

## Centres of Excellence – Guidance for applicants

### 1. Background

A new category of Research Grouping, Centres of Excellence, was approved by the University's Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee in October 2022. The purpose of establishing the Centres of Excellence (CoE) category is a means to recognise internationally-leading research and knowledge exchange activity which the University will actively promote to both internal and external audiences. CoEs are defined as the University's flagship pillars of research strength. They will:

- Increase the University's national and international profile and reputation in distinct areas of research strength, thereby generating a much stronger climate for stimulating research opportunities;
- Be exemplars of best practice in creating and sustaining a positive and inclusive research culture and environment in which teams encompassing academic faculty, Early Career Researchers, technicians and students can be fully involved in the strategy and conduct of research, and develop their skills for future careers;
- Transcend disciplinary boundaries and share a common vision and an overarching and clearly defined set of research objectives;
- Act as a hub for a critical mass of researchers and students, ensuring a dynamic, sustainable research base and an active knowledge sharing platform; and
- Provide a collaborative and supportive environment that nurtures high quality, impactful research and knowledge exchange with international visibility.

A one-size fits all approach will not be adopted, therefore CoEs may differ in size and mode of organization depending on their subject and scope, however they are expected to realise the following objectives:

- To undertake highly innovative and potentially transformative research that leads to significant advancement of capabilities and knowledge, consistent with the strategy of the University and the relevant School(s), and addressing topics of nationally and/or internationally recognised importance;
- To be a beacon for creating and sustaining a positive research culture and environment in which people can flourish;
- To enable researchers and students to work on large scale problems over, at least initially, a 5 year period;
- To provide high-quality training environments for the next generation of researchers and students;
- To generate significant<sup>1</sup> research funding, outputs, knowledge exchange and impact over the lifetime of the CoE;
- To develop relationships and build new networks with major national and international partners to help strengthen our research capability and achieve global competitiveness and recognition; and
- To have an impact on the wider community through engagement with other higher education institutions, government departments, industry, and the private and charity sectors.

### 2. Eligibility

All current Research Programmes and University Research Centres are eligible to apply to this first call for CoEs (the list is available at [Research programmes, centres and groups : Research at Sussex](#) :

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<sup>1</sup> *Significant* should be understood in the context of the disciplines involved in the CoE.

[University of Sussex](#)). In addition, Heads of School will be able to submit a request for one additional School governed Research Centre to be considered for CoE status.

All applicants must notify Debbie Foy [D.Foy@sussex.ac.uk](mailto:D.Foy@sussex.ac.uk) by 31 December 2022 of their intent to submit an application.

### **3. CoE Director**

The initial term of a CoE Director is *typically* five years or less and must be approved by the relevant Head of School before an application is submitted. We are not adopting a one-size-fits-all approach to the duration of a Director's term to allow flexibility to request a shorter initial term and to reflect already agreed terms with the Director's Head of School. As such, applicants are able to present the case for the most appropriate structure for their CoE, e.g. a single Director, a Deputy Director, several Co-Directors, succession planning after 2 years, a longer than five year term for example.

The CoE Director role will normally be undertaken in the 'Research' element of the Director's substantive academic post. As such it is expected that prospective Directors have agreement from whoever manages their workload (usually the Head of School) to undertake the role of Director. If additional time is required it must be agreed with the relevant Head of School before a CoE application is submitted.

For CoE Directors who reach the end of their term, there will be a transparent and open process of replacement or renewal led by the PVCRE.

### **4. Membership of a CoE**

CoEs will be beacons for creating and sustaining a positive research culture and environment in which people can flourish and in which teams encompassing academic faculty, Early Career Researchers, technicians and students can be fully involved in the strategy and conduct of research, and develop their skills for future careers.

CoEs will have inclusive membership and the process to select members across all relevant Schools must be open and inclusive. There should be a stated and transparent set of criteria for membership which could include research metrics for that individual, e.g. grant capture and publications, however should also include the individual's research area, their capacity for career development and potential to contribute to the CoE in the future. Evidence of such criteria should be included in the CoE application.

