Research Unit Policy and Procedure

Section 1 - Preamble

(1) Charles Darwin University ('the University', 'CDU') believes in the transformative power of research to change people's lives for the better. The University encourages collaboration and cooperation across and within academic disciplines and improving the visibility and accessibility of the University's research capabilities to external parties.

(2) Research units are focal points of scholarly activity that:

a. advance the excellence and impact of the University's research by developing critical mass and stimulating collective activity in areas of existing and emerging strength; and
b. enhance the external profile of the University in its regions, nationally and internationally.

Section 2 - Purpose

(3) This policy and procedure set out the principles and framework for establishing, operating, reviewing, and disestablishing organisational research units.

Section 3 - Scope

(4) This policy applies to research units and employees of the University with responsibility for research unit administration.

(5) This policy does not apply to:

a. The Menzies School of Health Research, which is subject to the Menzies School of Health Research Act 1985;
b. Externally funded bodies established in partnership with other organisations, including Cooperative Research Centres and Centres of Excellence; or
c. Institutes and centres whose primary function is not research.

Section 4 - Policy

Principles

(6) Each research unit will be housed within one (1) designated faculty. The faculty will support administration, including human resources, finance, and marketing and communications, to the extent that research units are not resourced to manage their own administration.

(7) Research projects conducted within research units will be funded externally. The University will provide support for non-project expenses including research support, infrastructure and overheads, and block grant investment.

(8) Research units may draw academic membership from several faculties to capture the opportunities and value

afforded by interdisciplinary collaboration.

(9) Research units will not be established to conduct one or a few research projects. Rather, they will facilitate collaborative endeavour in an area of strength through a sustained program of collective research activity that could not ordinarily be achieved within existing University structures.

(10) Research units can be nested within each other, for example, a tier 2 unit (a centre) may sit within a tier 1 unit (an institute).

Categories of research units

(11) Research units are differentiated according to their scale, breadth and expected longevity:

Tier 1 – research institute

(12) A research institute assembles a large group of researchers (generally more than 10 full-time equivalent (FTE)) whose academic disciplines collectively represent a body of expertise that is important to the Northern Territory.

(13) Research institutes undertake large-scale programs of research in areas of strategic importance, collaborate extensively with external parties (including stakeholders and end users), attract substantial research funding and higher degree by research (HDR) students, and produce publications that are above world standard.

(14) Research institutes provide a vibrant research environment that supports the productivity of researchers across all career stages, including HDRs.

Tier 2 – research centre

(15) A research centre assembles a smaller group of researchers (generally at least 5 FTE) working collaboratively in an area of strategic importance to the interests of the Northern Territory.

(16) Research centres undertake impactful research that is focussed on the facilitation of meaningful partnerships with external stakeholders, the production of publications that are above world standard, and the attraction of external funding.

(17) Research centres provide a supportive research environment that encourages and enables collaboration and attracts HDRs

Tier 3 – flexible units

(18) A tier 3 research unit – named hub, lab/laboratory, program, unit, network, community of practice, or special interest group – assembles a small group of researchers with a common interest in an area of emerging strength.

(19) Tier 3 units act as incubators and are established for a short term (up to three years).

Section 5 - Procedure

Establishment

(20) All research units must follow the establishment process relevant to their tier.

Tier 1 – research institute

(21) An institute is established by the Vice-Chancellor on the recommendation of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research and Community Connection, following receipt of endorsement from the Research Committee and Senior Executive

Team.

(22) A request to establish an institute must be made in the form specified and include the following:

a. Alignment of the plan of the proposed research unit with University plans, especially in relation to the contribution to University targets and performance indicators;
b. additionality to the University, including enhanced external profile, additional research activity, and complementarity to existing faculties and research units;
c. plans, capacity, and track record for cross-faculty mobilisation of staff to address important questions and/or societal challenges relevant to Northern Australia and its neighbourhood;
d. attractiveness to research students, including the promise of a vibrant and supportive scholarly environment;
e. Key performance indicators (KPIs) that correspond to the unit's objectives and strategic and operational plans
f. contemporary, demonstrated capability of foundation staff to attract external support and to participate in relevant national and international scholarly communities
g. endorsement by faculties that will provide resources and staff upon establishment; and
h. viability of the plan (research program, staff, finances) of the proposed research unit.

Tier 2 – research centre

(23) A research centre is established by the Vice-Chancellor on the recommendation of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research and Community Connection and the relevant Faculty Pro Vice-Chancellor following receipt of endorsement from the Research Committee.

(24) A request to establish a research centre must be made in the form specified and include the following:

a. alignment of the plan of the proposed research unit with University plans, especially in relation to the contribution to University targets and performance indicators;
b. attractiveness to research students, including the promise of a vibrant and supportive scholarly environment;
c. KPIs that correspond to the unit's objectives and strategic and operational plans
d. contemporary, demonstrated capability of foundation staff to attract external support and to participate in relevant national and international scholarly communities
e. endorsement by faculties that will provide resources and staff upon establishment; and
f. viability of the plan (research program, staff, finances) of the proposed research unit.

Tier 3 – flexible units

(25) A flexible unit is established by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research and Community Connection on the recommendation of a Faculty Pro Vice-Chancellor following receipt of endorsement from the Research Committee.

(26) A request to establish a flexible unit must be made by means of a business case that outlines:

a. how the unit aligns with an emerging area of research strength;
b. the proposed membership;
c. anticipated impact and benefit to the University; and
d. planned funding applications, projects, and publications over a three-year period.

