



STATUTE GOVERNING THE OPERATIONS OF RESEARCH CLUSTER

FOSTERING EXCELLENCE IN SCHOOLS OF TOMORROW FOR ALL: AN EVIDENCEBASED APPROACH TO SUSTAINABLE AND EQUITABLE EDUCATION (FESTA)

The University of Malta **Fostering Excellence in Schools of Tomorrow for All: An Evidence-based Approach to Sustainable and Equitable Education for All (FESTA)**

(hereinafter "the Cluster") is a multidisciplinary research initiative that **aims to:**

- a. Promote quality education through an evidence-based approach** that strengthens a robust, sustainable and equitable education system, and prepares tomorrow's early years settings and schools to inspire excellence and success for all.
- b. Generate high-quality evidence** on educational practices and experiences across the education continuum (including early childhood education and care (ECEC), compulsory education, and educator education), to inform decision-making and improve educational quality and equity.
- c. Engage diverse stakeholders** (e.g., educators, policymakers, learners, parents and communities) in collaborative work that supports a high-quality education system and strengthens the relevance and uptake of research outputs.
- d. Develop and disseminate actionable recommendations** and evidence-informed frameworks that enhance educational quality, sustainability, inclusion, and learner/educator wellbeing.
- e. Strengthen coherence and integration of learning** across early childhood education and care, compulsory education, and post-compulsory/teacher education, and across formal, non-formal, and informal learning contexts.
- f. Support lifelong learning and adaptability** in a rapidly changing world, including the development of key competencies (including literacy, numeracy, and digital literacy) needed for present and future societal challenges.

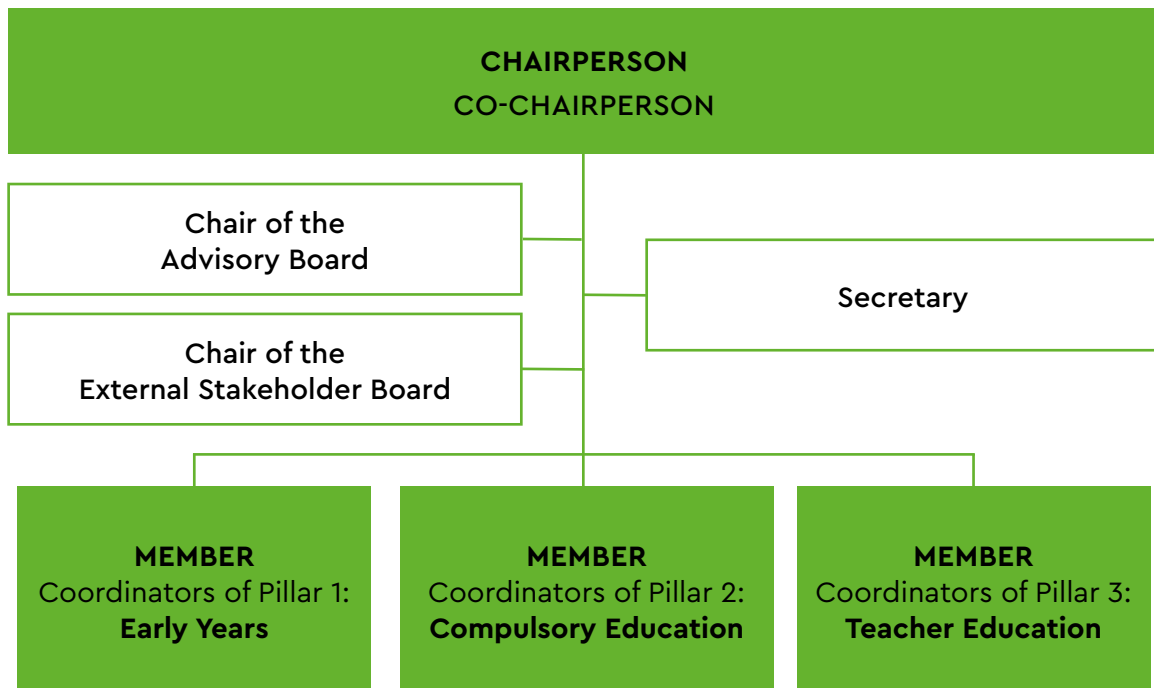
The Cluster's vision is to contribute to the further development of a nation where every school thrives as a beacon of excellence, supported by a sustainable, equitable, and evidence-based education system that empowers all learners to reach their full potential.