### **5. Governance of a CoE**

If CoE status is approved it will be conferred for a period of 5 years. The Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee will conduct a mid-term review to ensure the CoE is on track to meet stated objectives. Relevant Heads of Schools will be involved in the mid-term review.

Every CoE will have a Host School; the usual practice would be for the Host school to be the one in which the Director is based, however this can be determined through discussion between the Director(s) and the stakeholder Heads of Schools.

The Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee reserves the right at any point to pause or disband a Centre of Excellence, should it feel the need arises to do so, but this is expected only in very exceptional circumstances.

At the start of the fifth year post establishment, CoE Directors will have the opportunity to submit a renewal request. Renewal requests will be reviewed by the Research and Knowledge Exchange

Committee. The CoE Director will be expected to provide updated evidence that the CoE continues to meet specific eligibility criteria, including confirmation from relevant Heads of School of the CoE's continued relevance to School(s) strategy. Further details on the renewal process will be circulated closer to the first renewal date.

Outside of the mid-term and renewal process, CoEs will be subject to periodic monitoring by their host School according to the usual School practice for monitoring Research Centres and Groups. If a CoE is a cross-school endeavour, the host Head of School should involve all relevant Heads of School. Any concerns associated with CoE performance will be passed on to the PVCRE.

CoEs are expected to have a Steering Group or External Advisory Board. This group should normally include the host Head of School and have inclusive membership.

A CoE Director will continue to report to the line manager of their substantive academic post, usually the Head of School.

Members of the CoE, including the Director, will continue with their normal activities within the terms of their contract, line management arrangements, and workload model as it is implemented within the relevant School(s). Members of staff will continue to carry out teaching activities, and be subject to the same expectations of staff who are not members of CoEs.

## **6. Investment requests**

Having CoE status conferred is an exercise in celebration and recognition of excellence and is not linked to automatic ring-fenced institutional financial support. Resourcing for CoEs is likely to vary depending on the structure and aims of the CoE. Applicants can, as part of their CoE application, submit a request for financial support from the University's Strategic Development Fund. However, there is no expectation of requests for institutional financial support and, where possible, support should be sought from the relevant Schools in which CoE members belong. It is recognised that the ability for Schools to provide any level of funding will vary, therefore CoE applicants must discuss this with their Head of School before a CoE application is developed.

If a request for institutional SDF investment is sought, indicative costs for time-limited specific activities (not exceeding 5 years), accompanied by a clearly articulated case for support should be included in the CoE application. Requests are expected to be below £100k. Requests for institutional-level investment must include a clear rationale for how the proposed investment would enable the delivery of something new or transformational rather than a contribution to ongoing projects. Requests to support activity that could be funded from external grant awards or from School budgets would not normally be considered an admissible request for SDF investment nor would requests for marketing or communication costs.

If you plan to include a request for Strategic Development Fund investment, you must discuss this request with your Host Head of School and all relevant Heads of Schools if your centre is a cross-school. Please contact your School Business Finance Partner who will help you prepare the required financial information.

## **7. Application process**

The PVCRE and dPVCr will host a virtual meeting for prospective applicants on Friday 9<sup>th</sup> December 2022 at 12.00-1.00pm.

Applications must be endorsed by the applicant's Host Head of School therefore early discussions are recommended. If the CoE application is a cross-school endeavour, the applicant must consult with all relevant HoS and evidence of their support must be included in the application.

Applicants should contact the University's Research Intelligence Advisor, Hayley Cordingley [H.C.Cordingley@sussex.ac.uk](mailto:H.C.Cordingley@sussex.ac.uk) to discuss support for producing responsible metrics data to support their application.

Applications should be submitted to Debbie Foy [D.Foy@sussex.ac.uk](mailto:D.Foy@sussex.ac.uk) by **4pm on 13 February 2023**.

