

A POLICY FOR RESEARCH INSTITUTES AND RESEARCH CENTRES AT ROYAL HOLLOWAY

There is an ongoing need for research activities at the College to be grouped and/or collected under specific labels in order to create critical mass in research bids, to aid external promotion, to encourage greater cooperation and to generally foster an exchange of ideas between individuals with research common interests.

The standard approach in the sector is to present significant research activities as Centres and Institutes. At present the College has a large number of Centres (and some Institutes), some of which represent substantial research collaborations (such as HARC, ICT4D) while others are very modest activities and still others which are effectively moribund. There is little consistency about what we mean by a Centre or Institute and it is often difficult to assess the purpose, size and importance of any one of our activities from the obvious externally facing medium of our web pages. This is not helpful at promoting our external profile and generates confusion and in some cases disappointment.

It is time we introduced a consistent approach in order to bring some clarity on what exactly a Centre or an Institute is. We need sensible operating guidelines and effective support that meets the needs of our research and will lead to more active and effective groups. We also need to sift through what we already have, identify what is worthwhile and close down any activities that may have been valuable in the past but that are now superfluous and even unhelpful.

The College will therefore:

- 1) Introduce a formal guide for defining the differences between Centres, Institutes and Research Groups.
- 2) Introduce a requirement for each type of structure to have an annual reporting process and where appropriate to create a business plan and research strategy.
- 3) Require all existing Centres and Institutes to justify their continued existence within a set time period, and if they do not do so to the satisfaction of a working group that they are wound up.
- 4) Provide a mechanism for each unit to have a financial presence within the college.

PROPOSED CATEGORIES OF RESEARCH STRUCTURES

It should be recognised that research groupings come in different categories and have different objectives, and we need to reflect these differences in the names and structure of our research organisation.

Three broad categories have been identified:

- 1) **RESEARCH CENTRE:** Research groupings that consist of academics principally focused on a single department but which may include academics from a number of departments when there is a clear overlap in the research area between those departments. The purpose of the centre may be to generate collaboration to boost either outputs, funding or impact
- 2) **RESEARCH INSTITUTE:** Larger research groupings that are genuinely multi-disciplinary and which involve academics from multiple departments, where the rationale for the structure is to promote world class research funding, outputs and impact.

- 3) **SMART SPECIALISATION INSTITUTE:** A similar agenda to 2) but where the motivation is primarily to foster regional development and where the interaction may extend beyond research to embrace training, knowledge transfer and scholarship.

The boundaries of these three types of structure must retain a degree of fluidity as it is unlikely that every research collaboration will fall exactly under a specific heading!

RESEARCH CENTRES

Research Centres are activities linked to a specific relatively focused theme and focused primarily on a single department. They are research groupings that bring together and highlight key areas of activity that are substantial, prominent and represent some distinctive characteristic of the College's research. The purpose of forming a Centre is to provide momentum and focus, encourage external interest and where appropriate to act as a vehicle for research grant applications.

The creation of a Centre within a department could have the function of proving the impression of greater mass and support when research bids are submitted compared to bids from individuals or perhaps two or three academics. These Centres may involve academics from related departments where the theme boundaries naturally extend between the two (or more) units.

The operation and resourcing of a Centre is a matter that can be delegated to the departmental level and will be the province of the host department's Director of Research. The formation and operation of Centres will be subject to a light touch oversight centrally but it is important for the College credibility that each Centre has a remit, objectives and a plan of action and that the plan of action is regularly reviewed. All Centres must have as a central tenet that they exist to increase either research income, research outputs or impact or combinations of the three.

A Centre should have a designated Director whose responsibilities will include ownership of the Centre's research plans and drafting an annual report of activities for the Director of Research within the department. The Director of Research should report annually on the Centre to Research Committee with the expectation that if an annual report is considered unsatisfactory that the Centre will have a further year to prove its value to the College before it is dissolved.

Note in some large departments, major research groups have in the past been routinely called Centres. This custom should cease unless the "Centres" adopt the same overarching practices. A Centre of this sort, would alternatively be described as a Research Group (e.g. in REF terms).

Research Centres can develop headed notepaper, create and manage their web presence and promote themselves externally as entities within the university's structure, subject to the normal university brand guidelines and digital policy and protocols. Research proposals can be submitted with the Research Centre as the prime (sub-college) affiliation if this is considered beneficial from a publicity and grant winning perspective and is compatible with the grant awarding authorities processes (e.g. JeS). Similarly research papers can be published with the by-line of the Centre as well as, or instead of, that of the department. A consistent approach within each Centre will be encouraged and whatever approach is adopted should have the approval of the relevant Head of Department(s).