Upgrading an existing research unit

(27) Proposals to upgrade an existing research unit to a higher tier will follow the process described above but must be preceded by a recommendation to upgrade from a review conducted in the 12 months prior to submission to the Research Committee.

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Governance and management

(28) Tier 1 research units must establish an advisory committee or board including several external members who provide guidance to the research institute's leadership and the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research and Community Connection on strategic directions including funding sustainability, end-users' needs, and emerging opportunities. Terms of reference of the advisory committee are approved by the Research Committee.

(29) Tier 1 and 2 research units must establish a management committee to oversee planning and operations for grant applications, quality of research, recruitment of HDRs, outreach activities, and management of the research unit's membership. Terms of reference of the management committee are approved by the research unit's director.

(30) All research units must operate in accordance with all University governance documents. Importantly, all marketing and non-academic publications, including websites, must be compatible and comply with University branding and the University's external communications protocols. Refer to the Media Policy, the Marketing Policy, and the Web Management Policy and Procedure for more information.

Active status

(31) A research unit must include a group of research active staff members that fulfils the following requirements to achieve and maintain active status:

a. Tier 1 and tier 2 research units must:
    i. Maintain a current membership list in the University's Research Information System (RIS) that may be used to report on research unit activity;
    ii. Maintain a set of KPIs, against which their performance is measured;
    iii. Fulfil the reporting requirements outlined in this policy and procedure; and
    iv. Undertake an external review at least every five (5) years.
b. Tier 3 research units must:
    i. Maintain a current membership list in the University's Research Information System (RIS) that may be used to report on research unit activity;
    ii. Fulfil the reporting requirements outlined in this policy and procedure; and
    iii. Undertake an internal review at the completion of their three-year term, .

(32) All research units must support the University's research positioning including a presence on the University's website, in capability statements, and other promotional material and channels.

Leadership

(33) All research units must have a leader, director, or other identified person who accepts responsibility for oversighting all activities of the unit, and who is the point of contact between the research unit and the University. If no leader is currently appointed the role is undertaken by the Faculty Pro Vice-Chancellor or, for nested research units, the director of the host research unit.

(34) The leader of a tier 1 or tier 2 research unit will be appointed by the Vice-Chancellor in consultation with the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research and Community Connection and the relevant Faculty Pro Vice-Chancellor. The leader is responsible to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research and Community Connection for the conduct of activities within the research unit and for maintaining active status.

(35) Leaders of tier 3 units are appointed by the Faculty Pro Vice-Chancellor.

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Membership

(36) Research units will maintain a list of members whose affiliation with the unit is captured in the Research Information System (RIS).

(37) A research unit may establish membership categories.

(38) The management committee, for tier 1 and 2 units, or the leader or director, for tier 3 units, will:

a. establish membership criteria and expectations;
b. consider and approve applications for new members; and
c. review member performance and, if necessary, revoke membership.

Reporting

(39) Tier 1 and tier 2 research units must submit, before the end of each calendar year, an annual report to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research and Community Connection covering the research activities and operations of the unit during the previous year. Research and Innovation will provide a template that specifies information to be provided at the beginning of the year. Annual reports will be tabled with the Research Committee.

(40) Tier 3 research units must submit a brief annual report and plan to the Faculty Pro Vice-Chancellor and the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research and Community Connection in a timely manner.

Review

(41) Tier 1 and 2 research units will undergo reviews at least every 5 years.

(42) The Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research and Community Connection will provide oversight and guidance for the reviews.

(43) Reviews will be undertaken against specified terms of reference that will include:

a. an evaluation of performance against research unit objectives and KPIs, as specified in its strategic plan;
b. an assessment of governance and management structures; and
c. an evaluation of the degree to which the research unit has achieved local, national, and international recognition for its activities.

(44) The outcome of a review will be one of the following recommendations:

a. the research unit continues unchanged;
b. the research unit continues with changes;
c. the research unit continues but is reclassified; and
d. the research unit is disestablished.

(45) Tier 3 research units will undergo internal review after 3 years to determine their growth and associated viability to continue in some other form, or disestablishment. The process will be determined by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research and Community Connection.

Section 6 - Non-Compliance

(46) Non-compliance with governance documents is considered a breach of the Code of Conduct - Employees or the Code of Conduct - Students, as applicable, and is treated seriously by the University. Reports of concerns about non-

compliance will be managed in accordance with the applicable disciplinary procedures outlined in the Charles Darwin University and Union Enterprise Agreement 2025 and the Code of Conduct - Students.

(47) Complaints may be raised in accordance with the Complaints and Grievance Policy and Procedure - Employees and Complaints Policy - Students.

(48) All staff members have an individual responsibility to raise any suspicion, allegation or report of fraud or corruption in accordance with the Fraud and Corruption Control Policy and Whistleblower Reporting (Improper Conduct) Procedure.

Status and Details

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Responsible Executive	Steve Rogers Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research and Community Connection +61 8 89466890
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Glossary Terms and Definitions

"Faculty" - An organisational and academic unit in the University that delivers courses and conducts research.

"University" - Charles Darwin University, a body corporate established under section 4 of the Charles Darwin University Act 2003. The University is comprised of the various faculties, CDU TAFE, organisational units, and formal committees, including the governing University Council and Academic Board.

"Governance document" - means policy or procedure published in the Governance Document Library. Policies and procedures are collectively called ‘governance documents’ and are often referred to as ‘policy’ or ‘University policy’.