There shall be a Research Cluster managed by a FESTA Executive Committee.

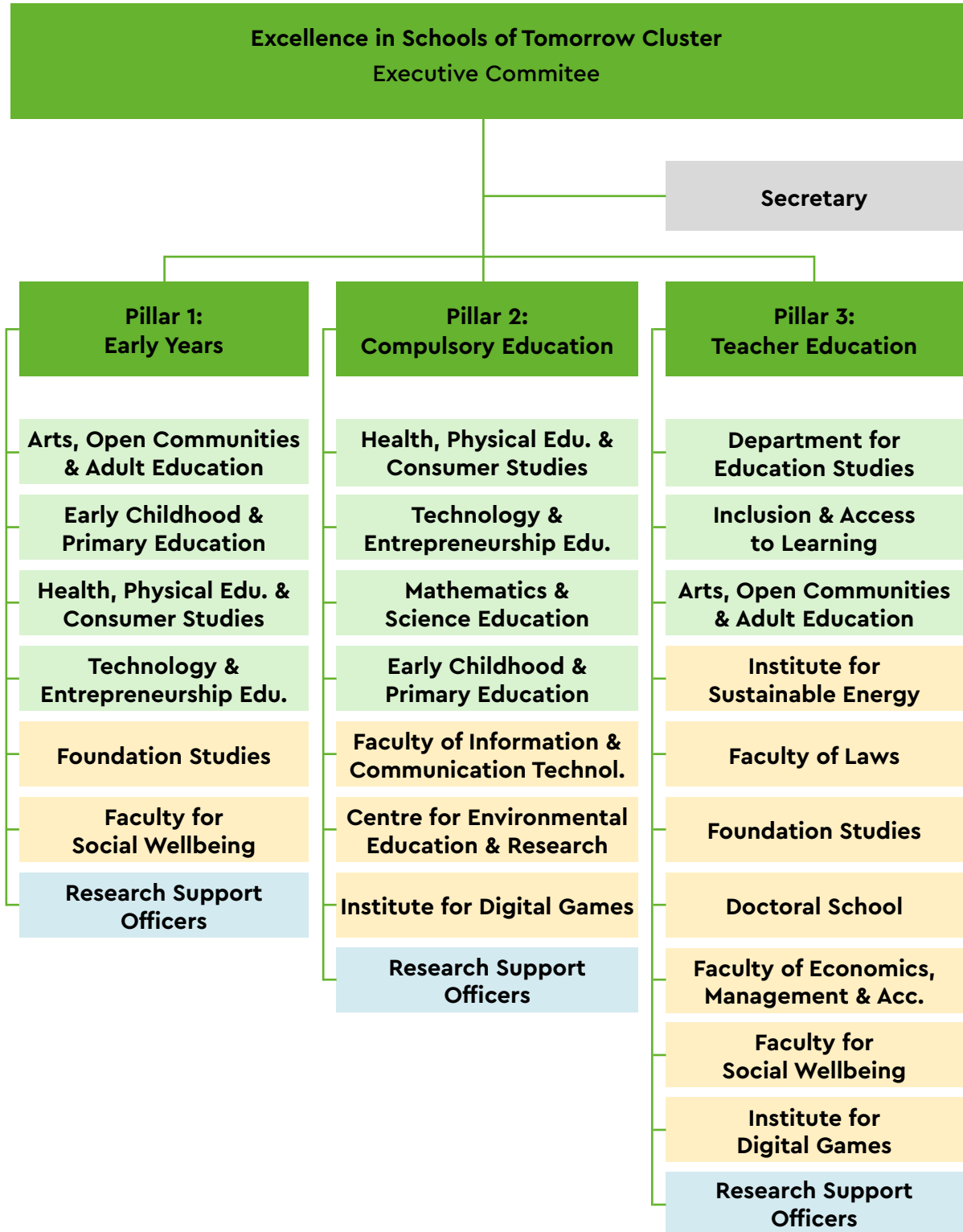
I. THE RESEARCH CLUSTER

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

The Structure of the FESTA Cluster Executive Committee



The FESTA Cluster Organisational Structure



2. Membership of the Cluster shall proceed as follows:
- i. All academics who are Council-appointed University of Malta members of staff, having a demonstrable research track record or a clear research interest aligned with the mission and objectives of Pillars and transversal components of FESTA, shall be eligible to become full members of the Cluster with voting rights.
 - ii. Researchers at UM who are not Council-appointed academics (RSOs, PhD and Master's students) and who are conducting work directly related to FESTA activities may be admitted as associate (non-voting) members of the Cluster.
 - iii. To qualify for full or associate membership, applicants must submit a formal written application via email to the Executive Committee. This application shall include:
 - a. A current Curriculum Vitae.
 - b. A cover letter detailing how the applicant's research interests align with FESTA's strategic objectives.
 - c. A statement specifying the FESTA Pillar and project to which the applicant intends to contribute.
 - iv. All membership applications shall be reviewed by the Executive Committee, and approval shall not be unreasonably withheld. Applications shall normally be approved by consensus of Executive Committee members present at the meeting. Where consensus is not reached, approval shall require a simple majority of those present. Rejection must be supported by a two-thirds majority vote of Executive Committee members present. The criteria for the approval of new members:
 - a. Alignment of the applicant's research interests to Cluster objectives.
 - b. Relevance of proposed contribution to the specific Pillar of the Cluster.
 - c. Demonstrated availability for Cluster-related activities.
 - v. Members are encouraged to contribute to Pillar(s) and transversal(s) where their expertise is relevant and needed to achieve the Cluster objectives.
 - vi. Cluster members (full or associate) may be removed by decision of the Executive Committee taken by a majority of members present and voting, for any of the following reasons:
 - a. Sustained or unjustified failure to produce agreed deliverables within agreed timeframes.
 - b. Unjustified failure to attend more than three (3) Pillar meetings, or persistent non-participation in agreed Cluster activities and correspondence.
 - c. Proven breach of the University regulations and/or research integrity, ethics requirements relevant to Cluster work.
 - d. Prior to any removal decision, the Executive Committee shall provide the member with written notification of the proposed removal, stating the reasons and any supporting information.
 - e. The member should have an opportunity to respond in writing (not less than fifteen (15) calendar days) to the Executive Committee.
 - f. The Executive Committee shall consider the member's response before taking a final decision. The decision shall be communicated to the member in writing, with brief reasons.
 - vii. A member may be suspended while undergoing disciplinary or investigatory procedures, where the Executive Committee deems that the matter may

affect the Cluster's functioning, integrity, reputation, or ability to meet its deliverables.

