



STATUTE GOVERNING THE OPERATIONS OF RESEARCH CLUSTER

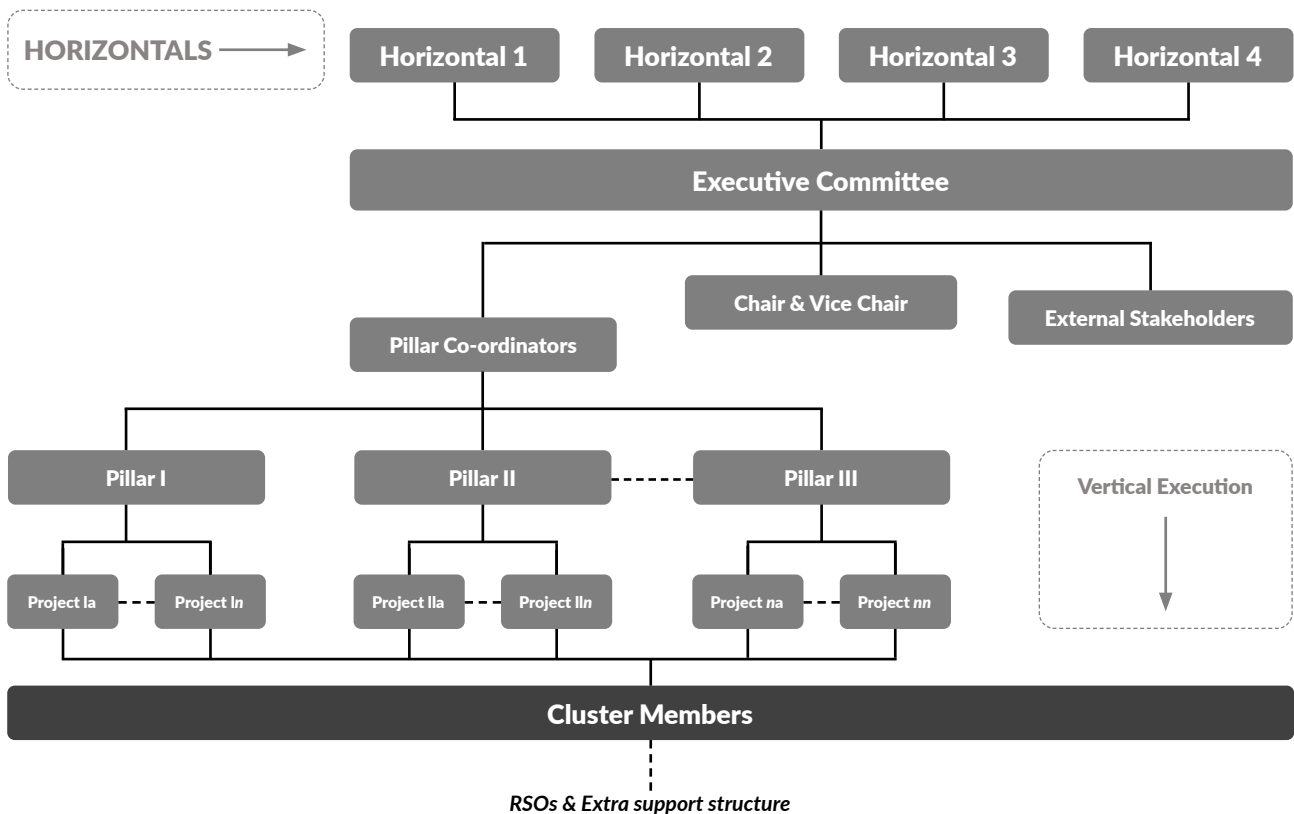
DECC | Discourses of the Environment and Climate Change: Language, Culture and the Environmental Humanities

The University of Malta Research Cluster DECC (hereinafter "the Cluster") is a multidisciplinary research initiative that aims to establish the Environmental Humanities as a field of academic excellence at the University of Malta, by investigating the crucial role of discourse, language and culture in mediating human-environment interactions. Its vision is to shape public perception and constructive responses to environmental and climate challenges, while fostering interdisciplinary dialogue and research across the University's Faculties, Institutes, Centres and Schools.

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

I. THE RESEARCH CLUSTER

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



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 or interest in the subject matter of the Cluster, are eligible to become members of the Cluster with voting rights.
- ii. Researchers at UM who are not resident academics, such as RSOs, can be associate, non-voting members of the Cluster.
- iii. 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:
 - affiliation with UM
 - an active interest in the area of Environmental Humanities.