To establish/maintain a Centre a proforma should be submitted to the Research Committee containing the following information:-

Requirements to establish (continue) a Research Centre:

Name of Centre

.....

Home Department

.....

Associated Departments

.....

Approval of Head of Department(s)

.....

Named Director and Management team

.....

Description of Research Area

(Scope, what is included what isn't)

Max 1/2 page

Justification for the Centre

(What are the benefits to the researchers in creating the Centre, how does RHUL rate nationally/internationally in the area)

Max 1 page

Strategic plan

(What activities are planned, what are the goals, what are the expected outputs, grant bids, impact case studies and timescales?)

Max 2 pages

RESEARCH INSTITUTES

The name "Institute" as opposed to Centre, implies a greater status with greater breadth of subject and a certain gravitas. This is the reason for selecting this name for research structures that are multidisciplinary in nature and traverse many departments and possibly faculties.

An Institute must be able to project itself externally as credible and significant. A Research Institute must have as its goal the promotion of world class inter/multidisciplinary research with a specific task of generating research income and research outputs and assisting in the development of Impact.

A Research Institute will appoint a Director and in a start-up phase will receive some administrative support from Research and Enterprise. However the Institute must create a business plan that will show a long term financial viability. The business plan can include a request for central funds to support buy out of some of the Director's departmental duties, as well as administration and general running costs. The business plan will be initially considered by the Deputy Principal and Vice-Principal (Research) and approved at PRC. Any resource allocation approved initially will be re-assessed during the College's annual planning round. It is expected that, in the longer term, income to the Institute for the purposes of hiring administrative staff, external promotion, specialist facilities, maintenance and potential space costs, and any other expenditure deemed necessary that cannot be found from existing College sources, will be generated from research contracts, and any external gifts or donations that may arise.

The intention of an Institute is to promote collaboration and not to detract from the departments that are considered to be the employers of academic staff and generators of taught programmes! Hence the proposed rules associated with grants for institutes are as follows:

- The academic member of the Institute has a prime obligation to his/her department which takes precedence over the Institute at all times.
- If an academic wishes to devote a high percentage of his/her time to a research contract within the Institute (such that teaching buyout is required to manage the grant commitment), then the home department has a right of veto over the acceptance of the grant and/or the amount of teaching buyout that can be allowed
- When a grant bid is proposed by academics from different departments, the percentage split of academic time, the percentage allocation of studentships and the percentage allocation of any research assistants hired by the grant is agreed in advance (a process for this has been developed by Research and Enterprise and Research Finance). These allocations allow the income from the grants to be allocated to departments pro rata.
- All income to the Institute is credited to the host departments, and for REF and basic budget formula purposes the departments are not disadvantaged in any significant way by the assignment of some or all of an academic's research time to the institute.
- The overhead return from grants is assigned to the home departments of the academics involved in the grant according to the percentage time allocation of the academics as agreed at the point of submission. This percentage could change subsequently with agreement on all sides (i.e. between the PI/CI's).

- The fractions of the 14% overhead return to the various departments' DoB and PI accounts are also allocated according to the same agreed ratio. In addition however, a further 7% of the overheads is returned to the Institute Investment Account (IIB).
- The Institute will be provided with an IoB (Institute Operating Budget) account under the control of the Director of the Institute. The IoB will be subject to the same rules as a DoB, namely that unspent funds cannot be rolled forward from year to year and no more than 10% of the IoB can be transferred to the DIB at the end of the year.
- Research contracts and other income generated by the Institute will be managed operationally by the academic PI's in the normal way. However the portfolio of grants may be considered as a single consolidated budget (IFA) to allow an assessment of the financial performance of the Institute to be assessed and to facilitate efficient use of resources from multiple sources in providing facilities, equipment and staff for the institute.
- The performance of the Institute against targets will be assessed through the annual planning round, at which time resource allocations will be reviewed.

Staff hired on research contracts will identify themselves externally as being staff of the Institute, and the collaborating departments will be given a proportional share of the staff member for inclusion in REF data. For the purposes of administration only (matters such as HR issues, promotions, PDRs, office allocation, secretarial support, payroll), they may be assigned to one of the supporting departments, based on an agreed distribution between the various departments and in proportion to the income split between the departments. Ideally Institutes will be able to site their research teams in a common location but this may not be always possible.

Research students will operate in a similar way, allocated as a percentage FTE based on an agreed split, while falling under the sole control of a given department for progression and assessment. Provision of basic student support such as travel costs, computers, will be the responsibility of the assigned department (as that department receives the bulk of the formula-based income) but the Institute may provide additional direct support if adequate finances are available.

