

**POLICY ON COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH AND STRATEGIC RESEARCH INITIATIVES
(RESEARCH POLICY III)
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A: POLICY STATEMENT

1. Purpose statement

The purpose of this sub-policy on research is to provide guidelines for internal and external collaboration amongst individual researchers, and to encourage the development of Strategic Research Initiatives which will be of benefit to the participating institutions and the individual researchers.

This sub-policy recognises the importance of inter-institutional collaboration, and confirms the University's commitment to build such collaboration on various levels. This sub-policy establishes the core principles that will guide the University in the development of these collaborations.

2. Introduction and background

The University encourages individual research and individual researchers, but at the same time recognises the advantages that may be gained from research collaboration and the formation of Strategic Research Initiatives with other institutions. While these collaborations cannot be "forced", they should be encouraged by the establishment of principles to guide their identification and establishment, and by their formalisation and periodic review, once established.

This sub-policy identifies existing and potential areas in which collaboration may be established, and outlines mechanisms that may be employed to promote such collaborations, such as Strategic Research Initiatives, visiting researchers and the appointment of research fellows.

This sub-policy makes reference to:

- Research Policy II – Developing, Retaining and Rewarding Researchers
- Research Policy IV – Institutes, Centres and Units
- University of KwaZulu-Natal: Appointment Categories, December 2004

3. Definition of terms

"Institutional Signature Projects" and 'Strategic Research Initiatives' (SRIs) shall refer to research areas identified by the University as significant, and in which the University wishes to develop expertise and resources.

"Research Focus Areas" shall refer to research areas of specialisation at the University, in which the University has established expertise and resources.

4. Scope

Applies to all staff, students and affiliates of the University engaged in research at or in collaboration with the University.

This Research Policy covers:

- Research collaboration;
- The establishment and monitoring of Strategic Research Initiatives;
- Visiting researchers; and
- Research Fellowships.

The policy relates to the collaborative research networks within the University, the encouragement of collaboration between University staff and researchers at other institutions, both in South Africa and internationally, and formal inter-institutional collaboration. The advent of the knowledge era with its diffusion of knowledge processes out of universities emphasises the need for strategic partnerships and collaborations.

5. The Policy

5.1. Principles Underlying the Policy

5.1.1. The University recognises the value of individual research, and fosters and nurtures the research activities of individual researchers.

5.1.2. The University encourages networking and the exchange of expertise between its researchers as a part of increasing both the quality and the quantity of its outputs. Such collaboration may be interdisciplinary and represent Mode 2 knowledge production, but could also arise within a single discipline.

5.1.3. In this context, where research groupings have an ongoing strength and exceed a critical size, the University encourages the forming of Institutes, Centres and Units.¹

5.1.4. There are broad areas of research in which the University has considerable research strengths, and thus a competitive advantage. It seeks to exploit these strengths strategically, by encouraging and fostering collaboration through targeted additional funding in the form of Strategic Research Initiatives. This should strengthen the research, underpin the branding of the University as a centre of excellence, enable the leveraging of funds from major national and international agencies, and at the same time benefit the researchers – the whole being greater than the sum of its parts.

5.1.5. The University recognises that there is great value for researchers in collaborating with fellow researchers, both from other South African institutions and from elsewhere in the world, and has in place mechanisms to foster such collaboration. Interaction with experts outside the University can only be beneficial to our research.

¹ Details of policy on these structures are set out in the document entitled “Research Policy IV: Institutes, Centres and Units”.

5.1.6. In view of the avowed intention of the University to be recognised as the premier University of African scholarship, a particular focus will be the interaction with scholars from other African institutions.

5.1.7. Where there is sufficient common interest between the University and another institution, formal inter-institutional research ties may be established to facilitate collaboration between individuals from the two institutions, to the benefit of both institutions.

5.1.8. The University will participate actively in the initiatives for internationalisation of education, such as World Ranking Systems, to enhance opportunities for collaboration and increase the impact of its research outputs.

5.2. Fostering Networking and Collaboration within the University

It is clear that, ultimately, research collaboration depends more on “interpersonal chemistry” than on anything else: collaboration cannot be forced. However, it is equally self-evident that, given the relatively small number of researchers in the region, the limited funding available for research infrastructure such as laboratory equipment, computing facilities and journal collections strengthens the argument for collaborative approaches. The need for the creation of a critical mass of researchers to allow South African science to engage more competitively with that of the major international centres of research is another strong argument that if researchers “put their heads together” and interact with one another, this can only benefit them.

