

USC University Research Centres and Research Institutes - Procedures

1. Purpose of procedures

1.1 These procedures provide guidance to staff on the establishment, operation and disestablishment of USC University Research Centres ('Centres') and USC University Research Institutes ('Institutes') that are within the scope of the USC University Research Centres and Research Institutes – Operational Policy. More detailed guidance may be provided by the Office of Research via guidelines, forms and templates.

2. Scope and application

2.1 These procedures applies to all staff, higher degree by research (HDR) candidates and members of university decision-making or advisory bodies.

2.2 These procedures applies only to Centres and Institutes that have been established under the USC University Research Centres and Research Institutes – Operational Policy.

2.3 These procedures do not extend to School-based research centres, units or groups that may be established to foster emerging research strengths and to meet strategic goals of a School or Schools. Such units or groups must be approved, funded and managed by the relevant Area Heads and must not use the terms 'centre' or 'institute' in their name unless prescribed by an alternative authority such as an external funding body, or as a consequence of a strategic initiative of the University and approved by the Vice-Chancellor and President.

3. Definitions

Please refer to the University's glossary of terms for policies and procedures. Terms and definitions identified below are specific to this policy and are critical to its effectiveness:

USC University Research Centre is an established and focused cohort of researchers recognised as having a significant national impact and international relevance. University Research Centres have a prime focus to conduct research of strategic importance to the University in terms of national/international standing and peer esteem, commercial research and research training, as well as engage in consulting and extension activities.

USC University Research Institute is a large research concentration of excellence established through formal agreement(s) with other external organisations or entities, and may have additional governance requirements and operational characteristics associated with the external partners. This large body of researchers is funded predominantly by significant external funding.

4. Baseline research performance criteria

4.1 The University expects Centres and Institutes to demonstrate an ability to meet the baseline research performance criteria (in both size and research capacity) together with an ability to develop a comprehensive, cogent and demonstrably achievable long-term research plan as set out in any related guidelines.

4.2 The criteria are subject to change at the discretion of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation) in response to changes in the strategic direction of the institution and available funding, and may involve renegotiation of forward plans for existing Centres and Institutes, as per the usual review cycle and operational planning.

4.3 Demonstrated ability to meet the baseline criteria is a necessary, but not sufficient condition for designation as a Centre or Institute. Alignment with the University's research priorities and/or strengths must also be demonstrated in one or more of the following ways:

(a) the majority of the group's publications need to be of high quality;

APPROVAL AUTHORITY

Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation)

RESPONSIBLE EXECUTIVE MEMBER

Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation)

DESIGNATED OFFICER

Director, Office of Research

FIRST APPROVED

1 March 2012

LAST AMENDED

16 November 2021

REVIEW DATE

31 October 2024

STATUS

Active

(b) the group's research focus is aligned with an FoR in which the University achieved a rating of 3 in the most recent ERA evaluation, but significant improvements in performance (especially in relation to publication numbers and citation counts) can be demonstrated since that ERA census period;

(c) the group's research focus is aligned to a research priority in the University's strategic plan, academic plan or any other equivalent university-level strategic document;

(d) the group's research can make a demonstrable and significant contribution to the University's aspirations in relation to international rankings; and

(e) the Vice-Chancellor and President or the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation) has identified the discipline as a current priority for further development.

4.4 The Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation) may exempt an existing or potential Centre or Institute from the need to meet any of these baseline performance criteria in exceptional circumstances (for example but not limited to where disciplinary norms differ from the approach or values listed).

4.5 Collective performance for ongoing assessment of established Centres and Institutes will be measured against key performance indicators as approved and published on MyUSC, as well as satisfactory progression against the approved plan, for each Centre or Institute.

4.6 Directors of existing Centres and Institutes may negotiate with the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation) a transition period for any change in status.

4.7 In all cases the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation) can use discretion regarding the performance eligibility of a Centre or Institute where this provides strategic benefits for the University.

5. Application for designation as a USC University Research Centre or USC University Research Institute

5.1 Expressions of interest should be submitted to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation)

5.2 Groups applying for designation and funding are expected to submit a comprehensive research plan for the first three-year life cycle of the Centre or Institute, as well as a detailed operational plan for the first year of operation, giving greater detail on activities and expected budget allocations.

5.3 Applications will be assessed by two international leaders in the cognate discipline of the Centre/Institute, in conjunction with a panel co-chaired by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation) and Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic). The panel may also include the Director, Office of Research along with co-opted members where it is felt that additional expertise is required.

6. Administration

6.1 Each Centre/Institute has one Director who will report to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation).

6.2 Other Centre/Institute Staff funded by normal University funding will report to a relevant Head of School.

6.3 Centre/Institute HDR students will be enrolled in and receive administrative support through a relevant School.

7. Research leadership team

7.1 Centre and Institute Directors will be supported by a leadership team identified as part of the application process. The role of the research leadership team is to assist the Director in:

(a) managing the Centre or Institute's day-to-day functioning and administration;

(b) facilitating coordination between areas involved in the Centre or Institute's activities;

(c) administering available funds; and

(d) preparing the annual report and documents required for reviews.