viii. These membership procedures may be periodically reviewed by the Executive Committee in line with evolving needs and objectives of FESTA.

3. The Research Cluster will initially comprise three (3) Pillars and three (3) Horizontals as approved by the Research Cluster Committee.

i. The Pillars will initially be as follows:

a. Early Childhood Education and Care: Pillar 1 focuses on co-developing a strategic plan to professionalise the early childhood education workforce to ensure a sustainable, equitable, and high-quality education system.

b. Compulsory Education: Focuses on research in primary and secondary schooling, including teaching and learning, inclusion, student wellbeing and achievement, and system- and school-level improvement for sustainable, high-quality education.

c. Education of Pre-service and In-service Educators: Focuses on the education, development, and support of educators across the career span, including initial teacher education, continuing professional development and educator wellbeing and working conditions.

ii. The Horizontals will initially be as follows:

a. Developing an evidence-based framework for a robust, sustainable, equitable, and quality education: A cross-disciplinary approach that supports all Pillars by strengthening evidence, indicators, and guidance for policy and practice that improve quality, equity, and sustainability across the education system.

b. Excellence in education for sustainable living in a rapidly changing technological world: A cross-cutting approach that integrates education for sustainable development with effective, ethical, and future-oriented use of technology, aligned to the needs of each Pillar.

c. Psychosocial factors as determinants of compulsory education student success and sustainable quality of life: A transdisciplinary approach focused on examining psychosocial and related socioeconomic factors that influence learner outcomes and wellbeing, and supporting evidence informed interventions to improve success and quality of life.

iii. Governance of Pillars and Horizontals

a. The Cluster's structure shall initially include three (3) Pillars and three (3) Horizontals. This structure may be modified by adding, merging, or discontinuing Pillars and/or Horizontals to align with the Cluster's evolving strategic needs. Any such modification requires approval by a majority vote of the Executive Committee members present at a duly convened meeting.

b. Each Pillar shall be led by a Pillar Co-ordinator. The Co-ordinator is responsible for convening Pillar meetings, co-ordinating contributions to the Cluster's work programme, and serving as a member of the Executive Committee responsible for all matters concerning Pillar deliverables, resources, and reporting.

c. Pillar Co-ordinators shall serve for a term concurrent with that of the Executive Committee (currently three (3) years). A Co-ordinator may be renewed for one consecutive term, subject to the appointment procedures outlined in this section.

d. The first Pillar Co-ordinators shall be appointed from among the Cluster's founding members at the time of its establishment.

e. Prior to the expiry of a standard 3-year term, or in the event of a vacancy,

the Executive Committee shall issue a call for expressions of interest to all Cluster members. Appointment of a Pillar Co-ordinator from the pool of eligible applicants shall be made by the Executive Committee, based on the eligibility criteria stipulated in paragraph (f) below.

