

# STATUTE GOVERNING THE OPERATIONS OF RESEARCH

## CLUSTER DATA INTEGRITY AND STEWARDSHIP (DISC)

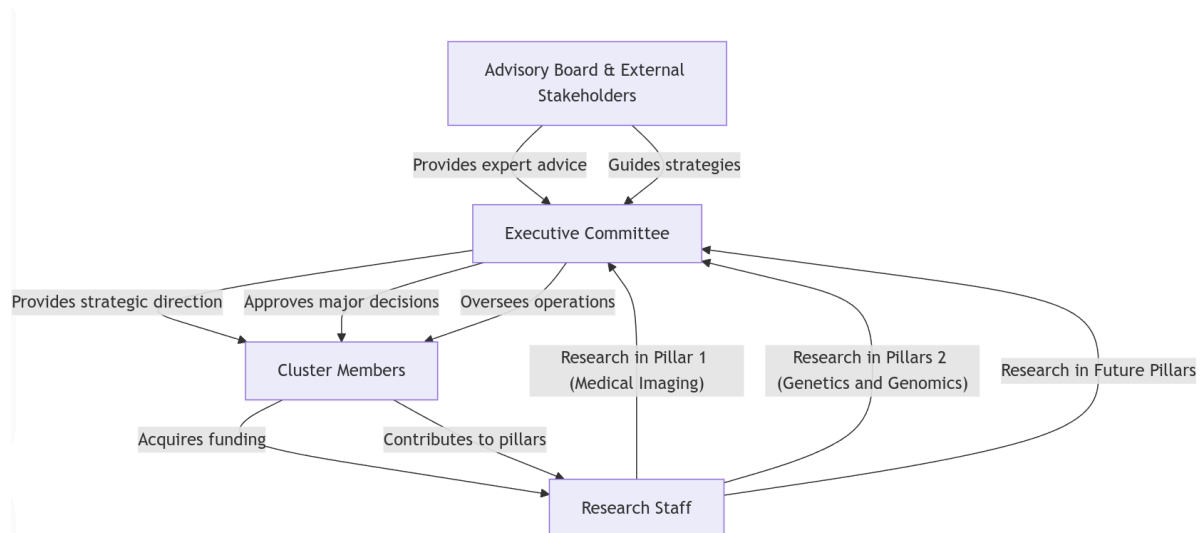
The University of Malta Data Integrity and Stewardship Cluster (DISC) (hereinafter “the Cluster”) is a multidisciplinary research initiative that aims to overcome legal, social, and technical barriers to data processing for the purposes of scientific research carried out in the public interest while upholding participant fundamental rights and interests.

There shall be a Research Cluster and an Executive Committee:

### I. THE RESEARCH CLUSTER

1. The organisational structure of the Data Integrity and Stewardship Cluster (DISC) will be as follows:

- Executive Committee (inter alia responsible for Cluster management)
- Membership
- Research Staff
- Advisory Board
- External Stakeholder Board



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 (both voting and non-voting), the applicants require the approval of the Executive Committee. Such approval shall not be unreasonably withheld and the Executive Committee shall adopt the following requirements for membership approval:
  - send a Curriculum Vitae to the Executive Committee;
  - send a letter of motivation indicating how the research interests and / or track record of the applicant are linked to the Cluster objectives. The letter should include how the applicant will contribute to the cluster's activities;
  - indicate which pillar(s) the applicant would like to be associated with.

As a point of clarification, membership pertains to the Research Cluster as a whole, rather than to any particular pillar or horizontal. All members will be encouraged to contribute to any, and all, pillars and horizontals, that align with their expertise in the spirit of true interdisciplinary endeavors.

- (iv) All applications for membership / associate membership shall be reviewed by the Executive Committee and shall not be unreasonably withheld. Applications are normally approved by consensus of the Executive Committee members present at the meeting. Rejection of an application must be backed up by a two-thirds majority vote of the Executive Committee members present at the meeting.
- (v) Cluster members may be removed for:
  - Unjustified failure to produce any agreed deliverables within agreed time-frames;
  - Proven breach of university regulations.
- (vi) Cluster members may be suspended while undergoing any disciplinary procedures, should the Executive Committee deem that such disciplinary procedures are related to the member's conduct, behavior, or actions that impact the cluster.
- (vii) suspension and / or removal of a member will be by two-thirds majority vote of the Executive Committee members present at the meeting.
- (viii) These procedures will be periodically reviewed and adjusted based on the evolving needs and objectives of the Cluster. All amendments are normally approved by consensus of the Executive Committee members

present at the meeting. In case that consensus is not reached, changes must be backed up by a two-thirds majority vote of the Executive Committee members present at the meeting. All changes will be made available on the Cluster website.