## **8. Content of application**

Applicants are encouraged to be as concise as possible and not exceed the maximum page limits specified below. Any material beyond these page limits will not be considered. Applications are structured as follows:

Part 1: Centre and Director(s) details

Part 2: Case for support (maximum 10 pages) structured under the following headings:

- Describe and evidence the importance of the research and provide an overview of the Centre's future plans. This section should: evidence the national and/or international importance of the research; demonstrate that the Centre has the capabilities to undertake highly innovative and potentially transformative research that leads to significant advancement of capabilities and knowledge; outline the Centre's ambition and objectives for the next 5 years; and demonstrate that it has the ability to enable researchers and students to work on large scale problems over a long period of time.
- Describe and evidence the Centre's inclusive Research Culture. This section should describe the current culture plus plans for future developments. It should detail how the Centre ensures equality, inclusion and diversity is embedded within its Steering Group, leadership and membership and how the Centre enables teams encompassing faculty, ECRs, technicians and students to be fully involved in the strategy and conduct of the research. It should describe how the Centre provides a high-quality & inclusive training environment for the next generation of researchers, providing equal opportunity for career development. This section should also include details of the Centre's current Leadership (including Head of School agreed terms for all Directors) and Steering Group membership.
- Provide an overview of the Centre's significant research funding over the last 5 years and describe how it will make a major contribution to the next REF, as evidenced by outputs, impact cases (or potential for) and contributions to the research environment.
- Describe and evidence the impact of the Centre's relationships and networks with major national and international partners in strengthening its research capability and increasing global competitiveness and recognition.
- Describe and evidence the Centre's social and/or economic impact on the wider community through collaboration and knowledge exchange activities with other HEIs, government departments or local authorities, commercial sector, public and third sector.

Part 3: Request for Strategic Development Fund investment (optional)

Part 4: Statement of Support from Head(s) of School(s)

## 9. Review process

Applications will be reviewed by the Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee using the following assessment criteria:

AC1	Does the research being undertaken by the proposed CoE address topics of national and/or international importance?
AC2	Has the proposed CoE demonstrated that it has the capabilities to undertake highly innovative and potentially transformative research that leads to significant advancement of capabilities and knowledge?
AC3	Is the proposed CoE a beacon for creating and sustaining a positive research culture?
AC4	Does the proposed CoE enable researchers and students to work on large scale problems over long periods of time?
AC5	Does the proposed CoE provide high-quality training environments for the next generation of researchers?
AC6	Does the proposed CoE generate significant research funding and/or make a major contribution to the next REF, as evidenced by outputs, impact cases (or potential for) and contributions to the research environment?
AC7	Does the proposed CoE have relationships & networks with major national and international partners to help strengthen our research capability and achieve global competitiveness and recognition?
AC8	Does the proposed CoE have a demonstrable social and/or economic impact on the wider community, facilitated through collaboration and knowledge exchange activities with other higher education institutions, government departments or local authorities, commercial sector, public and third sector?

CoE applications will be assessed acknowledging the different practices across and between disciplines, and adhering to the responsible use of metrics (as set out in various declarations / documents<sup>2</sup>). The Table in Annex 2 gives indicative examples of areas Directors may wish to highlight in order to demonstrate excellence in the assessment criteria.

Outcomes will be known by June 2023.

## 10. Key Commissioning Dates

Deadline for bids	4pm 13 <sup>th</sup> February 2023
RaKE review of bids	By 31 May 2023
Applicants notified of review outcome	June 2023
CoE status conferred	July 2023

## 11. Further Information

If you would like to discuss an application or have queries on the application or review process, please contact Debbie Foy [D.Foy@sussex.ac.uk](mailto:D.Foy@sussex.ac.uk)

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<sup>2</sup> In particular, reference to the principles/recommendations outlined in the following documents will be considered:

- [DORA](#)
- [The Leiden Manifesto](#)
- [The Metrics Tide](#)

## APPLICATION TO ESTABLISH A CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE

Please refer to the **Guidance for Applicants** before completing this application form. Questions relating to the application form or the selection process should be directed to Debbie Foy at [D.Foy@sussex.ac.uk](mailto:D.Foy@sussex.ac.uk)

### PART 1: COVER SHEET

Name, Title and Department of Centre Director:	
Name, Title and Department of Deputy and/or Co-Directors:	
Centre of Excellence Name	

### PART 2: CASE FOR SUPPORT (maximum 10 pages)

Please refer to the **Guidance for Applicants** for advice on what these sections should include.

