

Constitution of Research Centres

Research Centres / Centres of Excellence¹ may exist within and/or between schools, institutes and Colleges. They need not simply be sub-divisions of these larger structures. Centres create an identity and, where appropriate, a shared environment for specialist thematic, normally multi-disciplinary research and bring together academic staff and postgraduate students working on common interests. They provide a mechanism for the University to develop an active research programme in a new theme², or establish a presence in an existing area³.

The Centre Director will be formally appointed to plan, deliver and report on an agreed programme of research.

1. Purpose

- a. Centres will conduct thematic, normally multidisciplinary research addressing strategic research questions.
- b. The mission of a Centre⁴ will be to develop a competitive portfolio of research and establish an international reputation for leadership in the chosen theme. Leadership will be evidenced, for example, by the volume of high-quality publications the Centre produces, a growing volume of income generated from external sources, its output of trained, employable people at Doctoral and Postdoctoral level, the esteem of its academic staff and the impact of its outputs on academic and non-academic stakeholders.

2. Scope and Scale

- a. Centres may cross School, Institute and/or College boundaries. They may also form partnerships with external organizations, in which case specially negotiated constitutional arrangements may apply. In all cases, Centres will have a designated lead / home School or Institute.
- b. Centres create an identity and, where appropriate, a shared environment for specialist thematic, normally multi-disciplinary, research bringing together academic staff and postgraduate students working together on common interests.
- c. A Centre will not be established if its anticipated lifetime is less than 5 years. However, a Centre which is not delivering its mission may be closed prematurely (see Review).
- d. The minimum academic population of a Centre is not prescribed but must be sufficient to provide coverage of the disciplines necessary to address its theme and capacity to deliver its aims and objectives.

¹ This constitution covers start-ups and established centres e.g. Centre for Crime & Justice Research, CDMR, Wellcome Centre for Molecular Parasitology.

² Examples might include Solar Fuels, Asylum & Migration

³ For example, renewable energy

⁴ Softer and more developmental than the mission of an Institute, but the aim remains to achieve a reputation for leadership in the field

3. Approval Process

- a. Proposals to form Centres must be discussed and agreed with relevant Head(s) of College (or College Office on behalf of HoC(s)). Applications are then submitted to R&I by the Head(s) of College (or College Office on behalf of HoC(s)).
- b. The application will set out: the rationale for the Centre, its aims and objectives, proposed activities, core membership, performance measures, likely investment requirements and evidence of support from the academic community in the form, for example, of prior cluster or network activity. It should set the Centre in the context of the University's strategic plan.
- c. Applications will be triaged by the Office of the VP Research and a recommendation on whether to support the application will be sent electronically to RPSC for its approval. If further discussion is necessary, the application will be discussed at the next RPSC meeting.
- d. Where the HoC(s), the VPs for Research, or RPSC raise concerns about a Centre application, the application will be sent to SMG for approval.
- e. A list of newly approved Centres will be sent to SMG by R&I, for notification.

4. Governance

- a. Each Centre will be led by a Director, normally appointed competitively from amongst the existing staff complement of the University and, in the case of externally funded Centres, in consultation with the funding agency.
- b. The Director will normally hold office for a period of 5 years (renewable, normally for 5 years).
- c. The Director will continue to be line managed by his/her Head of School or Research Institute Director but will report to the relevant Dean(s) for Research for matters relating to the Centre as part of the annual review.
- d. The Director will coordinate the work of the Centre, deliver its strategic plan and grow its business.
- e. The Centre will maintain a 5-year business plan for research, teaching and innovation, refreshed annually with the Head of School / Research Institute Director alongside the Dean(s) for Research and Head(s) of College(s). Where the Centre is core-funded by an external agency, the plan will be consistent with remits set by that agency.
- f. Centre Directors may be appointed to relevant Research Institute Management Committee(s) and College Research & Knowledge Transfer Committee(s)⁵ at the discretion of the Head of College.