5.2.1. Collaboration may grow (within traditional disciplines and/or across them) if incentives are provided, and the University will provide additional funding to encourage such interactions. Where the interaction is sufficiently strong, it may lead to the forming of an Institute, Centre or Unit.

5.2.2. Where funding is provided to enhance collaboration, there is a need for a limited amount of monitoring – a brief annual report-back should set out the effects of the additional funding in enhancing collaboration, and research productivity in quantity and/or quality. The expectation would be that the additional funding would enable the research network to provide additional “value” over and above the normal research work of the individuals forming the collective.

5.3. Institutes, Centres and Units

5.3.1. The University has put in place mechanisms to give formal recognition to research networks that have grown beyond a critical size. This recognition comes in the form of structures such as Research Institutes, Centres and Units. Details of the processes involved in setting up and maintaining these structures are set up in the policy document entitled “Research Policy IV: Research Institutes, Centres and Units.”

5.3.2. The terminology “Research Group” may be used by a collective without formal University recognition.

5.4. Strategic Research Initiatives (SRIs)

SRIs are, in a sense, the top end of the more general process of networking and collaboration that the University encourages.

5.4.1. Classes of SRIs

5.4.1.1 An obvious class of initiatives would be those that are centred on one or more of the big questions and problems facing South African society or on unique geographic or natural resources arising from the University’s location, and in which we have research strength. Economic development and methods of dealing with the HIV/AIDS pandemic are obvious potential topics. Such initiatives could be in the form of Research Focus Areas.

5.4.1.2. SRIs need not be restricted to needs-driven projects. A second class of such research projects could be derived from the University’s role as a generator of knowledge, and be based on a field of fundamental research in which we have outstanding intellectual and other resources, and can thus make a major impact. Again, this can be seen as the University having the ability to help answer one of the “big questions,” in this case possibly an intellectual or cultural question.

5.4.1.3. From time to time the University should undertake a foresight exercise, so as to identify major areas that are or will in the near future impact significantly on South African society. The University, led by the Executive, may then take the strategic decision to develop research expertise from scratch in such an area. Clearly, in the absence of existing research strengths, this is a high-risk strategy, as there would be the need, for a start, to build up the necessary intellectual capital (“buying in” a number of outstanding research leaders), together with the research infrastructure, and that would be expensive. Thus, such an initiative should be embarked upon only with the greatest circumspection. Such areas could be identified out of the Research Focus Areas and targeted as Institutional Signature Projects.

5.4.2. Existing SRIs

5.4.2.1. Research Focus Areas include (i) Agriculture and Food Security; (ii) Biotechnology; (iii) Energy and Technology for Sustainable Development; (iv) Gender, Race and Identity Studies; (v) HIV/AIDS, TB and Health Promotion; (vi) Indigenous African Knowledge Systems; (vii) Maritime Studies; (viii) Social, Development and Economic Studies; and (ix) Water, Environment and Biodiversity.

5.4.2.2. Institutional Signature Projects

There are currently three Institutional Signature Projects: (i) Gender, Race and Identity; (ii) Indigenous African Knowledge Systems; and (iii) Maritime studies.

5.5. Visiting Researchers – Building External Collaboration

5.5.1. Research at universities is enhanced by interaction with leading researchers from other universities, research centres, industry, professional and scientific societies, and particular interest groups within the broader community. This collaboration needs to take place at both the national and international levels.

5.5.1.1. We need to foster a culture within the broader University community that visiting research positions should be treated as an integral part of the academic structure.

5.5.1.2. University systems and administrative procedures should be designed to be welcoming to visitors and to facilitate their easy and effective integration at UKZN.

5.5.1.3. The duties of honorary appointments include research collaboration with academic staff, postgraduate supervision and possibly some specialised advanced teaching.

5.6. Research Fellowships and Scholars

Research fellowships can play an important role in developing collaboration. The University at present has Postdoctoral scholars. It is proposed that this Programme be grown, and an additional class of Research Fellowships, "Senior Visiting Research Fellowships", be instituted.

