

## Definitions

Please refer to the University's glossary of terms for policies and procedures.

USC University Research Centre is an established and focused cohort of researchers recognised as having a significant national impact and international relevance. USC 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.

## 1. Purpose of procedures

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

## 2. Baseline research performance criteria

2.1 USC expects University Research Centres and Research 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 the related guidelines.

2.2 The criteria are subject to change at the discretion of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation) and Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) 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.

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

- The majority of the group's publications need to be of high quality as indicated in the guidelines.
- 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.
- 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.
- The group's research can make a demonstrable and significant contribution to the university's aspirations in relation to international rankings.
- The Vice-Chancellor and President or Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation) has identified the discipline as a current priority for further development.

2.4 The Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation) and Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) may exempt an existing or potential USC Research 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).

2.5 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.

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

### APPROVAL AUTHORITY

Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation)

### RESPONSIBLE OFFICER

Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation)

### DESIGNATED OFFICER

Director, Office of Research

### FIRST APPROVED

1 March 2012

### LAST AMENDED

28 April 2020

### REVIEW DATE

31 October 2024

### STATUS

Active

2.7 In all cases the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation) and the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic), can use discretion regarding the performance eligibility of a centre or institute where this provides strategic benefits for the University.

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

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

3.2 Expressions of interest must be endorsed by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) prior to submission to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation).

3.3 Groups applying for designation and funding are expected to submit a comprehensive research plan for the first five-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.

3.4 Research groups are encouraged to discuss their proposals with the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) and the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation) before lodgement of a formal application. Groups may also seek advice from external experts where this will enhance the robustness of an application.

### 4. Assessment of designation as a USC University Research Centre or USC University Research Institute

4.1 Expressions of interest will be assessed by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation) and the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic), Director, Office of Research and other relevant staff within the Office of Research.

4.2 Successful expressions of interest will be invited by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation) and Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) to negotiate and subsequently submit a full application comprising a five-year plan that will form the basis of an agreement. This plan will include the key performance indicators and performance targets that will inform subsequent reporting and reviews.

4.3 Full 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.

### 5. Administration

5.1 Each USC University Research Centre/Institute has one Director who will have a dual reporting line to both the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation) and the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic).

5.1.1 Here, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation) and the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) are the Director's research leaders for performance planning and review, and authorised signatory on external funding.

5.1.2 Here, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) and Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation) will be the Director's delegates for authorisation on administrative activities such as travel, expenditure and Human Resource matters.

5.1.3 USC University Research Institutes may have Co-Directors reporting to the Research Institute Director.

5.1.4 Research Directors (and Co-Directors for Institutes) will have line management responsibility for staff whose positions are funded from externally funded research.

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

5.1.6 USC University Research Centre/Institute HDR students will be enrolled in and receive administrative support through a relevant School or enrolling area.

#### 5.2 Research leadership team

5.2.1 USC University Research 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:

- managing the Centre or Institute's day-to-day functioning and administration
- facilitating coordination between areas involved in the Centre or Institute's activities
- administering available funds
- preparing the annual report and documents required for reviews.

#### 5.3 Advisory board

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

#### 5.4 Budgets and operational planning

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

5.4.2 Ongoing payments are made upon submission of satisfactory annual reports, as long as baseline eligibility criteria are continually met.

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

## 6. Reviews and reporting

6.1 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 USC Quality Framework, following a transparent and consultative process similar to formal reviews of schools and organisational units.

6.2 The fourth yearly review will determine if the centre or institute should be funded for a further five-year cycle.

6.3 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.

## 7. Third and final year reviews

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

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

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

7.4 The purpose of these reviews is to determine whether each USC University Research Centre or Institute:

- is effectively and efficiently pursuing the original functions and targets, and that those functions and targets continue to be relevant
- has demonstrated a case for its continuation
- has achieved the planned targets for the period of review
- has strategic and operational planning in place for the ensuing period, including succession planning
- continues to have strategic relevance
- has academic and financial support that remains sufficiently strong to justify its continuation
- 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).

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

## 8. Disestablishment

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

8.2 The Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation) and the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) may disestablish a centre or institute following a review.

8.3 A review panel may recommend the disestablishment of a USC University Research Centre or Institute for reasons such as:

- its strategic purpose has been fulfilled, or it no longer aligns to the strategic goals of the university
- it has experienced a significant change in direction
- 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
- 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 five years, or
- it has failed to meet any requirements under the terms of this policy and procedures as requested by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation), Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) or Research Committee.

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

8.5 All USC University Research 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.

8.6 After a formal decision to disestablish, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation) and Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) 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 USC University Research Centres or Institutes.

END

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RELATED DOCUMENTS

[USC University Research Centres and Research Institutes - Academic Policy](#)

LINKED DOCUMENTS

[USC University Research Centres and Research Institutes - Academic Policy](#)

SUPERSEDED DOCUMENTS

[Research Concentrations - Academic Policy](#)