



UNIVERSITY OF THE
WITWATERSRAND,
JOHANNESBURG

POLICY DOCUMENT

RESEARCH ENTITIES

WITS POLICY

Version Control

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1. PREAMBLE

Research in many knowledge fields is enhanced by a collaborative team approach. Multi-disciplinary teams are particularly valuable for tackling important and challenging research questions. It is therefore beneficial in a research intensive university to have a means to establish and operate, so called, Research Entities; especially when they are self-funded thus adding to the university's capacity to do research and supervise postgraduate (PG) students.

The vexing question is how to do this without disrupting academic Schools that are pursuing the core university mandate of creating knowledge (researching), sharing knowledge (teaching and learning) and using knowledge (practicing academic citizenship).

The purpose of this policy is to address this question in such a way that Schools in the research intensive university see the value of creating Research Entities that enhance their capacity and ability to perform high quality research and PG student supervision while conducting their core mandate. Figure 1 illustrates the desired constructive and additive relationship between a School and its Research Entity, working synergistically to deliver on the core university mandate within the context of a research intensive university.

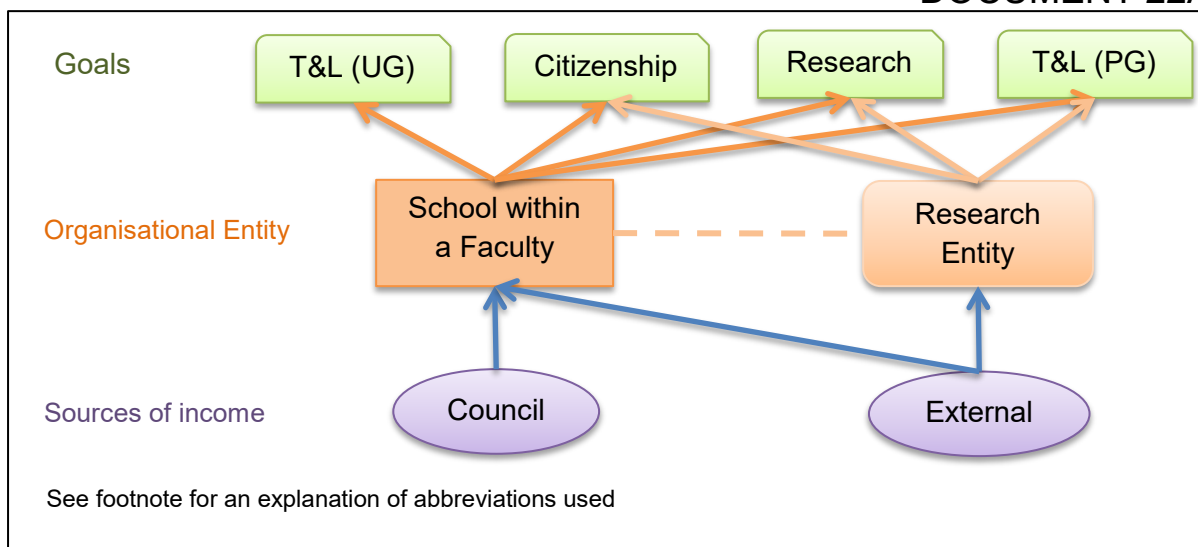


Figure 1: An illustration of how a Research Entity can support the goals of a School¹

2. CONTEXT

The University of the Witwatersrand (Wits, or the University) is a research intensive university that aspires to increase its research intensity while retaining local relevance and international competitiveness. To this end, the University strives to create an environment that supports high quality research and a rewarding PG student experience.

This ideal environment consists of many interacting elements. Those pertinent to this policy are associated with the provision of a framework which encourages, facilitates and regulates the creation, operation and eventual closure of collaborative Research Entities. As mentioned in the Preamble, this collaborative approach to research, especially multi-disciplinary research, is favoured because it often stimulates high quality research and can lead to significant advances in the University's research efforts, while supporting the strategic aspirations of Schools and Faculties. Moreover, working in teams can contribute to the mentorship of early career academics and contribute to a stimulating PG experience. Finally, Research Entities also provide 'leverage' through their branding and track record of excellence in securing resources from sources external to the University to fund the direct and indirect costs of research and PG student bursaries.

