



# Procedure for the Establishment and Review of Designated Research Centres in TU Dublin

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## 1. Document Control Summary

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## 2. Introduction / Context

Research and Innovation are central to the vision for TU Dublin, by which we pursue excellence in the conduct of our research and innovation activity and seek to disseminate our outputs widely, both via scholarly discourse and direct application in real-world settings. Our work is underpinned by fundamental / theoretical concepts that can translate into novel technologies, practices, and policies for the benefit of learning, society, business, and industry. Prior to designation as a technological university, there was a wealth of research activity in thematic clusters taking place in Research Institutes, Centres and Groups within the constituent institutes, across the creative arts, sciences, engineering, business, and technology arena, in order to focus on areas that have benefited business and society.

Therefore, despite being a young university, we have a community of distinguished researchers and innovators with a track record of generating scientific discoveries, developing technological advances, playing active roles in informing policy nationally and international, and contributing to the cultural and creative life of Ireland and global societal challenges.

The global landscape has changed since the establishment of TU Dublin. We have a new organisational design and a strategic plan that puts people, planet, and partnership at its centre, and have redefined our research priorities against the backdrop of the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which succinctly capture the breath and interconnectedness of all the challenges the world currently faces.

The recently approved Research and Innovation Strategy 2023-2028 sets out ambitious goals for the next 5 years so that we can continue to expand our contribution to knowledge and enhance TU Dublin's role as Ireland's global R&I gateway of knowledge and technology. In that Strategy we have set out a series of research priorities to coalesce our efforts in a transdisciplinary manner and amplify the excellence and impact of our research and innovation activity. These priorities are:

- Culture, Innovation and Inclusivity in a Changing Society.
- Health and Wellbeing for a Resilient Society.
- Materials and Devices for Sustainable Transformation.
- Sustainable Food and Environmental Protection.
- Transformative Digital Solutions.

Ireland's Research and Innovation strategy envisages the remit of a technological university as being a catalyst for R&I through driving collaboration. We have a long history of partnerships with public, private and third level sector organisations for research and learning, and much of that has been facilitated and led by the research centres and groups established prior to the new university structures.

Research centres enable effective interaction between researchers in academia, business, communities, industry, and other organisations to enhance real-world problem solving, and knowledge creation, dissemination, and more rapid impact of research activities.

TU Dublin now seeks to scale up its research capabilities, aligned to its 5 distinctive research priorities, in line with its strategic vision and pedigree, through the

establishment of designated Research Centres against the backdrop of its new organisational structure and changing external landscape. Such Centres will provide clear examples of research excellence founded on coherence, scale, competitiveness, and sustainability. They will attract greater external engagement, funding and create more impact.

### 3. Policy Statement

TU Dublin encourages and supports research and innovation that makes positive contributions to the ever-changing needs of the world's society and the economy, through the creation of new knowledge and providing practical and timely solutions to the challenges set out in the SDGs. The principles of excellence, inclusiveness, openness, fairness, ethical and scholarly practice dictate how we work in the conduct of our research. We value research carried out by individual researchers, groups, centres, and hubs that is aligned with our key priority areas.

In our efforts to increase the volume and impact of our research, we are committed to supporting **Designated Research Centres** that can achieve excellence at scale and long-term sustainability, to meet current and emerging societal needs. Therefore, proposals for **Designated Research Centres** will be examined rigorously, and their performance will be reviewed periodically.

The main purpose of a **Designated Research Centre** is to encourage researchers to generate a stimulating research environment for their work, which will both inspire new collaborative activity among experienced researchers and encourage the development of postgraduate research students and early career researchers (ECR). This will be done through the training, support and mentorship that arises through everyday interactivity. These centres would also act as a vehicle to advance the University's strategic educational and research missions, lead, and explore new and emerging areas, and attract external income.