5.6.1. Postdoctoral Scholars

It is generally accepted that in the great research universities of the world, postdoctoral research scholars play a key role. Not only is much of the research work that is inspired by the senior researchers actually carried out by the "postdocs", but they also bring fresh, young ideas into a research programme, and play a pivotal role in mentoring doctoral and Masters students.

5.6.1.1. Postdoctoral scholars may also play a valuable role in developing capacity and in attracting outstanding young researchers, who may subsequently join the staff of the University.

5.6.1.2. The University will constantly attempt to increase the scale of its postdoctoral scholars programme.

5.6.2. Senior Visiting Research Fellowships

To enable the University community to be kept fully aware of new research initiatives and changes in research priorities at the international level, it is proposed that outstanding scholars, working at the cutting-edge, be attracted to visit the University through the creation of Senior Visiting Research Fellowships.

5.6.2.1. The purpose of these Fellowships would be to stimulate research into new directions and expose staff to new research thrusts.

5.7. Inter-institutional Collaboration

5.7.1. Where it is clear that there is sufficient common research interest between the University and another institution, it is appropriate that inter-institutional links be cemented through the signing of a Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) between the two institutions.

5.7.1.1. Such inter-institutional agreements can facilitate collaboration between individual researchers from the two institutions, and should lead to research benefits to both partners.

5.7.1.2. Honorary and visiting appointments may play an enabling role in such linkages. Initial research links involving individuals can naturally lead to a widening of the institutional link, acting as a vehicle to initiate further research programmes, and hence to signing of a MoA.

5.7.2. Inter-institutional research links may be forged with a wide variety of universities and other organisations.

5.7.2.1. Opportunities exist for strengthening research links with organisations and units both in the province of KwaZulu-Natal, and more broadly in South Africa.

5.7.2.2 We need to take advantage of research opportunities arising from our geographical location, and a conscious effort made to strengthen our links within the South African Development Community (SADC) region and other countries in Africa.

5.7.2.3 Where we can establish a strong link with one or more of the great research universities of the world, this would be of great advantage to our academic staff and students, and to the reputation of the University.

B. PROCEDURES AND GUIDELINES FOR IMPLEMENTATION

1. Initiation of SRIs

1.1. Normally, the process for setting up SRIs would be that the DVC (Research) in consultation with the Research Strategy Group would identify areas of research strength which could be linked to a common theme, and bring together the relevant researchers.

1.2. Existing research Institutes, Centres, Units or Groups would, for instance, naturally form nodes that could act as starting points, but they would be augmented by individual researchers wherever appropriate.

1.3. The SRIs could include a limited number of researchers who are not on the University staff, for example, people working for local research-oriented organisations, but the intellectual leadership and the bulk of the activity should reside within the University.

1.4. The SRIs will usually be of a trans- or multi-disciplinary nature, and normally be cross-School and cross-campus.

1.5. It may be appropriate to allow for an initial seed operation over 6-12 months to set up the full network.

1.6. Key factors in setting up an SRI would be the quality of the leader (Director), a research plan and a business (financial) plan, that would set out clearly the intended research activity, the scholarly and community benefits that would be generated by the SRI, and the added value that would be derived from the recognition and funding associated with an SRI, as well as information on likely funding sources.

1.7. Once it is clear that there is a significant body of researchers who will willingly collaborate as members of an SRI, a formal process of accreditation recommended by the Research Strategy Group to College Academic Affairs Boards, Senate and Council should follow.

2. Management of SRIs

2.1. An SRI would normally be designated as such for an initial period of 3 years, and the approved University funding for it guaranteed for that period, subject to adequate progress being shown.

2.2. The funding from the University should be provided specifically to enhance the internal collaboration and/or to act as seed funding for generating funds from external sources for the SRI as a whole.

2.3. There should be clear terms of reference, with tangible goals and timelines being set, in terms of which progress may be monitored, and the performance of the SRI evaluated.

2.4. The Research Office should not micro-manage the SRIs, but should let them operate with minimum bureaucratic intervention.

2.5. As a minimum of monitoring that is required, the SRI will be expected to provide an annual report that sets out its scholarly, academic and community activities, as well as making clear what the effect of the SRI status and funding have been.

