

## STATUTE GOVERNING THE OPERATIONS OF RESEARCH CLUSTER

### **Knowledge discovery for HERITAGE materials: Multi-scalar approaches to resource mapping, building databases and data mining**

The University of Malta Research Cluster HERITAGE (hereinafter "the Cluster") is a multidisciplinary research initiative that aims to foster collaboration on cutting edge research, and sharing of, existing and future HERITAGE data, making the best use of interdisciplinary expertise and modern technological tools.

By giving researchers the possibility to find and access available information using FAIR<sup>1</sup> principles, this research cluster will build on heritage research collaboration within the University of Malta and with local and international heritage entities, already started through E-RIHS . E-RIHS ([e-rihs.eu](http://e-rihs.eu)) is not a project but is a very long-term European research infrastructure for Heritage Science. E-RIHS aims to support research on heritage interpretation, documentation, preservation, and management. It offers access to cutting-edge laboratories, tools, and data and provides training opportunities in Heritage Science. It is a partnership of 14 European countries which are funded by the individual member countries (for Malta this is the Ministry for the National Heritage, the Arts and Local Government). The University of Malta, in 2021, signed an internal memo (attached to this document) where nine different entities expressed their interest "in supporting the University with regards to this (E-RIHS) initiative and to contribute by providing their expertise, time and human resources as will be established by specific agreements." This Research Cluster should be one excellent way of doing this.

This specific Research Cluster aims to pass on to future generations knowledge and information on our heritage, its contexts and its environments and to lay the ground for the development of future lines of heritage research for its sustainable preservation.

The Cluster will be supported by a Stakeholders Forum, comprising representatives of key partners and stakeholders external to the University. This Forum serves as a platform for engagement, dialogue and collaboration between the research clusters and its broader community, including heritage partners, government agencies, academic and civil society. This Forum shall have a consultative role and can also lead to fostering partnerships and collaboration with external entities, provision of feedback to the cluster, promotion of the research cluster's work to a wider audience, and offers an external perspective on performance, outcomes and future directions of the Pillars.

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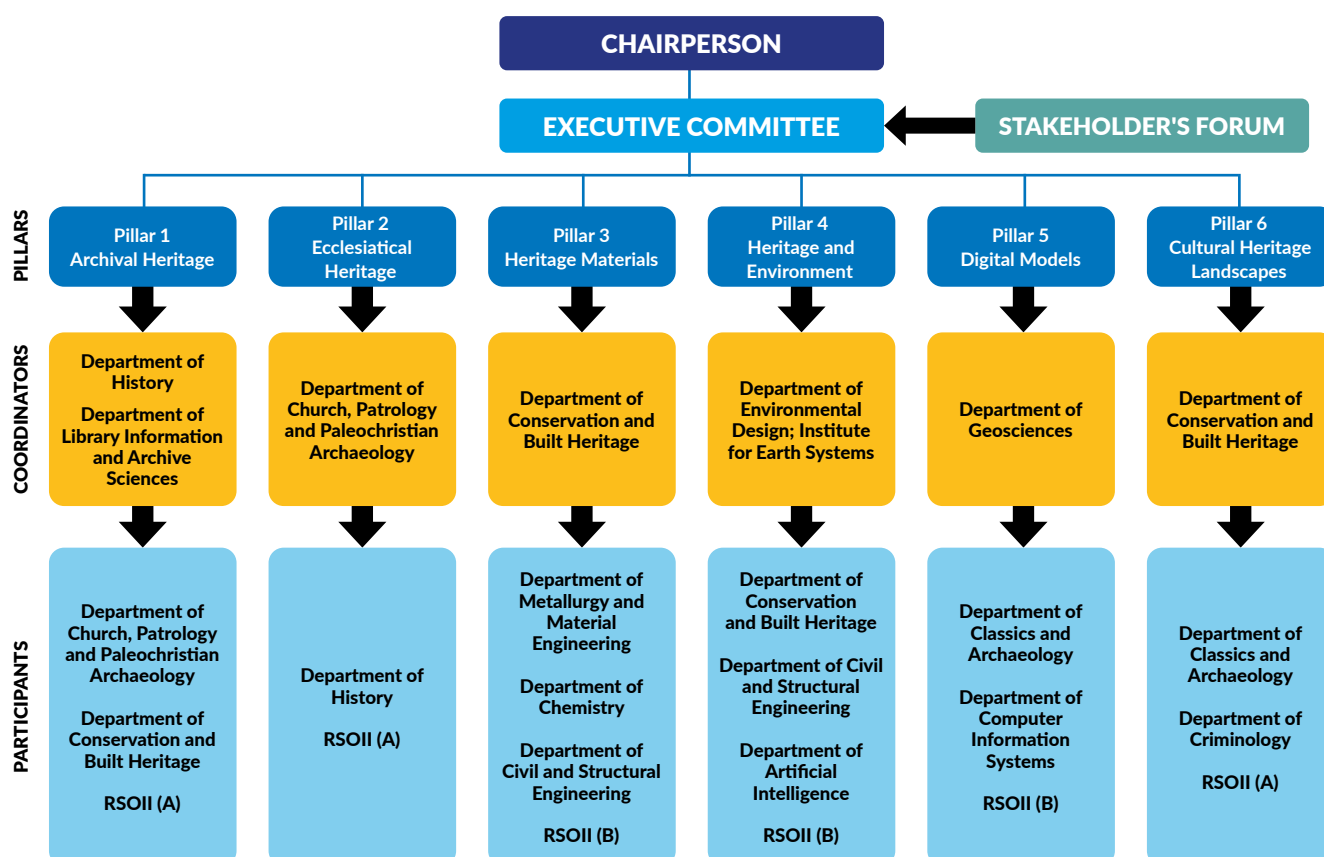
<sup>1</sup> FAIR data are data which meet principles of findability, accessibility, interoperability, and reusability (FAIR).