Research Centres will be supported by their host School and/or Hub and by the R&I Service in accordance with existing practices at this time. This is focused on resources and infrastructure for the most part. The *Procedure for Distribution of Research Overheads* sets out how TU Dublin can provide financial support other than that provided by funding secured from external grant applications and internal funded scholarship programmes.

Researchers and the University benefit from Research Centres. So, for example

- Researchers can pool knowledge and expertise to address a research question or problem and lead out on emerging fields.
- The Centre can help in research career development and augment the profile of a researcher.
- Being part of a Research Centre can result in greater recognition and validation for a researcher in having an established footprint in a particular field.
- Being part of a research centre helps improve the postgraduate research student experience in providing a community of researchers for the student to network

with, a better environment for the student, and access to additional resources for their research.

- The Centre can enable easier access to national and international networks.
- The Centre may be sustainable and enable continuity of research.
- Researchers involved in a Research Centre may attract more funding.
- Being part of a Research Centre can enhance engagement with business/community/industry/professional networks through access to previously established links between the centre and those partners.
- Benefit to early-stage researchers is the access to shared specialised research infrastructure and enhanced research practices.

#### 4. Scope

**Designated Research Centres** will be established in areas that are aligned to the 2023-2028 university priorities and be led by researchers with a high-level of experience. They will have a prominent level of national and international recognition for excellence. They will also be listed on the website as the official Research Centres of TU Dublin.

This procedure does not apply to Research Centres hosted nationally or externally through collaborative agreements with external higher education institutions or research performing organisations. The establishment of such centres or entities would be the subject of a different process and procedure, as determined by formal agreement with partners external to the university.

Researchers may also get together to form Research Groups, addressing a specific, multi-disciplinary research theme but that do not (yet) have the critical mass of or meet the criteria for a Research Centre. They may include groups aspiring to eventually develop into a Research Centre and details of how they are established is not dealt with in this procedure. The formation of groups is something that needs a more flexible approach.

#### 5. Definitions

**Research** - Research *and experimental development (R&D)* comprise creative and systematic work undertaken in order to increase the stock of knowledge – including knowledge of humankind, culture and society – and to devise new applications of available knowledge.<sup>1</sup>

**Researcher** – Someone who undertake activities consistent with the definition of research above.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.oecd.org/innovation/frascati-manual-2015-9789264239012-en.htm> and <https://hea.ie/assets/uploads/2017/04/High-res-links-v3-HEA-Principles-of-Good-Practice-in-Research-within-Irish-Higher-Education-Institutions.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Note: this is different from the university definition of “research active” which is only used for reporting purposes to the HEA and does not define what a researcher is *per se*.

**Principal Investigator** or PI is the person responsible for the preparation, conduct, and administration of a research grant, cooperative agreement, training or public service project, contract, or other sponsored project.

**Research Centre** - is a formal grouping of researchers focused on a significant common research area, with critical mass of research active staff, research activity and external funding, whose existence brings identifiable benefits, for example, scale of activity and personnel, potential for growth, funding potential, impact, and internal and external visibility. It is a flagship of excellence for research activity.

**Research Group** - is an informal cluster of researchers who share research interests, and who engage in collaborative or closely related research and scholarly/creative activities on a smaller scale or in a niche area and/or in new and emerging topics of interest. A Research Group may grow and develop and apply to become a Research Centre in the future.

**Research Hub** – a platform for the support of a community of researchers performing research and collaborating to contribute solutions to a range of societal challenges. Research Hubs manage and provide a range of hard infrastructure (buildings, lab space, workstations, research equipment, etc.) and soft infrastructure (e.g. seminars, invited speakers, journal clubs, business development expertise, funding proposal expertise, etc.) that can be accessed by research centres and individual researchers.