UM Academics wishing to join the Cluster will need to write a short letter of motivation describing their involvement with or interest in the area of Environmental Humanities and explaining which particular pillar or project they would like to collaborate in.

iv. Cluster members may be removed for:

- **Non-engagement and inactivity:** Failure to actively engage with the Cluster's activities, including non-attendance of scheduled meetings, for a consecutive period of one (1) year. This provision shall be waived in cases where the member is on a pre-approved leave of absence, such as sabbatical, parental, or medical leave, or in the event of documented, verifiable extenuating personal circumstances, provided such circumstances are formally communicated to the Executive Committee.
- **Failure to produce deliverables:** Demonstrated and persistent failure to produce agreed-upon deliverables, or milestones as defined in the project work plan, and subsequent failure to remedy this shortfall after a reasonable period of remediation.
- **Uncollegial conduct:** Engaging in sustained uncollegial conduct deemed detrimental to the cooperative functioning, professional environment, or reputation of the Cluster. The determination that such conduct necessitates removal shall require a formal review by the Executive Committee in consultation with the Research Clusters Committee.

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

- i. The Cluster's Horizontals are cross-cutting strategic priorities that must be integrated across all pillars and activities to ensure coherence, enhance interdisciplinary insight, and amplify the societal relevance of the planned research. The Cluster's Horizontals will initially be as follows:

- **Horizontal I: Framing of environmental discourses**

The Cluster's overall focus is on how environmental issues are conceptualized, communicated, and understood across different contexts locally and beyond.

- **Horizontal II: Interdisciplinarity and cross-sectoral collaboration**

The Cluster's will provide a space for building meaningful, reciprocal relationships between researchers from distinct disciplinary backgrounds, ensuring the dialogue between key civil stakeholders, while also placing special emphasis on participatory approaches that result in the co-creation of knowledge and proposed action.

- **Horizontal III: Community engagement and public outreach**

The Cluster's activities will highlight the vital involvement of the general public in the research process as a means to not only enhance relevance, legitimacy and impact, but also ensure that research outcomes are socially relevant, accessible and impactful beyond academic settings.

- **Horizontal IV: Cultural transformation in sustainability**

Given its explicit aim of constituting a catalyst for deep cultural shifts toward sustainability, the Cluster will dedicate part of its efforts to both the raising of awareness, especially through education, and the investigation of how formal and informal learning processes contribute to changing values, behaviors, and worldviews in relation to environmental issues.

ii. Primary oversight and managerial responsibility for the successful execution and integration of the Horizontals shall reside with the Executive Committee. This includes, but is not limited to, monitoring progress, allocating non-Pillar specific resources, and ensuring adherence to the core objectives of each Horizontal. The Cluster Chair and Vice-Chair shall coordinate the Executive Committee's efforts in this area, with them serving as the first point of contact for inter-Pillar issues related to Horizontal integration.

iii. The Cluster's Pillars represent the Cluster's sub-areas, each focusing on research and technical activities. The Cluster's Pillars will initially be as follows:

- **Pillar I: Discourses of Environmental Politics**

Pillar I will focus on current forms of political discourse related to the environment and climate change, including governmental and intergovernmental policies, public debates, media coverage, global protest movements and environmental activism.

- **Pillar II: Changing (Is)Lands and Seas**

Pillar II will analyse literary and oral narratives and conceptualizations of the environment and climate change across different linguistic, literary and cultural traditions, different genres, and different areas of knowledge. Its various thematic focuses include (is)lands and seas, changing environments, the weather, the

relationship between the local and the global, land reclamation, ecotopias and climate migration.

- **Pillar III: Environmental Futures**

Pillar III will look at the relations between nature, the environment, the climate and conceptions of the future in different languages and explores the pedagogy, frameworks and vocabularies of climate change. It will examine, evaluate and critique the language(s), used to think about, teach and discuss matters related to environmental futures by writers, policy makers, scientists and technologists, activists, educators, language learners and others.

iv. The following criteria apply to the Pillars:

- Each Pillar will be led by a designated Pillar Co-ordinator. The term of office for a Pillar Co-ordinator shall be three (3) years; renewable, subject to approval by the Executive Committee.
 - The initial Pillar Co-ordinators upon the founding of the Cluster have already been identified at the application stage. Subsequent appointments shall be conducted either through formal nomination by Cluster members or via an expression of interest submitted by an active Cluster member. The final selection shall be decided by the Executive Committee following a simple majority vote of its members. The criteria for Pillar Co-ordinator eligibility include at minimum active Cluster membership and demonstrable expertise directly relevant to the thematic scope of the specific Pillar being coordinated.
 - A Pillar Co-ordinator may be removed from their role on the basis of demonstrable failure to perform their defined duties. Such removal shall require a two-thirds (2/3) majority vote of the Executive Committee. Upon obtaining this vote, the Executive Committee must first issue a formal written letter of explanation to the Co-ordinator, detailing the reasons for the proposed removal and offering a two-week period for response.
- v. During the course of its work, the Research Cluster may identify the need to establish additional pillars to cover emergent and important elements, or the need to remove an existent pillar. To ensure optimal focus and manageable coordination, at no point will the cluster entail more than six (6) Pillars. This cap is meant ensure optimal executive representation, since every Pillar Co-ordinator will automatically secure a designated seat on the Executive Committee without the need for a secondary election process among Pillar Co-ordinators.
- vi. The following criteria apply to the establishment of new Pillars: Only active, formally recognised members of the Cluster may propose a new Pillar. To do so, they need to submit a formal written proposal to the Executive Committee. This proposal must clearly and comprehensively justify the relevance to the Cluster's mission, the importance and potential impact of the proposed research area, and a detailed estimate of the resources (financial, personnel, and time) required for its operation. New Pillars will only be considered if their associated projects cannot be reasonably