5. Operation

- a. Centres, in liaison with the home / lead School or Research Institute, will maintain (i.e. regularly update) a website to promote their research to external and internal stakeholders and liaise with Corporate Communications to publicise their achievements to the media.

⁵ RPSC agreed that it was desirable to keep representation at a relatively high level of aggregation –at College level unless the Centre is subordinate to an Institute or Institutes in which case Institute management committee is appropriate.

Research & Innovation Services

- b. Centres will plan and deliver seminars and workshops to develop their research interests and engage with other researchers.
- c. Centres will be expected to attract leading researchers to work at the University for extended periods, enhancing the University's reputation amongst the international academic community.
- d. Centres will participate in activities intended to enhance the reputation and business of the Schools / Research Institutes to which they belong, including promotion and recruitment.
- e. Academic staff associated with a Centre as core or affiliates will contribute to undergraduate and postgraduate teaching as directed by Head(s) of School. Limitations on the teaching activities of staff imposed by or agreed with external funding agencies must be respected.
- f. The duties of a Centre Director and the research activities of core and affiliate members of staff will be taken into account in College workload models.
- g. All areas covered by this section should be addressed and refreshed as appropriate within a Centre's business plan.

6. Membership

- a. Academic staff may be identified as 'core' to the Centre, if their research interests fully align with the Centre's research aims and objectives.
- b. Academic staff may be identified as 'affiliated' or 'associate' members if their research interests span more than one entity.
- c. Each Centre must have a group of core academic staff fully committed to delivering its objectives.
- d. The numbers of core versus affiliated staff required in order to form a Centre may vary and must be justified and approved by College management(s) on a case-by-case basis.
- e. Core and affiliated staff will continue to be line-managed by their Heads of School or Institute Director.

7. Finance

- a. Where appropriate, the Director will control a budget, devolved from the College(s) and/or partner Organisations, covering costs associated with running the Centre and any other investment agreed by the College Management Group(s).
- b. The composition of any devolved budget will depend on the proposed activities of the Centre and will be agreed with Head(s) of College at startup.
- c. The Director will be provided with tools to monitor and manage the finances of the Centre.
- d. Centres must be financially sustainable and will be expected to provide a return on any investment made by the University through College budgets. Appropriate targets will be set by Head(s) of College as part of the business planning process. Partnership funding requirements of external agencies will be taken into account.

8. Review

- a. Centres will be identified as either 'active' or 'under review', depending on whether the relevant College(s) have approved the Centre at its most recent annual review. Centres identified as 'under review' will be assessed by the relevant College(s) against the definition of Research Centres and to ensure they meet the following criteria:
 - The Centre is of the appropriate scale, as clearly demonstrated through its levels of activity.
 - The Centre enhances the reputation of the University and warrants the high profile given to formally approved Centres; these will be made available on a highly visible, externally facing webpage.
 - The Centre's own webpages are fully developed and up to date.

Once the relevant College(s) are satisfied the Centre meets the appropriate definition and criteria, the Centre's status will be amended to 'active'.

- b. Centres under five years old and identified as 'active' will be reviewed annually by Colleges to assess past performance and the future strategy of the Centre; following this, assessment will occur every five years. Reports will be collated by R&I for review by the Colleges, who will then inform RPSC of the outcome of these reviews. For Centres funded by external agencies, such reviewing might be based on regular external reviews organized by those agencies.
- c. The review will assess performance of the Centre against its stated mission, evidenced by such indicators as the volume and quality of research outputs, numbers of PG students and post-doctoral researchers trained, the impact of the Centre's work on users, income generation and financial sustainability.
- d. Continuation of Centre status will depend on the outcome of the review. The relevant College(s), in discussion with the Research Planning and Strategy Committee (RPSC) and the Senior Management Group (SMG), will have the power to recommend closure of the Centre, reconfiguration or continuation for a further period.
- e. Where it is determined that a Centre should close, a maximum wind-down period of one year will be applied during which the redistribution of resources will be agreed.
- f. R&I will report regularly to RPSC on the status of 'active' and 'under review' Centres.