3. PURPOSE OF THE POLICY

This policy is primarily designed to encourage and facilitate the creation, operation and evaluation of collaborative Research Entities that benefit from the intellectual stimulation generated by working in teams, especially multi-disciplinary teams. More specifically the purpose of this policy is to:

¹ T&L = teaching and learning, UG = undergraduate, PG T&L = supervision

- Ensure that Schools and Faculties use these Research Entities to achieve their strategic goals ultimately through the expansion of capacity funded by external sources;
- Describe the six different types of Research Entities;
- Describe the relationships of these types of Research Entities with their host Schools/Faculties/University Research Office and their governing bodies, namely the Faculty Research Committees (FRCs) and or the University Research Committee (URC);
- Establish the governance and management processes of some types of Research Entities. This policy should be read in conjunction with the **Standing Order on the Creation of University Entities** (hereafter the Standing Order) which provides the governance and management detail for other types of University Entities;
- Facilitate the enhancement of the Wits brand by contributing to the delivery of the University strategy and through fund-raising from external sources.

Finally, it is expected that research teams wishing to gain formal recognition and related support will seek this approval under this policy.

4. SCOPE

This policy limits itself to matters related to organisational structures, referred to as Research Entities, which have a primary focus on **research and the related PG supervision**. They are created from within and across knowledge disciplines, located normally in Schools and or Faculties, from all parts of the University and in collaboration with other external institutions.

This policy does not impact on the research efforts of individual researchers, but in so doing should not be construed as a sign of neglect of these valuable individual efforts.

5. TYPES OF RESEARCH ENTITIES

All Research Entities are formed around common research themes providing the basis for collaboration. However, to cater for various disciplines, development trajectories and contextual situations this policy provides for six different types of Research Entity.

5.1. Types of Research Entities

The types of Research Entities are defined formally in the Research Entities Procedure (see *Appendix 1: Definitions* on page 11), however they are introduced here via a descriptive analogy. The analogy uses different types of musical ensembles to illustrate the research teams, where the musicians are analogous to academic researchers. Thus Research Entities range in size from a:

- i. Program; a 'pop-up' band consisting of several musicians that is transient in nature;
- ii. Unit; a 'one-person' band focused around one strong musician (not to be confused with a medical research unit);
- iii. Group; a 'rock 'n roll' group with a number of musicians playing together;

- iv. Centre of Excellence (CoE); a 'rock 'n roll' group with usually one major external sponsor (medical research units are often associated with this type);
- v. Institute; an orchestra with its own concert hall which becomes part of the 'DNA' of the University and normally has multiple external funders;

The sixth type of Research Entity is envisaged to be slightly different in the sense that it is established to provide research support for the University. Although its focus is not entirely on its own research they are not excused from doing some research and PG student supervision. This type of Entity is called a Central Research Facility and, to keep with the musical analogy, it is similar to a music library that provides a service (e.g., providing musical scores) to the other ensembles and individual musicians. An existing example of a Central Research Facility is Wits Animal Research Unit.

5.2. A Hierarchy within the Different Types of Research Entities

The five practicing Research Entities are conceptualized in hierarchical terms meaning that, in the ideal, an Entity would begin as a Research Programme and mature through the stages of Unit, Group, CoE to an Institute. The expected longevity of each type of Entity, largely determined by the relevance of the research questions, the productivity of the Entity and the availability of funding, typically expands as one moves up the hierarchy from Programme to Institute.

Exceptions to this hierarchical developmental journey can be approved by the URC given a logical and strategically aligned motivation. The Central Research Facility is always excluded from the hierarchy as it is created by the URC to provide a necessary central research service.

5.3. Classification of Research Entities

The five practicing types of Research Entity are conveniently classified into two categories, namely self-funded Entities and those that are regarded as gatherings of existing academic and associated professional and administrative (PA) staff within Schools, or between Schools.

CoEs and Institutes are regarded as self-funded Entities and, as the name implies, are usually not funded by the University. They raise all their financial support from external sources and this offers them an amount of operational autonomy without moving out of the co-operative spirit described in the Preamble or the policy framework of the University. For example, using these external resources they are empowered to hire additional research and PA staff on fixed term contracts over and above those staff that may be seconded to the Entity from Schools or Faculties.

Programmes, Units and Groups are regarded as gatherings of existing School staff that benefit from collaboration by clustering around a common research theme. Although their research costs are mainly met by external sources they consist of academics paid for by the University through one or more Schools and Faculties. As such they operate entirely within the School structure. However, their formal recognition promotes high quality research and PG student supervision beyond what the School would be able to achieve without the Entity.

5.4. Approval of Research Entity Status

Granting of the status of a Research Entity is a formal process. The authorities empowered to grant this status are the:

- Relevant FRC in the case of Programmes;
- Relevant FRC and URC in the case of the Units and Groups;
- Relevant FRC, URC, Senior Executive Team (SET), Senate and Council in the case of CoEs and Institutes, that is, the self-funded Entities. The Standing Order describes this approval process;
- URC in the case of Central Research Facility.