3. The Research Cluster will initially comprise two (2) Pillars and four (4) Horizontals as approved by the Research Cluster Committee.

i. The Pillars will initially be as follows:

- Biomedical Imaging: Biomedical imaging at the University of Malta focuses on the utilisation of advanced imaging technologies to facilitate groundbreaking research in medical science. This pillar supports the enhancement of diagnostic precision and the exploration of new therapeutic avenues across various medical disciplines.
- Genetics and genomics: This pillar addresses the critical aspects of genetic research and the management of biobanks, focusing on the ethical, legal, and scientific challenges related to the collection and use of genetic data.

ii. The Horizontals will initially be as follows:

- Law
- Science
- Technology
- Society

iii. The following criteria apply to the Pillars and Horizontals:

a) Number of Pillars:

The Cluster initially comprises two (2) Pillars, with flexibility to add or remove Pillars based on the Cluster's evolving needs. Proposals for adding or removing Pillars must be approved by a two-thirds majority of the Executive Committee members present at the meeting.

b) Pillar and Horizontal Coordinators and formation of the Executive Committee:

Pillar and Horizontal Coordinators automatically form part of the Executive Committee.

Election and Appointment: Refer to section II subsection 3 below.

Term: Coordinators serve for a term of four years, consistent with the term of the Executive Committee. The appointment can be

renewed once, allowing for a maximum tenure of eight years. For clarity, if a Pillar or Horizontal Coordinator is elected to the Executive Committee partway through an ongoing term, their term will still expire concurrently with the existing term of the Executive Committee.

Criteria for Election: Candidates for Coordinator roles shall be voting members of the Cluster with relevant expertise in their area of responsibility.

c) Removal or Replacement of Coordinators:

Coordinators may be removed by a two-thirds majority vote of the Executive Committee present at the meeting if they are unable to fulfill their duties.

d) Horizontals:

Horizontals shall consist of a minimum of one (1) expert in the relevant area. They shall provide interdisciplinary support to the Pillars.

- iv. During the course of its work, the Research Cluster may identify the need to establish additional Pillars or Horizontals to cover emerging and important elements, or the need to remove an existing Pillar or Horizontal.
  - v. A proposal to activate a new Pillar or Horizontal, including the funding mechanism, needs to be proposed by a member to the Executive Committee. A two-thirds majority of the Executive Committee present at the meeting will be required to activate a new Pillar or Horizontal. The procedure will be the same for removing a Pillar or Horizontal.
- 4. The Cluster shall 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 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 Data Integrity and Stewardship Cluster (DISC) will operate as a revenue center with the ability to raise its own funds, subject to the UM's financial and procurement regulations. Any revenue generated by the 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:
  - (i) Pillar and Horizontal Coordinators will form the Executive Committee. They shall be Council appointed University of Malta members of staff, 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: (a) law, (b) science (c) society and (d) technology. 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) members from relevant stakeholders who are external to UM. The stakeholder Executive Committee members will be appointed to said Committee, normally by consensus of the remaining Executive Committee members present at the meeting. In case that consensus is not reached, appointments must be backed up by a two-thirds majority vote of the Executive Committee members present at the meeting.
2. The Executive Committee will serve for a term of four (4) years, after which it may be reappointed. This appointment can be renewed once, making a total tenure period of up to eight years.
  - (i) After serving a second term, members of the Executive Committee are to step down for a whole term before being eligible for re-election;

- (ii) Following a term when the individual is not serving as a member of the Executive Committee, the individual may be re-appointed as a member of the Executive Committee, for a 'first' term.

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

Upon the resignation of a Council appointed member of the Executive Committee, at the expiry of their term, or if they are otherwise unable to carry out their duties, eligible members will have the possibility to express their interest to join the Executive Committee (as a Pillar or Horizontal Coordinator). Each member must declare what role they are interested in occupying (specific Pillar or Horizontal Coordinator). The members will vote to formally accept or formally reject the candidate to the Executive Committee. Acceptance is indicated by a simple majority of votes submitted.

The Executive Committee shall appoint an independent Electoral Manager who will be a member of staff at UM. The Electoral Manager, appointed by a simple majority vote of the Executive Committee present at the meeting from among University of Malta members of staff, is responsible for overseeing the integrity and transparency of all election processes within the Cluster, including the election of Pillar and Horizontal Coordinators to the Executive Committee. The Manager, who must not be a current Executive Committee member, will initiate and organize elections, verify candidate eligibility, manage voting procedures, and ensure fairness and confidentiality. The Manager will serve a four-year term, coinciding with the Executive Committee's term, and is accountable to the Executive Committee for maintaining the highest standards of impartiality throughout the election process.

Following the establishment of the founding Executive Committee, after every full term of office of four (4) years, or should the post become vacant, the Executive Committee shall elect a Chair and vice-Chair from amongst themselves. As far as possible this election will be by consensus. If consensus cannot be achieved, a vote will be taken and the Chair and vice-Chair will be elected by a simple majority vote of members present at the meeting.

- 4. The quorum of the Executive Committee board meetings shall be three (3) members.
- 5. Apart from keeping regular Agendas and Minutes of meetings, the Executive 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 shall 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 shall 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. 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.

### **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 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. 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 2028**

Dr Mireille M Sant

Dr Claude J Bajada

Prof Nikolai Paul Pace

Dr Panagiotis Alexiou

Prof. Joel Azzopardi

Prof. Gillian Martin

**Signed by Chair:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Name of Chair:** Dr Mireille M Sant

**On this date :** 30 August 2024