accommodated within the scope of an existing Pillar. Prior to any formal decision, the Executive Committee will hold a general meeting to consult with all Cluster members so as to gather feedback and assess the strategic fit of the proposed Pillar. The final decision regarding the approval or rejection of the new Research Pillar shall rest with the Executive Committee, with approval requiring a two-thirds (2/3) majority vote.

Once approved, any new pillar will follow the procedure established in Clause 3(iv) above.

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

- The removal of an existing Pillar may be initiated to maintain the Cluster's strategic focus, optimize resource allocation, and avoid redundancy. Such removal shall be justified on one or more of the following grounds:
 - A demonstrable and persistent lack of scholarly output or project activity.
 - A fundamental misalignment with the Cluster's evolving research mission as determined by the Executive Committee.
 - Strategic redundancy, including the complete subsumption of the Pillar's activities into another existing Pillar.
- Prior to removing a Pillar, the Executive Committee must call a general meeting and conduct mandatory consultation with all Cluster members to assess the impact of the Pillar's removal. The final decision shall rest with the Executive Committee and shall require a two-thirds (2/3) majority vote.

4. The Research Cluster must maintain an up-to-date webpage, within the UM website framework detailing, among others, the statue, 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 significantly depends and is subject to the availability of governmental funding, the DECC 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. eight (8) members who are Council appointed University of Malta Resident Academics, two of whom are nominated to act as Chair and Vice Chair of the Committee, which shall include, but is not limited to, experts in the area of Environmental Humanities. The appointment of the nominated Chair and Vice Chair of the Executive Committee needs to be endorsed and approved by Rector. Both the Chair and the Vice Chair will be UM resident academics who are also experts in the area; and
 - ii. two (2) members from relevant stakeholders who are external to UM.
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 shall be as follows:

It is foreseen that the Cluster's Executive Committee will be made up of ten members, consisting of

 - The Cluster Chair and Vice Chair,
 - the Pillar Leaders,
 - one representative from each of the the two aforementioned external stakeholders.

Should the number of appointed Pillar Co-ordinators be less than six (6) at the start of a new term, the vacant seats allocated to UM-internal members shall be filled by other active Cluster members, with priority given to members leading a recognised project within the Cluster. In this case, an open call of interest will be circulated among Cluster members asking them to nominate themselves for inclusion in the Committee. Following the receipt of nominations, the Executive Committee will hold a general meeting during which Cluster members will vote to fill such remaining seats.

When an Executive Committee term elapses, the outgoing Chair will call a meeting with the incoming Executive Committee members specified above, who will vote for the continuation or replacement of the Chair and Vice-Chair seats. A two-thirds (2/3) majority vote is required in this case.

If an Executive Committee member resigns from their role prior to termination of term, a replacement will be sought by the Executive Committee, all members of which can nominate potential candidates that are already Cluster members. The final selection will take place during a dedicated Executive Committee meeting, with a two-thirds (2/3) majority vote applying in the selection of replacements for the roles of Chair or Vice-Chair, and a simple majority applying in all other cases.

4. The quorum of the Executive Committee meetings of the Board shall be 5 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. It is recommended that the Executive Committee should 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. In this respect it is recommended that the Committee appoints 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 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 two-thirds majority voting of members present at the Executive Committee meeting.

IV. THE STATUTE

1. This Statute is without prejudice to the Research Clusters Launch Plan Document issued by the Rector, dated 19 June 2023.
2. This Statute and any subsequent amendments thereto must be approved by the Council of the University of Malta.

Executive Committee Members for the first 3 years of the DECC Cluster

Dr Katrin Dautel (Chair)

Prof. Stavros Assimakopoulos (Vice Chair)

Prof. Anne-Marie Bezzina Busuttil

Dr Elisabeth Birk

Dr Denise Camenzuli

Dr Marija Grech

Prof. Adrian Grima

Prof. Kathrin Schoedel

Representative from the Environment and Resources Authority

Representative from Għawdix

Signed by: _____

Name of Chair: _____

On this date: _____