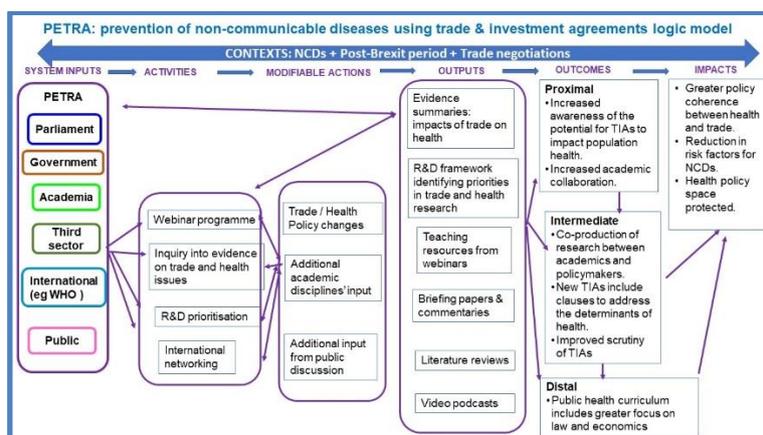


Figure 1: PETRA's stakeholders and the route to achieving policy coherence between trade and health

3.2 Potential stakeholders

During its next twelve months, PETRA will focus on achieving a shift in engagement with those stakeholders currently in the *High influence, low interest* group. This group comprises:

- **Policymakers** such as the Department for International Trade and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy to initiate a conversation on the potential co-benefits to the economy of including health in trade deals.
- **Parliament:** to encourage greater scrutiny of the health aspects of trade deals and to propose an inquiry.
- **Media:** to help engage the interest of, and input from, the public.
- **Academic publishers:** to promote, and find outlets for, interdisciplinary work that does not fit within traditional academic boundaries.

- **Funding bodies:** to secure further grants to enable PETRA's work to continue.

This shift will be secured through greater use of personal contacts with the UK's Parliamentarians and policymakers as well as concerted efforts to engage journalists with the aim of encouraging public interest in trade and health issues.

PETRA will also focus on engaging with new stakeholders to secure additional funding, generate greater understanding of the potential for trade and investment agreements to address NCDs, and promote the value of greater interdisciplinary research. Among the new groups that PETRA plans to reach are the elected youth parliaments in Scotland, Wales, NI, and the UK who represent young people at both national and regional levels, a cross-section of the public through the University of Sussex Mass Observation Directives, and additional stakeholders in the fields of agriculture and agronomy, ecology, information technology relating to digital marketing and ecommerce, as well as the behavioural and environmental sciences.

4. NEXT STEPS

PETRA will focus its final year of funding on i) testing, prioritising and refining this proposed R&D manifesto into a published document for consideration by researchers and policy influencers in the field of health and trade and funding bodies as an additional route to addressing the causes of NCDs and ii) achieving sustainability for the Network by securing its future as an academic Centre of Excellence and Action in Trade and Health through:

1. Evidence development & implementation. Key milestones will be:

- Securing funding for a proposed trade and health checklist, following the need reiterated at the Sandpit for a screening tool for trade and investment agreements. A stage one proposal for project funding to pilot this intervention is in development.
- Further briefing and position papers, including a commentary on the Sandpit workshops to reflect on the challenges and progress towards achieving a new R&D agenda, and exploring the potential for co-production of an evidence briefing on trade and health with the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities.
- Build further links with the SPECTRUM Consortium to pursue joint interests in addressing the commercial determinants of health.
- The selection of two or three priority topics from this manifesto for further exploration by PETRA.

2. Governance. Key milestones will be:

- Producing a fully costed business plan for PETRA to become an academic centre.
- Recruiting a trade policy specialist to PETRA's Management Team, to complement the trade expertise provided to PETRA by its Co-Investigators, Expert Advisory Group, and associated contributors.

3. Stakeholder engagement. Key milestones will be:

- A further set of webinars to explore tools available to policymakers that could be used to create greater coherence between trade and health policies.

- Testing this R&D framework with the youth parliaments across the UK. Ensuring that young people's views are taken into consideration is particularly important as trade deals currently being signed are likely to be in force for decades.
- Seeking views of the public through the Mass Observation directives.
- Stimulating Parliamentary interest in trade and health issues by submitting evidence to the International Trade Select Committee and pursuing the possibility of a trade and health inquiry.
- Building on and developing further collaboration with policy influencers such as the Trade Justice Movement, ASH, the Institute for Alcohol Studies and SUSTAIN to achieve further impact and implementation of policy actions.
- Continuing developing international links: continue collaboration with EUPHA Law and Public Health section on joint webinars, further the initial meetings with the University of Tampere, Finland to collaborate on a project investigating commercial determinants of health and TIAs; initiate contact with the Trade & Health Forum in the American Public Health Association.

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<https://petranetwork.org>

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