8. Advisory board

8.1 Centres and Institutes must establish an advisory board with external representation and an independent chairperson to support the research leadership team.

8.2 As part of the annual operational planning process, a Centre or Institute will receive its first year's funding in advance from the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation).

8.3 The Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research and Innovation) will approve ongoing payments upon review of satisfactory annual reports that demonstrate achievement against agreed performance criteria.

8.4 The quantum of funding received in each year may vary depending on relative research performance and overall available budget, and Centre or Institute Directors will be advised in a timely manner to allow for planning for the year ahead.

9. USC University Research Centre and USC University Research Institute membership

9.1 Core members

9.1.1 Core members will normally:

(a) be staff holding continuing or fixed-term appointments, who can commit a minimum of 20 percent of their time available for allocation to research; and

(b) exceed the definition of research active as stated in the Research Centres and Research Institutes Guidelines.

9.1.2 Core members may only maintain core membership in one Centre or Institute; however, they may be associate members of more than one Centre or Institute.

9.2 Associate members

9.2.1 Associate membership includes HDR candidates and adjunct appointments, as well as members of academic staff who do not meet the core membership requirements.

9.2.2 Associate members can be members of more than one Centre or Institute.

9.2.3 HDR candidates will automatically be allocated associate membership of the Centre or Institute in which their principal supervisor is a core member.

10. Reviews and reporting

10.1 Formalised review cycles for Centres and Institutes provide the opportunity to consider the return on the University's investment, which is broader than just financial considerations and may consider publications, reputation and relationship building, contributions to international rankings aspirations, and any other relevant factors. Reviews will be undertaken in line with the University's Quality Framework, following a transparent and consultative process similar to formal reviews of schools and organisational units.

10.2 The third yearly review will determine if the centre or institute should be funded for a further three-year cycle.

10.3 The Office of Research provides timelines for the annual review cycle and templates for reporting requirements. Failure to adequately address review and reporting requirements may result in an unsatisfactory review finding.

11. Third and final year reviews

11.1 In the latter half of the third year of funding, after the resignation of a Centre or Institute Director, or at the discretion of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation), each Centre and Institute will be reviewed to determine if they will receive further support.

11.2 A final review will be conducted in the latter half of the final year of the Centre or Institute base funding agreement.

11.3 The third yearly report should be accompanied by a new research plan setting out the goals, performance targets, activities and broad budgetary needs for the next three-year cycle.

11.4 The purpose of these reviews is to determine whether each Centre or Institute:

(a) is effectively and efficiently pursuing the original functions and targets, and that those functions and targets continue to be relevant;

(b) has demonstrated a case for its continuation;

(c) has achieved the planned targets for the period of review;

(d) has strategic and operational planning in place for the ensuing period, including succession planning;

(e) continues to have strategic relevance;

(f) has academic and financial support that remains sufficiently strong to justify its continuation; and

(g) has a case for a change in status, including strategies for achieving financial independence and any revised performance indicators and performance targets (progression is not mandatory).

11.5 Preparation of the review documentation is the responsibility of the Director and research leadership team in consultation with members.

12. Disestablishment

12.1 Voluntary disestablishment may occur at any time. The Centre or Institute Director should discuss the reasons for disestablishment with the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation), including any potential alternatives.

12.2 The Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation) may disestablish a Centre or Institute following a review.

12.3 A review panel may recommend the disestablishment of a Centre or Institute for reasons such as:

- (a) its strategic purpose has been fulfilled, or it no longer aligns to the strategic goals of the University;
- (b) it has experienced a significant change in direction;
- (c) it has failed to achieve a significant proportion of its key performance indicators and targets, and insufficient evidence of strategies to lift the performance to a satisfactory level has been provided;
- (d) there is a lack of an agreement between the University and the Centre or Institute regarding staffing, financial and/or resource arrangements for the ensuing three years; or
- (e) it has failed to meet any requirements under the terms of this procedures and linked policy as requested by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation).

12.4 Disestablishment may occur following either two successive unsatisfactory annual reviews, or an unsatisfactory three-year review, where the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation) has determined that there is little likelihood of resolution of the identified problems.

12.5 All Centres or Institutes are required to articulate arrangements for disestablishment in their initial business plans. These arrangements must address governance, management, research project completion, student completion, financial management and budget provisions.

12.6 After a formal decision to disestablish, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation) will work with the Centre or Institute Director to manage residual staff, assets or commitments within the associated academic areas. A similar approach may be employed to manage an amalgamation of two Centres or Institutes.

END

RELATED DOCUMENTS

- USC University Research Centres and Research Institutes - Operational Policy

LINKED DOCUMENTS

- USC University Research Centres and Research Institutes - Operational Policy

SUPERSEDED DOCUMENTS

- Research Concentrations - Academic Policy