

## **POLICY ON THE SYSTEM OF RESEARCH INSTITUTES AND DESIGNATED RESEARCH CENTRES AT MAYNOOTH UNIVERSITY**

**Owner:** VP Research and Innovation

**Approved by:** Academic Council, May 2018 (with minor correction by the Research Committee in September 2018)

**Review:** This policy will be reviewed by the Research Committee no later than June 2021.

### **Objective**

The University is committed to the establishment of a number of research institutes and centres of varying purpose and scale, which are dedicated to developing and carrying out research activities. These institutes and centres complement and augment the research work of academic departments. It is important that the University has a clear policy on the establishment and review of these institutes and centres, and that is the purpose of this document.

### **Existing Landscape**

In 2018 there are three types of research institutes, research centres and research groups operating in Maynooth University.

For the purposes of this policy these are categorised as follows:

1. Maynooth University Research Institutes
  2. Designated Research Centres
  3. Local Research Groupings and Centres
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1. **Maynooth University Research Institutes.** Four top-level research institutes have been established by a formal decision of Academic Council in 2016, and are the University's primary strategic vehicles for interdisciplinary research and critical mass towards tackling global challenges. They are:
    - Maynooth University Social Sciences Institute
    - Maynooth University Hamilton Institute
    - Maynooth University Arts and Humanities Institute
    - Maynooth University Institute for Human Health

The title "Institute" is reserved, and may be granted only by a decision of Academic Council.

MU Research Institutes are supported via a central budget allocation, including the director's salary and a core contribution to running costs; and also through a specific allocation to the director, derived from external grant income, as specified under the Research Incentivisation Policy.

2. **Designated Research Centres.** The status of "Designated Research Centre" is granted by Academic Council. Currently, these may be titled either Centre or Institute, but the intention of the designation is to denote that these entities have a particular status, and to distinguish between these and the Maynooth University Research Institutes. Designated Research Centres

are supported through a specific allocation to the director, derived from external grant income, as specified under the Research Incentivisation Policy.

In 2018 there are four *de facto* designated research centres that have been established over time by a variety of mechanisms. One of these centres was previously established by Academic Council as a “Centre of Excellence” following a formal assessment process. In other cases the centre was established by executive action without a formal process. Frequently, the establishment of the centre has been as a result of securing, or in order to secure, significant external research funding.

The Designated Research Centres, independent of the MU Research Institutes, are:

- ICARUS Climate Research Centre - approved as centre of excellence by Academic Council, 2009
- Innovation Value Institute - EI/ IDA Technology Centre, established as research centre by executive action, 2006
- Assisting Living and Learning Institute – established by executive action, 2017
- Centre for Ocean Energy Research – established in 2012 within Department of Electronic Engineering, and later as component of SFI Mareis Centre; recognised by VPRI in 2017 because of its significant external funding and scale of activity.

Three previous centres of excellence are now integral parts of a Maynooth University Research Institute, and are wholly managed and governed as part of those institutes, although they also maintain an identity as entities within the institutes. These are:

- National Institute for Regional and Spatial Analysis –now a part of MU SSI.
- National Centre for Geocomputation –now a part of MU SSI
- Centre for Digital Humanities –originally named An Foras Feasa, now a part of MU Arts and Humanities Institute

Other institutes and centres that were previously established by Academic Council, but which are now subsumed into the “Maynooth University Research Institutes” and whose separate identities are not maintained, are the Institute of Immunology and the Callan Institute.

3. **Local Research Groupings and Centres.** A number of other local research groupings exist within individual academic departments, or within MU Research Institutes, or have been put in place jointly by two or more departments. These include departmental or inter-departmental research centres and research clusters. New centres or groupings of this type may be established within any of a department, faculty or a research institute, on the approval respectively of the relevant Head of Department, Dean or Institute director. Any funding for these centres will normally be provided from within the departmental or institute budget (including funding derived from external grant income under the Research Incentivisation Policy) with no additional recurrent provision.