## 6. Research Centre Requirements & Guidelines

### Requirements

The following are the minimum requirements to qualify for recognition as a Research Centre:

- **Members:** Principal investigators and their constituent researchers (postdocs., PhD students ...) with aggregate research activities in related fields to achieve critical mass within a defined theme(s). They should share a commitment to the subject area and research focus of the Centre.
- **Theme:** A Research Centre must have a specific research theme that is aligned to strategic priorities of TU Dublin and encompasses the research interests of its members.
- **Size:** Research Centres are expected to demonstrate critical mass. They must comprise at least 5 members from the University (including academic staff, postdoctoral researchers, ECRs, and PhD researchers), and may in addition include Emeritus/Emerita Fellows, Adjunct Staff, technical staff and professional services staff and members of external agencies/business/academia. They should include at least one experienced PI.

- **Funding:** The Research Centre should include at least one member with a successful track record of research productivity and bids for funding. Once formed, the Research Centre will act as a stimulus for securing external funding.
- **Host School/Function/Hub:** The Research Centre must be integrated into the existing structures of TU Dublin and be hosted in a School or within the R&I function (which houses the Research Hubs).
- **Manager / Academic Lead:** The Research Centre must have a Manager / Academic Lead who is a/are research active from the host School/Function.
- **Strategy & Development Plan:** The Research Centre must have a five-year Strategy and Development Plan, building on an established track record of research activity and vibrant, inclusive, and interdisciplinary research environment. They could set up an Advisory Board to guide them in this regard.
- **Outputs & Impact:** Researchers associated with the Centre should all be actively engaged in research and disseminate their findings by publishing peer-reviewed research articles/other appropriate high-quality outputs (including, but not limited to datasets, software, or creative outputs) under the Research Centre's name on a regular basis.
- **Meetings:** Research Centres should hold regular (virtual/in-person/hybrid) meetings, symposia, workshops, and seminars aimed at facilitating research collaboration between existing members and potential members in TU Dublin and with external networks.
- **Mentoring & Training:** Research Centres could have a programme of mentoring and training to encourage the development of postgraduate researchers, ECRs, on methodologies and technologies they have specialist expertise on.
- **Website:** Research Centres will have their own microsite on the TU Dublin R&I webpages. They should maintain an up-to-date web presence, including information on current research, publications, and contact details to allow external visitors to contact them.

## Guidelines

The guidelines for the establishment, review and closing of a research centre are outlined below.

### ***Establishment of a Designated Research Centre***

The case for the designation of a Research Centre should emanate from staff that have, as a cohesive research agenda, a high level of experience and an excellent track record in research. The Centre should add value to the university. It should promote and be an exemplar of a positive research culture. It should be a thought leader and/or lead out in addressing complex research questions and in responding societal challenges. With that in mind, the following key elements of an application will be reviewed:

1. How the proposed Centre will provide unique advantages in terms of research within TU Dublin and for the outside world
2. Details of the combined track record of the Centre members
3. How the proposed Centre will add value to the University and its remit
4. How the proposed Centre aligns with the TU Dublin priority research areas and how it will support the achievement of the key actions set out in the R&I Strategy document
5. Plans on how to sustain, grow, and fund the activities of the Centre
6. Plans to mentor and train researchers and for dissemination of research findings and follow-on impact
7. How the Centre can bring together complementary skills and facilities to enable research topics to be tackled in ways not otherwise possible, or by developing an external profile that more effectively attracts grant funding and/or engagement with societal groups and enterprise.

Applications for designated centre status will be accepted throughout the year from the Lead PI. Timelines are provided below.

Applications can be submitted at anytime during the calendar year from the the proposed Centre Manager / Academic Lead on the **TU Dublin Research Centre Establishment Application Form**

Applications will be reviewed by an internal panel chaired by the VP R&I comprising the 5 Faculty Deans or their nominees, and three other Heads from within R&I as nominated by the VP R&I. The normal rules around gender balance will be applied and the panel will require a quorum of 70% to progress.

Successful applicants will be provided with a letter recommending that their application has been successful and will be informed of the time for which their designation will apply, and of any specific conditions attached, as appropriate.

Feedback will be provided to applicants following the review and for unsuccessful applicants the feedback will indicate where improvements to the application can be made to encourage a subsequent application.