- f. Candidates for the role of Pillar Co-ordinator (and, where applicable, Horizontal Convenor) must be Council-appointed University of Malta Resident Academics and voting members of the Cluster who possess relevant domain expertise and a demonstrated capacity for collaborative research leadership. The Executive Committee is empowered to define and publish more detailed criteria and procedures for candidates.
 - g. A Pillar Co-ordinator may resign voluntarily or may be removed by a majority vote of the Executive Committee members present at a meeting if deemed unable to fulfil the required duties. Following the creation of a vacancy, the Executive Committee may make an interim appointment, following a call for expressions of interest, or initiate the standard appointment process outlined in paragraph (e).
- iv. During its work, the Research Cluster may identify the need to establish additional pillars to cover emergent and important elements, or to remove an existing pillar.
- a. At no point will the FESTA Cluster entail more than six (6) Pillars.
 - b. In considering any emerging area of work, the Cluster shall first seek to absorb new members, projects, or themes within existing Pillars where these complement the ongoing work programme.
 - c. Any decision to establish, merge or remove a Pillar (and any required restructuring linked to the Pillars cap) shall require a two-thirds majority vote of the Executive Committee members present at the meeting.
- v. The following criteria apply to the establishment of new Pillars:
- d. A new Pillar shall be created only if the topic cannot fit within existing Pillars and/or Horizontals.
 - e. Any Cluster member may submit a written proposal to the Executive Committee (non-members must join first).
 - f. The proposal for the new Pillar should include a rationale, alignment with FESTA aims and key focus areas, an indicative workplan, deliverables, and a specification of the required resources.
 - g. The Executive Committee shall approve a proposed new Pillar only where it is strategic, viable, and non-duplicative, and where it strengthens the Cluster's capacity to deliver agreed outputs. Approval requires a two-thirds majority of Executive Committee members present.
 - h. Approval of a new Pillar shall be subject to compliance with the Statute's prescribed maximum number of Pillars. Where the addition of a new Pillar would result in that maximum being exceeded, approval shall be conditional upon the adoption of an accompanying restructuring plan, including the merger, consolidation, or discontinuation of one or more existing Pillars.
 - i. Once approved, any new pillar will follow the procedure established in Clause 3 above.
- vi. The following criteria apply to the removal of existing Pillars and Horizontals:
- a. A Pillar may be removed on grounds of limited output, redundancy, or lack of adequate funding to sustain its workplan, and the removal procedure may be initiated by any member of the Executive Committee and/or the Pillar Co-ordinator.
 - b. Initiation shall be by a written proposal submitted to the Executive Committee with clear justification and, where feasible, at least four (4)

weeks' notice ahead of the Executive Committee meeting where it will be discussed.