Typically, these centres have limited visibility at present, although they carry out important work. There are numerous examples, but they include, for example,

- Centre for Historic Irish Houses and Estates (History)
- Terahertz Optics and Technology Group (Experimental Physics)
- Centre for Youth Research and Development (Applied Social Studies)

Research Centres and Groupings of this type that can demonstrate a credible identity and level of activity may be listed as such on the University research web pages. This will be effected by application to, and approval of, the VP Research and Innovation.

### **Establishment of Designated Research Centres**

A procedure is outlined here for identifying "Designated Research Centres" which are capable of attaining a critical mass and level of excellence to be internationally competitive in a given programme area. It is generally preferred that centres should operate within existing Maynooth University Research Institutes, but it is recognised that there will sometimes be a strategic case for establishment of a designated centre that does not align with the scope and remit of an existing institute.

#### Submission Procedure for Designated Status

1. Individual academics, or groups of academics, who are permanent members of faculty may seek to make a submission to the Research Committee of Academic Council for the establishment of a Designated Research Centre. A formal submission should be preceded by informal discussions with the VP Research and Innovation. Submissions will normally follow a format determined by the "designation criteria" given below.
2. Proposals will be assessed by the Research Committee. The Committee will make an initial assessment and, if that is positive, will normally seek expert external opinion on the merits of the proposed centre. In exceptional circumstances the President or Vice President for Research and Innovation may directly seek the approval of the Research Committee for establishment of a designated centre. A recommendation for approval of designated status will be submitted to Academic Council.
3. All designated Research Centres will be reviewed at least once every five years, overseen by the Research Committee.

#### Designation Criteria

1. Verifiable evidence of research excellence in a focused programme area, e.g. publications, patents, awards, research grants, impact etc.
2. Verifiable evidence of multi-disciplinary or inter-disciplinary or inter-institutional collaboration.
3. Critical mass quantified in terms of academics, postdoctoral researchers and research students to demonstrate an internationally competitive position in a given programme area.
4. A statement setting out why the proposed centre should operate outside the aegis of an existing Maynooth University Research Institute.
5. A statement of the national and, if relevant, international, competitor centres/institutes in a given programme. Uniqueness and complementarity will be considerations in reaching a decision on designated status.
6. Adequate existing resources to support a competitive position, and a description of likely future resource requirements in terms of capital (buildings and equipment), together with realistic indications of external funding sources.
7. Verifiable evidence of integration of research activity with teaching and learning activity, e.g. evidence of active and completed research degrees over a given period.
8. An outline statement of the centre's plan for research over a five year period.
9. A statement of how the proposed designated centre and its research plans are compatible with and will further the University's strategic objectives.
10. 10. A statement of the centre's approach to achieving appropriate gender balance.



### Operation of Designated Centres

All centres that were granted de facto “Designated Research Centre” status before December 2017 will continue to operate as designated centres, subject to review by the research committee from 2019 onwards.

Each Designated Centre will be led a director whose appointment is approved by the President.

The director will report to their head of department in the normal way. In matters relating to the operation of the centre there will also be “dotted line” between the director and the VP Research and Innovation, but not in a way that bypasses the head of department.

Designated Research Centres will receive specific funding to support their operation, derived from external grant income, under the research incentivisation policy.

Each designated centre will maintain a register of members, and will publish a statement of membership criteria and rights and responsibilities.

The director of each designated centre will make an annual report to the Research Committee in the period October to November, providing a narrative and detailing its activities (including grants, projects, publications and impacts) for the previous academic year. This report will be reviewed by the Research Committee, and feedback provided to the director by the VP Research and Innovation. The Research Committee may also request additional updates in the course of a year.

A suitable advisory board proposed by the director, having consulted with the VP Research and Innovation, may be approved by the Research Committee.