The Cluster objectives target the promotion of heritage collaboration in a multi-disciplinary manner. In order to achieve this aim, it is essential to integrate expertise from various fields such as, but not limited to history, archival science, archaeology, chemistry, materials, environmental and civil engineering, geosciences, and conservation science. Such strategy also aims to strengthen cross-departmental and institute collaboration in heritage studies by fostering a comprehensive approach to preservation and interpretation. Furthermore, designing and populating heritage-related databases can centralise information and resources, facilitating easier access for researchers, scholars, and the general public. By utilising the best technology available, including Computer Information Systems and Artificial Intelligence (AI), these databases can be made searchable in a user-friendly manner, enhancing accessibility and engagement with cultural heritage. Moreover, AI can enhance research by processing vast amounts of data, identifying patterns, and generating insights that may not be immediately apparent to human researchers. This can lead to the discovery of new research questions and the development of more sophisticated models and theories. The creation of new knowledge using cutting-edge research tools is also an objective of the Cluster.

There shall be a Research Cluster, managed and overseen by an Executive Committee:

## I. THE RESEARCH CLUSTER

1. The organisational structure of the HERITAGE Research Cluster will be as follows:



2. Membership of the Cluster shall proceed as follows:

- i. academics who are Council appointed University of Malta members of staff, having a demonstrable research track record or interest in the subject matter of the Cluster, as well as UM doctoral students and RSOs conducting research related to the Pillars in this HERITAGE Research Cluster, are eligible to become members of the Cluster.
- ii. to attain membership, the applicants require the approval of the Executive Committee. Such approval shall not be unreasonably withheld, and the Executive Committee shall adopt the following criteria for membership approval:

New applicants who wish to form part of this Research Cluster may submit a formal application to the Executive Committee. The request should include their reasons for wanting to join the cluster including details of their expertise and research interest in relation to the research being carried out and their track record in heritage related research, projects/publications and intra disciplinary collaborative research and project development. All efforts will be made to identify an existing Pillar where new members and/or new proposals can be absorbed. These must also complement existing projects.

When new projects are suggested, or if the Executive Committee considers that a new Pillar is justified, it will follow the procedure defined at I. 3 (iii) and I. 3 (iv) below.

The criteria by which the Executive Committee reserves the right to accept or reject the request for new members are:

- Proof of the academic/researcher being a team player in collaborative work in its widest sense, as evidenced by previous projects and/or publications
  - Sustained track record of contributions, including publications in international refereed journals that are relevant to heritage or other relevant themes related to at least one of the Pillars of the Research Cluster will be required.
  - For Early Stage Researchers, evidence of engagement with heritage related issues needs to be demonstrated.
  - Any other condition that the Committee feels relevant at the time of application.
- iii. cluster members may be removed by a decision of a two-thirds majority of the Executive Committee, for:
- Sustained failure to complete agreed deliverables within agreed timeframes
  - Repeated failure to attend meetings and to participate in the activities of the Pillar and/or Cluster
  - Sustained failure to act in a supportive and collegial manner with regards to other members of the Pillar and/or Cluster

3. The Research Cluster will initially comprise 6 Pillars and 2 Horizontals as approved by the Research Cluster Committee and as given in the organisational structure (given in Section 1 (above)).

i. The Pillars will initially be as follows:

	ARCHIVAL HERITAGE	ECCLESIASTICAL HERITAGE	HERITAGE MATERIALS	HERITAGE AND ENVIRONMENT	DIGITAL MODELS	CULTURAL HERITAGE LANDSCAPES
	Pillar 1	Pillar 2	Pillar 3	Pillar 4	Pillar 5	Pillar 6
Coordinators	Dr Joan Abela Dr Charles Farrugia	Rev. Dr Nicholas Doublet	Prof. JoAnn Cassar	Prof. Daniel Micallef Prof. Charles Galdies	Prof. Sebastiano D'Amico	Prof. Reuben Grima
Coordinating Departments/ Institute	Department of History Department of Library Information & Archive Sciences	Department of Church History, Patrology & Palaeochristian Archaeology	Department of Conservation and Built Heritage	Department of Environmental Design Institute of Earth Systems	Department of Geosciences	Department of Conservation and Built Heritage
Other participating Departments	Department of Church History, Patrology & Palaeochristian Archaeology Department of Conservation and Built Heritage	Department of History	Department of Chemistry Department of Metallurgy and Materials Engineering Department of Civil and Structural Engineering	Department of Conservation and Built Heritage Department of Civil and Structural Engineering Department of Artificial Intelligence	Department of Classics and Archaeology Department of Computer Information Systems	Department of Classics and Archaeology Department of Criminology
SHARED RSO (II OR III)	A	A	B	B	B	A

#### Pillar 1

Aim: to identify documented materials (clay, stone, marble etc.) that provide the core evidence of human activity throughout the period 1500–1900.

#### Pillar 2

Aim: to promote a deeper understanding of the ever-changing landscape of the Maltese islands by studying archival documentary material.

#### Pillar 3:

Aim: Research on Heritage and related materials, also to build up searchable databases, primarily on the micro and meso scales.

#### Pillar 4:

Aim: characterisation of the environmental conditions to provide accurate environmental conditions prediction to understand stone deterioration.

#### Pillar 5:

Aim: to generate and use digital models, and digital twins, on scales from landscapes to individual objects.

Pillar 6:

Aim: to study and research traditional materials ranging from clay to stone, to materials harvested from plant and animal sources, primarily on a macro scale.

The Horizontals are made up of:

- (1) The Interactions between the Executive Committee and the Stakeholders' Forum.
- (2) All six Pillars coming together as the Executive Committee.

ii. The following criteria apply to the Pillars:

The number of Pillars in this Cluster at any one time shall be limited to a maximum of six.

iii. During the course of its work, the Research Cluster may identify the need to establish an additional Pillar to cover emergent and important elements, or the need to remove an existent Pillar.

iv. The following criteria apply to the establishment of new Pillars:

- All efforts will be made to absorb new members and/or new proposals in existing Pillars, where they may complement existing projects.
  - When the active number of Pillars is below the maximum allowed number of six, any new or existing member may propose the formation of a new Pillar, to be submitted to the Executive Committee for vetting, in order to determine whether the proposal is viable and relevant to the objectives of the Cluster. Any other academic who has a proposal for a new Pillar needs to first become a member of the Cluster. Any new proposals will be required to include:
    - a clear justification of the rationale of the need for a new Pillar, including a clear demonstration that the proposed Pillar would greatly complement the Cluster but does not fit under existing Pillars.
    - a proposed workplan with proposed deliverables in line with the wider work programme of the Cluster
    - a funding plan with firm commitments to contribute the additional funding required to fulfil the proposed workplan.
    - Any further requirement that may be specified by the Executive Committee.
- The Executive Committee will also set guidelines for requests and workings of any proposals for new Pillars.

Once approved, any new Pillar will follow the procedure established in Clause 3 above.

v. The following criteria apply to the removal of existing Pillars:

Pillar members may collegially decide to dissolve their Pillar if they consider it is no longer serving its purpose, or to subsume it under another Pillar. After achieving consensus within the Pillar/s concerned, the respective Co-ordinator/s shall submit and present the case to the Executive Committee, with clear reasons why. All deliverables up to that date must be fulfilled before the Pillar may be dissolved or subsumed.

4. The Research Cluster must maintain an up-to-date webpage, within the UM website framework detailing, among others, the statute, the organizational structure, current and past research projects, achievements, and deliverables.
5. The Cluster is subject to appropriate fiscal controls and audits that ensure that it remains true to its approved mission. All the UM's financial, human resources and research policies, IP policy, regulations, SOPs etc. shall apply to the Research Cluster.
6. The University Research Clusters Committee will review the Cluster every three years to decide whether it shall be allowed to continue its operations if an updated proposal for cluster continuation is submitted.
7. The Research Clusters Committee retains the right to dissolve the Cluster and/or the right to remove a cluster member for valid grounds, including among others, mismanagement, significant deviation from objectives, significant under achievement of targets/deliverables, and transgressions related to research integrity.
8. Without prejudice to the fact that the funding of these Research Clusters by the UM is wholly dependent and subject to the availability of governmental funding, the HERITAGE Research Cluster will operate as a revenue centre with the ability to raise its own funds, subject to the UM's financial and procurement regulations. Any revenue generated by the Research Cluster shall be used solely for re-injections into that same cluster fund.
9. Any grievances of any kind between the members of the Research Cluster and /or with Executive Committee should, in the first instance, be resolved internally using the Cluster governance structures. If unsuccessful, these should be brought to the immediate attention of the Research Clusters Committee. The Research Clusters Committee will investigate the grievances and aim to settle the issue amicably, it may if the need arises, propose remedial action where necessary for Council's approval.