## Timelines

There is a rolling call for applications. Applications can be submitted at any time. There will be two panel reviews convened each year. Details of timelines and key dates are set out below.

Timeline Steps	Key Dates
Closing Date for Panel Review	End of week 2 February
Panel Review	By end of week 2 March
Closing Date for Panel Review	End of week 2 September
Panel Review	By end of week 2 October
Notification of Outcome	One week after each panel meeting
Launch of Centres	Four weeks after each panel meeting

### *Periodic Review of a Designated Research Centre*

Designated Research Centres will be required to provide a summary one-page report annually to the VP R&I. This will be an executive summary of the previous year's activities and successes. The annual monitoring process seeks to show the Centre is still active, relevant, and pursuing their activities, and seeking to disseminate findings, gain recognition etc.

Designated Research Centres will be subject to a formal review at the end of their designated time. The periodic review will involve a comprehensive evaluation. Centres will be judged against their original objectives and agreed performance criteria, and on proposals for future development and sustainability for the next designation term (maximum 5 years). This will require the preparation and submission of a more formal report on the activities and achievements of the Centre and will also include updated research and development plan for the next period of designation.

It will be conducted by an external panel chaired by the VP R&I. This panel will be chaired by the VP R&I and will have 2 external members who will be leading researchers with experience of leading a research centre. The normal gender balance rules will apply, and all members must attend.

It will involve an oral presentation by the Centre Manager / Academic Lead to the evaluation panel.

Specific decisions from the periodic review be:

1. Continue;
2. Continue with recommendations;
3. Continue with conditions;
4. Not continue and re-assess in 6 months;
5. Not continue and close

The Centre Manager / Academic Lead will be provided with a letter with one of the decisions above. For those who are communicated with decisions 1,2 or 3 the letter also indicate the time for which their follow-on designation will apply and feedback will be provided in detail.

If the decision from the review is either 4 or 5 above, detailed feedback will be provided.

### ***Closing a Designated Research Centre***

When a Centre has been recommended to close after the periodic review, there will be a transition period of between 6-12 months to allow for a systematic wind down of the Centre and its operations, which may include proposals to transfer activities to another location or Centre.

The Centre will lose its endorsement as a TU Dublin Designated Research Centre; it will no longer be featured on the TU Dublin R&I website; and the role of Centre Manager / Academic Lead will no longer exist.

Care will be taken regarding personnel issues, funds, reassignment of activities, project completion dates, and the many other considerations entailed in phasing out an operation.

Any potential issues should be raised early and coordinated closely with the VP R&I Office, and such other personnel as necessary and appropriate.

The above also applies to those who wish to close a designated research centre themselves for reasons such as funding ceases or the research area is no longer relevant or of interest. Such requests should be submitted in writing to the VP R&I indicating the reasons for the closure.

## 7. Procedure Details:

*Applies to ALL new applicants AND existing Research Centres (as of May 1st 2024).*

### 7.1 Application to Establish a Research Centre

- Proposals for a Research Centre must be submitted on the **TU Dublin Research Centre Establishment Application Form** by the proposed Centre Manager / Academic Lead by email to [researchandinnovation@tudublin.ie](mailto:researchandinnovation@tudublin.ie) using RESEARCH CENTRE APPLICATION in the subject line.
- The Research Engagement and Impact Office will collate the application forms received and send them to the VP R&I within 3 days of receipt of the application.
- The Head of R&I for Engagement and Impact will work with the VP R&I to organise the evaluation of the applications received within 3 weeks of receipt of the application.
- The evaluation panel will consider the application and make recommendation to the VP R&I. Applications will be subject to a fair, open and transparent review process to ensure integrity, quality, and independence. Centre status will either be approved or declined. Decisions may be appealed to the President.
- The outcome will be notified to the applicant within 1 week of the panel review by the Head of R&I for Engagement and Impact on behalf of the VP R&I. Detailed feedback will be provided on request to the VP R&I directly. The Research Centre will be made aware that they must comply with the University's GDPR regulations and data processing and storage requirements and act in accordance with these policies at all times.
- The outcome will be communicated to the relevant host for the proposed Centre, the R&I Academy and UET for noting.

