Framework Research Priority Areas Policy

1 May 2017
Revised 2 January 2018
1. Introduction

This Framework was enacted in accordance with Article 30 of the Faculty Regulations, which stipulates that the dean must implement regulations for the designation, organisation and assessment of research priority areas.

Previous versions of this Framework were discussed in meetings between the Department Chairs and the Research Council. The Dean enacted the Framework on 1 March 2017. Partly on the basis of evaluation of the research priority areas by the Executive Board and further consideration by the groups concerned, the Framework in revised form was re-enacted on January 12 2018.

The Framework discusses the objectives of research priority areas policy (2), the designation of faculty-wide research priority areas (3), the allocation of additional resources (4) and membership in research priority area groups.

Further evaluation criteria will be developed during the term of validity of the current research priority areas (2017-2022).

2. Goals of research priority areas policy

Research priority areas were introduced within the UvA in 2008: “The research priority areas are focused on promoting excellence in research, and designed to enable the UvA to play a leading role in the international arena by excelling in a number of specific fields of scientific research.”

In more recent documents, the Executive Board has described research priority areas as “field[s] of research in which the UvA, compared to other institutions worldwide, or at least in Europe, has a strong starting point for maintaining excellent research standards in the medium term, e. g. by attracting external research resources and research talent; not only doctoral candidates, but also established researchers.”¹ In this context, the Board refers to the concept of “competitive advantage” as a characteristic of the research priority areas.² This is not meant to imply that research conducted outside the confines of the research priority areas is per se of any lesser quality; that research will only be in a somewhat less favourable position to attract external resources and talent.³

In line with UvA policy, the aim of the Amsterdam Law School’s research priority policy is to reinforce the “competitive position” of research priority areas, giving the faculty in those areas, compared to other institutions in Europe and beyond, a strong starting point for maintaining excellence in research in the medium term. At a minimum, the following four parameters must reflect this level of excellence:

- Research output
- Societal impact
- Ability to attract external research resources
- Ability to attract research talent - PhDs, post-docs and renowned researchers.

¹ Executive Board, letter dated 16 March 2016.
² Ibid.
³ Ibid.
3. **Criteria for the designation of research priority groups**

The criteria for identification of research priority areas within the Amsterdam Law School are directly derived from the criteria set out above. Research groups may be singled out on the basis of proven accomplishments and prospects for future achievement, relatively speaking, in terms of scientific output, societal impact, ability to generate external funding, and ability to attract and retain research talent.

The various criteria are not given equal weight; the quality of scientific output is by far the most important criterion. A group that has high scores for one or more of the other criteria will not be able to qualify as a research priority group unless its scholarly output is of sufficient quality. Nor will a research group that produces excellent articles but does not score well on the other criteria be particularly well-suited for research priority area status.

In addition to the criteria derived from the objectives of research priority area policy, the size (or ‘mass’) of a research priority group will also be taken into account. Research priority policy is based on the assumption and belief that the research results of groups of a certain magnitude and corresponding scholarly vitality will, in general, be better.

However, the Amsterdam Law School also recognises that, in certain cases, even smaller groups can score particularly well on the aforementioned criteria, and entertains the possibility that groups which are not granted research priority area status can nonetheless be put on a similar footing for the purpose of allocation of additional resources.

The criteria mentioned above will play a prominent role in the designation of research priority policy groups, the allocation of resources to them, and their assessment.

4. **Procedure for the designation of research priority area groups**

In 2010, three research priority area groups were designated at the Amsterdam Law School for a term of 5 years (Information Law, International Rule of Law, and European Public and Private Law). At the time, it was anticipated that the initial term could be renewed for an additional 5-year term, after which a thorough evaluation should take place to determine whether an extension was appropriate, or if other new groups worthy of research priority area status had emerged in the meantime. The change in deanship that occurred in 2016 led to some delay in granting the initial extension. The groups were eventually granted an extension until 31 December 2021 per 1 January 2017.

In 2020, an application procedure will be introduced allowing new groups to apply for research priority area status. The terms of the new procedure will be established by 2019 at the latest.

If, in the meantime, new groups should emerge whose excellence in terms of the aforementioned criteria warrants it, they may be deemed equivalent to research priority area status groups for the purpose of the allocation of additional resources.

5. **Additional resources for research priority area groups**

Additional direct funding/first flow of funds resources will be allocated to research priority area groups within the scope of research priority area policy in order to enable them to fulfil the four criteria set out in point 2. Without the extra resources, it would not be realistic to expect the research groups to maintain
and further develop their ‘competitive advantage’.

The allocation of additional resources can be broken down into two components, however, subject to the availability of sufficient resources in the faculty budget.

First, research priority area groups and equivalent groups are given resources enabling them to allocate additional research hours (10% on average) to participating researchers compared to researchers without research priority area status. In concrete terms, researchers will be able to devote 40% of their time to research.

Second, the funding of research priority area groups will be allocated as a lump sum, with the exact amount dependent on the resources allocated to the faculty. Research leaders can make use of the budget as they see fit to enhance the research group’s output in terms of the four dimensions of the objectives of research priority area policy as laid down in the Framework Research Priority Areas Policy: scholarly output, societal impact, procurement of external research resources, and recruitment and retention of research talent.

Research priority area status (or equivalent status) does not necessarily imply that all groups will be given equal resources. This depends on the size of the group and its performance in terms of output, societal impact, degree of success in attracting indirect/second and third flow funding, and its ability to recruit and retain research talent.

The allocation of additional resources goes hand in hand with agreements on performance prognoses based on the aforementioned criteria; an annual progress report will be expected.

The research leader of each research priority area group is individually responsible for the proper budgeting of additional resources allocated to the respective centres.

6. Membership in research priority area groups

In principle, research leader(s) decide whether an individual researcher should be admitted to the research priority area group(s). It is not compatible with the nature of successful research groups for research leaders to be ‘coerced’ into accepting certain researchers.

Partly in view of the potential consequences of (non-)membership for the allocation of research hours, it is desirable, however, that great care be taken during the procedure for admission/continuation of membership. This should in any event entail that:

- Research will be assessed on the basis of criteria that are recognised as international benchmarks for research in the field of law concerned. It should be noted that a good research group can consist of researchers who each play a different role, serve a different function, and that it is not particularly necessary for each individual participant to fulfil each of the various criteria. Whether differentiation is desirable in a given case is a matter for the research leader to decide.
- The researchers concerned shall be made aware of the evaluation criteria so that they can carry out their research in conformity with them.
- Performance interviews will be held with researchers participating in research priority area groups to allow them to make timely adjustments to their research;
- Decisions entailing a rejection of membership in a group shall be duly substantiated;
Decisions on the allocation or reduction of research hours require coordination between research leaders and department chairs. Because the department chair has a mandate in personnel matters, he must be kept apprised of any (proposed) decisions, which can after all lead to the employee concerned being assigned to perform other tasks (e.g. more teaching or administrative duties instead of research, or vice versa). In any event, the department chair will need this information to be able to conduct a substantive annual interview.