## **II. THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

1. The Cluster shall be managed and overseen by an Executive Committee approved by University Council on the recommendation of the Rector, and shall have the following structure:
  - i. a maximum of 6 members who are Council appointed University of Malta members of academic staff, elected by the respective Pillars, one of whom is nominated to act as Chair of the Committee, which shall include, but is not limited to, experts in the following areas: Archival Heritage, Ecclesiastical Heritage, Heritage Materials, Heritage and Environment, Digital Models, Cultural Heritage Landscapes. The appointment of the

nominated Chair of the Executive Committee needs to be endorsed and approved by Rector. The Chair will be a UM resident academic who is also an expert in the area; and

- ii. two (2) additional members from relevant stakeholders who are external to UM, as non-voting representatives. These representatives may be replaced from time to time at the discretion of their respective organisations. These stakeholders will also be invited to make up the Stakeholders' Forum.

2. To ensure continuity, replacement of members of the Executive Committee will be staggered as detailed below.

3. The procedure for the selection of the Executive Committee members and nomination of the Chair shall be as follows:

- Upon the formal launch of the Cluster, the members of each Pillar will elect their Pillar Co-ordinator who will also be their representative on the Executive Committee, thus being autonomous in their selection. These may or may not be the persons indicated as Pillar Co-ordinators during the design and preparation of the Cluster Proposal, indicated in Section 3 (i) above.
- After the first two years of the Cluster's lifetime have elapsed, half of the members of the Committee, decided by mutual agreement, will be required to step down and be re-elected or replaced. Subsequently, the duration of each term on the Committee will be four years. When four years of the Cluster's lifetime has elapsed the other half of the members of the Committee will be required to step down and be re-elected or replaced.
- At any time, when any member would like to resign from the Committee, he/she may hand in a written resignation addressed to the Chair of the Executive Committee; nominations will be accepted from other member/s to replace him/her from his/her Pillar, for the remaining part of his/her term.
- A Chair will be elected/re-elected every three years from among the members of the Committee. Anyone of the members of the Executive Committee may be nominated and seconded by two members of the Committee. When more than one person is so nominated, an election will take place. The incumbent Chair (or a delegated person if the Chair is up for re-election) will oversee the elections together with two other members of the Committee.
- Co-ordinators and Chair may be re-elected for a maximum of two successive terms.

4. The quorum for meetings of the Executive Committee shall be 4 members.

5. Apart from keeping regular Agendas and Minutes of meetings, the Committee shall regulate its own procedures during meetings, provided that every decision requires the approval of the majority of members at said meeting. The Executive Committee shall meet regularly and as necessary but should hold not less than three (3) meetings annually.

6. Subcommittees may be set up at the discretion of the Executive Committee and shall be regulated internally by it.
7. The Executive Committee shall submit annual progress reports to the University's Research Clusters Committee. The Committee will appoint a secretary for minute taking and recording purposes.
8. Any grievances of any kind between the members of the Executive Committee and /or with the Research Cluster should, in the first instance, be resolved internally using the Cluster governance structures. If unsuccessful, these should be brought to the immediate attention of the Research Clusters Committee, it may if the need arises, propose remedial action where necessary for Council's approval.

### **III. DISTRIBUTION AND OVERSIGHT OF FUNDS**

1. All funds shall be managed and all expenditures formally approved by the Chair of the Cluster. This approval is only a step in the standard procedures adopted by the University for the approval and disbursement of funds and expenses, which shall be followed at all times.
2. 2. As per Cluster Funding regulations, a Cluster is allowed to shift up to a maximum of 20% of the budget for a particular year to the next year. Such shifts from the approved budget require the approval of the Executive Committee by simple majority voting of members present at the Executive Committee meeting.
3. 3. The Cluster is allowed to shift up to a maximum of 20% of the budget allocated for each year from one budget line to another. Such shifts from the approved budget require the approval of the Chair of the Cluster.

### **IV. THE STATUTE**

1. This Statute is without prejudice to the Research Clusters Launch Plan Document issued by the Rector, dated \_\_\_\_\_.
2. This Statute and any subsequent amendments thereto must be approved by the Council of the University of Malta.



## **Executive Committee Members for 2024 to 2025**

To be elected (as in Section II 1 (i) above)

**Signed by:** \_\_\_\_\_<sup>2</sup>

**On this date:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ **(Chair)**

\_\_\_\_\_ **(Treasurer)**

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<sup>2</sup> It is advisable to have all members of the cluster/committee as signatories here.