- c. The proposal for removal of existing Pillar(s) shall include: (a) reasons for removal. (b) actions taken. (c) a plan for absorbing or closing ongoing activities. and (d) confirmation that deliverables to date are completed or a plan and timeline for completion/transfer agreed by the Executive Committee.
 - d. The Executive Committee shall consider the proposal and may, where applicable, consult relevant advisory/stakeholder structures prior to making a decision. Approval (or rejection) of the removal shall be by a two-thirds majority vote of Executive Committee members present, and the decision shall be recorded in the minutes.
4. The The Research Cluster must maintain an up-to-date webpage within the UM website framework that contains, among others, the Statute, the organisational 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, 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, underachievement 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 significantly depends on and is subject to the availability of governmental funding, the FESTA 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 the 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:
 - a. A maximum of 5 members who are Council appointed University of Malta Resident Academics, one of whom is nominated to act as Chair and one of them as Co-chair of the Committee, which shall include, but is not limited to, experts in the following areas: (a) Education, (b) Education for Sustainable Living, (c) Educational Technology (d) Psychosocial determinants of student success. The appointment of the nominated Chair and Co-chair of the Executive Committee must be endorsed and approved by the Rector. The Chair and Co-chair will be UM resident academics who are also experts in some areas of the Cluster's activities.
 - b. The Pillar Co-ordinators and Horizontal Convenors shall be ex officio members of the Executive Committee for the duration of their appointment.
 - c. Two (2) members from relevant stakeholders who are external to UM, as proposed by the Executive Committee and approved by the Rector.
 - d. The two (2) Executive Committee members from relevant stakeholder organisations external to the University of Malta shall participate in the work of the Executive Committee.
2. The Executive Committee will serve for a term of three (3) years, after which it may be reappointed.
3. The procedure for the selection of the Executive Committee members and nomination of the Chair and Co-chair shall be as follows:
 - i. The Founding Executive Committee shall consist of a maximum of five (5) Council-appointed UM staff members, one of whom shall act as Chair, one of whom shall act as Co-Chair, together with two (2) members from relevant stakeholder organisations external to UM.
 - a. The Chair and Co-Chair of the Founding Executive Committee shall be nominated by the Dean of the Faculty of Education, following consultation with the initial members of the Cluster, and shall be forwarded to the Rector for approval.
 - b. The remaining three (3) UM members of the Founding Executive Committee shall be selected from among Cluster members to ensure balanced representation across the Pillars and the Horizontal perspectives.

- ii. At the end of each three (3) year term, the subsequent Executive Committee shall be established through an election among Cluster members
 - a. Elections shall be decided by a simple majority of the Cluster members participating in the vote. The quorum for the election of the Executive Committee members and the Chair and Co-Chair shall be 60% of the Cluster members.
 - b. The election shall fill the three (3) UM Executive Committee seats (in addition to the Chair and Co-chair), maintaining the principle of balanced expertise/representation across Pillars and Horizontals.
 - iii. The Chair and Co-chair for the subsequent terms shall be elected as part of the election cycle (by simple majority and subject to quorum), and the elected Chair and Co-chair shall be forwarded to the Rector for approval.
 - iv. The Executive Committee (including the Chair and Co-chair) serve for a three (3) year term and may be reappointed. To support renewal and continuity, Executive Committee members (including the Chair and Co-chair) may serve a maximum of two consecutive terms, after which they shall step down for one full term before being eligible again.
 - v. Any Executive Committee member wishing to resign shall submit a written resignation to the Chair. Where a vacancy arises (including the Chair and Co-chair), the Executive Committee shall initiate an interim replacement process (e.g., call for expressions of interest) to appoint a replacement for the remaining part of the term, using simple majority voting unless otherwise specified in this Statute.
4. The quorum of the Executive Committee meetings of the Board shall be 3 members.
5. Duties and Responsibilities of the Executive Committee Members
- a. **The Chair** provides overall strategic and operational leadership of the Cluster and its Executive Committee, convenes and presides over meetings, sets agendas, ensures decisions are properly recorded and followed up, and represents the Cluster in internal and external fora as required. The Chair oversees delivery against agreed objectives, ensures compliance with the UM regulations, research integrity and ethics requirements, and co-ordinates (directly or through delegation of duties) the Cluster's reporting, planning, and stakeholder engagement. Where the Statute assigns financial responsibility, the Chair also oversees the Cluster's financial governance and resource use in line with UM regulations.
 - b. **The Co-Chair** supports the Chair in the day-to-day governance of the Cluster, may lead specific Cluster activities such as membership, compliance, outputs/deliverables, partnerships, and helps co-ordinate follow-up on Executive Committee decisions. The Co-Chair acts in the place of the Chair when the Chair is unavailable, ensuring continuity of governance, chairing meetings when required, and supporting timely decision-making and communication with members and stakeholders.

- c. Other Executive Committee Members** share responsibility for the Cluster's good governance, including contributing to strategic direction, ensuring balanced representation across the Cluster's thematic areas, actively participating in meetings and decision-making, and taking on assigned roles to support effective delivery. Members are responsible for monitoring progress against agreed plans and deliverables, maintaining confidentiality where applicable, upholding UM regulations and research integrity, and contributing to transparent, fair procedures in appointments, elections, membership decisions, and any disciplinary processes.
6. 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. It is recommended that the Executive Committee should meet regularly and as necessary, but should hold not less than five (5) meetings annually.
 7. Subcommittees may be established at the discretion of the Executive Committee and shall be governed internally by it.
 8. The Executive Committee shall submit annual progress reports to the University's Research Clusters Committee. In this regard, it is recommended that the Committee appoint a secretary for minute-taking and recording.
 9. 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. THE EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDER BOARD

1. The Cluster shall be supported by an External Stakeholder Board, which shall provide a structured mechanism for engagement with external stakeholders and shall advise the Executive Committee on relevance, uptake, impact, and collaboration opportunities. The External Stakeholder Board shall be advisory and shall not exercise executive or managerial authority.
2. The External Stakeholder Board shall comprise representatives of relevant external stakeholder organisations, including public authorities, schools/educational entities, civil society organisations, and other partners aligned to the Cluster's remit. Membership shall

be sized to remain functional (up to [8–10] members).