It is possible that some departmentally based Centres may fall within the overall scope of a large Research Institute. In these circumstances the Centres will become specific research activities within the institute. The same operating rules for institutes will apply to Centres operating under an institute umbrella as for normal Institutes activity. The Institute may seek central college support for actives within a Centre that is part of the institute. The success, viability and effectiveness of a Centre in such an arrangement is overseen by the Director of the Institute and is included in the annual reports of the institute to the Research Committee. The Directors of the Centres, report to the Director of the Institute.

The Institute will be expected to create and manage its own web presence and to promote itself externally as an activity within the university's structure, subject to the normal university brand guidelines and digital policy and protocols. Any costs associated with such promotional activities will be borne by the Institute from its operating budget or from external income or its share of overhead income.

Sign-off for grant proposals from an Institute will be by the Vice-Principal for Research who will require confirmation that any space or other resources required for a successful bid have been discussed and agreed in advance with the relevant departments.

DOCTORAL TRAINING CENTRES

Research Institutes may act as a natural home for Doctoral Training Centres where the focus of the DTC's is aligned with that of the Institute as opposed to a broad discipline based centre. This is common for example within EPSRC but less so with other RCUK funding Councils.

Where an institute wishes to submit a bid for a Doctoral Training Centre, this has to follow the general rules established for such bids with approval required from the Dean of the Doctoral School as well as the Vice Principal for Research.

Funds obtained to support a DTC may be held directly by the Institute under such circumstances but fee income and RDP income will continue to be allocated pro-rata to relevant departments (based on the supervisors) unless a specific agreement has been made in advance.

SMART SPECIALISATION INSTITUTES (SSI)

The SSI will operate in the same general manner as the general Research institutes with the main difference being in the objectives of the Institute which are to foster regional growth. The Intention is to create a model for such institutes now which maybe develop in response to regional devolution opportunities.

SSI's can, in addition to undertaking research, develop and supply training courses and may sponsor novel UG and MSc/MA options. The responsibility for and delivery of degree programmes will however remain with departments who may collaborate to provide novel courses under the auspices of the Institute, but all teaching, supervision and student welfare will continue to be the responsibility of the departments.

To establish/maintain an Institute a proforma should be submitted to the Research Committee containing the following information:-

Requirements to establish a Research Centre:

Name of Institute

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Academic proposers

.....

Associated Departments

.....

Pre-existing research unit(s) (e.g Research Theme, Institute, Think Tank)

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Description of Research Area

(Scope, what is included what isn't)

Max 1/2 page

Relevant existing grants, facilities and other resources

Max 1 page

Justification for the Centre

(What are the benefits to the researchers in creating the Centre, how does RHUL rate nationally/internationally in the area)

Max 1 page

Strategic plan

(What activities are planned, what are the goals, what are the expected outputs, grant bids, impact case studies and timescales?)

Max 4 pages

Business case

(Financial forecasts, long term viability)

Max 2 pages

ACTIONS

- Invite existing Centres/Institutes to present their plans and justify their existence.
Plans welcome from February 1st until ultimate deadline June 30th 2016
- Disband Centres that cannot explain why they should exist.
By September 1st 2016
- Support those Centres that can justify themselves by providing additional web presence and encourage departments to support from DIB.
- Establish Institutes and provide them with financial support if appropriate.
Proposals welcome from February 1st until ultimate deadline June 30th, 2016

Ultimate authority to provide authority for the establishment of Centres is Research Committee.

Ultimate authority to provide authority for the establishment of Institutes is Planning and Resources Committee.

PROCESS

From 1st December 2015.

Directors of existing Research Structures, Centres and Institutes, to discuss with relevant colleagues whether or not their specific structure should continue. This discussion should include the Head of Department(s) if a Centre and all relevant Heads of Department if a multi-disciplinary institute. A similar process to be undertaken if there is an initiative to start a Centre.

If the proposed ongoing/new structure is a Centre, the Proposed Director should then prepare the necessary paperwork (justifications etc.) and agree these with the HoD (s) and DoR(s) before submitting these to the Research Committee. The paperwork will be reviewed by a panel consisting of the associate Deans for Research, the Director of Research and Enterprise and the Vice Principal for Research who will make recommendations to the next Research Committee meeting for approval or otherwise. Once established the Centre will be required to generate an annual report

If the proposed new/ongoing Structure is an Institute, the proposers should in the first instance discuss the proposal with the Vice Principal for Research to ensure that the proposed Institute is compatible with the strategic goals of the College. The VP Research will consult with the College Deans. If the proposal is approved in principle then the Proposers should proceed with preparing the case which will go to Research Committee for discussion and comment before passing to the Planning and Resources Committee for approval. As part of this process the Deputy Principal and Vice Principal Research will consider any resource requests and make recommendations to PRC as appropriate. Once established an Institute will prepare an annual report which will be considered by Research Committee prior to the Institute entering into the annual planning round.