**Describe and evidence the importance of the research and provide an overview of the Centre's future plans** (assessment criteria 1, 2 and 4)

**Describe the Centre's Research Culture and future development plans** (assessment criteria 3 and 5)

**Provide an overview of the Centre's significant research funding over the last five years & describe how the CoE will make a major contribution to the next REF, as evidenced by outputs, impact cases (or potential for) and contributions to the research environment.** (assessment criterion 6)

**Describe and evidence the impact of the Centre's relationships and networks with major national and international partners in strengthening its research capability and increasing global competitiveness and recognition** (assessment criterion 7)

**Does the proposed CoE have a demonstrable social and/or economic impact on the wider community, facilitated through collaboration and knowledge exchange activities with other higher education institutions, government departments or local authorities, commercial sector, public and third sector?** (assessment criterion 8)

**PART 3: OPTIONAL REQUEST FOR SDF INVESTMENT (maximum 3 pages)**

**Please contact your School Finance Manager who will help you prepare the financial information needed to accompany this application.**

In addition to detailed financial information, applicants must provide a justification below of the requested resources. Requests for institutional-level investment must include a clear rationale for how the proposed investment would enable the delivery of something new or transformational rather than a contribution to ongoing projects. Requests to support activity that could be funded from external grant awards or from School budgets would not normally be considered an admissible request for SDF investment.

Provide details of your strategy to generate and sustain significant external research income, including details of how the Centre of Excellence will be funded following the time-limited SDF investment.

**PART 4: STATEMENT OF SUPPORT FROM HOST HEAD OF SCHOOL  
(maximum 1 page per School)**

Applications must include a statement of support from the Centre's Host School. If the CoE is cross-school please include either a single statement signed by all relevant Heads of School or individual letters. Letters should clearly set out how the CoE supports School and Institutional strategic plans. Heads of School should confirm the following: that basic resources are in place to undertake the described research; the School approved workload allocation for the Director(s); the length of the Director's current term; and that a transparent process to recruit a replacement will be undertaken when the term ends.

**Please return this form to Debbie Foy**  
**[D.Foy@sussex.ac.uk](mailto:D.Foy@sussex.ac.uk) by 4pm 13<sup>th</sup> February 2023**

## Annex 2

Being mindful of using metrics responsibly, example areas that applicants for CoE status may choose to highlight in order to demonstrate excellence in the key criteria are given below. Research Metrics/Intelligence tools and other potential sources that may be “mined” to help provide this information are given where appropriate below in green.

Criteria	Assessment detail	Exemplar information / metrics to support claim (NB if publication of research in documents is not the norm for your discipline, please help us create appropriate measures)	List of (5-10) world leading institutions / groups in the CoE area for comparison with	Information by which can determine excellence vs comparator international organisations in the same field <sup>3</sup>
Collaborative and supportive environment and Positive research culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Nurturing the next generation of researchers</li> <li>- Demonstrated support of individuals within the Centre</li> <li>- Inclusive environment of diverse researchers</li> <li>- Exemplar of Open Research practices</li> <li>- Highest standards of ethics and integrity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Hosting / supervising students (Doctoral students; Masters research projects; UG research projects) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Numbers (Cognos)</li> <li>- Success rates (Cognos)</li> <li>- Special courses/materials/events for them</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Special career / professional development events for members/people affiliated with the CoE</li> <li>- #s of members undertaking (meaningful) appraisal/research development discussions per annum and information fed back from appraisals has been used to inform practice</li> <li>- Numbers of meetings of staff within the Centre and examples of how feedback from staff has been used to improve the culture and running of the Centre and achievement of goals</li> <li>- Mentoring scheme participation (within / outside of CoE / Institution)</li> <li>- Progression data, 1<sup>st</sup> destinations of PhD students, Postdocs, successful fellowship applications, Promotion stats of staff, recruitment and onward destinations of academic staff</li> <li>- Proportion of outputs that are Open Access (SciVal)</li> </ul>		

<sup>3</sup> It is recognised that whilst Centre Directors should have a feel for who (people / institutions) are world leading in the areas they work in, they may not readily be able to pinpoint specific measures / metrics that reflect this fact. It may be that Directors need to work with research intelligence specialists to create a panel of indicators that can be used both for this initial assessment, as well as for benchmarking down the line.