- a. The Executive Committee shall identify priority stakeholders and invite nominations from relevant organisations.
 - b. The Executive Committee shall appoint members based on relevance, capacity to support collaboration and impact, and commitment to constructive engagement.
 - c. Appointments shall be submitted to the Rector for approval.
 - d. The Executive Committee shall designate one member to act as Stakeholder Board Convenor for meeting purposes.
3. External Stakeholder Board members shall be appointed for a term aligned with the Executive Committee term (currently three (3) years) and may be renewed.
- a. The External Stakeholder Board shall meet at least once per year and may organise thematic sessions linked to Pillars and Horizontals activities
 - b. The External Stakeholder Board shall, among other things, advise on the relevance and practical applicability of the Cluster's research agenda.
 - c. Identify opportunities for partnership, co-creation, knowledge exchange, and impact.
 - d. Advise on dissemination routes and stakeholder communication, and
 - e. Provide feedback on the Cluster's outputs, emerging needs, and opportunities for external resourcing and collaboration.

IV. THE ADVISORY BOARD

1. The Cluster shall be supported by an Advisory Board, which shall provide independent expert advice to the Executive Committee on the Cluster's strategic direction, research priorities, quality assurance, ethics and integrity considerations, and pathways for impact. The Advisory Board shall be advisory in nature and shall not exercise executive or managerial authority.
 - a. The Advisory Board shall comprise up to 8 to 10 persons with recognised expertise relevant to the Cluster's responsibility, drawn from outside the University. The Executive Committee shall seek, as far as practicable, balanced representation of disciplinary expertise, methodological competence, and sectoral experience relevant to the Cluster's Pillars and Horizontals.
 - b. The Executive Committee shall issue a call for nominations/expressions of interest as and when required.
 - c. The Executive Committee shall appoint Advisory Board members on the basis of demonstrated expertise and independence, and may invite specific individuals to ensure the required breadth of expertise.

- d. The list of Advisory Board members shall be submitted to the Rector for approval.
 - e. The Executive Committee shall designate one member of the Advisory Board to act as Advisory Board Chair for meeting purposes.
2. Advisory Board members shall be appointed for a term aligned with the Executive Committee term (currently three (3) years) and may be renewed once, subject to performance and continuing relevance of expertise. To support continuity, the Executive Committee may implement staggered appointments.
 3. The Advisory Board shall meet at least once per year (in person or online) and, upon request by the Executive Committee, at additional times. The Advisory Board may issue written recommendations, briefs, or an annual advisory note to the Executive Committee. The Advisory Board shall, among other things:
 - a. Advise on strategic priorities, research quality, and alignment with the Cluster's objectives.
 - b. Advise on ethical, integrity, and risk considerations relevant to Cluster activities.
 - c. Advise on dissemination, stakeholder engagement, and impact pathways. and
 - d. Support periodic review of Pillars/Horizontal and the Cluster work programme, when requested.
 4. Advisory Board members shall be non-voting and shall not be counted for quorum or voting majorities of the Executive Committee. Members shall declare any actual or potential conflicts of interest and comply with applicable University policies, confidentiality, and data protection requirements.

V. 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 should be followed at all times.
2. As per Cluster Funding regulations, a Cluster is allowed to make changes to the financial plan that can take the form of either: (a) a shift from one budget heading to another. or (b) a transfer of funds from one year to another. While such shifts are regulated by the cluster funding rules, decisions in relation to such shifts require the approval of the Executive Committee by a two-thirds majority voting of members present at the Executive Committee meeting.

VI. 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.
3. No signature shall be required for the validity of this Statute. The Statute shall be deemed duly adopted upon approval by the Council, and such approval shall be evidenced by the official record of the Council's decision, including the date and time of adoption as recorded in the Council's minutes.
4. The Statute shall enter into force upon such approval, unless the Council decision provides otherwise.