



Academic Centres Policy

University Secretariat

Academic Council 23/11/2023

1. Purpose

- 1.1. The University encourages the establishment of Academic Centres that respond to emerging research and education opportunities, and that promote interdisciplinary collaboration and networking.
- 1.2. The Policy provides mechanisms for governance and oversight of Academic Centres to ensure that the highest standards are maintained, along with structures and processes that best facilitate the activities of the Centres. The Policy provides the definition of an Academic Centre and defines principles, roles and responsibilities for the establishment, continuation and review of Academic Centres.
- 1.3. Academic Centres at UCD are governed by statute (Chapter 18, Statute 25). In accordance with the *Governing Authority Schedules of Reserved Decision-Making Authority and of Delegated Authority*, all decisions relating to Academic Centres have been delegated to Academic Council. The Academic Council has the authority to establish Academic Centres, appoint Academic Centre Directors, rename or abolish an Academic Centre, or merge existing Centres. Responsibility for the oversight of operational matters relating to all Academic Centres is delegated by Academic Council to the Academic Council Committee on Academic Centres (ACCAC). The purpose of the ACCAC is:
 - a) To review proposals to establish, develop or re-configure Academic Centres;
 - b) To carry out periodic reviews of Centres to ensure that (i) advancement is being made in relation to each Centre in meeting its objectives as outlined in the Rationale and Plan for each Centre, and (ii) each Centre is sustainable;
 - c) To evaluate applications for the naming or re-naming of Centres against the criteria included in this policy;
 - d) To evaluate applications for the appointment of Directors of Centres.

2. Definition of Academic Centres

In February 2008 the University defined the purpose and a number of organisational and management features of Academic Centres. Academic Centres are defined as:

- A simple organising structure to support research and activities related to research. An Academic Centre should be a means by which a collective of academic staff with a common research expertise, programme or activity identify themselves inside and outside UCD; and/or
- An identity and external point of contact to support a suite of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) (or Executive Education) activities and/or programmes.

Academic Centres are not management units, and therefore should not employ or manage

staff, or deliver programmes independently of Schools.

There is a clear distinction between Academic Centres at UCD and competitively-won national multi-institutional centres (e.g. SFI Research Centres or EI/IDA Technology Centres). These latter centres often involve significant UCD participation, and have a substantial presence in the University. Their establishment, continuation and governance are based on success in competitive processes and agreements between partners and funders, and do not fall under this policy.

Only in exceptional circumstances will the ACCAC recommend that Centres that do not meet all the criteria are given a derogation. This will only be in the case that the Centre is of high strategic value to UCD and that there are reasonable and logical grounds provided for a derogation from the normal criteria.

2.1 Types of Academic Centre

Chapter 18 of Statute 25 makes a clear distinction between Research Institutes and Academic Centres. While Research Institutes constitute a separate management unit within the University, this is not the case with a Centre as is clear from both the Statute and the recommendations of the Working Group on Academic Governance (February 2008). Applications from existing Centres carrying the title "Institute" must provide a rationale for the continued use of Institute as opposed to Centre (historic use is not sufficient justification).

This policy provides for the approval of three types of Academic Centre at UCD: (i) Research Centres (ii) Centres established to promote Continuing Professional Development or Executive Education, and (iii) Centres that combine both activities.

2.2 Governance of Academic Centres

All Academic Centres must be associated with a School and a Center's governance structures must reflect this. The primary reporting line from Centre Director is normally to the Head of School and then to the College Principal to whom an annual report must be submitted by the Centre Director.

A Centre may establish an Advisory Board to advance its objectives and, where relevant, to satisfy external funding requirements. A Research Centre Advisory Board shall normally be chaired by the Centre Director and have representatives from all affiliated Schools. Others may be invited to join the Board as required to satisfy external funding requirements, and may have relevant stakeholders from outside UCD. Centres should comply with the 'UCD Gender Balance on Committees Policy'.

Centres shall normally be associated with the School from which most of its full- and/or part-time research or teaching members derive.

2.3 Academic Centre Staff Affiliation

A minimum number of staff is necessary to justify a Centre's establishment and continued approval. In the case of a Research Centre or combined Research and CPD Centre, there must be a critical mass of at least five research active academic staff. In the case of a CPD-only Centre, there must be two or more members of academic staff involved.

Research across disciplines will be promoted as a feature of UCD Academic Centres. The critical mass of researchers may all come from one subject area or School, however applications should reflect plans for inter-disciplinary research and research collaborations beyond the originating School. Research Centres approved on the basis of plans for inter-disciplinary research will be given a maximum period of three years after establishment in which to demonstrate the attainment of stated inter-disciplinary goals, with reference to staff

affiliation, research activity and research outputs.