2.6. Where there is concern that the SRI is not fulfilling its aims and objectives, steps may have to be taken to ensure improvement.

2.7. Towards the end of the 3-year accreditation period, the SRI should be evaluated by the DVC (Research) in consultation with the Research Strategy Group to determine whether it has performed suitably with respect to its terms of reference. If so, the SRI status may be renewed for a further 3 years.

2.8. In regard to its internal structure, the SRI should have a simple but effective management system, led by a Director and steering committee. Management emphasis, with a light touch, should be on fostering high quality research and human resource development through networking, within a framework of transparent budget distribution.

2.9. The DVC (Research) in consultation with the Research Strategy Group should set up a process of evaluating the performance of the SRIs, with a view to extending their status or discontinuing them. In addition, in evaluating their proposed new research and business plans, cognisance should be taken of the changed situation within which the University operates, as well as the changes in internal structures of our institution.

3. Visiting Researchers – Building External Collaboration

3.1. The University has approved a document² which sets out the mechanisms of appointment of, and the associated privileges accorded to, a number of different categories of visitors, including Honorary, Adjunct and Visiting staff.

3.2. Where Honorary staff publish in the name of the University, it is recognised that the University may claim subsidy on these publications.

3.2.1. Honorary staff shall be accorded the same research funding privileges as are regular University staff members.³ Therefore Honorary staff shall be given a staff number and have access to the IRMA system.

3.2.2. Research funds derived from this source will be held in trust for the Honorary staff member by, and administered by, the Head of School.

² University of KwaZulu-Natal Appointment Categories, approved by Senate in November 2004 and Council in December 2004.

³ Details of research funding awarded to staff for research productivity are found in the policy document entitled Research Policy II: Developing, Retaining and Rewarding Researchers.

3.2.3. Such funds may be used solely to enhance the collaboration between the Honorary appointee and the University, for instance to fund the appointee's travel and subsistence or other research expenses arising from the collaboration.

3.3. Intellectual property rights arising from research publications and patents associated with these positions shall be vested in the University, unless specific alternative arrangements are agreed to by the University.

3.4. Colleges and the Research Office need to maintain a list of all honorary and visiting research appointments.

3.4.1. It is important that regular contact be maintained with appointees and they should receive copies of university publications and research news. That will enable them to be more deeply involved with the University, and increased communication will help to strengthen links.

3.4.2. A conscious attempt should be made to incorporate visiting researchers into the mainstream academic activities. For optimum results they should be located close to regular academic staff. Heads of Schools are encouraged to allocate dedicated office space in Schools and research laboratories to honorary staff to facilitate interaction with academic staff and students.

3.4.3. It would be in the interest of the academic endeavour if appropriate residential accommodation.

4. Research Fellowships

4.1. Postdoctoral Scholars

4.1.1. Although, for technical (tax) reasons, they are formally registered as "postdoctoral students" at South African universities, it is vital that administrative processes be modified so that they are afforded access to libraries, access to computer facilities, access to buildings and parking, distribution of University communications, etc. in a manner similar to that provided to University staff.

4.1.2. The recruiting, administration and selection of postdoctoral scholars should be managed by the Colleges.

4.2. Senior Visiting Research Fellowships

4.2.1. It is proposed that four Fellowships be established, one for each College, if funding is available.

4.2.2. The duration of the Fellowship should be three months, and Fellows should be housed in a particular School to maximise interaction with staff and students.

4.2.3. The Fellowships should be advertised internally and nominations should be made by School members to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research). The Research Office should manage the selection and appointment of Senior Visiting Research Fellows.

4.2.4. The value of the award should be sufficient to cover travel and living expenses at a level appropriate to the seniority of the appointee⁴.

⁴ An amount of R60 000 may be appropriate for a three-month visit.

5. Inter-institutional Collaboration

5.1. There is a need for a clear policy governing the structure and management of MoAs.

5.1.1. The underlying philosophy of the MoAs should be to actively benefit and facilitate research.

5.1.2. The high reputation of UKZN must be maintained and we should strive to build links with only the best universities, research laboratories and institutions.

5.1.3. All existing MoAs should be reviewed, and where appropriate, renewed.

5.1.4. All future agreements should be for a fixed period, for example, five years.

5.1.5. This process should be managed by the Research Office.