## 7.2 Review of a Research Centre

- **Annual Summary:** The Research Engagement and Impact Office will contact the Research Centre and request the submission of a one-page summary of activity on an annual basis. This should be an executive summary of the activities and successes of the previous 12-month period and indicate any changes to memberships and affiliations.
  
- **Periodic Review:** The Research Engagement and Impact Office will contact the Research Centre and request the submission of a Research Centre Review Report on the template provided 10 weeks prior to the expected submission date.
  
- The report must be submitted on the **TU Dublin Research Centre Review Report** template by the Centre Manager / Academic Lead by email to [researchandinnovation@tudublin.ie](mailto:researchandinnovation@tudublin.ie) using RESEARCH CENTRE REVIEW in the subject line.
  
- The Research Engagement and Impact Office will send the report to the VP R&I within 3 days of receipt.
  
- The Head of R&I for Engagement and Impact will work with the VP R&I to organise the external panel and will organise that to take place within 4 weeks of receipt of the report.
  
- The Centre Manager / Academic Lead or their nominee will be required to meet the external review panel and make a short presentation and take part in a short Q&A session that will take no more than 40 minutes.
  
- The evaluation panel will consider the report, the presentation and the discussions at the Q&A session and make recommendation to the VP R&I. Centre status will either be continued or discontinued. Decisions may be appealed to the President.
  
- The outcome will be notified to the Centre Manager / Academic Lead within 1 week of the panel review by the Head of R&I for Engagement and Impact on behalf of the VP R&I. Detailed feedback will be provided on request to the VP R&I directly.

- The outcome will be communicated to the relevant host for the proposed Centre, the R&I Academy and UET for noting.
- This document describes the procedure that TU Dublin Colleagues and Students follow in relation to Research Overhead Income:

### 7.3 Approval process

Amendments to this procedure must be recommended by the Research & Innovation Academy and approved by the Vice President for Research and Innovation.

### 7.4 Change Process

The Head of Research and Innovation for Engagement & Impact provides administrative support, and the Vice President for Research and Innovation has responsibility for this procedure.

This procedure will be reviewed at least every two years and more often if needed, including within six months of the publication of any change in other relevant national policies or guidance.

## 8. Related Documents

1. Application Form for the Establishment of a TU Dublin Designated Research Centre.
2. TU Dublin Research Centre Periodic Review Report Template.
3. *TU Dublin Procedure for Distribution of Research Overheads*, approved November 2023.

## 9. Document Management

### 9.1 Version Control

VERSION NUMBER	VERSION DESCRIPTIN / CHANGES MADE	AUTHOR	DATE
V2.0	<i>Include details of the rolling call and include associated timelines</i>	<i>Dr. Mary Deasy</i>	<i>6<sup>th</sup> December 2024</i>

### 9.2 Document Approval

VERSION NUMBER	APPROVAL DATE	APPROVED BY (NAME AND ROLE)
1.0	<i>2<sup>nd</sup> May 2024</i>	<i>Dr Brendan Jennings, Vice President for Research and Innovation</i>
2.0	<i>12<sup>th</sup> December 2024</i>	<i>Dr Brendan Jennings, Vice President for Research and Innovation</i>

### 9.3 Document Ownership

Accountability to defining, developing, monitoring and updating the content of this document rests with Research and Innovation Services.

### 9.4 Document Review

The Head of Research and Innovation for Engagement & Impact is accountable to review this document. This document should be approved by the Vice President for Research and Innovation.

### 9.5 Document Storage

This document will be stored on the TU Dublin content management systems under the Procedures INTRANET folder.

### 9.6 Document Classification

This version of the document is for internal use in TU Dublin only.