School administrative staff may be assigned to the Centre by the relevant Head of School. The proportion of the administrator's time allocated to the Centre must be agreed with the Head of School and this will be reviewed by the Head of School as appropriate. The Head of School has the authority to withdraw any administrative support.

3. Academic Centre Sustainability

All Academic Centres must be sustainable. In this context they must

- (i) deliver on their objectives, as outlined in the Rationale and Plan for the Centre
- (ii) demonstrate that they are achieving what UCD cannot achieve without the Centre
- (iii) promote interdisciplinary collaboration and networking
- (iv) have outputs that are measurable and valued by the University
- (v) promote a culture that aligns with the University's Research and Integrity Policy (applicable to research centres), and align with the University's teaching strategy (applicable to CPD centres).

4. Application and Approval Processes

4.1 Establishment of an Academic Centre

The Academic Council, on the delegated authority of Governing Authority will approve the establishment of Academic Centres. Applications for approval as an Academic Centre will be made using the application form that accompanies this policy document¹. An application requires the support of the Head of School and the College Principal and includes an opportunity for commentary from the University Vice-President for Research Innovation and Impact.

4.2 Appointment of an Academic Centre Director

The nomination of the Academic Centre Director must be included as part of the application for the establishment of an Academic Centre. Consideration of the appointment of the Academic Centre Director shall be made at each review point, so that the duration of the appointment in all instances is for the period between the last review of the Centre and the next review of the Centre. In instances where there may arise the need to appoint an Academic Centre Director outside of the normal review process, an application shall be made in writing to the ACCAC, submitted jointly by the existing Academic Centre Director (if possible), the Head of School with which the Centre is associated, and the relevant College Principal. The application must be accompanied by a statement from the relevant Head of School and the College Principal supporting the nomination, a statement describing the rationale for the appointment of the nominated individual, together with a short curriculum vitae of the proposed new Academic Centre Director. The term of appointment for the Academic Centre Director is effective from the date of Academic Council approval of the nomination. A Deputy Director may be appointed at the discretion of the Academic Centre Director.

4.3 Naming or Re-naming of an Academic Centre

The name of the Academic Centre must be included as part of the application for its establishment. The name shall normally reflect the academic, research and/or CPD orientation of its activities, with due regard also for the inter-disciplinary nature of any of its activities. The name shall normally refer to 'UCD' in the title in accordance with the University's *Brand Identity*

¹ Available on the [ACCAC webpage](#)

Guidelines, which stipulate that “each unit name must be prefixed with UCD.”² Academic Centres may be exempted from the requirement for the centre name to be prefixed with ‘UCD’ with the permission of the ACCAC, and only where they meet at least one of the following criteria:

- The centre is a national, international or global entity, recognised as such by the relevant bodies, and that status is to be reflected in the centre title; and
- The centre was established via a competitive process or by direct mandate (e.g. legislative provision) or through collaboration among a number of partners, and/or there is or has been external funding and/or peer review which has given rise to the establishment of the centre; and
- The centre is subject to external oversight, in addition to the normal internal UCD oversight of the centre.

In such instances, ‘UCD’ must still appear in the title of the centre, with “[centre title]...at UCD” being the recommended configuration.

Consideration of the name of the Academic Centre shall be made at each review point, at which time any proposals for re-naming of the Academic Centre may be made. In instances where there may arise the need to re-name the Academic Centre outside of the normal review process, an application shall be made in writing to the ACCAC, submitted jointly by the existing Academic Centre Director (if possible), the Head of School with which the Centre is associated and the relevant College Principal.

An Academic Centre may be named or re-named in order to honour an individual who has made a substantial contribution to the activity of the Centre, to the University more generally, or to the field in which the activity of the Centre is principally focused. In such instances, the following criteria shall apply:

- An Academic Centre may be named after a former member of the professorial staff of the University, including those holding the position of Emeritus Professor, who has demonstrated a commitment, or in any way has made a substantial contribution, to the activities of the Centre;
- An Academic Centre may be named after an individual who is an eminent leader in their field and distinguished by high achievement in the world of industry, business, science, the professions, the arts or public service and who has been recognised by peers as outstanding in the field in which the Centre is principally active. They should have displayed the type of leadership and innovation in their particular professional field comparable to the standards of scholarship and leadership normally expected of a professor;

The application must be accompanied by a statement from the Academic Centre Director which explicitly addresses the above criteria.