Each Designated Research Centre will be subject to regular review, at least once every five years, overseen by the Research Committee. The results of that review may lead to various outcomes including continued operation, modified operation or cessation of operation and removal of the designated centre status. The Vice President for Research and Innovation will subsequently bring a recommendation to Academic Council that the Designated Centre continue, be restructured, be redesignated as a local group, or cease operation.

The Research Committee may initiate a review at any time if it has concerns regarding the operation of a centre.

For those Designated Centres already in operation in 2018, a staggered review schedule will be set by the Research Committee, with reviews to commence no earlier than 12 months from the date of approval of this policy.

### **Establishment of Maynooth University Research Institutes**

The Maynooth University Research Institutes embody a major strategic intent of the university, and it will be an important consideration to ensure that unnecessary fragmentation of the institutes does not occur.

Nonetheless, over time, the research landscape in the University may evolve in such a way that there is a compelling case for establishment of one or more new Maynooth University Research Institutes.

In those circumstances, the director of a Designated Research Centre may apply to the Vice-President for Research and Innovation for consideration to be reclassified as a Maynooth University Research Institute. If the case is considered to have sufficient merit, the Research Committee may

invite a preliminary submission, and specify the criteria and issues to be addressed in the submission. Any such application will be considered by both the Research Committee and the University Executive. If viewed positively by both bodies, a full and detailed application may be sought. The criteria and any issues to be addressed in detail will be set formally by the Research Committee and approved by the University Executive. The details will depend on the particular case, but will always entail a very significant degree of multi-disciplinary activity, critical mass, quality outcomes and impact, at a level significantly higher than that expected of a Designated Research Centre.

The application will be formally considered by both the Research Committee and University Executive. If approved by both, the case may be recommended by the President to Academic Council for establishment of the new institute.

### Operation and Governance of Maynooth University Research Institutes

(The following is based on the Framework for Research Institutes, agreed by Academic Council in December 2016. Some details have changed, e.g. Research Incentivisation Fund, and governance details).

Each MU Research Institute will be led a director, appointed by the President. The director's term of office will normally be five years, and this term may be extended with the agreement of the President. If a director is appointed from existing academic staff then the home department of the appointee will be funded for a replacement staff member for the duration of the directorship.

The institute director will report to the VP Research and Innovation.

MU Research Institutes will receive funding to support their mission and activities through (i) central budget allocation and (ii) a specific provision under the research incentivisation policy.

The director of a MU Research Institute will be a member of both Academic Council and its Research Committee.

The Research Committee will be the Board of Governance for each MU Research Institute. The Research Committee will receive an annual formal report from the director, and at least one further update, and will oversee:

- the annual operational plan for the institute;
- the use of the resources of the institute;
- an appropriate approach to gender balance in the institute;
- the development of a research strategy for the institute.

Each MU Research Institute will also have an Advisory Board, appointed by the director following consultation with the Research Committee. The Advisory Board will support the director in developing and reviewing the strategy for the institute. The group will normally comprise a number of researchers of international standing, and may also include representatives of industries, public bodies, sectors or communities relevant to the work of the institute.

The director may establish such internal management structures and committees as are necessary for the effective operation of the institute to support the director.

Each Institute will maintain a register of members, and will publish a statement of membership criteria and rights and responsibilities. This will be approved by the Research Committee.

The director will make an annual report to the Research Committee, providing a narrative account and detailing its activities (including operations, grants, projects, publications and impacts) for the previous academic year.

Each MU Research Institute will be subject to regular, formal review, at least once every five years, overseen by the Research Committee. This may be combined, if appropriate, with the established quality assurance processes of the University. Centres and units that are an integral part of the Institute will be reviewed as part of the Institute, and not separately. The results of the review may lead to various outcomes including continued operation, modified operation or cessation of operation and removal of the MU Research Institute status. The outcome of the review will be a recommendation to the President. The President will subsequently bring a recommendation to Academic Council that the Institute continue, be restructured, be redesignated a research centre or local group, or cease operation.