5.5. Summary of Different Types of Research Entities

By way of summary, the Research Entity landscape consists of five² practicing types of Research Entities as illustrated in Figure 2 below. The relative size of the Research Entities and the expected longevity are shown along the ordinate (or vertical) axis. Entities above the central horizontal line are approved by the FRCs and URC (and below by the appropriate FRC). The dichotomies between the two categories of Entity (i.e., groupings and self-funded Entities that hire their own staff) are shown along the abscissa (or horizontal) axis. Arrows indicate the ideal developmental trajectory of Research Entities.

² The Central Research Facility is excluded from the summary as they are a construct of the University aimed at providing support for the academic researchers of the University

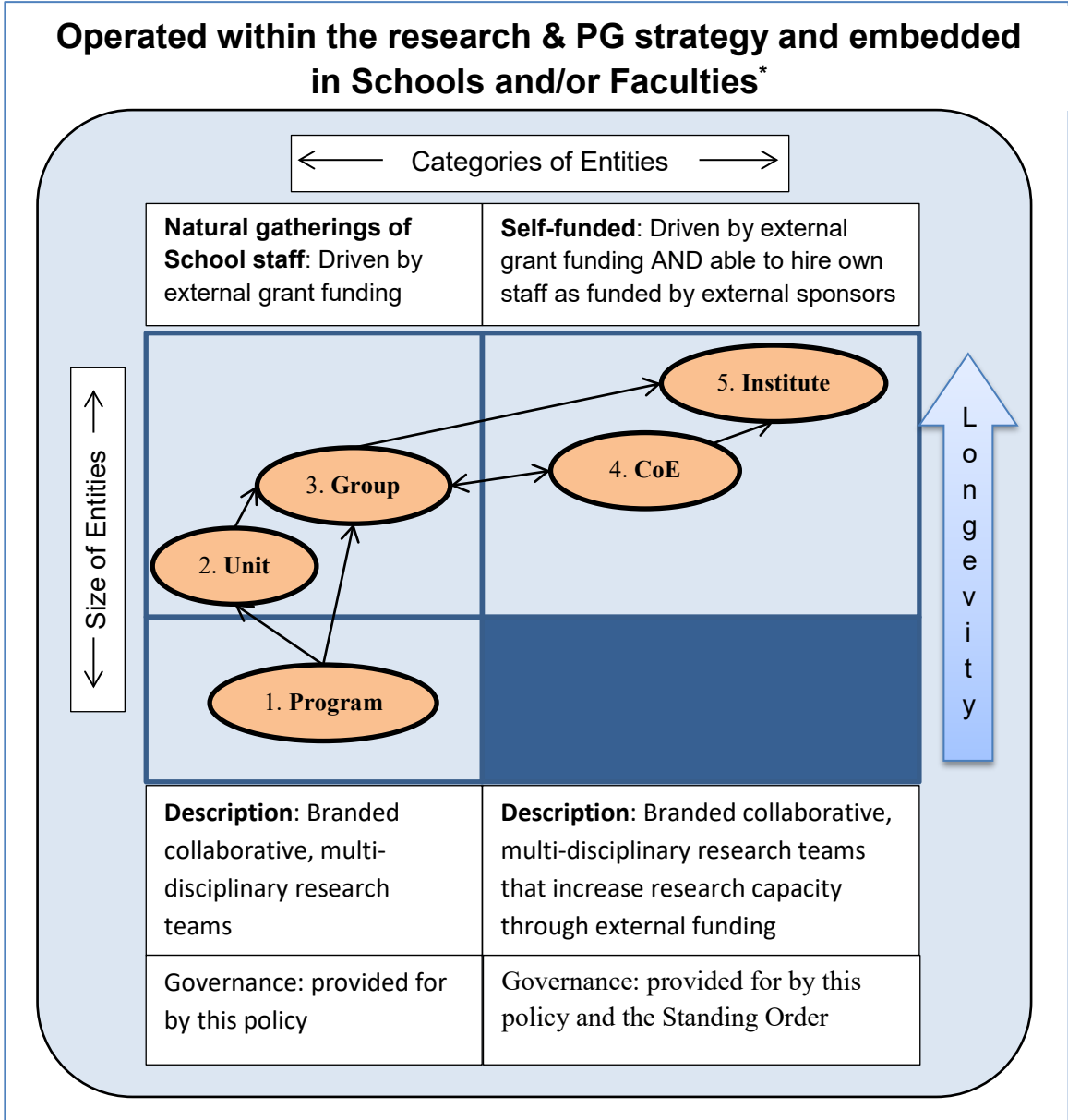


Figure 2: Summary of the Research Entity landscape

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