Any application to name or re-name an Academic Centre in honour of an individual must also be accompanied by a letter of support from that individual or that individual’s estate, confirming their willingness to agree to the naming of an Academic Centre in honour of that individual.

Use of the term ‘Centre’ by any entity associated with the University requires prior consultation with, and approval by, the ACCAC.

5. Academic Centre Review

² Available on the [University Relations Brand Guidelines webpage](#)

The ACCAC shall determine the nature and timing of any reviews for all Academic Centres. In the first instance, all Academic Centres shall be subject to review during their third year of operation. Subsequent to this, and pending the recommendations arising from any such review, additional periodic reviews of each Academic Centre shall be undertaken, according to a schedule determined by the ACCAC. The period of time between reviews for any Academic Centre shall not exceed five years. To ensure that the Centre is meeting the objectives established during the application or last review process, such review(s) will be conducted on the basis of a report submitted by the Centre Director which is approved by the Head of School and the College Principal. The report should outline the governance and reporting structure of the Centre, provide evidence of achievement and impact against its current plan and outline its future plan for the succeeding 3-5 years.

The submission of review reports is mandatory if a Centre wishes to obtain continuing approval by Academic Council. Where a Centre does not comply with the requirements of the review process, the ACCAC will recommend to Academic Council that the Centre be abolished with immediate effect.

In relation to the outcome of any review, the ACCAC may recommend that:

- a) Where the ACCAC considers that the Centre is sustainable and has met or exceeded its objectives as outlined in the Rationale and the Plan for the Centre, the ACCAC will recommend that the Centre continue to operate for a period no longer than 5 years before the next review.
- b) Where the ACCAC considers the Centre is required to address identified issues in order to fully meet its objectives as outlined in the Rationale and the Plan for the Centre, the ACCAC will recommend that the Centre continue to operate for a period no longer than 2 years before the next review.
- c) Where the ACCAC considers that the Centre is not meeting its objectives in the rationale and the plan for the Centre, the Centre will be required to resubmit a revised review report before the end of the academic session.
- d) Where the ACCAC considers that the Centre is not sustainable and has failed to meet its objectives in the rationale and the plan for the Centre, the ACCAC will recommend that the Centre be wound down by the end of the academic session.
- e) The Centre be discontinued with immediate effect.

The ACCAC may need to co-opt other members to ensure that appropriate expertise is available to conduct any review effectively.

6. Roles and responsibilities

6.1 Academic Centre Director

The Academic Centre Director is responsible for:

- Providing strategic leadership for the Centre,
- Operational planning and management of the Academic Centre,
- Consulting the appropriate governance structures for strategic oversight and support for the successful operation of the Centre,
- Reporting to relevant Head of School, College Principal and the ACCAC.

6.2 Head of School/College Principal

The Head of School is responsible for:

- Ensuring the academic, operational and financial sustainability of Academic Centres primarily associated with the School,
- Signing off on all review reports submitted to the ACCAC.

6.3 Academic Council Committee on Academic Centres (ACCAC)

Responsibility for the oversight of operational matters relating to all Academic Centres is delegated by Academic Council to the ACCAC. The purpose of the ACCAC is to adjudicate on the following before making recommendations to Academic Council:

- To review proposals to establish, develop or re-configure Academic Centres,
- To carry out periodic reviews of Centres and make review recommendations regarding the continuation of Centres,
- To evaluate applications for the naming or re-naming of Centres against the criteria included in this policy,
- To evaluate and adjudicate on applications to discontinue Academic Centres.
- To consider the appointment of Centre Directors.

6.4 Academic Council (AC)

The Academic Council, on delegated authority of the Governing Authority, has oversight of all matters related to Academic Centres. The main functions of the Committee in relation to Academic Centres is to consider and approve the recommendations of its sub-committee, the ACCAC.

7. Version history

Version	Date	Summary of Changes	Approved
1.0	10 Oct 08	Approved at Academic Council	AC
1.1	24 April 11	Changes made following the ACCAC meeting. Inclusion of section 8 'Five year review and Academic Centre continuance'.	AC
1.2	8 Dec 11	Updating of policy, including reference to ACCAC and amendments to review section.	AC
1.3	9 May 13	Approved at Academic Council	AC
1.4	10 Mar 15	Academic Council approval	AC
1.5	10 Nov 16	Approved at Academic Council	AC
1.6	18 May 20	Revised policy approved by ACEC	ACEC
1.7	23 Nov 23	Revised Policy approved by Academic Council	AC