High quality research with high academic impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Generation and dissemination of research outputs that are deemed to be of high value and/or impact <b>within the academy</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Quantity and quality of output from the Centre over a time period,</li> <li>- # papers from group of Researchers (SciVal)</li> <li>- Field Weighted Citation Impact – for group of researchers and/or set of publications (SciVal)</li> <li>- Percentage of outputs in top citations percentiles (SciVal)</li> <li>- Field weighted Views (=&gt; Article Influence) (SciVal)</li> <li>- (Altmetric Explorer – peer mentions, Mendeley etc)</li> <li>- Other measures of esteem for outputs that are not publications e.g. reports; performances; films; scores; patents</li> <li>- Influence of the discipline and field e.g. through conference organisation or coordination of special journal issues</li> </ul>		Can compare all SciVal information for our group of researchers vs other institutions / groups of researchers
Importance of the research area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Aligned with the University of Sussex Strategic priorities</li> <li>-</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Alignment with strategic priorities of external stakeholders e.g. government or research funders</li> <li>- Research Grant (and other) income both per FTE and in absolute sense and in comparison with comparator groups internationally. Grant income (SciVal)</li> <li>- Recognised in School strategic plans, e.g. identified for growth, and goals of the CoE remaining current/relevant to School strategic goals</li> </ul>		
International leadership and Partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Strong links with collaborators around the world</li> <li>-</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- International Collaboration/co-authorship (SciVal)</li> <li>- Visiting professorships in both directions</li> <li>- Leadership roles in international collaborations</li> <li>- Promotion of international mobility of research staff and PGR students</li> </ul>		
Socio Economic Impact (not involving KE)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Impact case studies (e.g. as created for REF submission)</li> </ul>		
Knowledge exchange with social/economic impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Facilitate research (non-tech) transfer into practice</li> <li>- Entrepreneurship, Commercialisation and IP</li> <li>- Influence discourse/practice to address grand challenges with impact</li> <li>- Influence on policy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Contract and collaborative research agreements</li> <li>- Innovate UK funding, other sources of non-academic funding</li> <li>- Consultancy</li> <li>- Patent filings (RES? Espacenet – but a bit old by then?)</li> <li>- Licensing</li> <li>- Start-ups and Spin outs</li> <li>- CPD or other professional training delivery</li> <li>- REF Impact cases with KE component, contribution to KEF narratives in public and community engagement and/or regional regeneration</li> <li>- Contributing to student learning re entrepreneurship</li> <li>- Co-authors policy documents, briefings (etc.)</li> <li>- Oral evidence to an inquiry or other demonstrable contribution to policy development</li> </ul>		

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Altmetric measures e.g. mentions / citations in policy documents – by different bodies in different world area (<a href="#">Altmetric Explorer</a>)</li> <li>- general world “knowledge” sources – e.g. news items / Wikipedia – by different bodies in different world area (<a href="#">Altmetric Explorer</a>)</li> <li>- Co-authorship of high-level reports etc.</li> <li>- Co-authorship or co-development of toolkits, organisational processes/strategies, software</li> <li>- Community projects, with clear co-creation process</li> </ul>		
Reputation and international visibility, and external engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Demonstratable international excellence / reputation in area</li> <li>-</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Geo-location profile of who is citing outputs (<a href="#">SciVal</a>; <a href="#">Altmetric Explorer</a>)</li> <li>- Key contributions to sector exercises / rankings of importance to the University (REF; THE; QS etc) – being aware that CoE contributions may not align specifically with data gathering purpose</li> <li>- Participation in editorial boards; funding panels; plenary conference presentations; select committee presentations</li> <li>- Social media – by different users around the world (<a href="#">Altmetric Explorer</a>)</li> <li>- How many times research is mentioned, used, saved and shared on blogs, social media, TV and radio</li> </ul>		
Critical mass / volume of activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- No. of people, publications, research income, resources, equipment and facilities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Information sources might include - <a href="#">Cognos</a>; <a href="#">SciVal</a>; <a href="#">Altmetric EFI</a>; <a href="#">Gateway to research</a>; <a href="#">Espacenet</a></li> </ul>		

Document Control					
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