It is intended that the process of reviewing existing Centres/institutes and authorising new Centres/Institutes should be complete by 1st August 2016.

Research Committee
November 2015

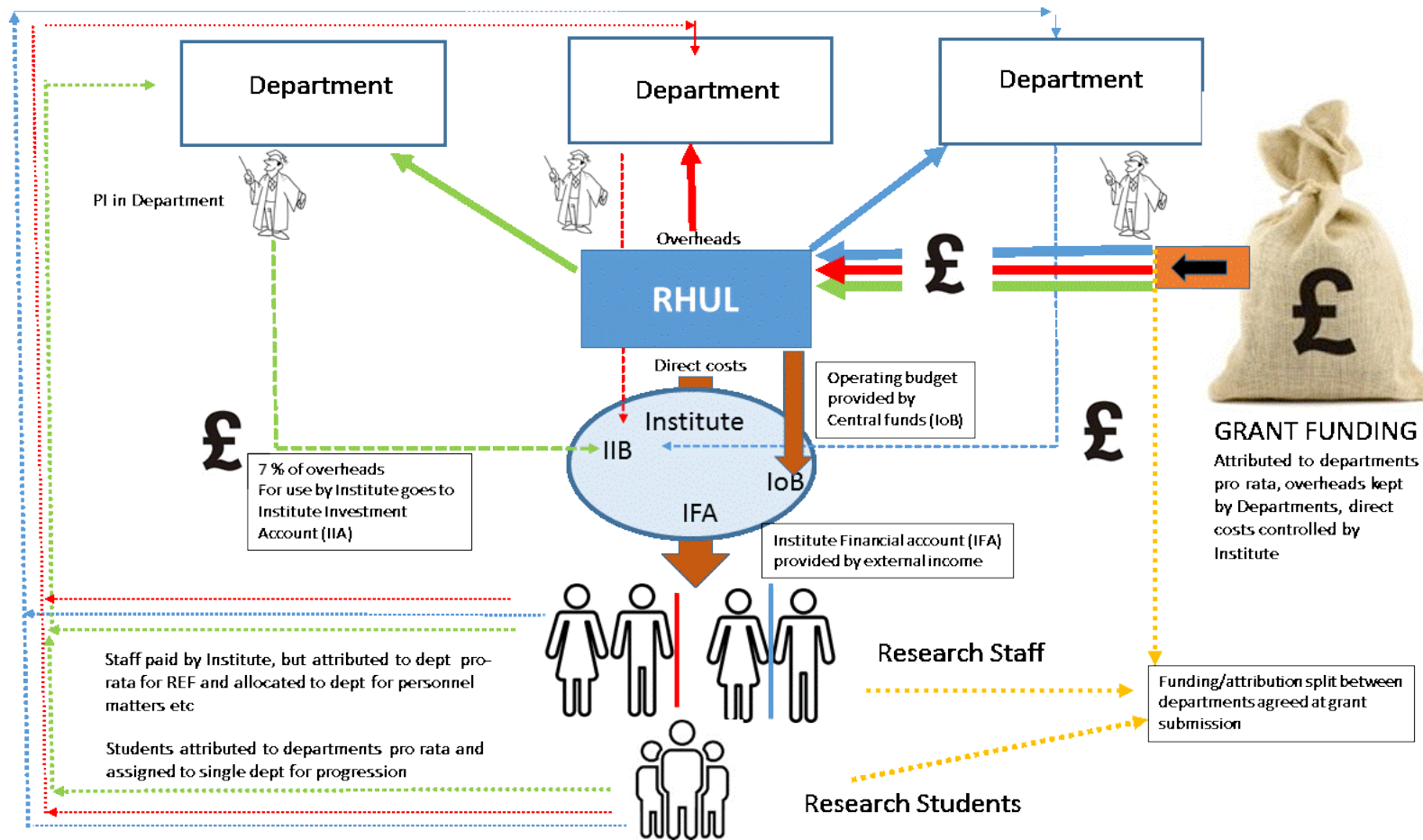


Diagram to illustrate cash flows and relationships within the proposed institute Structure.

Cash from research contracts or other sources is secured by the University. This is split into income streams for each contributing department according to the agreed split amongst PI's on that grant (e.g. into red green and blue).

The total overheads go back to departments in that ratio.

Staff employed and Students engaged by the institute similarly are attributed to department's pro-rata for matters such as REF returns and assigned to the most appropriate departments for dealing with personnel issues, progression etc.